

# An In-Depth Study Of John 3:1-12

## [Part 2]

### Again or above? –

The Greek word translated “*again*” in **John 3:3** is “*anōthen*”, has two possible meanings depending on the context.

The apostle John uses this five times, and it consistently means “*from above*”, or in one case, “*from the top*.”

In addition to **John 3:3** and **John 3:7**, John uses the Greek word “*anōthen*” in **John 3:31**, **John 19:11** and **John 19:23**.

In **John 3:31**, Jesus says that He came from above [“*anōthen*”].

This is an instance where “*anōthen*” clearly means “*from above*,” and it is unlikely that John would use the word with a different meaning in **John 3:3** which is in such close proximity.

As Jesus Christ came from above, so His followers are also born from above.

If Jesus Christ meant only “*again*,” John would have used the Greek word “*palin*”, as he does 47 times elsewhere in his gospel.

The apostle John is consistent in his use of “*anōthen*” and “*palin*” and his regular portrayal of Christ’s words being misunderstood indicates that John intended “*anōthen*” to mean “*from above*”, while Nicodemus took Christ to mean the more rabbinic term “*born a second time*.”

**Jesus meant we are to be “born from above” [born of God, who is above]; although to be born of God does amount to a second birth.**

**The rebirth is a spiritual one, not a re-enactment of our physical birth.**

To be reborn in a biblical sense means to undergo a total change in our character which is made possible by the Holy Spirit working in us to produce the “*fruits*” of the Holy Spirit [**Galatians 5:22-23**]. The Holy Spirit comes from above.

**Our part in this transformation is outlined in simple terms by Paul.**

**Romans 12:1-2** [NIV] “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

Our yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit in gratitude of what God has done for us through the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ the Son of God and Son of Man.

Some say that Nicodemus’ questions were proof that he correctly understood that Christ was speaking literally.

This is an impossible interpretation because, for Christ to be taken literally based on Nicodemus’ reaction, we would have to conclude that Jesus did mean for Nicodemus to actually re-enter his mother’s womb. That, of course, is absurd.

Nicodemus’ misunderstanding was based on his narrow view of rebirth and how it was accomplished.

Recently, there have been those who deny the need to examine the original Greek because the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus probably took place in Aramaic, and therefore, they say, the Greek wording of the apostle John is unreliable.

This argument tries to remove the debate from the real issues.

What does the Christian Bible say?

What does the Christian Bible record mean?

If we can't trust the original language of the scriptures, then the entire discussion is irrelevant.

**Of water and spirit –**

In **John 3:5** the expression “*born of water and spirit*” has been interpreted to mean born physically and born a spirit being [at the resurrection] respectively.

This does **not** do justice to the context.

**There is no mention of a future resurrection or glorification here.**

The phenomena Jesus describes are seen as occurring among Christ and His followers, **not** among Nicodemus and the Pharisees.

Jesus confirms this in **John 3:11**.

**Jesus is explaining where Nicodemus went wrong, he had overlooked the “from above” aspect or the spiritual component of rebirth.**

Jesus is continuing the conversation, explaining to Nicodemus where he is mistaken.

The expression “*born of water and the spirit*” is **not** referring to two different births, one physical birth and one spiritual.

**The fact that both nouns are governed by one preposition indicates one birth, “of water and spirit.”**

**Jesus is talking about one birth from above, which demands that a person [Jew or Gentile] cleans or buries their past completely before receiving the Holy Spirit.**

**Ezekiel 36:25-27** [NIV] “*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*”

This cleansing of water and subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit was prophesied by God through the prophet Ezekiel.

**Water baptism by total immersion, is the symbol that we have buried the “old person” [including our religion] and now live a new life.**

**Romans 6:3-4** [NIV] “*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*”

**The combination of water, the burial of our old life leading to the birth of a new life that is guided by the Holy Spirit. [Romans 8:14]**

**Luke 7:28-30** [NIV] *“I tell you, among those born of women there is no-one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptised by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptised by John.)”*

**The Pharisees refused to be baptised by total immersion by John the Baptist because to submit to the rite would have been to acknowledge that their Jewish birth was insufficient.**

While John the Baptist’s baptism symbolised cleaning and burial, it was also insufficient because it did **not** include the giving of the Holy Spirit from above.

**John 1:29-34** [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”*

John the Baptist said that his baptism was only with water to prepare a people to receive a baptism by the Holy Spirit which **only** Jesus Christ could and would give.

**Water refers to the outward show of baptism, and spirit refers to the inner change that is effected by the Holy Spirit, which transformed John’s baptism into Christian baptism.**

John often clarifies the work of John the Baptist in relationship to Christ’s work.

There must have been people in John’s day who refused to make the change from following John the Baptist to follow Jesus Christ. [**John 3:25** and **Acts 19:1-7**]

The apostle John shows that John the Baptist was **not** the light but that he testified to the light and that he must decrease while Jesus must increase. [**John 1:8; John 3:28, 30**]

**John 3:5** is an indication that John’s baptism would be transformed by Christ’s baptism.

It is **no** coincidence that immediately after the encounter with Nicodemus, that John compares the work of John the Baptist with Christ. [**John 3:22-36**]

**“Believing in” or “coming to” Jesus was not a superficial expression of acceptance.** [see **John 3:20-21; John 5:44; Hebrews 11:6**]

**It means a complete change of heart and mind to serve and obey Jesus Christ.**

**John 3:36** [New Revised Standard] *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life, he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.”*

**The test of true faith is does it produce obedience?**

**If not, such a faith is not saving faith.** [**James 2:17**]

The problem the Pharisees had was in order to receive the Holy Spirit and thereby eternal life, they would have to do something they were generally unwilling to do, come to Jesus Christ the Son of God to receive the Eternal Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

**Is that which is born of the spirit a spirit being?**

The expressions, *“that which is born of the flesh is flesh,”* and *“that which is born of the spirit is spirit”* [New King James] has been interpreted to mean *“born human”* and *“born a spirit being”* respectively. [John 3:6]

But this is **not** the intended meaning.

**The context shows that the three expressions, “born from above,” “born of water and spirit,” and “born of the Spirit is spirit” are parallel statements.**

**The antithesis of John 3:6 is not in the bodily composition of those who are born, but in the inner nature.**

**One has a special relationship with the Creator God and the other doesn't.**

**Galatians 4:29** [NIV] *“At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.”*

**Both of these men were human beings, made of flesh, but with different spiritual relationships with God. Isaac was converted and Ishmael was not.**

**Paul also draws a comparison between Judaism and Christianity in Galatians 4:21-31.**

Ishmael had persecuted or mocked Isaac [Genesis 21:8-11].

**Paul uses Ishmael to represent the Jews of his day who were persecuting the Christian Church and Isaac to represent the Christian Church. [Galatians 4:24-25, 28-29]**

**Like Ishmael, Nicodemus was born only according to the flesh, and like Isaac, Christians are born according to the spirit.**

**What is being discussed is a person's spiritual condition, not their bodily makeup. [Romans 8:9]**

We have an interesting parallel between **John 3:6** and **John 6:63** [NIV] *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”* The words that Jesus spoke were **not** spirit beings!

Nor did Jesus Christ mean that the words were of a nature other than the human languages of His day.

**Jesus meant that the words He spoke were to be understood spiritually.**

It is certainly possible to be spiritual without being composed of spirit, even as it is possible to speak human language with a spiritual meaning.

Notice what Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:13-16** [NIV] *“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”*

**Nicodemus fits well into Paul's thoughts in that he was a natural man and his religion was still on a physical plane, so he could not accept things that came from the Holy Spirit, they were foolishness to him, like re-entering his mother's womb.**

**Nicodemus' idea of rebirth, put simply, was converting a physical Gentile into a physical Israelite.**

**To Jesus a rebirth was converting a natural physical person [Gentile or Jew] into a spiritual person.**

**If “*that which is born of the spirit*” refers to the resurrection, several of John’s statements are very puzzling to say the least. Read the following statements:**

**John 1:12-13; 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:10; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 5:1**

The many references to rebirth, born of God in the writing of the apostle John clearly speaks of it in present or past tense, connecting it with Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and obey what He says.

Therefore, the context of **John 3** makes it unthinkable that John would present these terms inconsistently or in opposition to Christ’s usage.

**From this and the above references we must conclude “*that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” means that whoever is born again by the Spirit is spiritual, referring to the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit working in and through them. [see Titus 3:5-7]**