

## John Trips Over Nicodemus

We find this conversation (only) in the gospel of John, between Jesus and Nicodemus.

John 3:1-7:

**Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”**

**Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**

**“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”**

**Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’**

If you want more proof that John’s gospel in general (and this passage in particular) is based on something other than a first-hand account of what Jesus said, this vignette provides it for you. John (whoever he was) was using a play on words to make a point. The Greek word for *again* is *anōthen*, which has two meanings. (1) from above, from a higher place, from the upper part, from the top, from heaven; (2) from the first, from the beginning, anew, over again. John consistently uses it in the first sense, from above, and that’s what Jesus means here. But Nicodemus takes it to mean the second option, over again, and questions Jesus how that could be possible.

The story is cute because of the double entendre. Without that, it makes no sense. And that's how we can be sure this little exchange never took place, at least not quite as John describes it. The problem is that the double entendre exists only in Greek, not in Aramaic, which is the language that would have been used by Jesus and Nicodemus.

John is embellishing to make the story more interesting, or, more likely, he is just making the whole thing up. Not the author himself, necessarily. It's probably one of those stories that came to be passed down orally from person to person, changing along the way, for decades. That seems to be what John's gospel is all about – a collection of oral traditions that have no historical basis at all. That, in fact, is how Jesus came to be divine, not simply an apocalyptic preacher from Galilee as portrayed in Mark's gospel. Nobody would have been more shocked at Jesus' purported divinity than Jesus. Which means that Christianity is based on what John said, not what Jesus said or did. It's based on what Paul said, not what Jesus said or did.

In other words, the entire foundation of Christianity is false. It is a lie. It is a farce, a fraud, a con, a hoax.