

Lecture 15. John 3:1-8

1. “a man” (*anthrōpos*)

This ties in with 2:25 (Jesus knew what was in the heart of “man”)

Previous remark of narrator: critical of faith based on signs

The same faith will be criticized in this story

Ruler of “the Jews”

See lecture 14 for why this term needs to be placed in quotation marks.

Because of the lack of faith of “the Jews” it has a negative connotation here.

2. at night

probably a symbolic reference. The light is shining in the darkness

Perhaps Nicodemus does not wish to be recognized as a disciple

At the end of the Gospel he will be part of the team that buries Jesus.

In 19:39 the narrator will again note that Nicodemus first came to Jesus “at night”

Rabbi

The title is respectful.

It has been used of Jesus by some of his first disciples (1:38, 49)

We know

Whenever somebody in the Gospel of John says they “know” something, **they are wrong.**

He knows that Jesus “has come from God as a teacher.”

Of course “teacher” is not high enough for John’s Christology

Because . . . signs

Faith based on signs is criticized (See Lecture 14).

Nicodemus places Jesus in the same category as other men who have “come from God”

Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Unless “God is with him.”

Stephen, in his speech in Acts, uses this phrase to describe Joseph (Acts 7:9-10a)

"And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt; but God was with him¹⁰ and rescued him from all his afflictions. (NAB)

Moloney points out this also fits Moses and Jeremiah.¹

God answered: I will be with you; and this will be your sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God at this mountain. (Exod 3:12 NABRE)

Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you," says the LORD. (Jer 1:8 NET)

In fact, this is the way some early Christians thought of Jesus. See Peter’s speech to Cornelius . . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Act 10:38 NAB)

This Christology is too low for John.

3. answered and said

This is a “pleonasm” (an overly “full” expression); Semitic way of denoting a solemn statement

¹ Moloney, *John*, 91.

Amen, Amen

26x in Greek Bible; 25x in John; (The other occurrence is Tobit 8:8)

Hebrew OT: Num 5:22; Neh 8:6.

In the extra-Johannine occurrences the double-amen **ends a prayer**.

In the Synoptics Jesus is portrayed as beginning a sentence with a **single** “amen” 50X.

Nobody else in the entire bible begins a sentence with “amen.”

Jeremias argues that this is characteristic of the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus (Stage 1).

Only **the Johannine Jesus** begins a statement with a double “amen.”

This appears to be a characteristic of **Johannine style** (stages 2 & 3)

“born” or “begotten.”

The Greek means literally “to become a parent.”

In English, we refer to the action of the male as “begetting;” that of the female as “birthing.”

Brown argues for “begotten” because in the Gospels Spirit has no female attributes.²

However, Nicodemus will mention going back into **his mother’s womb**

Most translations will read “born” rather than “begotten”

Born “again” or “from above”?

Translations are divided

Born again: KJV, RSV, NIV

Born from above: NET, NAB, NRSV

The Greek is ambiguous (more on that when we get to verse 7)

Divine Begetting—Stage 1³

Could Nicodemus have understood this concept in Stage 1?

Ancient Israel: whole people of Israel is God’s “son” (Exod 4:22; Hose 11:1)

No clear reference to divine begetting.

Anointed king begotten on day of enthronement (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7)

In Post-Exilic times, pious individual Israelites are called “sons of God”

E. g., Wis 5:5; Sirach 4:10 (especially in the Hebrew)

It is possible that the basic ideas in the conversation can go back to Stage 1.

Kingdom of God

This phrase **never occurs even once** in the OT.

In John: only occurs in this story in John (3:3,5)

A common theme in the Synoptics.

“Kingdom of God”			
Matthew 4x	Mark 14x	Luke 32x	John 2x
“Kingdom of Heaven”			
32x	-	-	-

The second and **final** occurrence of the phrase will be in 3:5.

“See” the Kingdom

Probably Semitic idiom for “ to experience,” as in the expression “to see death” (quotes from RSV)

² Brown, *John I-XII*, p. 130.

³ Ibid. 139.

What man can live and never **see death**? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? S (Ps 89:48)

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not **see death** before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:26)

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not **see death**; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. (Heb 11:5)

Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never **see death**." (John 8:51)

In verse 5 the phrase "enter the kingdom" will be used synonymously.

4. Two Questions from Nicodemus

The first expresses an astonished lack of comprehension: "How can . . ."

The second question expects the answer "no."

5. Amen, Amen (as in v. 3)

"I" say to "you."

Note that the speaker is singular (Jesus). The hearer, "you" (*soi*) is singular (Nicodemus).

This is also true of the words "I" and "you" in verses 6-10.

Water and Spirit (Two levels.)

Stage 1, any discussion of Christian Baptism would have been totally incomprehensible to Nicodemus.

What could Nicodemus have understood at Stage 1?

Water & Spirit are connected in the OT (Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:25-26)

Also in the post-OT book of Jubilees (although the word "water" is not used explicitly)

And after this they will turn to Me in all uprightness and with all (their) heart and with all (their) soul, and I will circumcise the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their seed, and I will create in them a holy **spirit**, and I will **cleanse** them so that they shall not turn away from Me from that day unto eternity. (Jub 1:23)⁴

Stage 3, no Johannine reader could hear this passage without thinking of Christian Baptism.

John often writes on **two levels simultaneously**.

Pre-resurrectional words have **new meaning after** the resurrection.

6. Flesh

Not the Pauline sense of "sinfulness." In John it emphasizes "weakness & mortality."⁵

7. **anōthen** has a double meaning

It can mean "**again**" (which is how Nicodemus understands it)

It can mean "**from above**" (which is how Jesus means it).

This word-play **can only happen in Greek**.

Like English Hebrew & Aramaic need **different words** to express "from above" and "again."

This word-play **cannot possibly go back to Stage 1**.

8 "Wind" / "Spirit."

Many English translations render the Greek word **pneuma** by two different English Words.

One is capitalized; the other is not. Obviously capitalization is an "editor's choice."

The **wind** blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the **Spirit**." (RSV)

⁴ Accessed through BibleWorks9. Brown (*John*)

⁵ Brown (*John I-XII*, 131) dates Jubilees to the 2nd century BC.

The **wind** blows where it chooses . . . with everyone who is born of the **Spirit**." (NRSV)

The **wind** bloweth where it listeth . . . : so is every one that is born of the **Spirit**. (KJV)

The **wind** blows where it wills . . . ; so it is with everyone who is born of the **Spirit**." (NAB)

The **wind** blows wherever it will . . . with everyone who is born of the **Spirit**." (NET)

The **wind** blows wherever it pleases. . . . So it is with everyone born of the **Spirit**." (NIV)

It is impossible to capture the wordplay in English.

Brown notes that the simile is not original with John. A similar idea occurs in Qoh 11:5

Just as you do not know how the **life breath** enters the human frame in the mother's womb, So you do not know the work of God, who is working in everything (NAB RE)

Just as you know not how the **breath of life** fashions the human frame in the mother's womb, So you know not the work of God which he is accomplishing in the universe (NAB).

Lecture 16. John 3:9-15

9-10. Question of Nicodemus / Response of Jesus

Johannine Literary Device: Misunderstanding.

Gives Jesus a chance to elaborate. (If Nicodemus understood, the story would come to an end!)

The readers are in the "in group."

11. Amen, Amen (See Lecture 15, comment on v. 5.)

"I" say to "you."

The last singulars in the discourse!

Suddenly the verbs change to the **plural**

We Know, Speak, Have seen, Bear witness

More plurals! **You (all)** do not accept **our** witness.

In modern standard English "you" can be either singular or plural

Old English: thee / you

Southern English: you / you-all

Nicodemus has faded away. We have a Stage 3 conversation between

"us" (the Johannine community)

"you all" (i.e., "the Jews")

12. Note mixture of singular and plural.

"I" tell **you all** (*humin* not *soi*)

The narrator switches back to the singular because **only Jesus** is the revealer, not the community.

But the audience

Earthly / Heavenly

"Earthly" probably refers to what Jesus has been saying up to this point

"Heavenly" probably refers to the remainder of the discourse

13. Son of Man

Has ascended to heaven.

Notice that insights from Stages 2 & 3 are being mixed with Stage 1 material

Those who could not accept the “earthly” Jesus cannot accept the “heavenly,” ascended Son of Man.

Son of Man, Synoptics & John

For Synoptics: designates Jesus who will come from heaven in glory **in the future**.

Used by Jesus, as portrayed by the evangelists, as a self-description **during the ministry**.

(Fitzmyer thinks this is post resurrectional language from Stage 3. See Lecture 10.)

For John the Son of Man is **pre-existent**

Just because gospels use the same words, does not mean they have the same meaning.

14 Son of Man must “be lifted up.”

Key Johannine concept. Refers to death-resurrection-ascension as one process.

3:14; 8:28; 12:32,34

In each of these contexts, the “Son of Man” is also mentioned.

Second Isaiah will use this expression of the Servant of the LORD (Isa 52:13)

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. (NABRE)

The Greek verb, *hupsōō*, is the same as the one used by John.

An allusion to pre-existent Wisdom

"Like a cedar on Lebanon I am raised aloft, like a cypress on Mount Hermon, (Sir 24:13NAB). [NABRE, RSV translate “I grew tall”]

The Greek word is *an-hupsōō* a compound that puts “raise” and “up” into one word.

15 Eternal Life

A major Johannine theme

“Eternal Life”						
OT	Matthew	Mark	Luke / Acts	John / 1 John	Rev	Rest of NT
-	3x	2x	3x / 2x	17x / 6x	-	10x

“Eternal life” never appears in the OT.

Also never in Revelation. Another argument against one author for FG & Revelation.

Lecture 17. John 3:16-21

16, God loved the World.

This is the **only** Johannine passage which speaks of God’s love for the world.

In all other passages, God’s love is for the disciples.

There is nothing in John similar to Matt 5:45.

that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. (Mat 5:45 NAB)

The Unique Son (See 1:14, Lecture 5)

17. “Judge” (*krinein*) is used in the sense of “condemn”

God has “sent” the Son. (More on this in Lecture 19)

18. Has **already been judged.**

Note the similarity to [Mark 16:16]

[Mark 16:16] He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (RSV)	John 3:18 He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already,
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because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (RSV)

Realized Eschatology

In Mark it is a post-resurrectional statement referring to a future judgment; in John it is in the context of realized eschatology.⁶

Unique Son of God. (See Lecture 5 on 1:14.)

19. This **is** the judgment (*krisis*).

More realized eschatology.

The Johannine expressions *krinein* [to judge] and *krisis* [judgment] appear here (vv. 18-19) for the first time . . . The association of a **realized eschatology** with a theology of **self-judgment** is one of the Fourth Gospel's contributions to Christian thought. One does not wait till the end of time (traditional eschatology) for the return of the Son of Man who will exercise a final judgment (cf. Matt 25:31-46). **One judges oneself** by the acceptance or refusal of the revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ and by the good and bad deeds that flow from this decision.⁷

In the Synoptics Judgment is a **future reality**.

Matthew's parable of the last judgment

³¹ The queen of the South will arise at the **judgment** with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Luke 11:31 RSV)

²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of **judgment** for Tyre and Sidon than for you. (Matt 11:21-22 RSV)

For John, Judgment is a **present reality**

20. Coming toward the light || doing evil / worthless deeds

This is antithetic parallelism

21. Truth is something which a person **does**.

It is not simply an intellectual reality.

Lecture 18. John 3:22-30

22. Journey to Judea

One of several in John. These Journeys are unknown in the Synoptics

Jesus was baptizing!

Imperfect tense, signifying a repeated or continuous action.

There will be an "editorial correction" in 4:2 (more about that later).

⁶ Brown, *John I-XII*, 148.

⁷ Moloney, *John*, 102.

23. Aenon, Salim. Several locations have been proposed.

24. John not yet in prison

Ministry of Jesus / Arrest of John (Brown, 153)

In Mark & Matthew Jesus begins his ministry only after John is arrested.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God (Mark 1:14 || Matt 4:12, NAB)⁸

In the FG Jesus has been ministering in Galilee and Jerusalem, and JB has not yet been arrested!

25. Dispute between Disciples of JB, Disciples of Jesus

Historical? Certainly competitors in Stage 2 and Stage 3. (See earlier lecture)

26. JB is called “Rabbi.”

27-30. The response of JB.

Final testimony of JB to Jesus in FG.

Lecture 19. John 3:31-36

Who is the speaker?⁹

John the Baptist – speaking in 3:22-30; no change of speaker is noted.

The Narrator – an “aside” to the reader

Jesus – the patterns of speech fit those attributed to Jesus elsewhere in the Gospel

Would be **printed in red** in a red letter edition, if the editor follows this opinion.

Brown: An originally **isolated discourse** of Jesus has been attached here as a summary [by the narrator].

Moloney regards that as the **words of the narrator**.

31 The one who comes from above

This is a Johannine designation for Jesus, a major theme of John’s Gospel.

Only in John does Pilate ask Jesus, “Where are you from?”

Bound up with the teaching of pre-existence.

32 What he has seen & heard

No one receives his witness

The Johannine community views about Jesus are not accepted

33 God is “true”

34 The one God has “sent”

In the synoptics, “sending” is prophet language.

He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt 15:24 NAB)

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. (Matt 10:40 NAB)

⁸ Recall that in Luke the arrest of John is narrated (3:20) even before the **baptism** of Jesus (3:21)!

⁹ Brown, *John I-XII*, 159-160.

It has no connotation of Pre-existence. See the calls of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

"Here I am," I said; "send me!" (Isa 6:8 NABRE)

But the LORD answered me, Do not say, "I am too young." To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. (Jer 1:7 NABRE)

In the FG even JB is "sent by God" in this sense.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (Joh 1:6 RSV)

God "sends" these men as prophets. It does not mean they used to live in heaven with God.

Similarly, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, God "sends" Jesus **from Nazareth**, not from heaven!

In John, Jesus is sent "from above."

See the references to "from above"

See the Prologue.

We misunderstand the Synoptics if we interpret them in terms of Johannine pre-existence.

We misunderstand John if we interpret the "sending" in the FG as prophetic language.

Who gives the Spirit?

The Greek "he" is ambiguous.

It can refer to "God" **or** to "the one whom he [God] sent"

The **only** case where the present tense is used.

35 "The Father," "the Son"

Proverbial language: "The wise person . . . the foolish person . . ." (Prov 14:16 NAB, NABRE)

"the sluggard . . . the diligent . . ." (Prov 13:4, RSV)

This "absolute" usage will eventually evolve into the doctrine of the Trinity

36 Eternal life (See 3:15)

Believe / Disobey

Note that the opposite to "believe" is to **disobey**.

"Belief" is not simply an intellectual activity; it involves a concrete lifestyle.

Will not "see" life

Semitic sense of "experience" life. (See Lecture 15)

Life $zōē$

433x in Greek Bible (42 of these--10%-- are in John or 1 John)

Life ($zōē$) in the Gospels			
Matthew 7x	Mark 4x	Luke 5x	John 32x

The "Wrath" of God

A traditional apocalyptic concept

Often, what the wicked will suffer **at the last judgment**

. . . and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the **wrath to come**. (1Thess 1:10 RSV)

Here it refers to a **present reality** (realized eschatology)