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BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

WHAT DOES *MONOGENES* MEAN?

The Greek word which is the subject of this study is found nine times in the New Testament. It is translated "only begotten" six times, "only" twice, and "only child" once. It is pronounced mon-og-en-ACE, and a careful study of it is important because of what it tells us regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as its true meaning has long been misunderstood, this has given rise to erroneous conclusions concerning the record God has given of His Son.

It will be my purpose in this study to show that monogenes, according to New Testament usage, has nothing to do with birth or begetting. Therefore, it is illogical and unreasonable for anyone to use this word in support of their contention that since the Father begat the Son, then the Son is a created being and not God in the fullest sense.

In the examination of this word, and at the risk of cluttering up the manuscript, I will at times bring attention to the study apparatus which I have used in producing this study, so that any diligent student can take the steps which I have taken, steps which brought about the conclusions which I now set forth.

The occurrences of monogenes in the New Testament are as follows. (The italicized words are the translation of this word in each excerpt.)

Luke 7:12 - the *only* son of his mother
Luke 8:42 - for he had *only* one daughter
Luke 9:38 - for he is my *only* child
John 1:14 - as the *only begotten* of the Father
John 1:18 - the *only begotten* Son which is in

John 3:16 - He gave His only begotten Son that
John 3:18 - of the only begotten Son of God
Heb. 11:17 - offered up his only begotten Son
1 John 4:9 - God sent His only begotten Son

Monogenes is Strong's Concordance word No. 3439, and it will be found in Englishman's Greek Concordance on page 505. It is compounded from the words monos, which means sole, single, without another, alone, only; and ginomai (pronounced GHIN-om-ahee) which means, become. The strength and force of this compounded word is to be found in its first part, monos, and not in its second part.

   One of the most important facts to note in the study of this word is that if the New Testament writers had intended to say "only begotten," they would have used the words monos and gennetos, forming the word monogennetos, a *not* monogenes. As Moulton and Milligan, those two indefatigable etymologists, have said: "Monogenes is literally 'one of a kind,' 'only,' 'unique' (unicus), not 'only begotten,' which would be monogennetos (unigenitus), and is common in the LXX (Septuagint) in this sense (e.g. Judg. 11 :34, Psa. 22:20). It is similarly used in the N.T. of 'only' sons and daughters (Luke 7:12,8:42,9:38), and is so applied in a special sense to Christ in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9, where the emphasis is on the thought that, as the 'only' Son of God, He has no equal and is able to fully reveal the Father." (The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, page 416).

   The word **ginomai** is the basic word of the gen family of words, and it originally meant "to come into being," but not the beginning of something's existence. It is found 677 times in the New Testament (See EGC, page 117), and in no occurrence is it ever translated by any word related to birth, such as beget, begotten, born, etc. In view of this fact there is no logical reason for anyone to think that when this word is linked up with monos that it suddenly has to do with "birth" and the compounded word should be translated "only begotten."

   The misunderstanding of this Greek word by the so-called church fathers, the acceptance of this mistake by Arius, who used it for his own purposes, and the mistranslation of it by the King James translators, has long been used as an argument against the Deity of the Lord Jesus, and His equality with the Father. Ever since the time of Arius (about 306 A.D. to 336 A.D.), men have contended that if the Son of God was begotten of God, He must be

given a subservient place to God. Arius held that God is separate from every created being, and that Christ as a created being is not God in the fullest sense. Therefore, He is to be worshiped as a secondary God, but not as the God. He cited the word monogenes, which to the church fathers had been given the meaning that signified "begotten," and so the fathers were again and again "hoisted with their own petard," as Shakespeare puts it.

In reviewing the occurrences of the word monogenes in the New Testament, one occurrence that stands out is Hebrews 11:17 where it is quite clear that in this sentence, at least, this word can have nothing to do with birth or begetting. In this passage Isaac is spoken of as the "only begotten" son of Abraham, and this is not true. Abraham "begat" a boy named Ishmael fifteen years before Isaac was born. This being true, some translator caused the Bible to give a false witness when he translated **monogenes** here as meaning "only begotten." We cannot accept this or abide by it. But if this word means "only," "one of a kind," or "unique," it will fit the true status of Isaac very well. It is Isaac's personal being in relationship to Abraham that is stressed here. Even as Paul declares it in Galatians 4:23: **"For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise."** Thus, Isaac was the only son of Abraham produced by divine intervention.

No word in English fully expresses the word monogenes, but if the word "only" is used as a translation, we will come very close to its true meaning. Furthermore, in so doing we will create no contradictions and cast no cloud upon what the Spirit of God is telling us.

Hebrews 11:17 should read: **"And he that had received the promises offered up his only Son."**

In Luke 7:12 the translators have done this. It reads: **"There was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."** He was the only one of his kind, there could not be another, since his father was dead.

In Luke 8:42 the word "only" is sufficient to set forth all the truth. Nothing worth while would be added by inserting the word begotten. It would cause it to seem as if this Centurion wanted to tell Jesus how this twelve-year-old girl became his daughter.

In Luke 9:38 there is no noun which the adjective monogenes modifies. Thus it seems to stand alone, but the facts are that no adjective ever stands alone. In any sentence where it seems to do so, we must always seek for that which it modifies. This must be established by the context. The translators have supplied' the word "child" here, which was probably done to keep from using the word "son" twice in the same short sentence. However, it would have been more accurate to supply this ellipse from the context and read it, "my only son is he to me."

In John 1:14 the same construction is found in that there is no word qualified by monogenes. Some expositors think that this Greek adjective is here used as a noun, but this is questionable. The missing idea, which the adjective qualifies, must be supplied from the context and it should be either "God" or the "Logos." Thus it would read: **We beheld His glory, as a glory of the only Logos** (Expression) **parallel to (kala) the Father."**

In regard to John 1:18 - twenty years ago I stated that the ancient question of the true reading of the Greek is no longer in doubt. However, much study since that time has caused me to hesitate concerning this. Should this read monogenes theos (the only God), or monogenes Huios (the only Son)? Either reading is intelligible and acceptable here, as long as monogenes is not made to mean "only begotten," thus forcing the idea of "birth" into it. A.T. Robertson suggests: *"Probably some scribe changed it to ho monogenes huios to obviate the blunt statement of the deity of Christ and to make it like John 3:15."*

The ancient uncial manuscripts support the reading of ho monogenes Theos, and if we accept this, the passage will read**: "Now no one has ever seen God: the only God Who is in the bosom of the Father, He declares Him**."

John 3:16 and 18 are easily understood when we eliminate from the translation the interloping word "begotten" and recognize monogenes as a word that sets forth the Son's personal being, and that it has nothing to do with His origin or birth. In all occurrences of this word the Revised Standard Version eliminates all ideas of "begetting. "

The practical value of the study of this word needs to be noted. We are living in a time when millions are struggling to disparage the Lord Jesus

Christ, turning many away from the divine principle "**that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father**" (John 5:23). The words "only begotten," quite familiar to every Christian, are extracted from Scripture and are being used for this purpose. They argue that He who begets must be prior to and greater than the one begotten; therefore, the Father is greater than the Son. They make Christ to be subservient to the Father. And the compounded word monogenes, compounded from monos and ginomai is called in as a witness, but when it is examined it refuses to produce the testimony for which it was called. It does not mean "begotten."

The word ginomai is also compounded with other words in the New Testament. It is linked up with para to produce the word **paraginomai.** This is found in 37 passages, but in no occurrence does it suggest "birth" or "begetting." It is joined with pro in Rom. 3:25 which gives us proginomai, but it is translated "are past" without a hint of "birth" or "begetting." It is linked with epi in Acts 27:7 and Acts 28:13 where it is translated "was come" and "came;" linked with dia in Mark 16:1 (was past), Acts 27:9 (was spent), and 25:13 (after), but nary a suggestion of birth or begetting is found in these passages. How then can it be that when ginomai is linked up with monos it is given the meaning of "begotten"?

However in spite of the facts presented, there are those who will dismiss it all as meaningless, since it is declared in a great Messianic Psalm: **"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee**" (Psa. 2:8). Furthermore, since this is quoted in Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5 and 5:5 in which the Greek word **gennao** is used to represent it, and since gennao does have to do with birth and begetting, then we have proof that "begotten" does have to do with birth.

As long as we are speaking of the babe in Bethlehem the word birth does have a positive place in the history of the man Christ Jesus. It is used to describe how He became a man upon the earth. But it is never used to describe how the pre-existent Logos came into existence.

In the ancient customs of sonship, one became a child by birth, but the child became a son by investiture. It was at the resurrection of Jesus Christ that God declared the decree: **"Thou art My Son, this day have I brought Thee forth."** As Paul says it, **"Declared to be the Son of God. . . by the resurrection from among the dead"** (Rom. 1 :5).
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