

Misunderstood Titles of Christ

(Begotten, Firstborn of Every Creature, Firstborn from the Dead,
Firstborn Among Many Brethren, and Beginning of the Creation of God)

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Jesus Christ is assigned various intriguing titles in Scripture such as “only begotten,” “firstborn of every creature,” “firstborn from the dead,” “first begotten from the dead” and “the beginning of the creation of God.” These titles have notoriously been used by the cults to teach that Christ was physically born and that He was actually the first created being by God. As a result, the cults conclude that Jesus Christ could not be the eternal God. However, God’s children who know, love, and study their Bibles realize that Jesus Christ is declared to be God by the Father (Heb. 1:8). Bible students also know that Jesus was not created by the Father but that He was God the Creator, since the Father declared to the Son that “in the beginning (Jesus) hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Heb. 1:10). When understanding these unique terms attributed to Jesus Christ, we will confirm that Jesus Christ is of the very being and essence of God, that He reveals God’s existence (John 1:18), and He is the Almighty Creator and sovereign authority over the realms of both death and eternity.

Begotten and Firstborn

The terms “begotten” (John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) and “firstborn” (Col. 1:15, 18), as they relate to the Son, do not convey that the Son had His beginning or origin in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Col. 1:17), nor do they convey that He is inferior to the Father. They are actually titles that connote great *honor* and *dignity* because of Christ’s deity or divinity that He shares with the Father (John 3:16), because of the miraculous works that He has performed as God (Rev. 3:14), and because of the world and people that He will one day rule as God (Ps. 2:7; Rom. 8:29).

Let’s consider the concept of the firstborn child. The “firstborn” in the Old Testament was primarily a title indicating rank and privilege. In its basic meaning,

“firstborn” (prōtotokos) meant "the first one born" in a family. In Middle Eastern culture, the eldest son, by right of being born first, received the birthright, which entitled him to a double inheritance and family leadership upon the death of the father. He was the preeminent heir and supreme leader within the family unit. This expression is applied to the Biblical teaching of Christ being the “firstborn.” In the Old Testament the title “firstborn” expresses status. It appears in Psalm 89:27 as a title of sovereignty. “Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.”

Closely linked to the idea of the firstborn is the expression “first begotten.” First, this is an expression of *natural birth* (firstborn, only begotten) and is intended to *figuratively* convey that Jesus, as the Son of God, was of the same essence of being as the Father. In other words, He was God for He shared the same essence and Godlike nature with God the Father.

In the design of God, each creature begets offspring "after his kind" (Gen. 1:11-12; 21-25). The offspring bear the likeness of the parent. The fact that a son is generated by the father guarantees that the son shares the same essence as the father. *What is true biologically is also true intrinsically of Christ's eternal being.* He shares the same eternal existence of God with the Father (John 1:1; Heb. 1:3).

Second, the specific expression “only begotten” Son (John 3:16) would also imply how Jesus was the only Son of God, Someone who was very unique, Someone that was given all the rights, privileges, and preeminence as the Father. As God's eternal and only Son, Jesus was given the privileges of sonship. This means that He not only co-shared in the Father's essence as the one true God, but that He also possessed the same dignity and honor as the Father, and also possessed the same superiority and preeminence that the Father had over all things. The Greek word translated "only begotten" is monogenes. The thrust of its meaning has to do with Christ's utter uniqueness in sharing the very same essence (deity) as the Father.

Together these titles of firstborn and begotten speak of Christ's substance (sharing the same Godlike nature with the Father) and convey a sense of His superiority,

supremacy, and sovereignty, as Christ shares God's eternal existence within the realm of the Godhead.

As previously mentioned, in Bible times an "only begotten Son" or firstborn Son was given all the rights and privileges of the Father. They are titles that connote divine substance, superiority, and sovereignty within the relationship of the Godhead. When applied to Christ, the terms mean that He is God and that He shares God's supremacy and sovereignty over all things. This co-equal Son and Father relationship has been eternally shared even though there is *delegated authority* (John 5:22) and *voluntary submission* (1 Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:8; John 3:16) within the Godhead (Trinity) in the outworking of God's eternal purposes and plans. The Father is said to be "greater" than the Son (John 14:28) only in a *relational* and *functional* manner within the Godhead but all Members within the Trinity share the same essence and being as God and also the rights and privileges as God (Heb. 1:3).

Third, the specific term "begotten" may also reveal how the Father possessed a special love and intimacy with the Son. He was the beloved son who was begotten of God (Matt. 17:5), precious and dear to the Father (1 Pet. 2:6).

After understanding the basic concept and meaning behind these terms (substance, superiority, supremacy, sovereignty), we can now investigate how they are applied to Jesus Christ in specific verses throughout the Bible.

The Begotten King

Psalm 2:7 uses the word begotten and applies it to the Son:

"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

In this specific reference the title "begotten" refers to Jesus Christ's relation to His future reign over the earth, a time of coronation that inaugurates the Millennial Kingdom, the time He reigns on David's *earthly* throne.

The mention of Christ as the "firstborn" will herald or announce Christ's millennial rule. This prophetic reference looks ahead to the time when the Father will officially

recognize Jesus Christ as the King and be crowned as King during the Millennium. This will be a day of coronation and celebration in fulfillment of David's covenant (2 Sam. 7:14). This is the only Old Testament reference to the Father Son relationship which is an eternal relationship (Isa. 9:6; John 3:13; 16:27-28; 17:5; Heb. 1:8) but one that will be officially acknowledged in the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus will be declared and worshipped as God's only begotten Son, the One who shares God's very being and existence, the One of great preeminence, dignity, honor, and superiority over all! God's Son can only be God and share all the rights and privileges of God. I want to be there when they crown Him King of Kings!

The Begotten Ascended Christ

Hebrews 1:5 borrows from Psalm 2:7:

"For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

In this reference the term "begotten" also relates to the time when Jesus ascended back to Heaven, the time He was officially inaugurated as the sovereign heavenly God and King, sharing the Father's glory and *heavenly* throne as the Great High Priest.

The writer of Hebrews is obviously thinking about Psalm 2:7 at this point. He is not quoting this prophetic portion of Scripture as some kind of partial fulfillment (progressive dispensationalism) or symbolic fulfillment (amillennialism) of what can only take place in the future (the official recognition and glorification of the Son during the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-3)). Instead, the writer is *freely quoting* and *applying* this verse to the time when Jesus as the Messiah sat down at the Father's right hand after finishing His salvation work (Heb. 1:3).

Hebrews 5:3-5

"And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee."

Of course, Jesus did not sit down in Heaven in fulfillment of David's earthly Covenant (Luke 1:32-33) but sat down on the Father's throne (Rev. 3:21), sharing the eternal reign of God, after completing His work of redemption. When Jesus came back to Heaven and His glory was restored with the Father (John 17:5), it too was a day of coronation and celebration. It was the official recognition that Jesus Christ was God's Son, who possessed all the same essence, being, existence, preeminence, and privileges as the eternal God.

Firstborn of Every Creature

The term or title "firstborn" relates to how Jesus Christ was the Creator of everything and Sustainer of the entire natural universe. It is a title of deity that speaks of Christ's preeminence and supremacy over all creation.

Colossians 1:15-16

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him."

A "firstborn" son was used to speak of someone within the family who was given great rank and privilege. This is how the term relates to Christ. The "firstborn" speaks of a title of highest rank, privilege, priority, dignity, honor, supremacy and superiority over all others. It points to One who ranks above all others. As the Son of God, He shares the same existence with the Father who is also God. Therefore, He shares all the rights and privileges as God within the Godhead.

Colossians 1:15 identifies Jesus as the "firstborn or every creature" or the Supreme One over all creation, since Jesus is the very Creator of the entire universe! Again, this is a title of dignity, honor, supremacy, and superiority that Jesus Christ possesses, as the eternal God and Creator of all things.

The theological position of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a group that denies both the Trinity and deity of Christ, concludes that this phrase teaches Christ Himself was a creature, the first created by God, through whom God created all other things. Of

course, this is a heretical teaching and the sure sign of apostasy. The Bible never says that Jesus was the first created being but that He was the firstborn, a title that reflects Christ's deity and His absolute sovereignty and supremacy over all creation, as the Creator God.

This Jehovah's Witnesses heresy is contradicted by the context. Colossians 1:16 explains to us that "firstborn of every creature" (vs. 15) does not mean Jesus was the first created being (Jehovah Witness teaching) since the Bible actually says: "For by him all things were created" and "all things were create by him, and for him." This means that Jesus Christ was the Creator of everything that exists. In this context the title firstborn would suggest Christ's priority in time (He was the eternal God) and therefore His priority and supremacy over all creation (He was Creator God), since He was the Originator of everything that exists.

Firstborn From the Dead & First Begotten of the Dead

In the next references the titles "firstborn" and "first begotten" refer to Jesus Christ's relation to His bodily resurrection, the event that inaugurated His entrance into His glorified state.

Colossians 1:18

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence."

W. E. Vine speaks of the verse in this way:

"Following the description of Christ's creative power and glory as the Firstborn in regard to the natural creation, the apostle makes a similar statement with reference to the spiritual creation: "And He is the Head of the Body, the Church; who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

Jesus was not the firstborn from the WOMB but from the TOMB in these references. These expressions speak of Christ's physical and bodily resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:4). They are terms and titles of rank, privilege, priority, and supremacy that Christ's possessed in His resurrection - not birth. The titles of "firstborn from

the dead” and “first begotten of the dead” specifically relate to Christ’s own resurrection which was proof that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells within Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

Revelation 1:5 states a similar truth:

“And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”

These two titles (firstborn and begotten) in relation to Christ’s resurrection speak of Christ’s *priority, superiority* and *authority* over the realm of death, hell and the grave (Rev. 1:18) and that He holds the place of *honor* and *preeminence* among all who are raised from the realm of death. In relation to *priority and rank*, Jesus was the first One to rise from the dead Who would never die again (1 Cor. 15:23). In relation to *supremacy* and *sovereignty* over the realm of death, Jesus will raise the dead someday (John 5:29; Acts 17:30). Furthermore, as the firstborn and begotten from the dead, He holds the victorious position over death, as the resurrected Christ, who alone can promise and reassure us of our own future resurrection (John 11:25; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rom. 8:11). All honor and dignity is extended to Jesus Christ, as the firstborn from the grave, since He is the mighty Conqueror over death, who triumphed over the forces which held men captive in sin (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

Firstborn Among Many Brethren

The term firstborn also relates to the time when Jesus, as the risen Son of God (Col. 1:18) becomes Head over a newly glorified and completely sanctified body of saints.

Romans 8:29

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

As a result of God’s past elective purpose, to conform a body of believers to the likeness of His Son (glorification), Jesus Christ, one day in the future will be recognized as the “firstborn among many brethren.” This obviously means that in the coming day, when we are raptured or caught up to glory to live with Him forever in

a perfect state (John 14:1-3) that Jesus will become, as the resurrected and glorified Lord, the Head of a new race of humanity that has been purified from all contact with sin and which is prepared to live eternally in His presence (1 Cor. 15:42-49).

The term and title firstborn once again means first in rank or honor, supremacy, and priority. Throughout eternity Jesus will not be One among many equals among the glorified saints, but the One who has the supreme place of honor, dignity, and worship among the brethren. Throughout eternity Jesus will be the Supreme Being in all of the universe! This distinctive designation of Jesus Christ expresses His priority and preeminence over all the other members within God's family. Jesus will have no rivals. As the preeminent and supreme Ruler, Jesus Christ will rule over His perfected and glorified saints forever. The best is yet to come!

The Beginning of the Creation of God

Revelation 3:14

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

The term and title "beginning" (commencement of all things) does not suggest that Jesus had a beginning when He was created by the Father (Arianism heresy) and therefore could not be God. Rather, this also is a title of dignity, superiority, supremacy, and preeminence over everything and speaks of how Jesus Christ was the very source and originator of all God's universal creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:15, 17-18). Jesus was not the first created being by God but was actually the One who did the creating. In other words, Jesus Christ Himself is the beginning (source) of everything in that He Himself designed and created the entire universe. Jesus did not have a beginning (Micah 5:2; Rev. 1:8); He was the beginning of everything!

William MacDonald remarks:

"The expression, 'the Beginning of the creation of God' does not mean that He was the first Person to be created; He was never created. Rather, it means that He began all creation. It does not say that He *had* a beginning, but that He *is* the Beginning."

In conclusion, these unique phrases and titles given to Christ point to His supreme authority over everything, from Creation to death, and His sovereign rule throughout the eternal ages (past, present, and future) as He sits on His throne as the eternal God. As previously mentioned, these are titles speaking of Christ's substance (sharing the same Godlike nature with the Father) and portray His superiority, supremacy, and sovereignty, as Christ shares God's eternal existence within the realm of the Godhead. They reveal the glory of the Godhead. They are not titles that diminish Christ's person but confirm His deity, making Christ equal with God and the very One "*who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15).