



Nicodemus—A Rabbi Seeking Wisdom

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Abstract

The meeting of two teachers at night suggests that they will be discussing sacred texts, as this was a conventional time for such learned dialogues. Nicodemus initiates the discussion, pointing to the “signs” Jesus has performed; Jesus elaborates further on the deeper meaning of the signs that Nicodemus so far has missed. The story of Jacob in Genesis 28 and the descriptions in the Wisdom of Solomon provide rich intertext for understanding the Nicodemus pericope. In the person of Jesus, the Son of Man has descended from heaven, and the heavens have been opened, enabling access to the reign of God for the one who is born anew.

Keywords

Nicodemus; Kingdom of God; Born Anew; Eternal Life; John 3

John’s Gospel starts by introducing the *Logos*/Word, with God in the beginning (John 1:1; cf. Gen 1:1);¹ the *Logos* is an active agent in the work of creation (1:2–3) and then takes flesh (*sarx*) to participate in the very mortal and limited “stuff” of creation. As a divine being (1:1) the flesh-taking of the Word is described as “tabernacling” with us (1:14; *eskēnōsen*), making use of Israel’s word for God’s presence with them in the tabernacle (*skēnē*) (e.g., Exod 40:35 LXX). This story of the *Logos* mirrors the sages’ description of Wisdom/*Sophia* who was with God in the beginning, who participated in the act of creation, and then made her home in the holy tabernacle.

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth (Prov 8:22–23)

My Creator chose the place for my tent (*skēnēn*) . . .
Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me,
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.
In the holy tent (*skēnē*) I ministered before him (Sir 24:8b–10)

1 See Mary L. Coloe, *John 1–10*, WCS 44A (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2021), liv–lviii.

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Thus, Jesus is introduced to the reader through well-known images of God's Word (Gk. *Logos*) and God's Wisdom (Gk. *Sophia*). For the first readers, the presence of *Sophia* with God at creation, was probably already known in the Aramaic translation of the Scriptures, used in the Palestinian synagogue. In these translations creation happens—"In the beginning with *Wisdom*, the *Memra* of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth" (Tg. Neof. Gen 1:1).² While in the Septuagint God creates by speaking a word – "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), in the Targums the creative word of God is accompanied by Wisdom.

In the Gospel's narrative of Jesus, he continues to act as *Sophia*. Jesus, like Wisdom, gathers disciples, inviting them to dwell with him/her (Sir 51:23; John 1:35–51),³ offering them nourishment (Sir 24:19–22; Prov 9:1–6; John 6) and salvation (Wis 9:18; John 3:16).⁴ The disciples of Wisdom are called children/sons (Prov 2:1; Sir 2:1; 4:10–11; Wis 2:13; John 13:13), and friends (Wis 7:27; John 15:15). Wisdom lives with God and is loved by God (Prov 8:30–31; Wis 8:3; John 5:20; 10:17); she is an initiate in the knowledge of God and an associate in his works (Wis 8:4; John 8:29, 38, 42, 55). In light of such similarities, Michael Willett states, "Wisdom strides through the Gospel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is Wisdom incarnate, God reaching out to humanity to the fullest extent, as a human being."⁵

The Meeting of Two Rabbis⁶

The Wisdom background is obvious in the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, which shows the following structure framed by the description of two Rabbis: Jesus, "a teacher come from God" (v. 2) and Nicodemus "a teacher of Israel" (v. 10). Apart from this *inclusio*, the section is held together by the repetition of the word *dunamai* (translated as "possible" and its negative form "impossible"). Within this section, smaller units are also set in parallel form, such as vv. 3 and 5:

³"Amen, Amen, I say to you,
unless one is born anew (*anōthen*) it is not possible to see the kingdom of God."

⁵"Amen, Amen, I say to you,
unless one is born of water and the Spirit it is not possible to enter into the kingdom of God."

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- 2 The Aramaic term *memra* was used in the Targums to translate "word" (Heb. *dabar*). While dating the Targums is problematic, the term *memra* was being used at Qumran, providing evidence that this term pre-dates the Gospel. On this see Frédéric Manns, *L'Evangile de Jean à la lumière du Judaïsme*, SBFA 33 (Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1991), 41–42; also, Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Gospel*, JSNTSup 89 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 77–78.
 - 3 Feuillet notes the similarity between the disciples of Jesus and the disciples of Wisdom even though the latter are never called disciples. See André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), 89–91.
 - 4 On Wisdom's role in salvation see Alice Sinnott, "Wisdom as Saviour," *ABR* 52 (2004): 19–31.
 - 5 Michael E. Willett, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 127. See also the discussion of the Johannine sapiential voice and style in Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 18–27. In my commentary I discuss the "genre bending" in John's portrayal of the Word (masculine gender in Greek) as *Sophia*/Wisdom (feminine gender in both Hebrew and Greek; see Coloe, *John 1–10*, xiv–xlix; 20–22. Also, Harold W. Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 121 (2002): 3–21.
 - 6 Night was recommended for the study of Torah, "and rabbis are often found prolonging their discussions well into the night." Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, trans. K. Smyth et al., 3 vols., HTCNT (London: Burns & Oates, 1968–1982), 1:366.

The parallelism, typical of Hebrew poetry, establishes that seeing (v. 3) and entering (v. 5) the kingdom of God are synonymous, similarly, being born anew (*anōthen*) (v. 7) and being born of the Spirit (*pneumatōs*, v. 9). The arguments supporting Jesus's statements in vv. 3–5 begin with a statement of a principle (v. 6), presumably, one that Nicodemus could agree with. The principle is then expanded upon in the form of a small parable about the mysterious nature of the wind/spirit (*pneuma*); it is real, but not directly visible.

Introduction (2:23–3:2)⁷

²³Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; ²⁴but Jesus did not trust himself to them, ²⁵because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness of man (*anthrōpou*); for he himself knew what was in man (*anthrōpō*). ^{3:1} Now there was a man (*anthrōpos*) of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him,

Dialogue

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for it is not possible (*dunatai*) for anyone to do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.”

Birth/rebirth (3:3–5)

³Jesus answered him saying,
“Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless one is born anew (*anōthen*) it is not possible (*dunatai*) to see the kingdom of God.”

⁴Nicodemus said to him,
“How is it possible (*dunatai*) for a person to be born when he is old? It is not possible (*dunatai*) to enter into the mother's womb a second time and be born.”

⁵Jesus answered,

“Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, it is not possible (*dunatai*) to enter into the kingdom of God.

Principle (3:6)

⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh,
and what is born of the Spirit (*pneumatōs*) is spirit.

Parable (3:7–8)

⁷Do not marvel (*mē thaumasēs*) that I said to you, “You must be born anew/from above (*anōthen*).”⁸

⁸The wind (*pneuma*) 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 (*pneumatōs*).”

7 In this passage, John 2:23–3:10, I am using my own translation to demonstrate the parallelism of the Greek text.

8 In this context, speaking of the Spirit/wind (*pneuma*), the evangelist is exploiting the double-meaning of the Greek *pneuma*. Similarly, *anōthen* can mean born anew, and born “from above” (i.e., born of the Spirit).

Conclusion (3:9–10)

⁹Replying, Nicodemus said to him, “How is this possible (*dunatai*)?”

¹⁰Replying, Jesus said to him “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not know this?”

Logic of the Dialogue⁹

Nicodemus begins the dialogue with his statement recognizing Jesus as a fellow rabbi, a “teacher come from God,” and he has come to this conclusion because he has seen signs (v. 2). But his perception has not gone far enough. He has not recognized in the signs the arrival of the eschatological reign of God.

The first sign at Cana, the abundance of wine, pointed to the arrival of the Messiah.¹⁰ According to 2 Bar 29:5, with the coming of the Messiah, “On one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster shall produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor [120 gal.] of wine.”¹¹ Similarly, Jesus’s actions in the temple could be seen as a fulfillment of the ancient promises. “And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one. . . And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day (Zech 14:9, 21). In John’s account of the temple episode (2:13–22), Jesus echoes Zechariah and commands, “Stop making my Father’s house a house of trade” (auth. trans. 2:16). Malachi also writes “and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1). As a Pharisee learned in the Scriptures, Nicodemus could be expected to see the signs and understand that they point to the arrival of the day of the LORD, and the reign of God. So, Nicodemus’s perception of Jesus as a teacher, and possibly a prophet, is insufficient, as Jesus’s response to him indicates; “unless one is born anew (*anōthen*), it is not possible to see the kingdom of God” (v. 3). By seeing the signs, but not seeing the reign of God, Nicodemus shows his need to be reborn. Jesus is not introducing something new, rather, he is expanding on the statement Nicodemus made about signs.

At first Nicodemus simply asks: “How is it possible for a person be to born when he is old?” (v. 4). But then, without waiting for Jesus’s answer, he continues by saying such rebirth is not possible. “It is not possible to enter into the mother’s womb a second (*deuteron*) time and be born.” He is understanding Jesus’s words literally and imaging that to be born anew requires entering a mother’s womb a second time. This leads Jesus to expand on his first statement and to speak about two different forms of birth—a first birth through water and a second birth through the Spirit; “unless one

9 According to F. Peter Cotterell, “The conversation does not proceed smoothly. The opening statement by Nicodemus supplies the propositional part of a typical P[roposition] R[esponse] adjacency pair. The expectation is that Jesus will accept the cultural implication of Nicodemus’s initiative and further the conversation.” See F. Peter Cotterell, “The Nicodemus Conversation: A Fresh Appraisal,” *ExpTim* 96 (1984–85): 237–42 (239). Cotterell believes that Jesus departs from the conventions for a conversation and introduces a new topic. In what follows I will show that *contra* Cotterell, there is a logic to the conversation, where Jesus is responding to an issue raised by Nicodemus—namely “signs” and what they mean.

10 Several biblical passages associate the coming of the Messiah with abundant wine (Gen 49:10–12; Amos 9:11, 13–14; 2 Bar 29:3, 5). For further discussion see Jocelyn McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel*, SNTSMS 138 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47–50; Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998), 29–30.

11 Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 79.



Matthias Stom. Christ and Nicodemus. Oil on canvas. Early 17th cent. Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matthias_Stom_-_Christ_and_Nicodemus.jpg

is born of water and the Spirit, it is not possible to enter into the kingdom of God” (v. 5). It is this second birth “of the Spirit” that enables participation in the reign of God.

Jesus, the teacher, then continues to clarify what he means, using two familiar teaching techniques. Firstly, he provides Nicodemus with a principle he should be able to accept: “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (v. 6). He then offers a parable about the wind introduced with the phrase, “Do not marvel” (*mē thaumasēs*; v. 7), thereby challenging Nicodemus to move beyond what he can see, to accept something that he cannot see but is real; just as the wind is real even though the wind cannot be seen.¹² “The wind (*pneuma*) 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 (*pneumatōs*).” But neither the principle nor the parable works; and at this stage in the Gospel, Nicodemus remains confused and repeats his earlier question—“how is this possible?” (v. 9). The dialogue concludes with Jesus, the teacher come from God, asking, perhaps with exasperation, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not know this?” (v. 10).

Seeing the Reign of God (*tēn basileian tou theou*)

The introductory verses (2:23–25) align Nicodemus with those people who believed because they saw the signs. Because of the signs, Nicodemus sees in Jesus a “teacher come from God” and probably a sign-prophet like Moses, but he has not seen in the signs the arrival of the *basileia* of God. Jesus’s response invites him to see more, and is similar to his earlier reply to Nathanael, who called Jesus “Rabbi,” “Son of God,” and “King of Israel” (1:49); Jesus tells Nathanael he will see greater things, that he will see “the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51). The reply to Nathanael echoes the vision of Jacob and his dream at Bethel (Gen 28:12). Jesus’s reply to Nicodemus may be drawing on the same scene, for we find in the Wisdom of Solomon a description of Jacob’s dream that provides the only place in the Old Testament where the expression *basileian theou* is used.

12 “This introduction [*mē thaumasēs*] with the negative is designed to emphasize the self-evident nature of a statement. . . In this case it is used of a position which is presupposed to be generally recognized.” Georg Bertram, “*Thauma*,” *TDNT* 3 (1964–): 29.

When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him on straight paths; she showed him the kingdom of God (*basileian theou*) and gave him knowledge of holy things; she prospered him in his labors, and increased the fruit of his toil (Wis 10:10).

Jesus invites Nicodemus to see beyond the signs and see in him the arrival of the *basileia*.

While the phrase "Kingdom of God" had its basis in the preaching of Jesus, it does not dominate the Fourth Gospel as it does the Synoptics, being found only in this Nicodemus pericope (vv. 3, 5). Rather than look to the Synoptics, the Wisdom of Solomon seems a more likely intertext. This section of Wisdom (10:1–19:22) recalls the history of Israel, told with divine Wisdom/*Sophia* as the savior. It is the figure of Wisdom who guides Israel's ancestors, who comes to their aid, and grants them visions and knowledge of the *basileian theou*.

That we are meant to hear the Jacob story, retold through the Wisdom of Solomon, is confirmed in the second allusion to Jacob in John 3:13 with its language of "ascending," "descending," "heaven," and "Son of Man." Together, Genesis 28, Wisdom 10:10, and John 1:51 provide the rich intertext for understanding the Nicodemus pericope. In Jesus, the Son of Man has descended from heaven, and the heavens have been opened, enabling access to the reign of God for the one who is born anew.

Born Anew

The term *anōthen* can function as both an adverb of place and an adverb of time. It can mean "from above," and it can mean "from an earlier time," hence "again," or "anew";¹³ the meaning here (v. 3) is probably "born anew" rather than "born from above."¹⁴ Nicodemus understands *anōthen* in a temporal sense, for he speaks of being born a second (*deuteron*) time (v. 4). The misunderstanding between Jesus and Nicodemus is not so much about the meaning of *anōthen* but about what Jesus means by birth.¹⁵ Jesus is not speaking of ordinary natural birth but birth by the Spirit.¹⁶ The first is natural birth, achieved

13 Friedrich Büchsel, "anōthen," *TDNT* 1 (1964–76): 378.

14 See Linda Belleville, "'Born of Water and Spirit': John 3:5," *TJ* 1 (1980): 138 n. 75. Belleville provides six arguments for interpreting *anōthen* as "'again' or 'anew,' and notes the number of modern and ancient commentators who also opt for 'born again.' This same article provides an excellent synopsis of the variety of interpretations, which Belleville describes as ritualistic, symbolic, physiological, dualistic, cosmological and figurative. Jones also supports this reading of 'born anew' noting that: "misunderstandings based on 'misplaced literalness' characterize the Fourth Gospel." See Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John*, *JSNTSup* 145 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 69.

15 Scholars are divided on the issue of whether the misunderstanding of Nicodemus is to be found in the two possible meanings of *anōthen*, (from above, again), or on the meaning of rebirth. With Dodd, Witherington, and Schneiders, I place the confusion with the meaning of 'born anew'. As Schneiders notes, if Nicodemus had understood Jesus at this point to mean 'born from above', he would not have responded with the grotesque image of re-entering the mother's womb. Nicodemus has understood the expression to mean born again, which he then takes literally. See, Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 304; Ben Witherington III, "The Waters of Birth: John 3.5 and 1 John 5.6–8," *NTS* 35 (1989): 159; Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 120.

16 Being born of the spirit (3:5, 6, 8) echoes the promise of the Prologue that believers would become children of God, being born of God (1:13).

with the release of the mother's amniotic fluid (birth by water);¹⁷ the second is the spiritual birth of the believer brought about through the gift of the Spirit. The first birth gives access to human life that is mortal (of the flesh).¹⁸ The second birth draws one into the life of the Spirit, into participation in God's eternal life (or "eternity life," described below). At this point *anōthen* (v. 7) holds both meanings, born anew, and born from above, born of God.

Jesus the Unique Revealer

Nicodemus withdraws from the dialogue at this point, but Jesus continues to address the issues raised (3:11–21). Because Jesus has come from God, as Nicodemus recognised (v. 2), Jesus is able to reveal heavenly things. In speaking to Nathanael he promised a vision of the Son of Man (1:51), and this apocalyptic figure from the book of Daniel appears again in the discourse (3:11–21). In Daniel, this human-like figure arrives when the cosmic powers of evil have been defeated, and so he can be given "dominion and glory and kingship" (Dan 7:14).¹⁹ Where Daniel situates this revelation in the future, the Gospel of John draws this revelation into the present in the historical person of Jesus. As the enfleshed *Logos/Sophia*, Jesus is mortal, and his lifting-up on the cross is the climax of his revelation of God, and his defeat of one called "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Jesus's love unto death reveals God's love of the cosmos, and such love offers to those who believe a new quality of life named in this Gospel *zōēn aiōnon*; this Greek term is usually translated as "eternal life," but I prefer to emphasize not the duration of this life (eternal) but its quality, and so I translate the term as "eternity life."

¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have *zōēn aiōnon* [eternity life]. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have *zōēn aiōnon* [eternity life]. (3:13–16).

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- 17 Understanding "of water" to refer to physical birth, means that this phrase need not be interpreted as a reference to baptism. This is not to deny that a Christian community did not see in this text an allusion to their baptismal rituals, but that its first meaning is to be sought in the natural realm, as Lee writes, "It is likely that water, as a symbol, evokes both birth and baptism in this passage, the text making no attempt to delimit the symbolic meaning. While Christian baptism is not the primary focus of the dialogue, John's symbolism is evocative in a number of directions and suggests a wider field of meaning." See Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 71; also, Jones, *The Symbol of Water*, 76. "Although the practice of baptism may stand somewhere behind the text, nothing stated by the narrator or by Jesus makes an association with baptism concrete." "One needs to be aware that in ancient Near Eastern literature the word 'water' can be and is used as a *terminus technicus*, or at least a well-known circumlocution, for matters involving procreation, child-bearing, child-bearing capacity, or the act of giving birth itself": Witherington III, "The Waters of Birth: John 3.5 and 1 John 5.6–8," 156. See this article for further examples of "water" used as a reference to childbirth.
- 18 Flesh in this context refers to creatureliness, the mortal nature of the human person. "By becoming flesh, God enters the world in the thin garb of mortality, entering the darkness of creation clad only in the armor of skin and vein, sinew and bone: mortal, vulnerable, naked." For a rich examination of the Johannine use of the term "flesh," see Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 29–64. The quotation is from page 50.
- 19 A helpful study of the first-cent. apocalyptic sense of an evil power at work in the world is Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Evil in Johannine and Apocalyptic Perspective: Petition for Protection in John 17," in *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic*, ed. Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 200–32.

The phrase “the reign of God” disappears from the rest of the Gospel, but this reality will be expressed using the Johannine equivalent “eternity life.”²⁰

Eternity Life

One understanding of life after death involved the raising of the body at the end of time, for the experience of judgment, so that the righteous could then receive God’s blessings.²¹ This late Jewish idea emerges in the books of Maccabees (2 Macc 7:9; similarly, vv. 10–11) and Daniel (12: 2–3). Even later than these writings, and perhaps concurrent with the life of the historical Jesus, a new idea of life was emerging as evidenced in the Wisdom of Solomon.²²

Wisdom is possibly the latest in the Greek Old Testament, and it may have been written as late as 70 CE.²³ In this work, influenced by Hellenistic views, particularly neo-Platonism, we find a new thinking about human life in relationship with God, and a new anthropology, and a new conception of eschatology.²⁴ The Greeks considered that the gods were immortal because they were able to feed on heavenly ambrosia, which prevented their “atoms” from dissipating and corrupting.²⁵ Humans did not have access to this nectar of the gods, and so human life knew death, disintegration, and decay. When considering God’s response to the death of the righteous, Wisdom postulates that God gave the righteous, those who choose the way of *Sophia*, the gift of immortality, which is usually a quality of divine life, “for righteousness is immortal (*athanatos*)” (Wis 1:15). The righteous one already participates in the life of God and can be called a “child of the Lord” (Wis 2:13), who “boasts that God is his father” (Wis 2:16). Drawing on the creation account of Genesis 1, the writer makes the bold claim, “for God created us for incorruption and made us in the image of God’s own nature” (Wis 2:23). According to the logic in Wisdom, the righteous only “seem to die” (Wis 3:2); in fact they already have the gift of God’s own “incorruptible spirit” (Wis 12:1), enabling them to live on “in the hand of God” (3:1) and “live forever” (*eis ton aiōna zōsin* Wis 5:15).

The understanding of what it means to be human in the Wisdom of Solomon is that the divine gift of immortality is bestowed *prior* to death. The righteous, who have chosen the way of *Sophia*,

- 20 The expression *zōēn aiōnon* occurs in 3:14, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2; and *aiōnios zōē* in 17:3. Dodd understands this expression in the Fourth Gospel to mean “the life of the Age to Come, qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from this life.” See Dodd, *Interpretation*, 144–49. In this qualitative sense, the adjective “eternity” describes a quality of the divine in the writings of Plato and Philo (*ibid.*, 149–50).
- 21 A more detailed discussion of Jewish eschatological views and further references can be found in Mary L. Coloe, “‘The End Is Where We Start From’: Afterlife in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Living Hope – Eternal Death: Conceptions of the Afterlife in Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Manfred Lang and Michael Labhan (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 177–99; also, Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Johannine Spirituality,” in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John’s Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown, SS* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005), 168–98.
- 22 Bibles within the Catholic tradition include this book within the biblical canon; in other Christian traditions these books are called “deuterocanonical,” and many editions of the Bible do not include them.
- 23 See John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 179. More conservatively, David Winston places this book in Alexandria during the time of Caligula (37–41 CE); see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, AB 43 (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 23.
- 24 These complex concepts involving both Hellenistic philosophy and Jewish theology are well treated by Matthew Edwards, *Pneuma and Realized Eschatology in the Book of Wisdom*, FRLANT 242 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), esp. 131–200.
- 25 Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 186, n. 16. The Greek form of ambrosia is only found in Wis 19:21 and usually translated as a “kind of heavenly food” (*ambrosias trophēs*).

live *now* with this gift of eternity life. Their mortal bodies will experience death, but the eternity life they *now* possess will continue. Thus, the righteous are able to see and experience the reign of God *now*. In the wisdom literature, it is the choice of *Sophia* that initiates and enables God's gift of eternity life. With Nicodemus, Jesus uses the image of new birth to describe the radically new quality of life now available through belief in *him*—*Sophia* incarnate.

Conclusion

Two expressions found in John 3 (“Kingdom of God” and “eternity life”) occur only in the Wisdom of Solomon (10:10; 5:10). The discussion about the need for a new birth for entry into the realm of God draws upon the eschatology of this late Jewish writing, which teaches that God intended from the beginning to gift humanity with God's own quality of life, which is immortal (Wis 1:13; 2:23). “But the ungodly by the words and deeds summoned death” (1:16); while “the righteous live forever” (5:15).

Wisdom of Solomon claims that “in kinship with wisdom there is immortality” (8:17) but this is a gift of God (8:21). It was Wisdom who showed Jacob the kingdom of God (10:10), and in coming to Jesus/*Sophia*, a teacher from God, Nicodemus is a seeker of Wisdom, but is not yet able to perceive in Jesus what he desires. For Nicodemus, at the moment, this is impossible, but Nicodemus appears on two more occasions where the reader notes a gradual shift in his openness to Jesus. First, he speaks up in Jesus's defense (7:50), and then with Joseph of Arimathea, he anoints Jesus with a lavish amount of spices as befits a king (19:39–40). The sign of the elevated Son of Man on the cross has brought about a new birth for him, and has finally brought perception of the kingdom of God (3:13–15).²⁶

26 I have argued that the cross is a moment of birth symbolized in the pierced side of Jesus and the flow of blood and water, accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. See Mary L. Coloe, *John 11–21*, Wisdom Commentary Series 44B, (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2021), 494, and the excursus by Barbara Reid, “Birthed from the Side of Jesus,” 494–98.