

begotten of water and Spirit (ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος), he is not able to enter the kingdom of God. That having been begotten of the flesh is flesh (τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστίν), and that having been begotten of the Spirit is spirit (καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστίν) Do not be amazed because I said to you, it is necessary for you to be begotten again (γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν). The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it is coming from or where it is departing; so is everyone having been begotten of the Spirit." (πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος)

A number of interpretive proposals have been made concerning the meaning of the phrase "begotten of water and Spirit (γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος), including the following:

(a) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" to refer to the ordinance of baptism; thus this phrase refers to the necessity of water baptism for salvation.

(b) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" to refer to baptismal regeneration; i.e., the Spirit uses baptismal water instrumentally to effect regeneration.

(c) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" as a symbol for the Spirit; thus this phrase refers to the Spirit's act of regeneration, and would be more accurately translated "begotten of water even the Spirit."

(d) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" as a symbol for cleansing; thus this phrase refers to the spiritual and moral cleansing the Spirit accomplishes in regeneration.

(e) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" as a figure for the cleansing effect brought about by the application of the Word of God and the Spirit of God to bring about regeneration.

(f) "begotten of water and Spirit" uses "water" as a figure for natural birth; thus Jesus is saying that human beings must be begotten, not only naturally, but also spiritually.

Although some of these proposed interpretations are attractive (especially the next to last one), the last one seems most cogent and coherent. This proposed interpretation views Jesus as saying that unless one is begotten, not only naturally (i.e., the way one is begotten the first time), but also spiritually (i.e., the way one needs to be begotten a second time), he or she is not able to enter the kingdom of God. This view proposes that "water" is a figure, not for baptism, or cleansing, or for the Word of God, but for natural birth. It suggests that Nicodemus and the people of his day (much more so than the people of our day) were aware that a baby in its mother's womb is enclosed in a membrane or sac containing a water-like fluid (the amniotic fluid), which sac ruptures shortly before the baby is born, releasing the "water" (even modern doctors say "the water broke"). Thus being "begotten of or out of water" is an excellent figure for natural birth. This view proposes that Nicodemus was told, "You must be begotten again"; and that he answered, "How is a man able to be begotten