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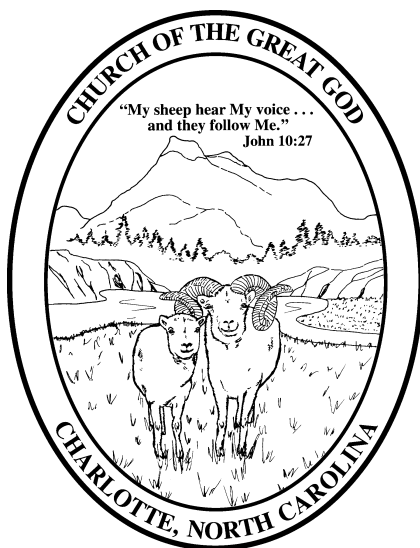
# YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN!

When Are  
Christians  
Considered  
to be  
"Born Again"?

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# You Must Be Born Again!

by John W. Ritenbaugh



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# You Must Be Born Again!

**T**he apostle Paul quotes Isaiah in I Corinthians 2:9: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Man, without the Spirit of God to open his mind to his wonderful future, cannot grasp God’s plan and his part in it. In these last days we have had man’s incredible potential revealed to us.

But Satan the Devil is trying to make us lose the big picture. If he can succeed in that, he will have removed most of our motivation to yield to God and to apply ourselves to His way. By believing our goal is already accomplished, we feel we have nothing to contribute, no part in the process. We have little motivation to fulfill the biblical command to grow because it is all over but the shouting.

This is what occurs when Satan confuses Christ’s teaching about being “born again.” To say that we were “born again” or “born from above” at the beginning of our conversion leaves us with the impression that the purpose of salvation is already an accomplished fact. Our life after baptism easily becomes a matter of “marking time,” which flies in the face of our free moral agency. God gave us free moral agency to enable us to choose and grow. But why grow if we have already been born again?

Thus, we need to clarify what Christ *really* said about being born again. Virtually everyone approaches this subject by beginning in John 3 and proceeding from there. This may be a major reason for the

confusion over Christ's words: The explanation begins in the wrong place! Seeing this idea in the context of the entire Bible will show very clearly that John 3:1-8 is a plain and wonderful truth.

## God Teaches Through Patterns

God often works through patterns, types and symbols. Paul uses Adam as the pattern for mankind and calls him "the first man Adam" (I Corinthians 15:45-49). Other patterns include the furnishings and equipment of the Tabernacle and the Temple, as well as the sacrifices and offerings, from which we can learn much about the Work of Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. These types, patterns or symbols are ordained by God to give us instruction in spiritual matters.

Jesus Christ is the pattern for Christianity. He is called "the second Man" (I Corinthians 15:47). As the beginning of a new creation, He is the prototype whom converted Christians must follow, even as the first Adam is the prototype whom all of mankind has followed. Adam set the human pattern at the very beginning: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Christians are called to emulate the second Adam (Ephesians 4:13). He set a variety of patterns as an example for us. For instance, He shows how a Christian should suffer, even if it is unfair:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. (I Peter 2:21)

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)

The word *author* comes from the Greek *archegos*, meaning "a pioneer, trail blazer, scout, author, captain or founder (of a city)." Depending on the context for its exact translation, *archegos* generally implies one who leads and works so that others can follow him. Jesus Christ, the author of our salvation, our captain, the pioneer, blazed a trail for us to follow!

Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." Christ is the pattern of obedience that we are to copy in our own lives. In four eyewitness accounts, God gives us a detailed biography of His Son so we can emulate Him in every way.

Though we may not experience everything *exactly* as He did, in type, in principle, we will go through what He did. What is the out-

come? We will be in His image (I Corinthians 15:49)!

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory [or, *from the glory of man to the glory of God*], just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (II Corinthians 3:18)

God will lead us through the same basic steps that His Son took so that we will turn out just like the prototype.

In Matthew 3:13-16 He is the pattern regarding baptism:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." And then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

This scene supplies us with two patterns. First, though Jesus did not need what it symbolically pictures, He went through a baptism to show an example of what others should do. To paraphrase His response to John, Jesus said, "Let's do it anyway because I have to show what a righteous man should do."

The second pattern is that God sent His Spirit. Christ did not need it—He had it from the beginning! God, however, gave Him a visible representation of it so that we learn that we will also receive the Spirit of God sometime after baptism.

With this thought in mind—that Jesus set the patterns—we can understand what He means by being "born again."

## **What Is the Firstborn?**

We need to define *firstborn*, beginning with the English definition. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*, reads, "first brought forth: eldest." *Born* means "brought forth as by birth," and *birth* means "the emergence of a new individual from the body of its parent." So a person is born when the fetus is separated from the womb. And the firstborn is the first in order to emerge as a new individual from the body of its parent.

The Greek equivalent of "firstborn" is *prototokos*, defined by *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* as: "Firstborn (usually as noun,

lit. or fig.): —first begotten.” Thayer’s *Lexicon* reads, “In the same sense, apparently, he [Christ] is called simply the *prototokos*, Heb. i.6; . . . the first of the dead who was raised to life” (p. 556). Our Savior is called “firstborn from the dead” twice (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5).

*Prototokos* is used in Matthew 1:25. “And [Joseph] did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.” According to Matthew 13:55-56, Mary had at least four other sons (James, Joses, Simon and Judas) and three daughters (“all,” verse 56). But only one was the firstborn, the *prototokos*, the one who opened the womb, Jesus of Nazareth.

In Hebrews 11:28, the author writes that God slew the firstborn (*prototokos*) of Egypt. Who or what did God allow to die on that Passover evening? God killed those born first into a human family and those born first to an animal.

Colossians 1:15 describes Jesus Christ: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Lately, some have said that *firstborn* here means “preeminent.” Undoubtedly it can be used as such, but its more natural meaning is “the first to open the womb.”

*Creation (ktisis)* “denotes a particular created thing” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, p. 897), meaning in this case, “humans” or “humanity”. This phrase, then, could be translated: “the first born of humanity.” But was not Adam (or more technically, Cain) the firstborn of humanity? This does not seem to fit Jesus Christ. He was the firstborn of Mary, but He came four thousand years after Adam and Cain! What does Paul mean here?

He is not discussing preeminence, especially when he links it to “the image of the invisible God.” Man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Paul is writing about humanity being born into the Family of God! Jesus Christ is indeed first! He is the first of all humanity to be born as God. Three verses later he writes, “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 3:18). It is so obvious! He is writing about a resurrection, a birth from physical to spiritual, from humanity to God!

## Birth by Resurrection

For further proof we need to consult Romans 1:1-4:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power,

according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

What this section shows is that Jesus actually became a born-again Son of God through a resurrection from the dead. Before His resurrection He was a son of David, born into that line by physical birth. His ancestry is meticulously recorded, showing His descent from Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:23-38). Thus, He was indeed the Son of God prior to the resurrection of the dead by means of human birth.

Though Romans 1:3 plainly shows His *physical* generation, verse 4, in contrast, shows His *spiritual* generation. We see Christ in two different positions, born first as a human, then born as God. Why did Paul differentiate between the two if a birth is not involved in each? He is showing that at the resurrection, our Lord and Savior became the Son of God just as we will—by a resurrection from the dead!

Paul writes more about this birth in Romans 8:29, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn [*protokos*] among many brethren.” Who are His brethren? His disciples, members of His body, the church! We will be born again! We have already been born one time, even as Jesus was born to Mary. But He was *declared* to be a Son, born by spiritual generation, and we will follow that pattern.

Jesus Christ was born again! He is the pattern. His brethren, converted Christians, will go through the same born-again experience that He did. Consider that He never had to repent, be baptized, have hands laid on Him to receive the Spirit or be converted, yet He was born again. But He was not born again *until He was composed of spirit*.

This reveals when being born again takes place! For us, it occurs precisely when it occurred for the pattern, Jesus Christ. He was not a born-again Son of God until His resurrection from the dead, and we will not be born again until our resurrection from the dead (I Corinthians 15:50-54)!

All of Romans 8 leads up to the birth of the sons of God:

But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [which] dwells in you. (verse 11)

We will have life beyond our mortal bodies—eternal life—through God’s Spirit at the resurrection from the dead, just as Jesus has.

“The Spirit Itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (verse 16). This confirms that we are now God’s children, though not yet born. As seen in verse 29, we are “*to be*

*conformed* to the image of His Son.” It has not happened yet, since we have not yet been resurrected. Though we have already experienced our physical generation, we have not gone through the complete spiritual generation.

Since Jesus did not have to be converted, and since He was declared God’s Son by His resurrection, BEING CONVERTED IS NOT BEING BORN AGAIN. All of God’s children will follow the same pattern as the Firstborn. We will be born again the same way, by the resurrection from the dead. “And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (verse 17). When did Christ become glorified? At His resurrection! We will be glorified together. When? At our resurrection! We will follow the pattern.

Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (verses 21-22).

Birth pangs wrack the body, but the birth has not yet occurred! “And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (verse 23). Can that be? Verse 15 shows we have already received the Spirit of adoption! But he says *the adoption itself* will not occur until “the redemption of our body”—the resurrection. In fact, the adoption *is* the redemption of our body!

It becomes so clear if we just follow the pattern that was established in Jesus Christ. Though we have not yet looked into John 3, it is plain that being born again refers to the resurrection from the dead. It has nothing to do with conversion except that it is when the process begins, at begettal.

## A Physical Body, A Spiritual Body

More proof can be found in I Corinthians 15, the Resurrection Chapter:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. . . . But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you

do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. (verses 20-22, 35-38)

Paul is writing about a change connected to the resurrection, but he is not finished:

So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (verse 42-45)

He BECAME a life-giving spirit! How? He became that way—born again—by means of a resurrection of the dead. The conclusion is inescapable.

The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. (verses 47-48)

In other words, even as all men follow the pattern of Adam, so will all those of the new creation follow the pattern of the second Adam, Christ, who was born again by a resurrection.

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. (verses 49-50)

## **Clothed With Glory**

The apostle John restates this in I John 3:1-2:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

A progression takes place in our spiritual lives. It begins with the calling of God, and then moves to repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit and growth in our relationship with God. Finally, we are clothed with God's glory through the resurrection from the dead.

We can see this in II Corinthians 5:1-5:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

The spiritual process is underway! Paul says we still desire to be clothed with glory and that God is preparing (a better translation) us for it. Being "swallowed up by life" is the end of the spiritual process. We will be born again, but this birth is from flesh and death to spirit and eternal life.

## **Born of the Spirit**

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:3-6)

How plain! Flesh generates flesh and Spirit generates spirit!

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you a teacher of Israel and do not know these things?" (verses 7-10)

Several words, both in English and Greek, need clarification. The word translated “born” comes from the Greek *gennao*. According to Zodhiates, *gennao* means “to beget as spoken of men; to bear as spoken of women” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, p. 364). In a passive sense it means “to be begotten or be born.” He continues:

Spoken of God begetting in a spiritual sense which consists in regenerating, sanctifying, quickening anew, and ennobling the powers of the natural man by imparting to him a new life and a new spirit in Christ.

Thayer concurs: “properly of men begetting children . . . ; more rarely of women giving birth to children” (*Lexicon*, p. 113). Thus, *gennao* means to beget or bear; to generate, procreate, engender or sire. These are only a few of its synonyms.

The Greeks used a different word for “conceive”: *sullambano*. Strong’s defines it as “to clasp, i.e. seize (arrest, capture); spec. to conceive (lit. or fig.)” It occurs sixteen times in the New Testament, but only four times to indicate conception (Luke 1:24, 31, 36; 2:21). Each of these four times, it describes a woman’s part at the beginning of the birth process, not the man’s. Further, it always identifies a human conception, not one from God.

## What Does “Beget” Mean?

The word *beget* has caused great confusion in the church. Some claim that it is obsolete and that it means exclusively “to be born.” They accuse Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong of twisting its meaning by applying it to conception. Indeed, we do not often use “beget” in our everyday speech, but it is not obsolete.

When a word is obsolete, a good dictionary will inform the reader by using the abbreviation *obs*, meaning that lexicographers can find no evidence of its recent use. “Beget,” though, has no such indicator—it is not even considered archaic. It is a word of literary elegance, of formality. Still very much in use, it is a word similar to “bequeath” and “behoove,” which are still used, just infrequently. Lawyers use “bequeath” in a special, formal sense. Sometimes we use “behoove” when we say, “It behooves me to do this.” “Beget” belongs to the same class of words.

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, probably the world’s most authoritative English dictionary, gives these definitions for *beget*: “to procreate or generate.” What does *gennao* mean? “To beget or bear; to generate, procreate, engender or sire.” What does *OED* say *pro-*

*create* means? “Engender, give rise to, bring into existence.” Synonyms for procreate are “sire” or “father.” Male horses become sires of their offspring.

*Webster’s Third International Dictionary* defines *beget* as “procreate as the father: sire, father; to give birth to, breed, make a woman pregnant.” Does not a woman become pregnant at the moment of conception? *Conceive* means “to become pregnant.” All these definitions lead us in a circle; these words all have similar meanings. “Engender,” “generate,” “procreate,” “sire,” “father,” “conceive” and “beget” are all synonyms that can be used for *the BEGINNING of the process that ends in birth*.

John Masefield, who died in 1967, wrote two poems concerning the Arthurian legend, the first titled *The Begetting of Arthur* and the second *The Birth of Arthur*. Did he know the difference between begetting and birth? This man was a wordsmith, a poet, who spent his life working with words. He knew that begetting occurs at conception.

If a man fathers a child which dies prior to its birth, he is nevertheless considered to have begotten a child. If a horse sires a foal and it dies before birth, we say it was stillborn. The foal had been sired—begotten—but not born alive.

So *beget*, a word in current usage, means either “conceive” or “bear,” exactly what *gennao* means! They are exact duplicates of each other. Both can be used as the male equivalent of the female “conceive.” Notice that “conceive” and “bear” together cover the whole process, from conception to birth. *Gennao* and “beget,” then, cover the whole process from conception to birth.

To simplify this, *gennao* means “to become the father of,” whether the beginning of the process or the end. Secondly, though very rarely, it means “to become the mother of.” Because of its broad use, covering from conception to birth, its meaning has to be determined by the context in which it appears. And Herbert Armstrong hit the nail right on the head.

Notice Matthew 1:20:

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”

“Conceived” in this verse is *gennao*. The center reference in the New King James Version reads “begotten.” So why did they translate this “conceived”? Because a woman is involved in the context. This is the only case in the Bible where *gennao* describes the woman’s part of conception.

Notice that Jesus was not yet born! The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to use *gennao* to describe the beginning of the gestation process, not the end. Scholars who believe otherwise have to do a lot of intellectual gymnastics to get around this verse. But because the emphasis here is on a woman, *gennao* had to be translated “conceived.” This is same word that is translated “born” in John 3:3.

## “Born From Above”?

Some have written that the phrase “born again” in John 3:3 means “born from above.” Undoubtedly, they do this to lend credence to their theory that this birth takes place at the time of conversion. The combination of words here is *gennao anothēn*. *Anothēn* can be translated “from above,” “again” or “from the first,” depending on the context. But notice Nicodemus’ understanding of what Jesus said when He said it, not two thousand years later.

“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a *second time* into his mother’s womb and be born?” (verse 4). He understood *anothēn* to mean “again,” not “from above”! Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, was no simpleton; as a scholar and elder among the Jews, he was very conversant with the language that Jesus spoke. And his response was, “How can a man return to his mother’s womb?” He knew the context of their conversation demanded “again.”

Returning to a mother’s womb is very earthly. Nicodemus understood Jesus to mean being born again on earth. Jesus never took the conversation out of an earthly realm, but simply contrasted flesh and spirit on earth. Not until verse 12 does Jesus refer to anything beyond the earth, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

By Jesus’ own testimony, He was talking about something confined to the earth. He says, “. . . if I tell you heavenly things,” not “I have told you”! Thus, the birth He is talking about will take place on earth, not from above. Nicodemus understood it in that context, and in the course of their dialogue, Jesus did not correct him in that regard.

## Not Abstract

Their entire conversation is confined to an earthly setting. “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (verse 3). “See” is *idou*, meaning either “to perceive mentally” or “to see literally with the eyes.” By the context of the next two verses, we can understand it in its physical sense.

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is

old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" And Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (verses 4-5)

*Enter* means literally "to go inside of," as one would enter a building, not an ethereal or abstract concept.

Paul says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 15:50), which agrees perfectly with Jesus' statement. When combined with Jesus being the pattern for the entire new creation, and that He did not go through a conversion process and yet was born again by a resurrection from the dead, ***John 3:3-8 must refer to the end of the process.***

Otherwise, we have to try to explain away verses like "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (verse 6). It is perfectly clear on its own; it needs no explanation. We are still confined to the earth. But the birth Jesus is speaking about occurs later: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"!

The old "hat pin test" still works. We still bleed and feel pain. We are still flesh. We are not spirit yet, so we have not been born again. It becomes even clearer:

Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again."  
The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it,  
but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is  
everyone who is born of the Spirit. (verse 7-8)

If we—proven to be fleshly beings—can still see each other coming and going, we are not yet spirit. It is so plain!

## Confusion of Type and Reality

The process that ends in being born again begins at begettal. Throughout the entire process, however, there are types, symbolic actions, that represent later realities. Repentance and baptism typify a death (Romans 6:2-11). We have died to sin, and when a person dies, he is buried. Likewise, we are buried in water and are raised up out of it (typifying a resurrection) to begin a new life.

But we are not born again yet; we are still flesh and blood. God imparts His Spirit to us at the laying on of hands, but we are not spirit. We *have* the Spirit in a small measure as a down payment, an earnest, a guarantee, of our future, complete endowment (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). It has begotten us to begin the process.

We go through these types but the reality is still future. And it will

not occur until we literally die, our bodies decay, and we are resurrected by the power of God. Only then will we be spirit. Then we will be like the wind. The process will have been completed. We will be born again!

## **Old Testament Proof**

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (John 3:10). Should Nicodemus have known of this teaching? Yes! What had he neglected? The Scriptures! He was a teacher of the Old Testament. Does the Old Testament say anything about the resurrection from the dead? Yes, indeed!

Here at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus emphasizes the hope of mankind, the resurrection from the dead, changing from flesh to spirit, only he calls it becoming “born again.” Like any good teacher, He used different metaphors to explain the same process so that greater numbers of people can grasp the concept. So now He tells Nicodemus that he should have recognized and understood it from the teachings of the Old Testament.

Job knew about the resurrection. He says to God:

Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. (Job 14:13-14)

Job, although he does not call it being born again, knew he would be changed from physical to spiritual.

Nicodemus, a master of the law, apparently never understood Job’s words, so Jesus was opening his understanding. “You shall call [the last trump], and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job 14:15). Our God will desire to fellowship again with the wonderful attitude, the beautiful heart, the sterling character that He created in us through our experiences in the flesh. Just like a father desires to see his child finally born after waiting so long during his wife’s pregnancy, God wants to see us born into His Kingdom.

Later, Job returns to this theme:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that [out of, free from, without] my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25-26)

He knew that when he rose from the grave, he would not be flesh, although Nicodemus apparently did not.

Others in the Old Testament, like Daniel, also understood a spiritual resurrection:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteous like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2-3)

Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:40, “There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.” As a star is brighter than a light on earth, so shall we be after the resurrection compared to now. Paul found this idea—that people will be resurrected and glorified—in the Old Testament.

Isaiah also writes of the resurrection:

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth [tribulation and the Day of the Lord], and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to *your* light, and kings to the brightness of *your* rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

Paul uses this same imagery in II Corinthians 3:18: “But we all . . . are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory,” meaning from the glory of man to the glory of God.

Isaiah writes about it later in his book:

Before she travailed, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? (Isaiah 66:7-8)

A nation is a family grown large, but Isaiah speaks of such a nation coming into existence “at once,” in a moment (see I Corinthians 15:51-52). Here is the God Family, the Kingdom of God, born (again!) all at the same time, except Christ, the Firstborn.

“Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery,” says the LORD. “Shall I, who cause delivery shut up the womb?” says your God. “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her,

all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom [also part of the birth analogy], that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” (Isaiah 66:9-11)

Jerusalem, a type of the church, is resurrected, born again and glorified.

## **The Birth Process**

We were created in God’s image and likeness, but not in His composition. Even now, because we have a human spirit, mankind is exceedingly greater than animals. But we need another Spirit, one that gives us the potential, the empowerment, to become sons of God. The process begins when we receive the Holy Spirit and ends when our change comes.

Becoming a son of God, however, is a process. Just like the human birth process, it begins with conception, an impregnation, followed by gestation, or growth, until the baby is born. Before birth, the fetus has certain similarities with his parents, and these similarities increase as birth nears. When the baby is finally born, he is just like his parents; he is fully human. The baby then takes his place as a full and participating member of the family.

And so it is with God. When we are born again, we will be just like Him. Of the same Family, the same kind, we will be in the image of our Father—just like Him!—but we will not be as great as our Father. Even as a human baby is just as much human as his mother and father are, we will be just as much God as He is! There will be differences: talent, development, position, authority, power, etc., but we will have truly been born into eternal life!

## **Other Scriptures Clarified**

Once we understand “born again” correctly, other problematic verses, especially in John’s writings, become plain. Notice I John 5:1: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” As we know from John 3:3-8, we are not yet born of God. So how is this clarified?

“Born” is *gennao*, which includes everything from conception to birth. What synonym fits best here? Fleshly humans are not born of God yet, so we could use “begotten,” “engendered,” “sired,” “fathered,” etc. Since it refers to the male part in this operation, “conceived” will not work here.

“Everyone who loves Him who begot [the Father] also loves him who is begotten” (same verse). Here we could use “conceived,” “fathered,” “sired,” “engendered” and so forth.

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin” (I John 3:9). How do we explain this? We could leave it as it is because I John 1:8 clearly states that we can still sin. In this case, we would understand I John 3:9 as referring to one literally born into God’s Kingdom.

Another, more accurate understanding is that a Christian, begotten of God, should not *practice* sin. We have seen that we can still sin, and I John 2:1 says that we “may not sin.” “May not” indicates that we do not have permission to sin, but if we do sin, it can be forgiven. The context implies sinful actions, not habitual practices.

This dovetails with I John 3:9, where a begotten son of God “does not sin.” This is written in the present tense, indicating continuous action. Thus, it becomes an urgent appeal: A Christian *must* not sin! It means we must not sin habitually, deliberately, easily or maliciously. Translating *gennaō* into “begotten,” “sired,” etc., gives us a more accurate and deeper understanding of our responsibility to glorify our Father in heaven by following after righteousness.

If we understand that from the Bible’s own testimony and the Greek’s definitions of their own words, that *gennaō* covers from the beginning to the end of the birth process, that Jesus Christ established the pattern we will follow by being born again through a resurrection from the dead, we can insert these synonyms to clarify the meaning. If we are careful in this, we will not twist the Scriptures in any way.

What awesome truths leap from the pages of the Bible when we let it explain itself! With such perfection God has crafted the Scriptures to broaden and deepen our understanding of His marvelous purpose for us. In types and metaphors and plain language, He has revealed the wonderful process that we follow as we strive toward eternal life in the soon-coming Kingdom of God!

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**“Born-again Christian” is a term supposedly identifying those who have “given their hearts to the Lord.” Though we may have devoted our lives to God and His way, are we “born again”?**

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