



**WELCOME TO
GOSPEL PASSAGES...
WITH
PASSAGES**

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

with Becky & John Hart

REVIEW: JOHN 1:14

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”



INTRO TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN...

- THE BIBLE PROJECT

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UNIQUE to JOHN:

- Wedding @Cana
- Nicodemus
- Samaritan woman
- “I am” revelations
- Raising of Lazarus
- Foot washing
- Farewell discourse
(re: Spirit)

IRONY

in the Gospel of John

- The woman at the well & “living water” (chapter 4)
- Crowds & Bread of life (ch. 6)
- Martha & Lazarus (ch. 11)
- Pilate & “The King of the Jews” on the cross (ch. 19)
- AND: Nicodemus (chapter 3)
- *Irony is the juxtaposition of what on the surface appears to be the case and what is actually the case or to be expected.*



INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 3

Some of the fundamental themes of the Fourth Gospel appear in chapter 3 with Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus

- *Believe in Jesus Christ*
- *Eternal life*
- *Salvation is spiritually effected by God ("born again")*
- *Jesus being "lifted up"*
- *Jesus as light in darkness*

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 3

Chapter 3 is the first instance of a common Johannine pattern:

- a central event (in this case a conversation)
- Jesus' discourse that draws general theological themes out of the particular event.
 - e.g. • woman at well: "living water"
 - Lazarus is raised: "I am the resurrection and the life"

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 3

- ⇒ 3:3 (“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again”)
- ⇒ 3:14-15 (“so must the Son of Man be lifted up”)
- ⇒ 3:16 (“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ...”)

¹ Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² 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.”*

³ Jesus replied, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**

⁴ *“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!”*

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹ *“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.*

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we

we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man. ¹⁴ **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

WHO IS NICODEMUS?

- Pharisee: extremely serious about his faith, striving to live faithfully according to the OT Law
- “Ruler of the Jews” (vs “member of the Sanhedrin” – written to a non-Jewish audience)

NICODEMUS

Nicodemus appears 2 more times in *John* in a positive light:

- *at feast of Tabernacles (7:50-52)*
- *at Jesus' burial (19:39).*

“DISCOURSE” in the *GOSPEL OF JOHN*

Nicodemus starts the conversation, but Jesus soon takes control.

After verse 2, Nicodemus’ words are all questions -- and his questions get progressively shorter:

v 2:	24 words
v 4:	18 words
v 9:	4 words
v 10:	0 words

JOHN 3:3

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

2 key points:

- 1) Jesus uses a pun
- 2) Jesus describes an act of God (“to be born of God”) – passive verb, i.e. something that happens to the believer

THE PUN: TO BE BORN “ANOTHEN”

The Greek word “*anochen*” means both “again” and “from above”

In the *Gospel of John*, the normal meaning of “*anochen*” is “from above”:

3:31; 19:11; 19:23

“This double meaning is possible only in Greek (there is no Hebrew or Aramaic word with a similar double meaning). Thus, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus are unavoidably and intentionally ambiguous because of the inherent double meaning of *anōthen*. This makes an accurate English translation impossible – we have to choose either ‘again’ or ‘from above’. Thus, the translators decide for the reader that one reading is primary and the other secondary, **when John intends both to be heard simultaneously.”**



Jesus intends both meanings of *anōthen*

- 1) One must be born “again” (in addition to one’s physical birth)
 - *Nicodemus hears this, although it is a befuddling concept!*
- 2) One must be born “from above” (i.e., from/by/of God)
 - *Nicodemus misses this meaning*

To be “born of God”?

John 1

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.

¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ **who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.**

John 1:13 -- Four ways of “being born”

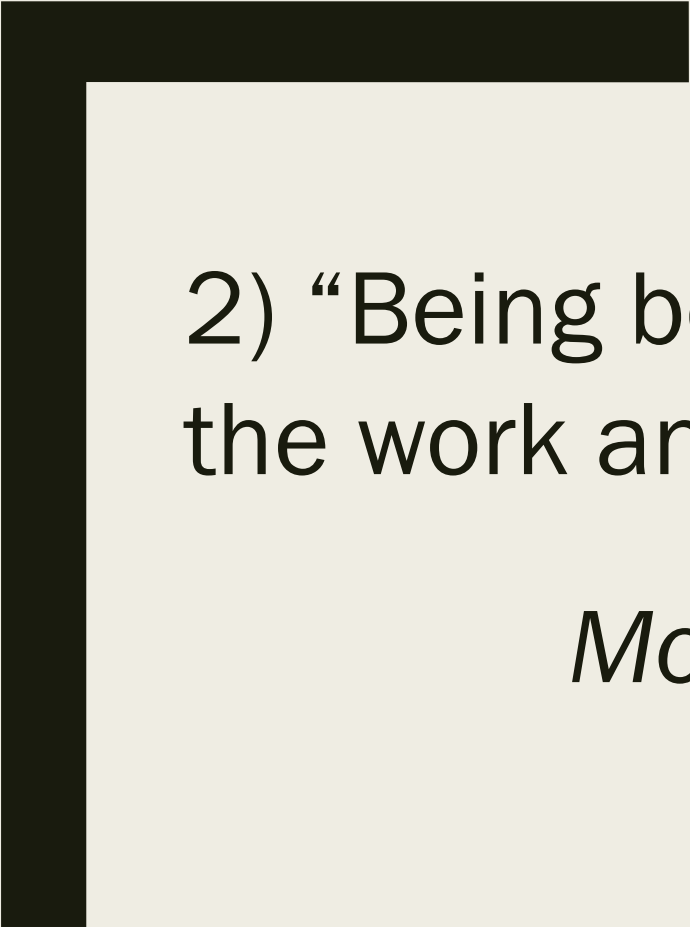
- Of blood = of one's mother
- Of the will of the flesh = of sexual desire
- Of the will of man = of one's father
- Of God = ?

What does Jesus mean by “being born of God”?

Three Key Points

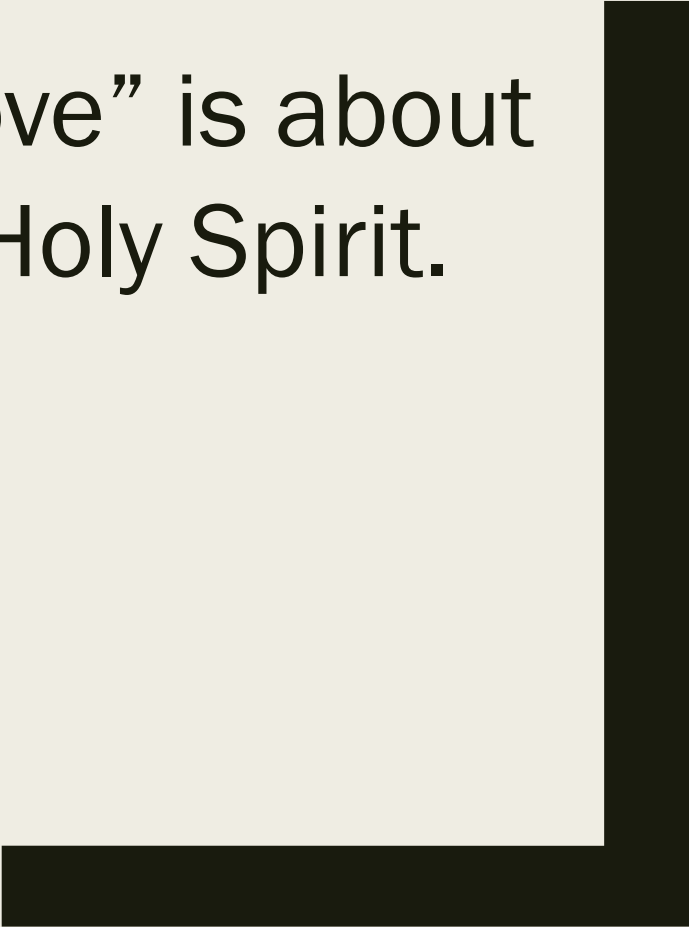
1) To be “born of God” is an image that’s not unique to the *Gospel of John*

- *1 John 2:29; 4:7; 5:1*
- *1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 1:23; Titus 3:5*



2) “Being born again/from above” is about the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

More puns ...



JOHN 3:5-8

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the **Spirit**. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the **Spirit** gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The **wind/Spirit** blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the **Spirit**.”

- Note the passive voice: we do not give birth to ourselves – we are born through another’s agency
- A person takes on flesh and enters the kingdom of the world because her parents beget her; a person can enter the Kingdom of God only when she is begotten by her heavenly Parent through the Spirit.
- The begetting through the Spirit of which John 3 speaks refers to Jesus’ gift of the Spirit when he has been lifted up in crucifixion and resurrection (20:22)

3) Being born from above/of God is intertwined with “believing in the Son for eternal life” = 3:14b-15 & 3:16

“Eternal life” is the gift of salvation– a spiritual rebirth effected by the Holy Spirit, accessed through faith in Jesus Christ

“BORN AGAIN” IN CONTEMPORARY USAGE

To interpret *anóthen* as describing spiritual rebirth through personal conversion can miss the decisive Christ-focused dimension of *anóthen*.

Contemporary usage of “born again” risks emphasizing one’s personal life change more than the divine basis for this change – the work of Jesus on the cross, his victorious resurrection and ascension, and the gift of the Spirit.

JOHN 3:14-15 – JESUS IS “LIFTED UP”

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

Biblical background: Numbers 21:4-9

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, but the people became discouraged on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.”*

⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.

⁷ The people came to Moses and said, “*We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.*” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, “*Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.*” ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Literal-to-spiritual correspondence

- Venomous snake bite = sin leads to death
- Bronze snake = Jesus looks like us, but without venom/sin
- Raised up on a pole = Jesus lifted up on the cross
- Look & believe for healing = look & believe for eternal life

“Lifted up” is a key theological word & concept in the Gospel of John with a profound double-meaning:

- 1) Exalted
- 2) Crucified

⇒ 8:28; 12:32

Exaltation and glorification are intertwined in the *Gospel of John* in a manner unique in the New Testament. Whereas other writers view the death of Jesus as deepest humiliation, reversed by the divine action in raising him on high (Philippians 2:6-11), the *Gospel of John* sees the death on the cross as itself participating in the glorification of Jesus.

John 19:30 – “It is finished/accomplished.”

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”



GOD SO LOVED ...

- So
 - Not “so much”, but “thusly” – *this* is how God loved the world
- **loved** = *agape* (Christian word = selfless, self-giving, for the benefit of the other)
 - Aorist tense – one-time, specific action
 - The aorist implies a supreme act of love.
 - Cf. 1 John 4:9-10

... THE WORLD ...

- 1) Mostly = humanity at odds against God
(same for Paul) 1:10; 7:7; 15:18-19
- 2) Here = every person in the world
The world as a whole is the object of God's
love

... THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON ...

- “His only son” = “the son, the *monogene*” (1:18)
- “gave” = aorist tense again
- 3:16 is the only place in *John* that says God “gave” his Son to the world; the more common expression is that God “sent” Jesus.
- “Gave” refers not only to the Incarnation but also to the crucifixion; it is the *entire mission* of the Son that is in view.

... THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM ...

- *pas* (all) (not “whoever” [*ho*])
- “all those believing ones” (active participle = ongoing belief)
- In him – Christ-focused faith

... MAY NOT PERISH ...

Apollumi = killed in battle, suffer loss, perish, to be lost (in the sense of end of life). What is in view is not just physical destruction but a destiny of eternal death

- Mk 8:35; Lk 15:32

This verse makes it clear there is no middle ground in *John's* vision. (3:17-21 repeats this theme, using the “light/darkness” image)

... BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life is one of the dominant metaphors in the *Gospel of John* to describe the change in human existence brought about by faith in Jesus' saving work.

- 4:14; 5:24; 6:27; 10:28; 17:4

“Eternal life” = *zoea aionion*

Lit. “life of the aeon” / “life of the age”

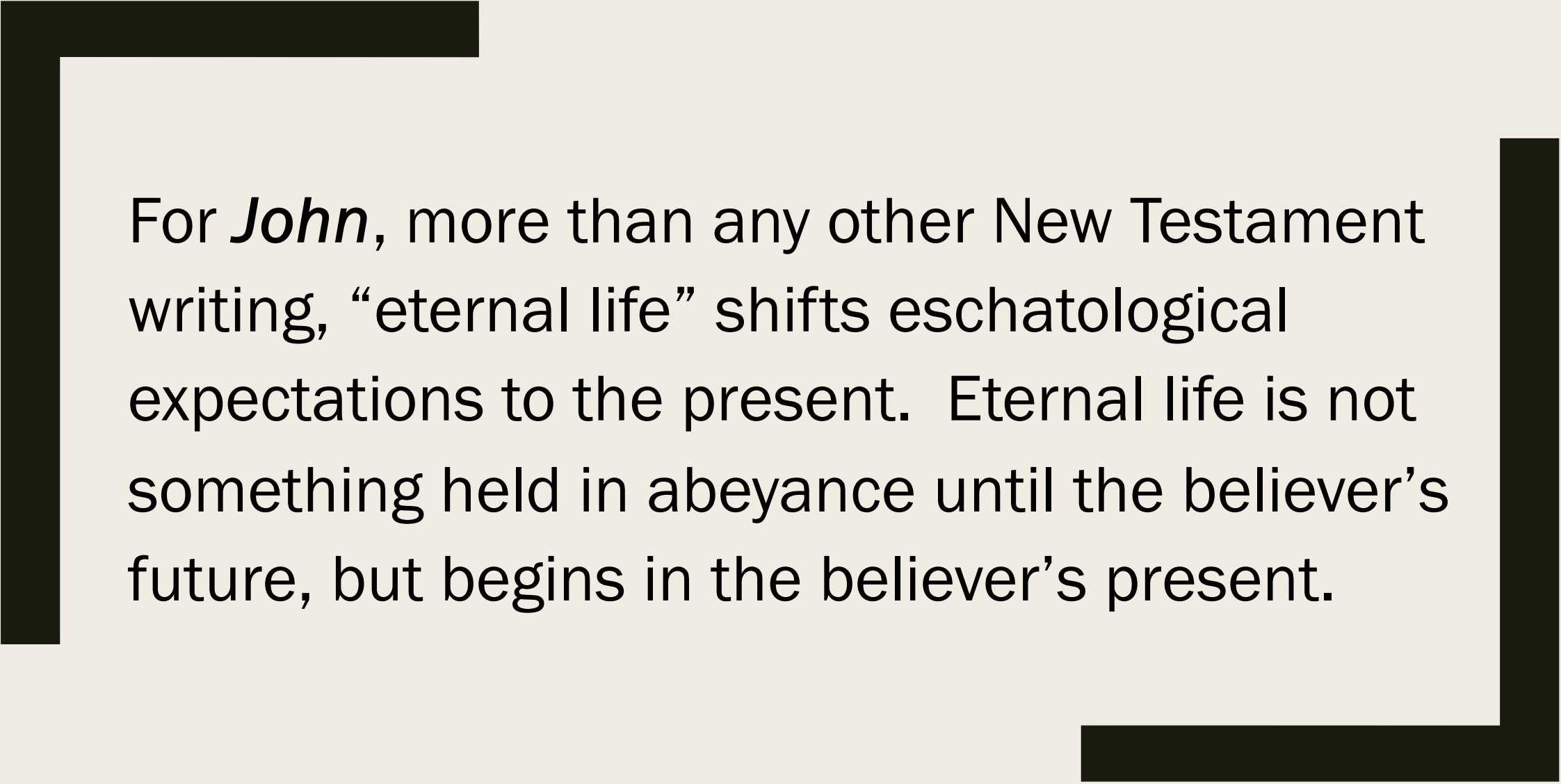
= “new age life, life lived in the new age of God”

Eternal life describes the life of the children of God, the life begotten from above, the life begotten of the Spirit.



ETERNAL LIFE

- In *John* (and the rest of the New Testament), the term “eternal life” emphasizes not such much the duration of life (i.e., forever) but the quality/newness of life.
- Eternal life (“life in the new age”) is a way of describing life as lived in the unending presence of God.
- “Eternal life” in the *Gospel of John* resembles the “kingdom of God” in the Synoptics

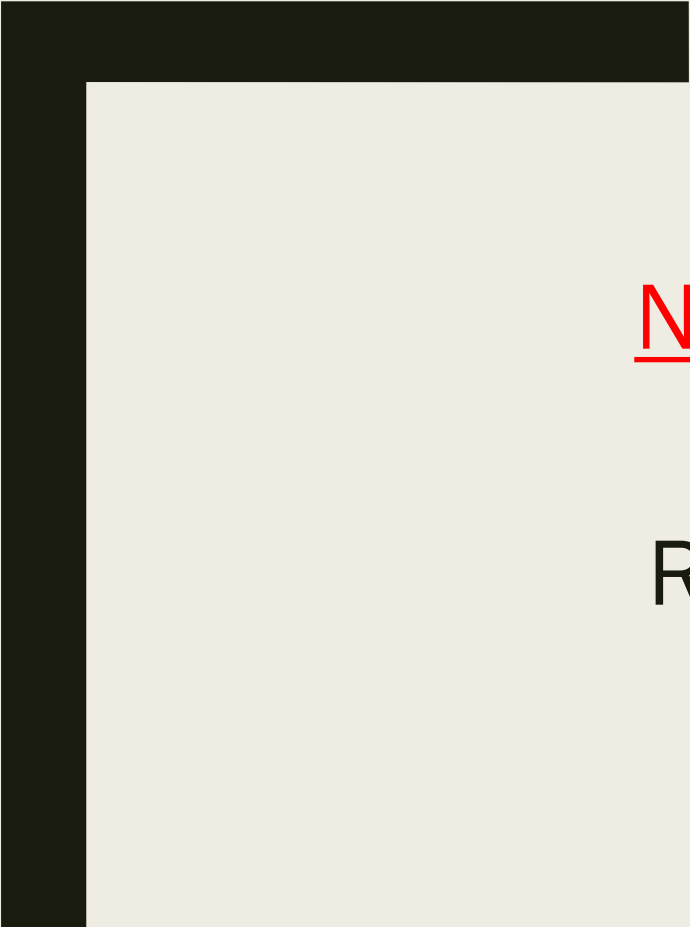
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For *John*, more than any other New Testament writing, “eternal life” shifts eschatological expectations to the present. Eternal life is not something held in abeyance until the believer’s future, but begins in the believer’s present.

And now for a word from Paul...

- Paul uses not “born anew” but “dying and rising”
- “So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)



NEXT WEEK (January 21)

Read through **Chapter 6**
of *The Gospel of John*

