

## 1.0 Introduction

Two views of being born again:

1. The new birth occurs in two parts (at conversion and at the resurrection)
2. Conversion is only a conception, the new birth only occurs at the resurrection.

## 2.0 Defining Terms

Important terms: the kingdom of God, the English verb *beget*, and the Greek verb *gennao*

### 2.1 The Kingdom of God

Armstrong: "The Kingdom of GOD is composed of the divine FAMILY of God."<sup>1</sup>

The kingdom of God is a present reality and a future event. (Luke 17:20-21, John 18:36)

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; (21) "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."<sup>2</sup>

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

### 2.2 Beget

Armstrong: *Beget* refers to fertilization by the father.<sup>3</sup>

*Beget* means to procreate, to become the father of, to give birth or to produce

Zech 13:3 KJV "...then his father and his mother that begat him..."

### 2.3 Gennao

Armstrong: *gennao* can be translated as either *beget* or *born*<sup>4</sup>

*Gennao* means to procreate, to become the father of, to give birth or to produce

*Gennao* does not refer to conception (*sullambano*)

*Gennao* can refer to a child that has been fathered but not yet born

This is usually not the case unless clearly indicated by the context

## 3.0 Jesus and Nicodemus

Jesus gave Nicodemus four important statements about the kingdom of God

The encounter with Nicodemus begins in John 3:1-2

John 3:1-2 "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert W. Armstrong, *Just what do you mean - Born Again?*, (n.l.: Worldwide Church of God, 1972), 5, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Scriptures are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 35, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 32, 36.

### 3.1 Seeing the Kingdom

John 3:3 "...unless one is born again, he cannot see (*idein*) the kingdom of God."

Armstrong: a person must be changed from flesh to spirit to see the spirit realm

The Greek term *idein* means to see, to understand or to experience an event or state

Nicodemus lacked spiritual understanding (Matt 13:15ff, Mark 8:18)

A person must be converted to have a place in the kingdom (John 8:51, Rev 18:7)

John 8:51 "...if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death"

Rev 18:7 "I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow"

John 3:3 cannot be used to prove Armstrong's position

### 3.2 Born of Water and Spirit

John 3:5 "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit"

Water plays no role in the resurrection of the saints

Water refers to baptism &/or sanctification and regeneration (Ezk 36:25-27, Titus 3:5)

Ezk 36:25-27 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. (26) Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit

The second birth = water and Spirit together, not just the Spirit alone<sup>5</sup>

Armstrong's interpretation cannot explain being born of water and the Spirit

### 3.3 Born of the Spirit

John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"

Armstrong: being born of the Spirit = the resurrection

Many passages describe conversion as a new life or a new creation

Rom 8:9 Christians are not in the flesh but in the Spirit

1 Cor 3:1 they were carnal (*sarkikos*, fleshly), not spiritual (*pneumatikos*)

Eph 4:20-24 Put on the new man by being renewed in the spirit of the mind

Col 3:9-10 Put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge

2 Cor 4:16 The outward man perishes, the inner man is renewed daily

2 Cor 5:17 Christians are "a new creation"

John 3:6 cannot be used to prove Armstrong's position

### 3.4 Like the Wind

John 3:8 "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."

Armstrong: those who are resurrected will be invisible to human eyes

The unconverted were spiritually blind (Luke 19:41-44, Matt 16:1-4)

John 3:8 cannot be used to prove Armstrong's position

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<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 42

### 3.5 Entering the Kingdom

John 3:5 "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"

Armstrong: Christians cannot enter the kingdom until the resurrection

Christians enter the kingdom at Christ's return (Matt 7:21-23, 25:21, 23, Acts 14:22)

Acts 14:22 "...Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"

Nicodemus needed to be converted to enter the kingdom of God (Matt 18:1-3)

Matt 18:1-3 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (2) Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, (3) and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was new a first century audience (Acts 19:1ff)

### 3.6 Status of the Church

Armstrong: the church cannot be part of the kingdom now (begotten, not born)

Col 1:13 God has "...conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"

Ephesians 2:19 Gentiles are "...fellow citizens with the saints"

Philippians 3:20 "For our citizenship is in heaven..."

Christians are sojourners, pilgrims & resident aliens (1 Pet 2:11, Heb 11:13)

### 3.7 Inheriting the Kingdom

Christians cannot inherit the kingdom of God as flesh and blood mortals (1 Cor 15:50-53)

Christians will not be changed from flesh to spirit until the resurrection

Therefore, Christians cannot inherit the kingdom of God until the resurrection.

Being born again refers to a change from flesh to spirit (Armstrong, John 3:6)

Christians will not be changed from flesh to spirit until the resurrection

Therefore, Christians cannot be born again until the resurrection

John 3:6 is not referring to the resurrection:

John 3:5 (born of water and the Spirit) is a reference to conversion

John 3:6 does not say that flesh will be changed to spirit

1 Corinthians 15 does not describe the resurrection as being born again

### 4.0 Conversion as a Conception

Armstrong: conversion is only a conception; the Christian life is a gestation

Armstrong: the church is "the mother of us all" (Galatians 4:26)<sup>6</sup>

Armstrong: *gennao* should be translated as *begotten* not *born*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, Born Again, 19, 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, Born Again, 36-37.

#### 4.1 Conception as a Misconception

There are no passages that portray Christians as unborn children

There are no passages that refer to conversion as a conception (*sullambano*)

There are no passages that refer to the church as “the mother of us all”<sup>8</sup>

Galatians 4:24-26 “Jerusalem above” is the new covenant not the church

Armstrong: Christians are unborn children in God’s family now

Armstrong: Christians become part of God’s family in the resurrection<sup>9</sup>

Armstrong’s arbitrary definition of the kingdom is inconsistent

#### 4.2 Babes in Christ

Many passages picture conversion as a birth, Christians as born children

Gal 4:19 Paul suffered birth pains until they were restored to Christ

Christians are often referred to as infants (1 Cor 3:1-2, Heb. 5:11-14, 1 Pet. 2:2)

Paul described his converts as his own children (1 Cor. 4:15, 1 Tim. 1:2, Philm. 10)

Timothy and Onesimus were treated as adult sons, not unborn children

John described his converts as his own children (1 John 2:1, 3:18)

The Greek verb *apokueo* means to give birth, to bring forth or to bring into being

James 1:15 “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth (*apokueo*) death.”

James 1:18 “Of His own will He brought us forth (*apokueo*) by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

The Greek verb *anagennaio* means to beget again or to cause to be born again = John 3:3

1 Peter 1:23 Christians have already been born again (cf. 1 Pet 2:2)

#### 5.0 Resurrection as a Birth

Armstrong cited several passages that appear to refer to the resurrection as a birth

They do not explicitly connect the resurrection with the metaphor of being born again

#### 5.1 Christ Was Born Again

Armstrong: “Christ was born a SON of God *by a resurrection* from the dead (Rom 1:4).”<sup>10</sup>

Romans 1:3-4 “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, (4) *and* declared (*horizo*) *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Jesus was identified as the Son of God, not born as the Son of God

#### 5.2 Christ the Firstborn

Rom 8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Armstrong: Christians will be conformed to the image of Jesus through the resurrection

Armstrong: they will be put on His same plane and also become God’s sons.<sup>11</sup>

Christians inherit eternal life and a sinless nature as a result of glorification

They will never be placed on the same plane as God (Isa 43:10, 44:6)

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<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Armstrong, *Born Again*, 42-43.

Isa 43:10 "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.

Isa 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God.

Col 1:15 Jesus is called "the firstborn over all creation"

It does not connect the resurrection with the metaphor of being born again.

Col 1:18, Rev 1:5 Paul and John referred to Jesus as "the firstborn from the dead"

These passages do not clearly connect the resurrection with being born again

Leaven can be a symbol of evil or the kingdom (Matt 13:33, 16:6)

### **5.3 Creation Labors**

Romans 8:22 "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now"

Armstrong: "Although this is not referring directly to *our* being born again, it is a direct comparison to the BIRTH of a child being DELIVERED from its mother's womb."<sup>12</sup>

Romans 8:19-23 does not clearly connect the resurrection with John 3

Romans 8:22-23 Christians are groaning in pain rather than being born

The terms *resurrection* and *birth* are not used, but rather *adoption* and *redemption*

### **6.0 Conclusion**

The most likely meaning of being born again is that of conversion

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<sup>12</sup> Armstrong, Born Again, 20-21.