

04.F : Jhn.3:3

This looks for perception of the friendly riddle set by Jesus to Nicodemus (ben Gurion?). To test him, Jesus served up a purposely ambiguous *born anew*. Smiling, Nicodemus returned a 'you cannot be serious' *born again*, to which Jesus volleyed with *spiritual birth* you ninny.¹ Game, set, and match. All good fun of course, and Nicodemus would remain an honest spectator until Yeshua, overcoming Death, proved himself champion. Something like this would serve: [Jesus] Only those who are born *anew*² can see God's kingdom. [Nicodemus] How can an old person be *born [again]*?³ Surely they can't re-enter their mother's womb and be born a second time? [Jesus] ...Don't be surprised that I said to you, "You⁴ must be born *from above*."⁵ In short, **A** (3) must allow the misunderstanding **B** (4) but pan out as **C** (7) or revert to A (3). *Anōthen* is from *anō*, has the primary meaning of 'above' (Jhn.3:31; 8:23; Ac.2:19), but could double for beginning/source (Ac.26:3). It's a little like just saying, "born another", which might mean "born another of the same kind, ie again", or "born another of a different kind, eg spiritually". That John captured this range of meaning underlines how even the leading rabbinic lights were fuzzy as to biblical prophecies of spiritual birth being a special feature of the messianic age. So, the term 'born again' – a second birth of the same kind – was friendly Nicodemean wit, wasn't what Jesus had said, and failed the test.

This is a crucial text on spiritual life. Evangelicalism, from *eu-angelion*, means Good Newsism, and *Born Again* is its defining term, for some a holy cow, some fundamentally differentiating between *Christians*, and *Born Again Christians*. The Nicodemean bit (4) in itself requires but a small change in expression (7). That done, change should go deeper. Nicodemus was being primed that though he was in God's earthly kingdom, by human birth (1 Chr.28:5; Ex.19:6), not even Jews could be in God's messianic kingdom, except by spiritual birth consequent to the cross. That would be the only kingdom that spiritually mattered. Today the whole dialogue leaves many Evangelicals with a puzzle. Namely, if ultimate eternal life was hitherto accessible by all people, and henceforth it would only be accessible to those who became Christians, why call that *limitation* good news?⁶

Scores: I ignore sageist language (man/he). V3 must neither give Nicodemus' negative answer, 'born [again/a second time]', nor the true answer, 'born from above/spiritually'. For v4, I accept anything along the lines of reborn/born again/born...second-time; I reject the ambiguous 'born anew' (EOB) and the sense that Nicodemus *knew*, but rejected, Jesus having talked of being 'born again' (MSG). Formally, v7 may have the same open phrase as v3, 'born anew', but perhaps is better put functionally as 'from above', or equivalent. Unless reincarnation is true, we are not re-born, *contra* NRSV (another birth of the same kind), but by conversion we experience a change by God that's somewhat analogous to human birth, entering into a new dimension.

A1 (v3 text): allowing both B and C (8 points); as C above (4 points); as B above (2); combined and confused jumbling of B & C (zero).

A2 (v3 footnote): a good substantial note (3); A in footnotes (2); a less helpful footnote (1); none (zero); as B (-1).

B (v4 text): as born [a second time/again] (8); as second entry into womb [formally OK] *then* [second] birth (7); as third entry into womb [eg re-enter (go back) a second time] *then* [second] birth (6); simply A as ambiguous (2); implying that Nicodemus reflected on C (zero).

C1 (v7 text): either as A 'born anew' (context defines), or as a functional definition of A (context defined), eg spiritually born (8); as B (2); badly compounded translation (zero).

¹ *Gennaō anōthen*: v3; *gennaō...deuteros*: 4; *gennaō ek ho pneuma... gennaō anōthen*: 6f.

² Unless defined the Gk. word *anōthen* could mean *again* or *from above* (spiritually).

³ Nicodemus said a simple *born (gennaō)* followed by *second time...born (gennaō...deuteros)*: v4. The few versions that helpfully put *born again* in this text, tend to do so for Nicodemus' first reference to birth.

⁴ Jesus generalised by the Gk. plural 'you' meaning 'you people'.

⁵ At this point less ambiguous than *anew* (v3): by reference to God's spirit as the agent rather than one's mother, *again* has been defined out of his meaning. Incidentally, *born again* shouldn't be used in 1 Pt.1:23, where the KJV ditched the Reformation's Tyndale (*born anew*) in favour of Rome's Martin (*born again*).

⁶ *My Israel's Gone Global* redefines Evangelicalism, cutting this Gordian Knot.

C2 (v7 footnote): a good substantial note (3); either A or C in footnotes (2); a less helpful footnote (1), none (zero); as B (-1). An affirmation of B (-2).

Kingdom Entrance	A1	A2	B	C1	C2	T	T-5	%	
WEB	8	3	7	8	0	26	21	100	A+
CEB	8	1	7	8	0	24	19	90	A+
NRSV	4	2	7	8	2	23	18	86	A-
CEV	4	2	8	8	0	22	17	81	A-
NABRE	4	3	7	8	0	22	17	81	A-
EOB	8	3	2	8	0	21	16	76	B
LEB	4	3	7	8	-2	20	15	71	B-
NET	4	3	7	8	-2	21	16	71	B-
TLV	4	1	7	8	0	20	15	71	B-
GWT	4	0	6	8	0	18	13	62	C
ISV	4	1	6	8	-1	18	13	62	C
NJB	4	0	6	8	0	18	13	62	C
NOG	4	0	6	8	0	18	13	62	C
GNB	2	1	8	2	2	15	10	48	D+
NASU	2	1	7	2	2	14	9	43	D
ESV	2	2	7	2	0	13	8	38	U1
HCSB	2	2	7	2	0	13	8	38	U1
NLT	2	1	8	2	0	13	8	38	U1
VOICE	2	1	8	2	0	13	8	38	U1
ERV	2	0	8	2	0	12	7	33	U1
MEV	2	1	7	2	0	12	7	33	U1
MSG	4	0	0	8	0	12	7	33	U1
NCV	2	0	7	2	0	11	6	33	U1
NIV	2	1	8	2	0	12	7	33	U1
NLV	2	0	8	2	0	12	7	33	U1
NWT	2	1	7	2	0	12	7	33	U1
KJ21	2	0	7	2	0	11	6	29	U2
KJV	2	0	7	2	0	11	6	29	U2
NKJV	2	0	7	2	0	11	6	29	U2
REB	2	0	7	2	0	11	6	29	U2
CJB	0	-2	8	0	0	6	1	5	U4
EJB	0	-2	7	0	0	5	0	0	U4