

Article of the Month

August, 2020

***The “Only-Begotten”***

(The Nine Uses of “Monogenees”)

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is known Scripturally as “The Only Begotten Son” of God. The term should make us ask questions about what that means. This month’s article is for the specific purpose of analyzing the nine Scriptures which use the term “only begotten” which is the translation of a single Greek word: “*monogenees*.”

It is not so much the literal meaning of the word (which literally means “only begotten”) that we need to know, but the implications behind its use as a TITLE, i.e., its *symbolic meaning*.

It is certainly correct to say that the Logos (the “Word” of John 1) was the only direct creation of the Father, and that through him all other things were made. Surely in that sense the word “**only**” becomes important. But what we generally mean is that he was the only directly-created. That, however, is not what is meant by “only begotten.”

There is an inherent danger that the term “only begotten” can be thought of with *too little significance*. We know that Isaac, for instance, is called the ONLY son of Abraham. We KNOW that that is not literally true! But this usage of “only son” helps us better to understand the ADDED SIGNIFICANCE to the title “only begotten” when applied to our Lord. We see with Isaac that “only” does not really mean “only.” He was actually Abraham’s second son. We must look for a better understanding.

If we think about the Gospel Age, we would likely admit that the saints are “begotten of God.” (The Scriptures SAY SO!) The Scriptures also make it plain that the saints are “SONS of God.” Therefore, in the very literal usage of the words, Jesus would no longer be the “only begotten son” because he has brothers, begotten of the same Father. But THIS IS NOT THE POINT! The way the Scriptures use “*monogenees*” is more as **an honorary TITLE** than as a literal statement. We will much more appreciate the title which Jesus holds if we comprehend this distinction.

“Monogenees” (Strong’s #3439), or “Only Begotten,” is used regarding our Lord as the ultimate “**position indicator**” for him. Whether or not God is the Father of many sons, Jesus remains the “ONLY” one — the one for whom all was planned and who is

## Return to 2020 Index

heir of all things. Perhaps this last term, “heir of all things,” comes closest to the Scriptural intent of the title, “Only Begotten Son.”

As we look through the nine New Testament usages of “*monogenees*,” the above distinctions should become more obvious. When we henceforth hear “The Only-Begotten Son,” we should immediately mentally fall in awe and worship of this ONE being who is the all-in-all of our Father’s delight.

### THE NINE USES OF “MONOGENEES”

It will be of interest to us as we go through these nine uses of “only begotten” that only FOUR of the nine directly refer personally to Jesus. The other five texts help us to understand the true significance of the term, “Only Begotten.”

#### **(1) Luke 7:12**

This text IMMEDIATELY challenges our common concept of the term “only begotten.” In this verse, “only begotten” is applied to the dead son of a widow. Clearly, women do not beget! Yet this verse calls the man (in the Greek text) “the only begotten son of his mother.” Obviously, “monogenees” MUST mean something other than “only begotten.”

We instinctively know what is MEANT. In this context it simply means that this man was his mother’s only child. But the meaning goes far deeper when we apply some thought to it. As mentioned, SHE did not beget this child. Thus the term “only begotten son” has far greater meaning than that this was her only child. It means that this was her HEIR. In this son was wrapped up EVERYTHING pertaining to this woman’s life and its continuing heritage.

It is fortuitous that this is the first text to use our term. It CLARIFIES our term for us. It suggests to us that “only begotten son” (monogenees) MEANS “the heir.”

#### **(2) Luke 8:42**

The English translations again hide the Greek word “monogenees.” But it IS present here. Interestingly, it is followed by the word “daughter” instead of “son.” This is the account of Jairus whose daughter Jesus raised from the dead. The lesson, of course, is much the same as the Luke 7 lesson. We could just take the statement to mean that the daughter was his only child. That would be correct. But it would miss the point that

## Return to 2020 Index

Jairus had his everything invested in this only child — even though she was a daughter and, thus (in the minds of many), not capable of being an heir.

However, we must here object to our common reactions about inheritance. The ENTIRE reason that Mary's genealogy is given in Luke 3:23-38 is that Jesus' inheritance comes THROUGH (or BECAUSE OF) Mary's line of inheritance. It is because of MARY that Jesus is of the Tribe of Judah and the descendant not only of David, but of a son of David other than Solomon. Thus, Jairus' daughter DID have a Jewish tribal inheritance to pass on to any son she might have eventually had. "Only begotten" here thus has the IMPORTANCE of saying that the INHERITANCE of Jairus would have had to come through and pass through this "only begotten" daughter.

### **(3) Luke 9:38**

"Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my **only begotten**." The **bold**-type letters are "monogenees." Once again, this MAY mean that this was the man's only child. But we must not, therefore, miss the thought of "monogenees." It is more as if the man is saying to Jesus: "I beg you to look at my son, because in him is my everything."

### **(4) John 1:14**

The Apostle John uses "monogenees" more than any other writer — four times in his Gospel record, and once in his first epistle. Luke uses it three times; Paul uses it once — but with great efficacy for our understanding.

John's first use of the term is in 1:14. It is frequently translated in a way guaranteed to make us miss the point! For instance, the NAS reads:

"...we beheld his glory, glory as of ***the*** only begotten from ***the*** Father..."

Unfortunately, the Greek text does NOT read that way! It reads like this:

"...we beheld his glory, glory as of ***an*** only begotten from ***a*** father..."

We might think the difference is small. But it is not. John is not speaking of Jesus' being the only-begotten of God. He is saying that Jesus had the kind of "glory" (honor and station) held by any father's heir. This distinction is important. It is telling us that "monogenees" is NOT descriptive of being an ONLY child. It is descriptive of being the HEIR. Obviously, an only child would be an heir. But one can be an heir

(a “monogenees”) WITHOUT BEING AN ONLY CHILD (as with Isaac). The “monogenees” is the child in whom ALL is placed — all the “glory” — whether or not he is the only child — or even the firstborn!

**(5) John 1:18**

This verse is SO IMPORTANT. Many translations obscure its importance by reliance on newer manuscripts. The NAS is here correct (relying on more ancient manuscripts) and, consequently, helps us to realize a certain body of truth. It reads:

“...the only begotten God...” — speaking of Jesus

(This is the FIRST of four verses in the Bible to refer to Jesus as “the only begotten.”)

Jesus points out that “god” is a word used for any being of mighty power or influence. He points out that the Old Testament, for instance, calls the prophets “gods.” (John 10:34, 35) So what is John telling us in 1:18?

While we have not yet in the New Testament seen a single text that has directly referred to Jesus as “The Only Begotten Son,” our first direct reference to Jesus using “monogenees” is NOT as “Only Begotten Son,” but as “Only Begotten God.”

The fact is that there are MANY gods (even when we EXCLUDE the false gods). Some of these (like angels) ARE the “sons of God.” Some of them (like the prophets) are not yet the “sons of God.” But John tells us that in this entire pantheon of gods, Jesus is “the only begotten God.” The definition we have seen stated or hinted at in the prior uses of “only begotten” gives us the proper thought. Of ALL the gods — of all the mighty ones of the universe, human or spirit — Jesus is the HEIR, the one who has ALL the “glory” because of his station.

In this verse, John is telling us that, BECAUSE OF THIS STATION (this “glory”), Jesus was given the honor of “declaring” (KJV) or “explaining” (NAS) his Father for us. Jesus is the ONE (the only) who has been entrusted with ALL that God has been pleased to reveal. Jesus does, indeed, have the “glory” as of “an only-begotten” in the true title-sense of that word (“monogenees”).

It might be of interest for us to note that the Logos was actually NOT begotten. He was created. But this helps us understand the true meaning of “only begotten.” It is not a reference to begettal at all. It is a reference to POSITION.

**(6) John 3:16**

Who, among all that call themselves “Christian,” does not know this verse? And it is the FIRST VERSE in the Bible which specifically calls Jesus the “Only Begotten Son.” It is the SECOND verse to call him “monogenees” — “only begotten.”

What we have learned up to this point MAGNIFIES the power of this verse. Since we have seen that “Only Begotten” means MORE than “ONLY,” we can see that Jesus is telling us that God gave Jesus — the VERY CENTER, the VERY EPITOME, the VERY GLORY of God’s family — to redeem mankind. It is NOT that God just gave His only direct creation! It is that God gave us His ALL (outside of Himself). This verse is powerful beyond its immediate surface reading!

**(7) John 3:18**

Based on the power of 3:16, Jesus uses the term (“monogenees”) to show WHY salvation will be dependent upon the “name” (character) of this special, singular, all-in-all being.

This is the THIRD use of “monogenees” applying to Jesus — the SECOND which adds “son” after “only begotten.”

**(8) Hebrews 11:17**

THIS TEXT, above all the others, serves as THE DEFINING AUTHORITY for the proper understanding of “only begotten son” — even though it does not refer to Jesus at all.

This is the great Apostle Paul’s only use of this special word. It does not refer to Jesus, but to Isaac, Abraham’s son of promise. We all realize, of course, that quite literally Isaac WAS NOT the “only begotten son” of Abraham. But Paul calls him that in this passage. Paul is not misleading us, nor is he mistaken! Rather, Paul is helping us to understand the truth that we have been investigating. He is telling us that, while Isaac WAS NOT Abraham’s only son (he was actually Abraham’s second son), he WAS his “**only begotten son**” — MEANING that Isaac was the HEIR, the center of Abraham’s personal universe, just as Jesus is the heir and center of God’s personal universe. THIS is the meaning of “monogenees” or “the only begotten.”

When Paul continues his argument in the next verse (11:18), he quotes from the Old Testament to make his point:

“In Isaac your descendants shall be called.”

Return to 2020 Index

Here is THE point! As with Jesus, NO ONE shall obtain life (be an heir — a “descendant”— of life) EXCEPT it be through THIS SON — “The Only Begotten Son.” All of the promised “seed of Abraham” (whether “stars” or “sand”) will be through Isaac — the heir, the “only begotten.” Paul has defined “Only Begotten” (monogenees) for us in its clearest usage. Paul has put his “stamp of approval” and “proof” upon all we have investigated and concluded in the above texts.

**(9) I John 4:9**

Here is the FOURTH (and last) time that the Bible refers directly to Jesus as the “monogenees” — the THIRD time the word is followed by “son.” It is very much akin to John 3:16.

In verse 7, the Apostle has INCLUDED the saints as being “begotten of God.” But the saints are NOT the “only begotten of God.” Even though they have received spirit begettal to BE the “sons of God” (3:2), the saints (even though they ARE begotten sons of God) are NOT “**THE ONLY BEGOTTEN.**” THAT remains for Jesus ONLY — in verse 9. In other words, “Only Begotten Son” is a ***TITLE***, not a literal description.

SUMMARY

There is a special phrase (“Only Begotten”) used in the New Testament. It does not refer to either of its parts! (1) “ONLY” does not mean “only.” (2) “BEGOTTEN” does not mean “begotten.” But the two parts of the word (“mono-genees”), when combined into ONE Greek word, become a word of intense symbolic significance. The word always refers to the being who is “at the center of it all.” It refers to the being who is the undisputed heir. It refers to the being who, while perhaps NOT the only or first child in the family, IS the person through whom all promise, inheritance, and power are channelled.

Thus Jesus, who, indeed, WAS (at one time) the ONLY direct creation of God, does not carry the TITLE of “Only Begotten” (“monogenees”) BECAUSE of that fact. He carries it BECAUSE he is the center of God’s plans, purposes and universe. He is the “heir of all things.” In him dwells “all the fulness of the Divinity” (Colossians 2:9). In this respect he is ALONE — “the ONLY.”

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