

CHRIST—BEGOTTEN OR UNIQUE?

A controversial matter relating to Christ is whether He is the “only begotten” Son of God, **or** is He the “only Son, one of a kind, or unique”. It is said that early secular writers introduced “only begotten” to the passages that refer to Jesus as “the only begotten Son”, and that the original word *monogenes* should be rendered “unique”. However, before the introduction of the idea of *genos* as meaning something else (such as “unique”), there were writers that used *monogenes* with reference to Jesus' *birth*, and called Him “begotten”. The concept of Jesus' being “begotten” (with reference to the conception by Mary), is seen in the major translations of scripture through the years. This article is written in defense of the use of the rendering as seen in the KJV, ASB, NASB, etc.. Many modern (20th and 21st century) translations leave out “only begotten”, and change it to “son”, “only son”, or “one of a kind”, and claim justification for it. I would not attempt to describe their motives, but believe they are in error more so than the translators of the above mentioned translations are in error.

The rest of this article will be an examination of Biblical words relating to this topic, as seen in (1) Promise, (2) Prophecy, and (3) Typology. A combination of thought from these three areas will help us to determine the validity of the proposition set forth in the above paragraph.

(1) Promise. We begin with the promise God made to Satan in Gen. 3:15, when He stated that the “seed” of woman would bruise the head of Satan. Without question, this is the first indication of a coming Savior, who would come from “woman”. Satan used a woman for the downfall of the human race, as he deceived Eve and tempted her to partake of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:15f). God was going to redeem man through another woman, whose offspring would offer salvation to man. Paul stated in Rom. 16:20 that God is bruising Satan's head through the work of Christ and the gospel. No wonder Paul writes again in Gal. 4:4,5, “*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his **Son**, made of a **woman**, made under the law*”. No reference here to the Son coming from a man, but from a woman. Everyone born into the world under usual conditions has an earthly father, and is “begotten” by a father. Jesus' earthly beginning would be through a “woman”—not a man and a woman. The implication from all this is, that there would be something special (or unique) **about** the coming of the Messiah, and it would not be unique because it was unique, but unique because of the manner of His “conception and birth”. He would of necessity have to have miraculous events in His coming to earth.

Another promise relating to God's **Son** is given through the prophet Samuel. In relation to God's covenant with David, Samuel writes, “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom....I will be his Father, and he shall be My Son...” (2 Sam. 7:12, 14). Of course, Solomon was the next generation son of David, but God surely had more in mind than just Solomon. God is saying that a **physical** descendant of David, would ultimately sit on David's throne, and He (the **Son**) would rule from the right hand of God in heaven. In Paul's great sermon of Acts 13, he stated, “*And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's **seed** hath God according to his **promise** raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus*” (Acts 13:22, 23). Then, in verse 32, he again refers to God's “**promise**”, and then in verse 33 he quotes from Psa. 2:7, to show that it was Jesus who fulfilled the promise that stated, “Thou art my **Son**, this day I have **begotten** thee”. The word “begotten” in this passage is quoted by New Testament writers, and use the word *gennao*, which is a basis for the language of the New Testament where Jesus is called the *monogenes* (the only begotten Son). That Son has the “key” of David as He reigns over the kingdom today (Rev. 3:7; 22:16). Again, we have reference to the “Son” and the “Seed”. It was Jesus who was begotten of God through Mary, to become that Savior. He is unique because of this, but the “this” must not be forgotten or minimized by translating it out of the scripture. Jesus was of the **seed** (offspring, lineage) of David, but the immediate **seed** of woman (Mary), who had no earthly husband at that time, but conceived of the Holy Spirit, for one to be “begotten” (ASV) or “born” (KJV) of her.

(2) Prophecy. There are hundreds of prophecy in the Old Testament that relate to the coming of the Savior, but the one that is pertinent to our study is that of Isa. 7:14. Isaiah addressed the “house of David” (v. 13), then says, “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign, Behold, the **virgin** shall **conceive** and bear a **Son**, and His name shall be called Immanuel*” (v. 14). Amidst any discussion of whether this actually refers to Jesus is mute, when we look at the fulfillment in Matthew 1. In Matt. 1:18, Matthew writes concerning the **birth** of Jesus Christ, and explains that before she and Joseph “came together” (still a virgin), she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Mary had been visited by an angel of

the Lord who informed her that the Holy Ghost (Spirit) would overshadow her, and she would give birth to a **son**, who would be called the “**Son** of the highest”, who would fulfill the promise of one to sit upon David's throne (cf 2 Sam. 7:12-14). He would be called the “**Son** of God” (Luke 1:31-35). The RSV does not use the word “virgin”, but it should be, as Matthew by inspiration quotes Isaiah, and uses the word “virgin” in the quotation—signifying that “virgin” is what was meant in Isa. 7:14. Also, Matthew says this Son (Savior, Jesus) would be Emanuel, or “God with us”, as foretold by Isaiah in Isa. 7. The implication of all this is overwhelming. A **virgin** was to conceive of the Holy Spirit, who would be called the “Son of God”. He would have no earthly father, but God would be His Father, as God sent the Spirit to Mary to bring about the conception, “begotten” by God, and He would be the “only” one ever to be begotten in this manner. It is certainly proper to refer to Jesus as “the only begotten Son of God”, as do other passages in the New Testament. In Acts 13, reference is made to the fact that the only begotten one was raised, and was to become king. In Heb. 1:5, the one who was the only begotten one was above angels. Paul quotes from Psalms 2:7, and from 2 Sam. 7:14, both about His being “**begotten**” and becoming God's Son, and as the “first begotten” He came into the world at which time the “angels of God worshiped Him” (Heb. 1:5,6; Luke 2:13, 14). The word “begotten” and “firstbegotten” are thus used interchangeably. He was the “begotten” One when He *came* into “the world”. In Hebrews 1:5-7, we have several steps in the order of events. 1st, there is the “**action**”--the Begetting. 2nd, there is the “**relationship**”--Father--Son. 3rd, there is the “**time**”--when He came into the world. 4th, there is the “**response**”--angels rejoicing.

(3) Typology. The Old Testament reveals several types, that have their anti-type or fulfillment in Christ. We see this especially in Genesis 22, when God told Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and offer his “only son” Isaac on the altar. True, Abraham previously had another son, Ishmael, who was born to Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Abraham is never said to have begotten Ishmael, but is said to have begotten Isaac (Matt. 1:2). As matter of fact, when Ishmael was sent out, he could no longer be considered a son, and was “dead”, in a similar fashion as was the prodigal son in Luke 15:24. Then, there was a substitute offering involved instead of Isaac, as Christ is a substitute offering for us. Abraham accounted Isaac as having been raised from the dead “in a figure”, as Abraham considered this “**seed**” to be dead (Heb. 11:19). Just as Jesus was to be offered up (as the only begotten Son), such is typified by Isaac being the “only begotten son” of Abraham. At this point in Abraham's life, Isaac **was** the “only begotten son” (*monogenes*) of Abraham. He was the only son at all, since Ishmael had been “cast out” (Gal. 4:30), and his relationship with Abraham is associated with the “**promise**”(Heb. 11:17). In these ways, Isaac was indeed Abraham's only begotten son. He was the only son of Sarah at this point, as the promise to Abraham was to be through Sarah. Sure, Abraham later had other sons after this, but at this time Isaac was the only one under consideration. Some have supposed that the translators saw this typology and used the same language that described Jesus in John 1 and John 3, etc..

The argument is made that since *monogenes* is a compound word, and since *genos* is used instead of *gennao*, that it takes on a different meaning entirely. However, in the Greek there are five (5) words relating to *gennao*, and **all** are related to and derivatives of *ginomai*, and all basically mean the same thing. For instance, Thayer lists *genos*, as one of them, and says that it means “offspring” (113). **1** It is the word used by Paul in Acts 17:28, when he referred to everyone being the “offspring” of God. This being the case, Jesus can be considered the “offspring” of God in the word *genos*. He is the *monos* (only) One of God's offspring that was “begotten”, and the word is inclusive of that fact. All the words relating to *gennao* have to do with begetting, birth, etc.. As we have noted previously, God had other sons (Adam, Luke 3:38), angels, and now has spiritual sons who have been begotten by the gospel (the work of God's Spirit in the inspired word), but **none** were begotten like Jesus—He is the “only begotten Son” of God in the manner described in Matthew 1 and Luke 1.

Regarding the compound word *monogenes*, we remember that the *mono* is taken from *monos*, but it does not change in meaning because it is added to another word—making a compound word. The *mono* still means the same--“only”. They just **why** should we be forced to think that *genos* would mean anything other than *gennao*, because it has been added to another word? When one word means “only”, and the other means “begotten”, (and *mono* still means “only”), would not *genos* still basically mean the same thing? If not, why not? When one letter (s) is removed from *monos*, it is not questioned, but when an (n) is removed from *genos*, all of a sudden it doesn't mean the same anymore (according to some). Why don't they make an issue of *mono* as well as *genos*?? Could it possibly mean “unequal”, “many”, or “varied”? Surely not! Some don't **want** the first part of the compound word changed, but the last part. “Both *genos* and *gennaoo* derive from *ginomai* and are thus akin in meaning” (32) **2** As someone has said, “the legs of the lame are not equal”.

Some believe Jesus was “begotten eternally” in heaven before the world was. We find no evidence

of this in scripture. Other have asked that if this is true, and Jesus was the “begotten Son of God” before His physical birth, “who was His mother?” Then some admit that Jesus was begotten physically, but want to use the word in other ways than its literal meaning. It indeed **can** be used figuratively, but only under the figure of a birth, as it **is** used that way in regards to our being begotten by the word in the new birth (1 Cor.4:15; John 3:3-5; James 1:18). It seems perfectly clear and understandable from our good standard translations as to the meaning of “only begotten Son”. The average reader is not capable of going back into the original language and getting into a debate over such a controversial subject. We are not contending that every time we speak of Christ that we have to describe Him as “the only begotten Son”, but we should not deny that He is, or try to twist the meaning of “begotten” to make it mean something else.

Jesus is “unique” because He was “begotten of God” by the Spirit causing Mary to conceive, and is **not** just unique....period. He is unique **because** He was “begotten of God” in the manner described in the scripture, and not unique for the sake of being unique. Let's illustrate it this way. Suppose I decided I want to have a 1957 Chevrolet automobile gold plated. It will be the only one of its kind in the world. So, I announce it to the automotive world what I am about to do. The time comes, and I manage to get the car gold plated. I have it documented as the first and only “gold plated” car in the world. A hundred years later there is still no other car like it. When someone searches the records and learn what they can about it, they decide since language has changed in the last 100 years, that they need to re-write the document. They look at the words “gold plated”, and decide to leave off the “d”, and that the words actually mean “goldpainted”, and anything that unusual must be “unusual”. When questioned about it, the lawyers state that since two words were compounded, that it changes it's meaning, and it simply means “unusual”. From that time on the automotive world is divided as to whether the car was gold plated or just “unusual”. The car **is** unusual, but not because it is unusual, but because it is “gold plated”. The most accurate way to describe it by saying it is “gold plated”. Some examine the automobile and say, “That car is gold plated”, and others say, “No, it is just unusual”.

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WORKS CITED:

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2. Guy N. Woods, *Commentary on John*, Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, TN.