

# Parsing Nicodemus's Words: A Biblical Grammatical Approach to Adult Spiritual Rebirth John 3:4

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## Abstract

This research aims to uncover the profound significance and theological consequences of Nicodemus' inquiry by employing Bible language analysis. This study employs a thorough biblical grammar methodology to examine Nicodemus' utterance in John 3:4, explicitly focusing on the interrogative line "How can a person be born when he is old?" This study employs theological literature and biblical commentaries to analyze grammatical elements to elucidate Nicodemus' inquiry's context and theological importance. Linguistic research indicates that Nicodemus's focus was directed. Nicodemus' inquiry demonstrated genuine sincerity, although it appeared that there was a state of perplexity. The contextual perspective highlights that Nicodemus' inquiry stemmed from his Pharisaic education, and his status caused him to overlook Him in his questioning initially. Researchers provide an alternative interpretation of Nicodemus' inquiry, suggesting that it may be sarcastic and convey a feeling of superiority. Other researchers argue that Nicodemus fervently articulated his request due to his weak understanding. The ability to accept and study different points of view with an open mind and without prejudice allows for the development of broader knowledge.

**Keywords:** Adults, Born Again, Nicodemus's Question, John 3:4, Spirituality

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap kedalaman makna dan implikasi teologis dalam pertanyaan Nikodemus melalui penerapan analisis tata bahasa Alkitab. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan tata bahasa alkitabiah yang komprehensif untuk menganalisis pernyataan Nikodemus dalam Yohanes 3:4,



dengan fokus kalimat "Bagaimanakah mungkin seorang dilahirkan, kalau ia sudah tua?". Kajian ini menggunakan literatur teologis dan komentar-komentar alkitabiah untuk menguji aspek tata bahasa. Analisis bahasa mengungkapkan bahwa perhatian Nikodemus diarahkan. pertanyaan Nikodemus terbukti tulus, tetapi tampak ada bingung. Pandangan kontekstual menekankan bahwa pertanyaan Nikodemus adalah dampak dari pendidikan Nikodemus yang bersifat Farisi dan kedudukannya mengakibatkan bahwa pertanyaan yang diajukannya pada awalnya terkesan untuk mengabaikan-Nya. Perspektif lain dari para peneliti memandang pertanyaan Nikodemus sebagai sarkasme yang menyiratkan rasa superioritas, dan beberapa peneliti lain mendukung gagasan bahwa Nikodemus dengan penuh semangat mengungkapkan permohonannya karena pemahamannya yang terbatas. Kemampuan untuk menerima dan mempelajari sudut pandang yang berbeda dengan pikiran terbuka dan tanpa prasangka tentang Yohanes 3:4 memungkinkan pengembangan pengetahuan yang lebih luas dan inklusif.

Kata-kata Kunci: Dilahirkan Kembali, Orang Dewasa, Pertanyaan Nikodemus, Spiritual, Yohanes 3:4

## Introduction

Explaining concepts that need to be comprehended is crucial in facilitating effective communication, fostering knowledge acquisition, and enabling problem-solving.<sup>1</sup> The utilization of interrogative sentences is typically employed for this purpose. Interrogative phrases are linguistic constructs that elicit information or questions about a specific topic. Interrogative sentences serve multiple functions in communication, encompassing both inquiry and the manifestation of diverse speech patterns.<sup>2</sup> Interrogative phrases serve various roles beyond the mere acquisition of information. These functions encompass expressions of welcome, surprise, pity, wrath, demands, and numerous more, encompassing a wide range of communicative goals for persons.<sup>3</sup> The origin of interrogative sentences can be traced back to categorizing sentences based on the listener's immediate response following a

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<sup>1</sup> Susan M. Grover, "Shaping Effective Communication Skills and Therapeutic Relationships at Work: The Foundation of Collaboration," *Workplace Health and Safety* 53, no. 4 (2005): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1177/216507990505300408>.

<sup>2</sup> Rolyana et.al Ferinia, *Komunikasi Bisnis* (Medan: Yayasan Kita Menulis, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Herring, *Complete English Grammar Rules* (USA: Farlex International, 2016).

sentence's utterance.<sup>4</sup> The sentences inside the text have been classified into three categories: assertions, inquiries, and directives, depending on the interlocutor's response. Interrogative sentences are commonly employed in communication to elicit a response from the addressee—individuals who express interrogative phrases are actively transmitting utterances.<sup>5</sup>

Interrogative phrases play a crucial role in facilitating interaction and significantly contribute to the overall dynamics of communication.<sup>6</sup> Interaction activities are constructed by incorporating several components that assist and enhance the interaction process. The components encompassed in this framework consist of the interaction agent, who assumes a pivotal position in the interaction process, the context that serves as the foundation for engagement, and the interaction media employed to assist the contact. The utilization of interactive media can manifest in diverse formats, including verbal media, nonverbal media, or a fusion of both.<sup>7</sup> Interrogative sentences also play a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue, enhancing the overall dynamics of interpersonal communication. The construction of interaction activities involves utilizing several components that effectively enable and promote interaction. The components encompassed in this framework consist of the interaction agent, who assumes a pivotal position in the interaction process, the context, which serves as the foundation for engagement, and the interaction media employed to assist the contact. The utilization of interactive media might manifest in diverse ways, including verbal, nonverbal, or a combination of both.<sup>8</sup>

In the opinion of Leech, the categorization system for sentences is predicated upon three distinct viewpoints: syntax, semantics, and

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<sup>4</sup> Mariam L.M. Pandean, "Kalimat Tanya Dalam Bahasa Indonesia," *Kajian Linguistik* 5, no. 3 (2018): 75, <https://doi.org/10.35796/kaling.5.3.2018.25030>.

<sup>5</sup> Lindawati L., "Fungsi Tutar Kalimat Tanya Bahasa Indonesia," *Litera* 11, no. 2 (2012): 257, <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v11i2.1067>

<sup>6</sup> Ileana Comorovski, *Interrogative Phrases and The Syntax-Semantics Interface* (USA: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Ileana Comorovski, *Interrogative Phrases and The Syntax-Semantics Interface* (USA: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Hasyim and Burhanuddin Arifah, "Semiotic Multimodality Communication in The Age of New Media," *Studies in Media and Communication* 11, no. 1 (2023): 96–103, <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i1.5865>.

pragmatics.<sup>9</sup> The interrogative sentence is a linguistic construct utilized to elicit information or solicit a response. Pandean defines linguistically interrogative sentences as phrases that exhibit formal indicators in language forms and functions to elicit information from the recipient.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is frequently observed that individuals pose questions not solely to acquire information, including many forms of communication, such as expressions of hospitality, astonishment, empathy, indignation, or solicitations.<sup>11</sup>

Individuals often use questions to communicate to express various emotions such as hospitality, astonishment, empathy, indignation, or requests. Nicodemus' profound question in John 3:4 about the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, which serves as a turning point in the passage and talks about the idea of spiritual birth, demonstrates the complex nature of questioning.<sup>12</sup>

A specialized analysis of biblical grammar is required to understand its theological significance fully. In the Bible, Nicodemus' query in John 3:4 indicates profound perplexity over spiritual birth.<sup>13</sup> "How can a person be born again when he is old?" Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born again? Provides a foundation for in-depth theological inquiry. In this scenario, a biblical grammatical method becomes indispensable for comprehending the layers of meaning concealed in Nicodemus' statements. This study aims to elicit spiritual messages and theological implications from Nicodemus' queries using Biblical grammatical analysis.

## Book of John

The New Testament has four volumes known as the Gospels, which can be categorized into the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. The

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Leech, *Semantics*. (New York: Penguins Book, Ltd., 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Comorovski, *Interrogative Phrases and The Syntax-Semantics Interface* (USA: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Ellen Guffey and Dana Loewy, *Essentials of Business Communication* (USA: Cengage Learning, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> David F. Ford, "Meeting Nicodemus: A Case Study in Daring Theological Interpretation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no. 1 (2013): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930612000270>.

<sup>13</sup> James Joyce, "An Encounter," *Dubliners* 3 (2009): 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1093/owc/9780199536436.003.0003>.

synoptic gospels encompass the canonical texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. “synoptic” originates from a Latin term that signifies “to perceive collectively.” This is because the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share numerous narratives, frequently employing similar language and adhering to a similar sequence. The three synoptic Gospels document the external events of Jesus’ life, various facets of His human nature, His teachings, and His ministry in the region of Galilee.<sup>14</sup>

The Gospel of John, sometimes called the fourth gospel, exhibits notable distinctions compared to the three synoptic Gospels. These dissimilarities can be attributed to the authors’ possession of a greater breadth of information or sources and their ability to recall memories with enhanced clarity and abundance compared to the authors of the synoptic Gospels.<sup>15</sup> The theology of John has distinct qualities in its portrayal of Christ, which can be considered the focal point of utmost significance in his theological framework. A further component within John’s theological framework is his recurrent allusions to the Holy Spirit. Among the four canonical Gospels, the Gospel of John prominently portrays that incorporating the Holy Spirit will perpetuate Jesus’ mission.<sup>16</sup>

The Gospel of John commences with the introduction of the word, which has been in the presence of God since its inception and afterward assumes human form as Jesus Christ, dwelling among humanity. The aforementioned linguistic expressions, originating from the Jewish cultural heritage on the entity known as Wisdom, can be observed throughout epistolary texts, including but not limited to Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3. In contrast to the three synoptic gospel writers, John’s Gospel employs a more elevated discourse while discussing Jesus Christ. Phanuel’s research mentioned that the Gospel of John portrays Jesus as a figure who possessed a conscious awareness of his celestial origins while he traversed the earthly realm.<sup>17</sup>

The significance of the Gospel of John cannot be overstated. Within Christian history, this particular gospel has garnered significantly greater

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<sup>14</sup> James Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, United States 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Baxter, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Tafsiran Alkitab Masa Kini 3 Matius – Wahyu*, cet. 12 (Jakarta: Yayasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih/OMF, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Osweto O. Phanuel, “Analysis of The Gospel of John in Light of Christology.” (Tesis MTh, Charles University, Prague, 2008).

readership and admiration than any other extant account of Jesus' life. The profound nature of this gospel is evident in John's astute comprehension of the interplay between the mortal and the celestial. The existence of this relationship consistently poses a challenge that leads to confusion among individuals. In light of God's attributes as an everlasting, omniscient, and omnipotent entity, the question arises as to how direct interaction between God and entities that are transient, subject to change, and constrained by the limitations of space and time is possible. In alternative terms, how can divinity be reconciled with humanity unless one becomes engaged with the temporal aspects inherent in such a union? Given the inherent presence of opposing elements within this union, the question arises about how divinity may be reconciled with humanity. John's response to this inquiry consisted of the following declaration: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John's response to this inquiry consisted of the following declaration: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>18</sup>

## **Method**

This research methodology will employ a comprehensive biblical grammatical approach to analyze the terms used by Nicodemus in John 3:4, particularly those about the notion of spiritual regeneration in adults. This study will utilize theological literature and biblical commentaries to support grammatical analysis. This will elucidate the context and theological importance of Nicodemus' inquiry. This study seeks to uncover the concealed depths of meaning and theological implications in Nicodemus' inquiries through Biblical grammatical analysis.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Nicodemus Profile**

Neighbour explains Nicodemus' profile confirmation. Nicodemus was morally upright, exhibiting a robust ethical framework and an

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<sup>18</sup> "Summary and Analysis The Gospel of John," *CliffsNotes* 2018, <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/n/new-testament-of-the-bible/summary-and-analysis/the-gospel-of-john>

outstanding demeanour.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he was a deeply religious person. He had diligently followed the Law, fulfilled the obligatory rituals, observed the prescribed periods of fasting, engaged in prayer at the Temple or synagogue, and read and revered the Scriptures as the divine pronouncements of God. He was the worthiest person in his neighbourhood. His reputation was flawless.<sup>20</sup> Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, is portrayed in the biblical account as a distinguished religious figure renowned for his bravery and profound theological expertise. His nocturnal meeting with Jesus unveils aspects of his discipleship and probable commitment to rabbinic tradition. Despite his crucial social position, Nicodemus is portrayed as a teacher and dedicated follower of the Torah. He exemplified moral integrity and religious devotion, as supported by both biblical accounts and scientific viewpoints.

As documented by John, the account of Nicodemus' nocturnal encounter with Jesus is a frequently cited passage generally interpreted as evidence of Nicodemus' discipleship to Jesus, despite his first hesitant and secretive approach. Although initially hesitant, two instructors arranged an evening gathering to discuss with Jesus, as this was a customary time for intellectual conversation.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in moments of great peril, Nicodemus demonstrated bravery on multiple occasions by successfully preventing Jesus from receiving the death penalty during the Sanhedrin trial.<sup>22</sup> According to an alternative perspective, the nocturnal visit of Nicodemus may have followed a customary gathering of rabbis, instructors, or scribes during that historical period. The evening chats can manifest the rabbinic tradition of utilizing the tranquil hours of the evening for profound theological discourse.<sup>23</sup>

When they engage in conversation, the nocturnal encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus is inherently intertwined with their contrasting social positions. In the biblical passage of John 1:3, a Pharisee

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<sup>19</sup> R. E. Neighbor, "The New Birth and the Conversation with Nicodemus.," *Review & Expositor* 20, no. 1 (1923): 28–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463732302000102>.

<sup>20</sup> Neighbor.

<sup>21</sup> Mary L. Coloe, "Nicodemus—A Rabbi Seeking Wisdom," *Interpretation (United Kingdom)* 77, no. 4 (2023): 316–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643231183424>.

<sup>22</sup> Sidney R Sandstrom, "Nicodemus: Coward or Convert?" *Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 49–61, <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-9-no-3-2008/nicodemus-coward-convert>

<sup>23</sup> Peter Cotterell, "Sociolinguistics and Biblical Interpretation," *Vox Evangelica* 16 (1986): 61–76. [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol16/sociolinguists\\_cotterell.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol16/sociolinguists_cotterell.pdf)

named Nicodemus is mentioned. Nicodemus is described as a religious leader, indicating his prominent role within the religious community. Additionally, he is identified as a member of the Sanhedrin, a council of Jewish leaders, further highlighting his influential position. Furthermore, Nicodemus is recognized as a teacher, as seen by Jesus' response to him, where Jesus acknowledges Nicodemus as the instructor of Israel. The passage referenced is John 3:10. As noted by Hutagalung, a Pharisee asserted that Nicodemus belonged to a faction that diligently adhered to the Torah Law and rigorously observed its precepts. The individuals comprising the Sanhedrin Council demonstrated the scholarly acumen of Jesus, as he possessed extensive knowledge of the Torah and was regarded as an authority in interpreting its legal and religious principles.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, despite lacking formal education, Jesus was recognized as a teacher, unlike his contemporaries who held advanced degrees in theology.<sup>25</sup>

A parallel can be drawn between the individual in question and Nakdimon ben-Gurion, a prominent figure in Jewish history known for his affluence and philanthropic endeavours, as documented in the Talmud. Nicodemus ben Gurion, also known as Nakdimon ben Gurion in (Hebrew נקדימון בן גוריון *Nakdimon ben Gurion*), was an affluent Jewish individual residing in Jerusalem around the 1st century AD. A belief exists among specific individuals that he is identical to the individual named Nicodemus, referenced in the Gospel of John. In the opinion of Sandstrom, the biblical figure Nicodemus and the character Nicodemus ben Gurion in the Talmud are believed to be the same. Consequently, the narrative surrounding Nicodemus is regarded as one of the most poignant accounts of repentance and selflessness in a religious tradition.

## Biblical Grammatical Approach

### Linguistic Analysis

John 3:4 can be categorized into six distinct sets of explanations in the Greek context. Every category offers a distinct perspective or analysis

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<sup>24</sup> Stimson B. Hutagalung, "Nikodemus: Tepatkah Sebutan Baginya "Murid Rahasia,"? *Jurnal Koinonia* 11, no. 2 (Desember 2019): 61-70.

<https://jurnal.unai.edu/index.php/koinonia/article/view/2355/>

<sup>25</sup> Sandstrom, "Nicodemus: Coward or Convert?"



of the verse's substance, aiding readers in comprehending the significance and consequences of the verse.

*How: Πῶς (Pōs).* The term in question is an adverb that serves as an interrogative word and denotes "in what manner." Nicodemus is wondering about the mechanisms or methodologies that can be employed to facilitate this process of rebirth.<sup>26</sup> *Can: δύνανται (dunatai)* is the present indicative conjugation of the word δύναιμι (*dunamai*), which means "able" or "having the ability". This form is employed in the grammatical classification of third-person singular. Nicodemus displayed a specific fascination with the potential for an elderly individual to undergo rebirth.<sup>27</sup> *To be born: γεννηθῆναι (gennēthēnai)* represents the term *gennaú* (*gennaú*) is an aorist passive infinitive form that signifies "to be born" or "to be begotten." This specific conjugation of the word denotes the meaning "to come into existence through birth." The utilization of the passive voice redirects attention from the active involvement of the individual and instead highlights the reception of the activity.<sup>28</sup> *Man: ἄνθρωπος (anthrṓpos):* This term is commonly employed to denote an individual of humankind, specifically a male. Nicodemus is specifically enquiring about the possibility of an elderly individual undergoing a rejuvenation or renewal process within their lifetime. *Old: γέρον* is an adjective that can be translated as "old" or "aged." Nicodemus highlights the elderly status of the individual by using this adjective.<sup>29</sup> Overall, *εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ δευτέρου εἰσελθὼν γεννηθῆναι (eis tēn koilian tēs mētros autou deuterou eiselthōn gennēthēnai):* Nicodemus uses this expression to emphasize the impossibility that he anticipates, underlining the foolishness of entering the womb of the mother the second time around.<sup>30</sup>

An examination of John 3:4 through a linguistic lens uncovers six discrete components that jointly enhance our comprehension of Nicodemus's exploration of the notion of rebirth. Using the interrogative

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<sup>26</sup> J. P. Green, *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible* (Indiana: The Book Factory, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Green, *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*.

<sup>28</sup> Francis-David Thelstan Scalzo, *The Jewish Basis for the Born Again Experience in John 3*, Faculty of Divinity (Virginia: John W. Rawlings School, 2022), [www.aging-us.com](http://www.aging-us.com).

<sup>29</sup> Green, *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*.

<sup>30</sup> Green, *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*.

adverb, indicative conjugation, aorist passive infinitive form, precise terminology for human and elderly individuals, and a metaphorical expression together clarify Nicodemus's genuine, although bewildered, inquiry. This language framework facilitates a more profound examination of the intricacies of spiritual rebirth, highlighting Nicodemus's endeavor to harmonize the spiritual doctrines expounded by Jesus with his preexisting comprehension grounded in conventional Jewish principles.

### Contextual Analysis

Nicodemus's multifaceted identity contributes to the intricate nature of his exchanges with Jesus, as depicted in the Gospel of John.<sup>31</sup> Being a Pharisee, he exemplified the meticulous and erudite nature commonly attributed to this faction of the Jewish faith, which is well-known for its strict devotion to the Law and traditional practices.<sup>32</sup> His simultaneous participation in the Sanhedrin, the esteemed Jewish governing council, further emphasized his elevated position in the religious hierarchy and strengthened the significance of his meeting with Jesus. Nicodemus' decision to rendezvous with Jesus during the night implies a yearning for seclusion, potentially motivated by the delicate nature of his inquiries or a wish to evade scrutiny from his Pharisee peers.<sup>33</sup> Nicodemus' literal understanding of Jesus' teachings, as demonstrated by his inquiry concerning rebirth, at first shows a disregard for the subject.<sup>34</sup> While Nicodemus tries to comprehend the necessity of perceiving the kingdom of God through his questioning, Jesus answers his queries, establishing the foundation of their discourse.<sup>35</sup>

Nicodemus's position as a Pharisee and Sanhedrin member deepens his meetings with Jesus in John. Despite his thorough and educated

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<sup>31</sup> Adam Zeidan, "Nicodemus," Britannica, accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicodemus>.

<sup>32</sup> Scalzo, *The Jewish Basis for the Born Again Experience in John 3*.

<sup>33</sup> Sandstrom, "Nicodemus: Coward or Convert?"

<sup>34</sup> Brent L. Top, "Spiritual Rebirth: Have Ye Been Born of God?" in *The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels*, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 201–17. <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-message-four-gospels/spiritual-rebirth-have-ye-been-born-god>.

<sup>35</sup> William C. Grese, "'Unless One Is Born Again': The Use of a Heavenly Journey in John 3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 4 (1988): 677, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267629>.

Pharisaic upbringing, Nicodemus first disregards the issue, especially in his literal grasp of Jesus' teachings. However, Nicodemus' questions and Jesus' responses complicate their conversation, exposing his complexity and the complexities of his relationship with Jesus.

### Two Points of View on "How Can Adults Be Born Again?"

Nicodemus's esteemed position unequivocally establishes his scholarly significance within the realm of theology. The biblical passages in which Jesus engages in dialogue with the individual in question can be located in the book of John, namely in verses 3:3 and 4. In response, Jesus provided a statement, affirming, "Verily I declare unto you unless an individual undergoes a spiritual rebirth, they will be unable to perceive the realm of divine sovereignty." Nicodemus asked Jesus, "In what manner can an individual experience rebirth in their advanced age?" Is it possible for him to re-enter his mother's womb and be born anew?

A narrative posits that Nicodemus' inquiry on being born again is conveyed through his interrogative remark, "How can a person be born when he is old?" Nicodemus' misinterpretation lies in his query regarding the possibility of an individual re-entering their mother's womb and experiencing a subsequent birth. It was asserted that Nicodemus lacked comprehension regarding the statements made by Jesus.<sup>36</sup> Nicodemus understood this as a form of rebirth, explicitly referring to physical birth.<sup>37</sup>

Damarwanti shares a congruent perspective with the researchers, as mentioned above. Nicodemus's interpretation of being "born again" was based on a literal understanding, explicitly relating it to the biological process of childbirth experienced by women.<sup>38</sup> According to Koester, Nicodemus possessed a limited comprehension of Jesus' teachings regarding the concept of spiritual rebirth.<sup>39</sup> Nicodemus's response to

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<sup>36</sup> Nikson Siburian, "Menimbang Kembali Konsep Kelahiran Kembali: Kritik Sosio-Historis Yohanes 3:1-21," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 7, no. 1 (2022): 114–23, <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v7i1.657>.

<sup>37</sup> Nikson Siburian, "Menimbang Kembali Konsep Kelahiran Kembali: Kritik Sosio-Historis Yohanes 3:1-21," 114, <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v7i1.657>.

<sup>38</sup> Damarwanti, "Gaya "Permainan Kata dan Pernyataan yang Disalahpahami" Sebagai Cara yang Lebih Efektif dalam Berteologi Dibandingkan Dengan Gaya Tulisan Deklaratif dalam Tulisan Yohanes," *Sanctum Domine Jurnal Teologi* 6, no. 2 (2018): 60, <https://doi.org/10.46495/sdjt.v6i2.39>

<sup>39</sup> Craig R. Koester, "Theological Complexity and the Characterization of Nicodemus in John's Gospel," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed.

Jesus' initial remark presented challenges for commentators, as observed by Wells. Nicodemus' intellectual capacity was deemed insufficient since his interpretation of Jesus' statement, "How can a man be born when he is old?" indicated his adherence to conventional obstetric reasoning, thereby overlooking the spiritual nature of Jesus' remarks by the statement above.<sup>40</sup> Suggit similarly expressed the notion that Nicodemus was unable to comprehend this concept. It is posited that one can attain such comprehension only through a first-hand encounter with the crucifixion.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is argued that the transformative processes of the crucifixion and resurrection are necessary to initiate a new spiritual existence. The utilization of rebirth during the second century was frequently observed in conjunction with the sacrament of baptism. This is notably obvious in 1 Peter 1:3, 1:23, and Titus 3:5.<sup>42</sup>

It can be inferred that John composed his writings during a period characterized by frequent baptisms. Consequently, he was vested in highlighting the profound spiritual truths beneath what some individuals may perceive as mere ceremonial practices. Therefore, Nicodemus' lack of comprehension can be explained by the requirement to undergo a rebirth, including both water and spirit. This is seen in replacing the term "another" in verse 3 with "*ex hūdatos kai pneumatos*" in verse 5.<sup>43</sup>

Hoyt further contends that Nicodemus poses the subsequent inquiry within this framework. Is it conceivable for an individual to undergo a subsequent instance of birth by re-entering their mother's womb? The anticipated response he was expecting was negative. The syntactical structure of this sentence in its original Greek form indicates that the speaker anticipated a negative response. Nicodemus knows that he was the outcome of a particular course of events. The individual was aware that by articulating the inquiry, he acknowledged the consequences of his actions from one hour prior and from previous days, weeks, months,

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Christopher W. Skinner (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472550330.ch-010>.

<sup>40</sup> George R. Wells, "Some Aspects of the Discourse with Nicodemus," *The Biblical World* 51, no. 1 (1918): 3–8, <https://doi.org/10.1086/475934>.

<sup>41</sup> J. N. Suggit, "Nicodemus - The True Jew," *Neotestamentica* 14 (1980): 90–110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40118190>

<sup>42</sup> J. N. Suggit, "Nicodemus - The True Jew," *Neotestamentica* 14 (1980): 90–110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40118190>

<sup>43</sup> J. N. Suggit, "Nicodemus - The True Jew," *Neotestamentica* 14 (1980): 90–110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40118190>

and even years across his entire lifespan. Is it possible for him to undergo a process of reversion to the embryonic state within the confines of his mother's uterus and afterward experience a second birth? He knew this needed to be more attainable in terms of physical capability. The interconnection between human existence's spiritual, psychological, and physical aspects renders it equally unfeasible to disentangle them at advanced stages. However, the profound spiritual and psychological characteristics of personality components further amplify the improbability of such endeavours.<sup>44</sup>

Considering specific authors, there exists an opinion regarding Nicodemus' inquiry as stated in John 3:4, whereby he poses the question: "How is it possible for an individual to experience rebirth when they have reached an advanced age?" Is it possible for him to re-enter his mother's womb and undergo a second birth? The remark mentioned above pertains to Nicodemus' lack of understanding of rebirth.

A study by Westcott reviews John 3:4 with a different view. The three degrees of greeting are denoted by three noun forms, namely rab, rabbi, and rabban, with the latter representing the most significant level. Nevertheless, the employment of the term "rabbi" does not conclusively establish the nature of the connection between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus' use of the phrase, while formally displaying respect, may contain an underlying element of irony, as suggested in subsequent speech.<sup>45</sup>

Nicodemus demonstrated comprehension of Jesus' message. The custom of proselyte baptism was observed within Judaism around the first century AD. Baptism constitutes a significant prerequisite that necessitates fulfilment by individuals who have recently embraced their faith. The response provided by Nicodemus, a scholarly individual and rabbi actively engaged in this theological argument, can be characterized as either a lacklustre response stemming from a lack of comprehension or an uncooperative reaction stemming from the scholar's wounded pride. Nicodemus would have been familiar with the doctrine of water baptism, which goes beyond the mere instruction on the baptism of repentance. Nicodemus may have believed that being born of water alone would

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<sup>44</sup> Herman A Hoyt, "The Explanation of the New Birth," *Grace Journal* 8, no. 2 (1967): 14, [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/grace-journal/08-2\\_14.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/grace-journal/08-2_14.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Cotterell, "Sociolinguistics and Biblical Interpretation."

suffice. However, Jesus highlighted that more was needed. In the words of Jesus, an individual must undergo both a physical birth involving water and a spiritual rebirth involving the spirit. Subsequently, Jesus proceeds to elucidate the rationale behind this insistence, asserting that physical matter is inherently limited to its kind and possesses the exclusive capability to generate similar physical matter.<sup>46</sup> Jesus also explained that the source of spiritual life is only derived from the spirit. This statement pertains to the perspective of a Jewish scribe who possessed a sense of righteousness and holiness, leading them to believe that the teachings of Jesus were not intended for an individual such as Nicodemus.

The confirmation of divergent perspectives has been established through a recent study undertaken by Cotterell. A novel and highly reliable representation of Nicodemus comes to light. He has been established to contrast and compare with the numerous individuals whose ideas ultimately prove wrong. The individual's perceived social dominance and intellectual superiority are subject to scrutiny. Nicodemus retreated into a state of quiet, displaying a sense of humility and, potentially, embarrassment, as noted by Cotterell.

The individual's position within the divine realm was assured due to factors such as their racial background, adherence to circumcision, strict adherence to legal regulations, and professional achievements. The evident dissatisfaction displayed by Nicodemus in response to Jesus' statements, prompted by his incorrect response, serves as a clear indication of his profound discomfort. In what manner might an individual of advanced age undergo the birth process? The individual doubts the possibility of undergoing a second birth by re-entering their mother's womb, as stated in verse 4. However, Jesus did not yield or retreat. The individual re-affirms their stance and, in doing so, exaggerates their presence, emphasizing their significance and uniqueness: "One must undergo a spiritual rebirth" (verse 7). Nicodemus potentially expressed, "I implore you to heed my words, for I am a person of integrity and moral rectitude!" I possess a significant level of influence within this community. I own the most exceptional Curriculum vitae among all individuals in Jerusalem. However, he exhibited signs of surprise by swallowing audibly, blinking rapidly, and verbalizing his inquiry, "By what means did this occurrence transpire?"

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<sup>46</sup> Cotterell, "Sociolinguistics and Biblical Interpretation."

By verse 9, Nicodemus' reaction conveys significant insights into his character. The response of Jesus, as translated directly, can be paraphrased as follows: "Are you the instructor of Israel and yet lack comprehension of these matters?" The tenth verse of the New American Standard Bible acknowledges Nicodemus' esteemed scientific standing. Jesus referred to him as a teacher, emphasizing his role beyond a mere instructor. During the contemporary period, he was widely regarded as the foremost authority on the Old Testament. Jesus expressed a sense of mild frustration upon realizing that the "teacher of Israel" lacked comprehension of the fundamental principle of the new birth.

Furthermore, several commentators provided their perspectives in addition to the comprehensive explanation provided before. Meyer explained that Nicodemus comprehended the phrase "born again" as not wholly unfamiliar to him.<sup>47</sup> Nicodemus poses a question that can be considered implausible.<sup>48</sup> Bengel reinforces this assertion by contending that Nicodemus exhibits considerable resistance to the degree that his remarks appear to verge on mockery.<sup>49</sup> Marsh further noted the inherent difficulty in accepting the proposition that Nicodemus truly believed that Christ's reference to being "born again" was to be understood in a literal and bodily sense. Based on the provided context, it is highly probable that Nicodemus knows the metaphorical notion of "new birth" as a symbolic representation of spiritual rejuvenation. The person under consideration either deliberately distorts the intended significance of Christ's statements to render them devoid of logical coherence or, more plausibly, without a proper rejoinder, presents a query that they know cognizant is evasive.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

Examining the language used in John 3:4 offers vital insights into Nicodemus's investigation of the idea of being born again. Nicodemus's

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<sup>47</sup> Charles John Ellicott, *Ellicott's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>48</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Meyer's Commentary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon, US: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> F. S. Marsh, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: University Press, 1942).

inquiry is shown to be genuine. However, he needs clarification by six specific linguistic elements: the interrogative adverb, indicative conjugation, aorist passive infinitive form, exact terminology for human and aged individuals, and a metaphorical word.

An analysis of the specific circumstances surrounding Nicodemus's meetings with Jesus in the Gospel of John reveals a multifaceted identity that influences their relationships. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who was deeply committed to following the Law. He is meticulous and possesses extensive knowledge. His role inside the Sanhedrin enhances his religious importance, highlighting his engagements with Jesus. Nicodemus first needs to demonstrate more interest in the subject matter due to his literal interpretation of Jesus's teachings. However, the exchange of questions and responses between Nicodemus and Jesus adds richness to their discourse, ultimately shedding light on Nicodemus's connection with Jesus and his unique characteristics.

According to several theologian scholars, Nicodemus' inquiry in verse 4 can be interpreted as indicative of his inability to comprehend the statement made by Jesus in verse 3. Another scholar contends that the matter pertains to sarcasm, exemplified by a comment reflecting the individual's sense of superiority. Nicodemus passionately expressed his entreaty, pushing the audience to contemplate his presentation attentively and emphasizing his dedication to maintaining ethical ideals and personal integrity.

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