Jesus: Born But Not Begotten

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Introduction

There are several places in KJV/NASB that speak of Jesus as the only "begotten" Son of God…

- John 3:16 (most well known); again in v18

- Back to John 1:14 and 18

- Again over in 1 John 4:9

- Word "begotten" generally suggests the idea of originating from or being produced by someone else

- Genesis chapter 5; Matthew chapter 1

- Yes, the human person of Jesus was born into a human family [see next section], but the pre-incarnate Son of God as a divine person has no origin…

Human Person of Jesus Born

Other places where it is stated that Jesus is "begotten" or "born" of God; translated from Greek *gennao* (Strong #1080)…

- Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Acts 13:33, all quotes from Psalm 2:7, likely referring to Christ's birth and arrival as the promised Messiah

- Same word is translated as "born" in regards to Jesus in Matthew 2:1, 4; Luke 1:35; 1 John 5:1 (also v18 regarding Christians who are born of God)

Christ is Eternal

Indeed Jesus is as God, who is without end or beginning. God, in Exodus 3:14, referred to His eternal nature when He said, "I AM WHO I AM." A similar statement is made by Jesus concerning Himself in John 8:57-59: "The Jews therefore said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am!' Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him."

Notice that not only does Jesus say He existed before Abraham was born, more than 1500 years before Jesus' earthly conception, but He describes Himself in the very same manner ("I am") as God described Himself in Exodus 3:14 ("I AM"). It appears that Christ is claiming that same eternal and self-existent nature as possessed by God.

Notice these words were spoken concerning Jesus in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." God Himself spoke of the Son in Hebrews 1:8 and says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."

Micah 5:2 similarly states of Jesus: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Recall also that one of the names given to Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 is "Eternal Father." John 1:2,

speaking of Jesus (though disputed by some, the context is clear that this is indeed Jesus) says, "He was in the beginning with God."

In John 17:5, Jesus said, "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was." Jesus clearly indicates that He existed before the foundation of the world. (See also Genesis 1:26; John 1:15; 3:13.)

Numerous other passages indicate that Jesus was responsible for the creation of all things. Looking again at John 1, concerning Jesus, v3 says, "All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul refers to "one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."   Hebrews 1:10 says of Jesus, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands."

Colossians 1:15-17 says, "And He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Some have implied that "first-born" means the first created being, but Paul himself defines the term in v16. He calls Christ the "first-born of all creation" and then explains why such a term is used: "FOR by Him all things were created."

Paul indicates that "first-born" here means that Christ is the origin of creation, not that He was the first created being. He specifically says that Christ existed before ALL created things. Were Christ actually the first thing created, then it would not be accurate to say that Christ created ALL things. [The New World Translation (Jehovah's Witness version) adds the word "other" to read "because by means of him all [other] things were created," thus giving a false meaning other than that given in the original inspired Greek text.]

Are these verses (John 3:16, etc.) wrong?

Consider once again the verses that say that Jesus, the Son of God, is a begotten being or person. Numerous other passages show that not to be the case. Is God's inspired word thus contradicting itself in these verses? No! The problem is that these verses have been translated wrong! The word "begotten" in these verses is actually a poor, inaccurate, and misleading translation of the original inspired text.

The Original Greek Word Monogenes

The phrase "only begotten" in the above-mentioned verses, in the original Greek language, is *monogenes* (pronounced hard g as in go; Strong #3439)…

- Combination of two words: "monos" which means "only" or "alone," and "genos" which means "of the same nature, kind, sort, species" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*)

- A better translation might be "only one of its kind" or "only unique" or just "only," but not "begotten." ☐
Jesus Christ, the Son of God is a unique and one-of-a-kind being.

- Hugo McCord defines it as "a lone being, a unique existence, the only one of its kind, that which has no duplicate" (*Gospel Advocate*, 3/20/86)

- It's interesting to note that the 2nd century Old Latin version translated all nine NT occurrences of *monogenes* as UNICUS, which means "unique."

The word (actually inspired) has nothing to do with origin, as does typically the word "begotten." Rather the intent is to affirm that Jesus Christ is the unique, only one of His kind, Son of God.

Hebrews 11:17

- If *monogenis* refers to begetting or origin, then this passage contradicts other clear Biblical teaching

- KJV reads" "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his ONLY BEGOTTEN (*monogenes*) son."

- Is it true to say that Isaac was begotten by Abraham? Yes, according to Genesis 21; Matthew 1:2; Acts 7:8

- But is Isaac the ONLY son begotten by Abraham? No; look at Galatians 4:22: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman." Ishmael was also begotten by Abraham. In fact, Scripture shows that Abraham had several other sons. Therefore, Isaac was NOT the ONLY begotten son of Abraham. Any version of Scripture that says so is actually contradicting itself!

- However, was Isaac the UNIQUE and ONE OF A KIND son of Abraham? Yes indeed! He was the "son of promise" and Ishmael was not. That certainly made Isaac unique and special.

- All this serves to illustrate that *monogenes* does not mean "begotten" in the sense we normally use it.

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not begotten by God in the sense that He (Christ) has an origin.

- These verses will be much more accurate and consistent with the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit when they are rendered, not as "begotten Son of God," but more like "one and only" or "only unique" Son of God.

Origin of the Term "Begotten"

First, the term came about because of translation errors. Most modern translators have correctly identified the original language and its intent, and thus have something similar to "one and only Son" (the NASB retains "only begotten" in the text, but some NASB publishers include a footnote which states the literal translation is "unique, only one of His kind"). But some ancient translators apparently erroneously thought that the root of the second part of *monogenes* was *gennao* instead of *genos*. Remember *genos* means "of the same kind," but *gennao* does indeed mean "to beget," from which comes "begotten."

However, if *gennao* was indeed the true root, an additional "n" would apparently have to be added to read *monogenNes*. Hugo McCord used to advocate the "only begotten" translation; but then he wrote, "I, too, was in the same error. I did not realize I had to add to the Greek to get 'only begotten' into the New Testament. One added letter in a word lowers Jesus from being the only Son of God to being only a son of God" (*Gospel Advocate*, 3/30/86). Instead of being truly unique, being begotten relegates Him to merely being a created being like everyone else!

Second, it appears that the term came about because of doctrinal reasons. Somewhere in the 3rd century, Origen promoted the doctrine of eternal generation (that Christ eternally came from the Father; not sure what all was meant by such, but the phrase and doctrine evidently caught on). This idea was furthered in the 4th century by Jerome and others to battle against the growing Arian heresy (Arius taught that Jesus was indeed begotten or created by God). Thus came about the teaching that Christ was not created or begotten by God at the time of His earthly birth, but that He was "begotten from everlasting." This is a nice-sounding phrase, but it still promotes (maybe even unknowingly) the idea that Christ (as deity) has an origin, which is not true!

The next step was the formation of creeds and the inclusion of such phraseology in those creeds. And because it was in certain creeds, it then made its way into certain translations. Lewis Kash writes, "The translators of the King James Version (1611) were Anglican churchmen and theologians who subscribed to the doctrines of the 39 Articles of the Church of England (1563), which state that the Son was 'begotten from everlasting of the Father' (Art. II). 'Begotten from everlasting' is a clear reference to the doctrine of the eternal generation. In 1604, the same year in which the translators for the KJV were selected, all English clergymen were required 'by His Majesty's authority' to pledge, 'I ... do willing and from my heart subscribe to the 39 Articles of Religion.' When King James appointed his translators to revise the Bishops' Bible of 1568, he gave them instructions to make as few changes as possible, to keep 'the old ecclesiastical words,' (such as 'church') and, 'when any word hath divers significations,' to keep that 'which hath been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers.'"

For more on this and other lessons, see *The Doctrines That Divide Us*, available on Amazon.com.