**"Born Again..."**

What Jesus Really Meant

To see the Kingdom of God you must be born again.” [Joh 3:3] (paraphrased by me)

**What Jesus Meant by Being Born Again**

When something is to be done again, it means that it had been done, at least once, before. Therefore, to be born again simply means to be born a second time.

This was the plain meaning of what Jesus said and from the question Nicodemus asked in reply, this was what Nicodemus understood the question to mean.

How can a man be born when he is old? …Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born! [John 3:4]

Of course, since the natural way human beings are born is through women, if a man had to be born a second time, his mother, or some other woman, would have to conceive him again. He would have to enter again into her womb for her to give birth to him again.

Nicodemus naturally wondered how this was going to be possible, especially for a full-grown man. Perhaps, for a new born child it is even conceivable, but certainly not for an old man. How would a full grown man re-enter his mother’s womb? Was this what Jesus really meant?

**BORN AGAIN OF THE SPIRIT AND NOT OF A WOMAN**

Jesus answered Nicodemus by rephrasing and expanding his initial statement to make it clearer.

I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the Spirit. John 3:5

By this, Jesus points out to Nicodemus that the one who was to give birth to him the second time, who was to give birth to him again, was not his mother, or any other woman for the matter, but the Spirit. Nicodemus’ mother gave birth to him the first time, the second birth was, however, to be by “water and …the Spirit”.

Rephrasing Jesus’ words thus far, “If any man will enter the Kingdom of God, he must be born by the Spirit.”

**BORN AGAIN AS A SPIRIT**

Jesus continued,

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. John 3:6

By this statement, Jesus informs Nicodemus of the implication of being born of the Spirit—just as Nicodemus’ was flesh because his mother who bore him was flesh, so too, Nicodemus would become a spirit being once the Spirit gave birth to him.

Flesh means mortal, earthly, natural and though differing from one another, human beings and animals of every kind are all flesh [1Co 15:39]. On the other hand, however, God [Joh 4:24], Jesus in his present form 2 [1Co 15:45ff], angels [Heb 1:14], and all heavenly creatures [1Co 15:5,48], such as the cherubim and seraphim are all spirits and none mortal, earthly, natural.

What Jesus is saying, therefore, is that the second birth will make Nicodemus a spirit, i.e., a spirit being. This means that from the moment Nicodemus, or any other man, is born again, he will be a spirit and will no longer be mortal, earthly, or natural. Put another way: no one can say he is born again if he is still flesh, i.e., mortal, earthly, natural.

So, when Jesus here speaks of being “born again,” he means “becoming a spirit being”.

**TO BE BORN AGAIN, WINDS AND ANGELS**

Although, at this point, what Jesus meant by being born again should have been clear, Jesus did not stop here. Rather, to make sure there was no room for speculating what he really meant, Jesus gave Nicodemus a description of those who are born again that would drive home the point,

You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. John 3:7-8

The description Jesus here applies to those who are born again is the same description Scripture applies to angels [Psa 104:4]—they are winds! And to say that angels are winds, is to say that they are spirits. Thus, by applying this description to those who are born again, Jesus makes it very certain what he meant by being born again. And what did he mean? He meant that those who are born again, or born of the Spirit, are like angels, they are “winds”! They are spirits! They are not mortal!

Of course, Nicodemus, being a Pharisee [Act 23:8], would have known this scripture which describes the nature of angels, and would have plainly understood what Jesus was saying. And he did! But it so shocked him that, in unbelief, he asked,

How can this be? [Joh 3:9]

Nicodemus’ question shows that he understood what Jesus was saying, he did not ask this question because he did not understand but because he did. How such a feat could be accomplished was, however, beyond him. He was sort of asking, “How can a man become wind like the angels?” “How can a mortal man become a spirit!?!?” “Is that even possible?!?!”

The problem was that it was hard to believe that mere mortals could become spirit beings like the angels.

**SUMMARY**

What Jesus is saying is that no man can enter the Kingdom of God unless he has become a spirit. In other words, **becoming a spirit is a key requirement for entering the Kingdom of God.** Unfortunately, all men born of women are flesh, therefore, all are unqualified for the kingdom of God. This is why we need another birth, one that will make us spirits, and thus, fulfilling this requirement entry into the Kingdom of God.

Only the Spirit of God can bring this about.

**BECOMING SPIRITS LIKE ANGELS**

We can be very sure that what Jesus meant, when he said that those who are born again are like the wind, is that they are spirits like angels. We can be sure of this because, though not with the exact same words, he teaches this same thing somewhere else.

**CHILDREN OF THE RESURRECTION, CHILDREN OF GOD**

In answer to a question of the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead, Jesus stated that all who partake of the resurrection of the dead would be like the angels [Luk 20:34-36]. Now, what being like the angels meant is clear from two characteristics Jesus spoke of that the resurrected and angels share in common—they do not die and they do not marry nor give in marriage.

Angels possess these characteristics because they are spirits and not mortals as humans. Therefore, possessing these characteristics quite clearly means that the resurrected will not have the same physical nature they once had as humans. Rather, the resurrected would be, through their resurrection from the dead, made spirit beings, like the angels. *Therefore, he compares both because they are both spirits.*

Furthermore, and more interestingly, he says that

They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection [Luk 20:36]

Please, observe that they are children of God not simply because they believe in God, but because they partake of the resurrection. In other words, according to these words, by partaking of the resurrection, one becomes a child of God.

Now, if one becomes a child of God through the resurrection, then the resurrection from the dead is a form of birth. Therefore, the resurrection will make a man a spirit like the angels. This is no different from what Jesus was telling Nicodemus about being born again when he applied the scriptural description of angels to them.

Now, since no man, with the exception of Jesus Christ, will be changed from mortal to spirit before the resurrection [1Co 15:51-52 1Th 4:15-17], it means that it is at the resurrection of the dead that men will be born again. Until then, therefore, no one, except for Jesus, can be said to have been born again.

**BORN AGAIN AS GOD’S CHILDREN**

At this point, we may observe that, since there can’t be conception and birth without parents, the words “born again”, since it is a birth, mean that we are made members of God’s family, i.e., we become God’s children when we become spirits. We are sure it is God who is our Father through this process because it is the Spirit of God, he says will bring about this birth and not our human mothers. This very plainly teaches the same thing as Jesus’ words that we become God’s children through the resurrection from the dead [Luk 20:36].

Therefore, by being born of the Spirit, by becoming spirits, we become God’s children.

**THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST**

When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was given a different nature—he was glorified, he was raised to life as a spirit being [1Co 15:42-45]. This confirms that there is indeed a bodily change from human, mortal nature to spirit, immortal nature and this was what Jesus had in mind when he spoke to Nicodemus of being born again.

What Jesus meant by being born again is quite literal and physical, it is to have a change of our physical, human, natural bodies, it is to become spirits such as angels are. Though, for whatever reason, perhaps, because we have understood “born again” differently, this may be more than many of us are willing to believe, nevertheless, it is exactly what Jesus meant.

Paul confirms all of this when he says,

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. [1Co 15:50]

In other words, just as Jesus meant in his words to Nicodemus, to enter the Kingdom of God, or to inherit the Kingdom of God, one must become a spirit being—he cannot be mortal.

**JESUS AS THE FIRSTBORN AND BEING BORN AGAIN**

That it is through the resurrection from the dead that men will be born again is confirmed in the title of Jesus Christ as firstborn.

Because Jesus is the first and, thus far, the only man who has been raised from the dead as a spirit being, he is called the firstborn from among the dead [Col 1:18].

Also, because the change from mortal to spirit being is a birth—in fact, the second birth—and by it one becomes a son of God, all who partake of the resurrection, being children of the same Father, God, are all brothers. And because Jesus is the first man to have experienced this birth, he is called the firstborn among many brothers [Rom 8:29].

Now, because of the popular conceptions about spirits being bodiless, I consider it important to emphasise that the second birth is about the body and not about the spirit within a man. It is our physical bodies that will be raised from the dead and it is these physical bodies that will be changed into spiritual bodies. No man, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has yet been born again.

**BECOMING SPIRITS IS A BODILY AFFAIR**

I think it is important that I emphasise that the becoming of spirits is very literal and concerns the body rather than the spirit of a man within him. Being born again, being born of the Spirit, is not something that happens in the spirit of a man, it is something that happens to the body of a man. It has to do with the body. Not realizing or accepting this leads to a misunderstanding of what Jesus meant by becoming born again. Though what many teach with Jesus’ doctrine of the second birth is good and good intentioned, if they are not saying this, they are, nevertheless, not what Jesus meant.

One of the reasons why some may not see this and why others may reject it, though it is the truth, is the false and unscriptural idea that spirits don’t have actual, real, tangible bodies.

**LIVING SPIRITS HAVE BODIES**

There are various reasons why some believe that spirits are bodiless. For some, it is because spirits are normally invisible to us and they suppose that the reason for this is because they are bodiless and immaterial. Now, although, indeed, there are some spirits, like the spirits of the dead, that are bodiless, because they lose their bodies in death, this belief is certainly not rooted in scriptures, for we are plainly told that,

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. [1Co 15:44b].

So, although it is not all spirits that have bodies, in scripture, with their exception of some spirits, to be a spirit is not to be bodiless, but instead it is to have a higher kind of body. It is false to say that spirits all don’t have bodies.

This false belief that spirits don’t have bodies, as inconsequential as it may appear, is at the foundation of quite a number of distorted and false doctrines. These include distortions of Jesus’ doctrine of the second birth, and even views about God, and hinders the understanding of so much more.

**DIDN’T JESUS SAY ALL SPIRITS DON’T HAVE BODIES?**

Some may find it hard to accept the fact that spirits have spiritual bodies [1Co 15:44-45] based on the words of Jesus that

…handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. [Luk 24:39].

 Indeed, at first glance, the words may seem to be a categorical and incontrovertible statement from Jesus defining a common characteristic of all spirit beings that they all don’t have bodies. However, with some reflection and some attention to the details of the account, one realizes that this is not so.

No, He Didn’t The statement in question has two implications at first glance, neither of which is true: it seems quite clear that Jesus is saying that,

1. A general characteristic of all spirits is that they don’t have flesh and bones, i.e., they don’t have bodies. This leads to the next point,
2. He, the resurrected Jesus, is not a spirit being since he has flesh and bones.

As I just said, neither of these is right. First, let us address the second point above.

**GOD IS A SPIRIT, THE RESURRECTED JESUS IS A SPIRIT**

Before his conception in Mary, Jesus was in very nature God [Joh 1:1ff; Php 2:5-6]. Through His conception, he took on the nature of a man and remained so till his death [Php 2:7-8]. Before dying, however, he prayed to God the Father that he would be restored to his previous glory which he had before the creation of the world [Joh 17:5]. Thus, after his death, raised to life on the third day, he was restored to his previous nature and glory which he shared with God and was exalted to the highest place [Php 2:9-11; Col 1:19; 2:9; Heb 1:3]. Therefore, the resurrected Jesus is no longer in human form or nature but is once again like God.

Now, Jesus had said, “God is a spirit” [Joh 4:24]. Therefore, since Jesus, by his resurrection from the dead, was restored to being in very nature God, the resurrected Jesus is certainly a spirit like God. Let me say it again, because God is a spirit, the resurrected Jesus is a spirit.

Therefore, because he certainly is one, the resurrected Jesus couldn’t have, by the statement in question, or any other, meant that he was not a spirit being. If he denied that he was a spirit being, *(which some enemies of the faith would prefer)*it means he was denying that he was God.

So, since, beyond reasonable debate, the resurrected Jesus was a spirit, and he had flesh and bones, when he said spirits don’t have flesh and bones, he couldn’t have been referring to all kinds of spirits. He wasn’t stating a characteristic common to all spirits but to a particular class.

So, what kind of spirit was he saying he was not?

As we will see from the account, he was referring particularly to the spirits of the dead he had in mind when he said that “a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have”.

**The Spirit of a Dead Man or the Man Himself**

Jesus spoke the words in question to his disciples when, once, after his resurrection, he suddenly appeared among them, and they were afraid because they thought he was a spirit [Luk 24:38]. Jesus then said to them,

Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for **a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.** [Luk 24:38-39 KJV]

 Jesus on this occasion offered them three proofs,

1. The holes in his hands and feet [Luk 24:39-41]
2. The fact that he had a body of flesh and bones which they could feel [Luk 24:39]
3. The fact that he could eat food [Luk 24:41-43]

We must be careful not to read the account with the assumption that Jesus was trying to prove his identity to them, if we do we may fail to see that the proofs he gave are really not suited for such an end. What was he trying to prove?

With the exception of the first, these proofs are quite generic. Every man has flesh and bones and generally we all eat, so certainly the purpose of these proofs was not to prove that it was Jesus and not somebody else. So, we can see right away that Jesus wasn’t trying to prove his identity to them.

Now, if Jesus wasn’t trying to prove to them that he was Jesus and not someone else, then their doubts, since that was what he was trying to clear, were not about his identity but about something else. So, what was it?

The only thing these all really serve to prove is that Jesus, the one they were seeing, was alive. We can see then that the real issue for them was to know if Jesus, who was appearing to them was alive or if he was still dead and it was his spirit appearing to them.

Luke, who recorded this account, writing in the book of Acts, tells us that the purpose of the proofs Jesus gave the disciples were to convince them that he was alive [Act 1:3]. The question in the hears of the disciples was therefore, whether it was the spirit of a dead man or the man himself, alive again, they were seeing was. The issue was not the identity of the person they were seeing, they knew it was Jesus, the issue was whether he was alive or not. Now, the only way Jesus could appear to them and still be dead was if his spirit appeared to them. Therefore, the issue was if what they were seeing was dead Jesus’ spirit or Jesus himself alive in his body again.

When one realizes that this was the issue and that this was what Jesus gave proofs to clear, one understands that he wasn’t referring to all spirits when he said, “a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have” but only to the spirits of the dead.

*Jesus was saying, “It is I myself, and not my spirit. I am no longer dead. I am alive. Handle me. Feel my body. Confirm for yourself that I am actually alive. This is me and not my spirit appearing to you.”*

***No, He Didn’t***

So, no, Jesus did not say that all spirits are bodiless but that the spirits of the dead are bodiless.

1. Since the resurrected Jesus was God and therefore, could not be claiming he wasn’t a spirit,

and

1. Since the issue he was addressing was whether he was the spirit of a dead man or the man himself,

Jesus wasn’t speaking of all spirits when he said that “a spirit hath not flesh and bones” but was, in particular, stating a characteristic of the spirits of a dead man.

In addition, rather than prove that spirits don’t have bodies, the account in fact proves they do. Since the resurrected Jesus, who is a spirit, had flesh and bones, we can be totally certain that, except for the spirits of the dead, spirit beings have bodies. Spirits have flesh and bones. We can be totally certain that there is indeed, as the apostle Paul said, “a spiritual body” [1Co 15:44-45].

**Conclusion**

 To be born again in the words of Jesus is not to experience a change of heart or character, rather it is to experience a bodily change. Those who are born again are those who have had their bodies changed from this mortal, earthly form into the kind of body Jesus received when he was raised from the dead. It is not to be filled with the Holy Spirit, rather it is to have become a spirit being like the angels and like Jesus became after his resurrection from the dead.

To drive the point home, no human being, since the creation of the world till this present hour of writing has been born again except for Jesus. Jesus is the only human being that has been born again because he is the only human being that has experience that change from human nature to spirit nature.

**A Word of Caution**

We may not realize it but` teaching that being born again is a change of heart or something akin to that is a serious distortion of Jesus’ message. It is a distortion because it hides the unique message of the passage. It is good to have a change of heart, but that is not what Jesus meant. If we insist that the change of heart, or some mysterious thing that happens in the spirit of a man, is what Jesus meant by being born again, we shroud in darkness a central doctrine of Jesus and hinder a more thorough understanding of the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [2Ti 1:9-10].

**Summary of the Points**

1. For any man to enter the Kingdom of God, he must be born again.
2. To be born again is to be born of the Spirit.
3. To be born of the Spirit, is to be changed into a spirit. One who is born of the spirit is a spirit and is no longer be mortal, earthly, natural.
4. Therefore, for any man to enter the Kingdom of God, he must become a spirit.
5. This change, from “flesh”, mortal to spirit, immortal, can only be brought about by the Spirit of God.
6. Jesus calls this change from natural to spiritual being birth—born again—because by it one becomes a child of God and God becomes one’s father.
7. It is at the resurrection of the dead that that those who believe in Jesus will experience this birth.

**Some Implications of the True Meaning of Jesus’ Words**

1. Since every human being is a mortal man, except for Jesus, no human being has been born again. Except for Jesus who became a spirit being by his resurrection from the dead, no human being, however pious or spirit filled, righteous or sinner, before or since Christ, has been born again.
2. It is pointless asking a mortal man if he is born again because, if he were born again, he wouldn’t be mortal.
3. Telling a convert that he is born again because he believes in Jesus and has made a commitment to him, according to Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, is a lie, because no man will be born of the spirit until the first resurrection.
4. Though Jesus’ body had not decayed by the third day, it was nowhere to be found after his resurrection. Why? Because that very same body was what was raised from the dead. Now, since Jesus, by his resurrection became a spirit and was no longer mortal, it means that it was his body, his human body, that was changed.

**APPENDIX**

**To Be Born of Water**

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [Joh 3:5 KJV].

In the book of John, the Lord Jesus in his teachings used water to represent the Holy Spirit [Joh 4:10,13-14; 7:37-39]. This was not a particularly new practice, however, for before his earthly ministry, the use of water as a representation or metaphor for the Holy Spirit was already present in Scriptures [Isa 44:3-4; Eze 36:25-27]. Consistent with how he used ‘water’ in the book of John, we can see that it is to the Holy Spirit he was referring when he spoke of “being born of water…” [Joh 3:5a]. Therefore, to be “born of water” is another way of saying to be “born of the Spirit”.

One may wonder why, if this is true, why Jesus said that a man had to be “born of water and of the Spirit”. That is, why didn’t he just say either “born of water” or “born of the Spirit”. Well, mentioning water along with the Spirit helps to identify the spirit of which Jesus was speaking as the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of which Jesus spoke was not defined, the identity of the spirit that would birth us again, could be debatable. For example, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” [Joh 3:6], could be taken to be a general principle applying to all spirits. It could then be argued from this that a man could be born again through any spirit and that it didn’t have to be the Holy Spirit.

We may note that after mentioning being “born of water and of the spirit” [Joh 3:5] Jesus simply mentions “born of the Spirit” without adding “water” [Joh 3:6,8]. This is because it was not necessary to mention “born of water” again and again since it should have served to identify the Spirit of which Jesus spoke. With this, we can substitute ‘and’ for ‘even’ in John 3:5.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water even of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [Joh 3:5].

One more thing, water does not represent the baptism of water as nowhere in the teachings of Jesus does, he ever uses “water” as a representation of water baptism.

**The Apostles Seem to Use Born Again Differently**

 Peter says that we have been born again through God’s word [1Pe 1:23] he speaks of being born again as something that has already taken place for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, not only Peter, but the apostles John and Paul also spoke of our (believers in the Lord Jesus Christ) having already been born as God’s children. Paul even calls it a “regeneration” or “rebirth” [Tit 3:4-7]. So, again, like Peter, the birth they speak of is past for everyone who is already a believer in Christ Jesus. Our understanding of Jesus’ use of the term, “born again”, however, points to the future, to the First Resurrection, and not something that has happened. It is something we are hoping and waiting for, it is not something that has happened already.

Since it’s the same term, “born again”, and the same idea of birth as God’s children that we find with Jesus and the apostles, one might be hasty to reject our interpretation and understanding of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus. One may wonder, is it past or present, are we born again or are we to be born again? Or have we seriously misinterpreted Jesus’ words, “you must be born again”?

Well, this is the kind of confusion that arises when we superficially “interpret scripture with scripture” based on similar words, while ignoring the context of each usage. It is a poor and bad practice to do this even if the words or phrases are very rare; interpretation must always be contextual because context can greatly affect the meaning of words and phrases, etc. Certainly, all because two persons use the same words and phrase does not mean that they must mean the very same thing. If one has no mischievous intention but is sincere, then the proper thing to do is to study and interpret contextually.

This error may be hard to detect because it looks on the surface to be a legit practice, since we may argue that we are “interpreting scriptures with scriptures”. Yes, scripture should interpret scripture, but we must be careful that we are not ignoring proper context.

**The “Born Again” of the Apostles**

Although, it is the same words used, the “born again” of Peter and the other apostles is different from the one Jesus spoke of. However, as we will see, they are related. I compare the two below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Jesus’ “Born Again”** | **Apostles’ “Born Again”** |
| By it, one becomes a child of God [Joh 3:3; Luk 20:36] | By it, one becomes a child of God |
| To take place in the future, at the first resurrection [Luk 20:36] | Takes place immediately one believes in Jesus Christ and repents of sins [1Pe 1:23] |
| One experiences a change | One experiences a change |
| The change one experiences is of the body [Joh 3:5-6] | The change one experiences is of the heart [1Jo 3:9; 5:18] |
| Through this birth we physically become like the resurrected Jesus, our bodies are made like his body [1Jo 3:3; 1Co 15:44-45,49; Php 3:20-21] | Through this birth we become like Jesus in character [1Jn 4:17] |
| One is changed from flesh to spirit, from mortal to immortal—one becomes a spirit being [Joh 3:5-6] | One is not physically changed, rather, one can now hope to experience the change from mortal to spirit [1Jo 3:3; 1Co 15:44-45,49; Php 3:20-21] |
| The body receives eternal life [Rom 8:11] | The body is without eternal life [Rom 8:10] |
| One has full access into the Kingdom of God [Joh 3:3,5] | One has the hope of entering the Kingdom of God |
| The Holy Spirit brings this birth about | The Holy Spirit brings this birth about |
| The Holy Spirit brings about this birth through the power of God [Joh 3:5,6,8; 1Pe 3:18; Rom 8:11; Php 3:20-21; Mat 22:29 the resurrection is by the power of God] | The Holy Spirit brings about this birth through the preaching, hearing and practice of the word of God [1Pe 1:23; Rom 10:17] The preaching of the word of God depends of the Spirit, [1Pe 1:10-11,12; 3:19-20; 1Co 2:10,12-13,14; Joh 15:13,26; Luk 4:18; Isa 59:21; 61:1], therefore, wherever the word of God is accurately and rightly taught and applied, the Spirit of God is at work there. |

The birth of which the apostles speak for a true Christian is past and not future. It begins with believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and turning from sin, i.e., repentance. For this reason, the apostles speak of us as having already become God’s children.

We should, however, not confuse this birth with that of which Jesus speaks, for it is certain that Jesus’ “born again” makes a man a spirit but the birth of which the apostles speak, does not make anyone a spirit.

**THE BIRTH THE APOSTLES LOOKED FORWARD TO**

Now, we must take note that though the apostles speak more of a birth that has already occurred for every true Christian, they, nevertheless, also spoke of the future birth and looked forward to another birth. They all looked forward to our physical change from mortality to immortality, which is what “born again” in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus means.

Paul, for example, though he already regarded us as children of God still wrote of us hoping for, looking forward to “our adoption as sons”,

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. [Rom 8:23-25]

This at first sounds contradictory—if we are already children of God, then how can we still be hoping to be adopted as sons of God? But it isn’t. This just goes on to demonstrate that there is indeed another birth, the one of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, which concerns the change of our physical bodies.

This adoption as sons, or becoming sons, is not something we already possess but something we hope for. And just as we have seen Jesus’ “born again” means, this adoption of sons, of which Paul speaks, concerns our body. In other words, though, we are in a sense, already children of God, there is a birth, another birth, we are looking forward to, one that will bring about the change our mortal bodies.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us that this bodily change will make our bodies like the present body of the Lord Jesus Christ [Php 3:20-21]. In like manner, John also writes of our being changed, of our becoming bodily like the Lord Jesus Christ and, like Paul, he points out that this has not yet happened.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [1Jo 3:2 cf., 1Co 15:49; Php 3:20-21].

So, though they wrote that we are already children of God, having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and having repented of our sins and turned to God in obedience, they also spoke of our bodily change from mortality to immortality, and they regarded this as our hope.

**PETER’S “BORN AGAIN” AND ISAIAH 40**

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25but the word of the LORD stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. [1Pe 1:23-25]

Peter describes this “born again” as a birth into a “living hope”. Now, it may not be obvious at first, but the hope into which Peter says we are “born again” through the word of God is the hope of becoming a spirit being. This is the “born again”, the “born of the Spirit” Jesus spoke about, and the “adoption as sons”, Paul wrote of. (This is how we acquire eternal life, and this is why he calls it a ‘living’ hope.). However, if we understood the scripture, he quoted in 1Pe 1:24, a quotation from Isaiah 40, it becomes very obvious.

**A Brief Commentary on Isaiah 40**

In his message to his people, after calling them to return to him in repentance [Isa 40:1-3ff. cf., Joh 1:23; Mat 3:11], God promises, on the condition of their heeding his call, to reveal his glory [Isa 40:5]. God then, in the verses that follow, among other things, describes his glory to them, the glory he intends to reveal.

God starts off by comparing his glory with the glory of man [Isa 40:6-8], and in this comparison, the body of man is man’s glory. God describes man’s glory as “grass” and as “the flowers of the field”. He is, however, not thinking of the beauty of flowers but of their frailty and general short lifespan. In other words, God is saying man’s glory is frail, he his mortal—men age and die. This comparison shows us that the glory God intends to reveal is his immortality—God, unlike, fragile man, is everlasting [Isa 40:28].

God goes ahead to describe other attributes of his glory such as his wisdom, knowledge and understanding [Isa 40:12-14,28] which he points out is beyond our comprehension [Isa 40:28] and also, his unequalled strength [Isa 40:15-17,22-23], etc.

*From other chapters that follow, we see different ways in which God plans to reveal his glory. In this chapter, however, God speaks of one way in which he will reveal his glory.*

After describing his glory, God then promises those who wait for him that he will renew their strength.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is **the everlasting God**, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will **not grow tired or weary**, and **his understanding** no one can fathom. 29He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31but those who hope in the Lord will **renew their strength**. They will **soar on wings** like eagles; they will run and **not grow weary**; they will walk and **not be faint**. [Isa 40:29-31].

Please observe

1. That there are three groups of persons in the verses quoted above:
   1. The LORD God,
   2. Men in their youths, and
   3. Those who wait for the LORD.
2. That the quality of each groups physical strength is the characteristic described for each group
   1. The LORD is everlasting, he never grows tired or weary. (God’s power is so great that though he created “the ends of the earth”, i.e., the whole world and everything it, he was not tired or depleted in strength.)
   2. Men in their youths, this is man at his strongest, grow tired and weary and stumble and fall (that is they die like flowers [Isa 40:8])
   3. Those who wait for the LORD, just like the LORD, never grow tired or weary or faint

* That the quality of each group’s strength is a present fact for the first two and future fact for the third
  1. The LORD God has always, presently and forever will be strong and eternal
  2. Men have always been frail and weak
  3. Those who wait for the LORD do not presently have the everlasting strength God describes, it is a promise from God to them and is yet to be fulfilled.

1. That the quality of the strength of the first and last group is the very same
   1. The LORD God is everlasting and never grows tired or weary.
   2. Those who wait for him, just like him, when God renews their strength will never grow tired or weary or faint.

We can see that God is promising those who wait for him his own divine strength. God is promising them his glory. God is promising them his immortality. God is promising them his very own nature. God is promising to make them just like him. Like God, they will be supernatural in strength and will not fall like even young men do but will be everlasting like God. men’s strength—physically, biologically, mentally— will be absolutely nothing compared to theirs.

By describing his own strength and then the far, far, far… inferior strength of men even in their strongest and then saying he will give those who wait for him his own kind of strength, God is plainly saying he will make them like himself. In other words, those who wait for God will be made like God in his glory. They will be gods!

**This Promise is Literal!**

 This promise is literal! Sadly, however, this scripture, especially where it matters, the promise of God to those who wait for him, is too often interpreted figuratively. But, frankly, who will not try to interpret it figuratively? Though very plain, the promise is so shocking and unexpected, even if one saw it, he would doubt himself. Oh, thank God for Jesus who brought life and immortality to light [2Ti 1:9-10]! Oh, thank God!

This promise is literal! God will change the physical, bodily nature of those who wait for him into his own nature. As a result, they will have supernatural strength and never grow tired or weary no matter what they do. They will be everlasting like God and will never, ever die—they will not fall like mere men. In fact, it is not just strength that they will have, but they will even have the ability to fly! Just like God.

In other words, one of the ways God intends to reveal his glory is through those who wait for him. When this happens, when we are glorified with the glory of God, “all mankind will see it”, they will see God’s glory, the supernatural power of God in us. Amen! Amen! Amen!

In summary, according to God’s word through the prophet Isaiah, those who wait for God will be given such a glory that

1. Like God, they will be able to fly
2. Like God, they will never grow tired or weary whether they are walking or running
3. Like God, they will be immortal

This is the same message of immortality that Jesus was preaching to Nicodemus when he spoke of being “born again” and being “born of the spirit”. God’s glory will be revealed bodily in us [Rom 8:18,23].

**Back to Peter**

 So, we can see then that, by quoting this scripture, where God compares his immortality with man’s mortality and promises his immortality to those who heed his call and wait for him, that the hope into which Peter says we have been born through the word of God is the hope of becoming glorified like God. I must emphasise that this promise is for those who heed the call of God to return to him in repentance and who in faith, wait for him, i.e., those who trust in his word and obey him.

Therefore, Peter’s “born again” gives you the hope of having what Jesus’ “born again” will give you immediately. Peter’s “born again” is the start of our journey [1Pe 2:2], Jesus’ “born again” is the end of our journey when we are changed from mortality to immortality. We could also say that Peter’s “born again” is the conception while Jesus’ “born again” is the actual birth.

**The Gospel in Isa 40**

 God commands his servants to preach the message of this prophecy as “the gospel” [Isa 40:9]. Therefore, the promise of the revelation of God’s glory through the impartation of his glory or nature to his faithful is a huge part of the gospel.

We see in this gospel, just as it was preached by Christ and his apostles,

1. The call to turn to God in repentance [Isa 40:2,3] and faith [Isa 40:31]
2. The promise of immortality for those who heed the call

* The announcement of a coming wrath—men will perish by the breath and word of the LORD [Isa 40:8]
  1. Men will be destroyed not simply from aging but from the breath and word of the LORD [Isa 40:8]. That is, it is by God’s word, by his judgement that men will fall, i.e., will be destroyed.

1. The announcement of the coming of the LORD [Isa 40:10]
2. The revelation that this promise, and wrath of God will be fulfilled at the coming of the LORD [Isa 40:8,10].
   1. The LORD is coming with his reward for the righteous who are faithfully waiting for him
   2. The LORD is coming with his recompense for sinners and
3. Repentance from sins as a requirement for salvation and sharing in the promise of God [Isa 40:2,3]
4. The command to preach the gospel [Isa 40:9]
5. The command to be bold and courageous in the preaching of the gospel [Isa 40:9]

**Flesh vs. Spirit—Flesh is not Always “Sinful Nature”**

;But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. …8“Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. [Isa 31:3,8].

Flesh is not always a reference to the, so called, ‘sinful nature’. For an example of comparison between flesh and spirit that does not have to do with sin versus righteousness see Isa 31:3,8a.

God here wants his people to know that he could deliver them from the Assyrian army. He lets them know that his own deliverance is surer than that of Egypt because unlike the Egyptian army, he and his army are not mortal and neither are their horses, but they are spirits. The assurance he is saying that he has horses that are not.

If one has read of “horses of fire” in the stories of Elijah and Elisha [2Ki 2:11; 6:17], one will understand that God is saying that the nature of his horses are superior to the nature of the horses of Egypt. God’s horses have spiritual bodies while Egypt’s horses have fleshly, natural, mortal bodies.

*(Commentary on Isa 31:3) Yahweh is saying that his own army comprises of gods and spirit horses (the kind that caught Elijah up to heaven [2Ki 2:11] and which surrounded the hills around Elisha [2Ki 6:17].) Yahweh will come down with an army that is not made up of mortals. Isa 31:4-5; 42:13-14; Joe 2:1-11; Zec 14:1-5*

*(Commentary on Isa 31:8) The same point, more or less, as in verse 3 above—Yahweh's army, horses and weapons are not mortal or man-made but of the spirit.*