



# **Bible & Life**

## **Bible Teaching Newsletter**

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### **“The Only Begotten of the Father”**

By David Dunlap

The Christmas season rightly reminds us of the incarnation, yet we should not forget that Christ is the “only begotten” One. Scripture gives great significance to the statement that Jesus Christ is the Father's “only begotten” Son! To miss the meaning and implication of this phrase is to miss much of the richness of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This unique phrase is used of the Lord Jesus just five times, and all the verses contain vitally important truths concerning Christ.

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14 KJV).*

This is the key verse of the incarnation, assuring us that the man Jesus, who dwelt among us, was the eternal Word who was “in the beginning with God” and that He “was God” and that “all things were made by Him” (John 1:3). Jesus, the eternal Word, was God the Creator manifest in the flesh.

*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 1:18).*

The Father is invisible to mortal eyes, but as Jesus said: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Men have seen and heard the Father in the person of His only begotten Son. Whenever God has been distinctly seen by men, it has been through the Son who has revealed Him.

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

This verse is the most magnificent of all gospel texts; many would call it the greatest verse in the Bible. It assures us that, if we simply put our trust in Christ who has become a man in order to die for our sins, and then to defeat death and become our Savior, our sins will be forgiven, and we shall live forever with Him.

*...but he that believes not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).*

Considering all that our Savior has done for us, this verse gives a stark warning that those who refuse to believe on the person and work of God's only begotten Son will die in their sins, condemned forever by the Father whose Son they have spurned.

*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9).*

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***“The Word was never ‘made’ anything. The Word became flesh. He who was one with the Father from all eternity became man. ‘The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory,’ the divine glory shining out. John saw the holy life, “the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.”***

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**H. A. Ironside**  
(1876-1951)

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***“The only begotten from the Father indicates that He was the sole representative of the Being (Godhead) and character of the one who sent Him. The term ‘only begotten’ does not refer to the incarnation but speaks of that relationship as Son in which He stand alone, coequal and eternal with the Father...”***

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**W. E. Vine**  
(1873-1949)

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Finally, this great verse is a wonderful summary regarding eternal salvation in Christ and the matchless love of Christ for a lost world.

### **The Only Begotten Son**

But why was it important for the Spirit, who inspired these five great verses to stress that the Lord Jesus was the incarnate only-begotten Son. Many modern English translations of the New Testament apparently do not consider it important, for they render the phrase merely as “only son.” It is so rendered in the Contemporary English Version (CEV), the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Version (NASV) and many others. The New International Version (NIV) renders it “one and only son.” In my opinion, I believe the King James and New King James versions best capture the teaching and revelation of the Holy Spirit by using the phrase “only begotten Son.”

But false teachers have latched onto this phrase to deny the deity of Christ, and His equality, oneness, and relationship to God as the Second Person in the Trinity. They see the word “begotten” and say that Jesus is a created being because only someone who had a beginning in time can be “begotten.” What this fails to note is that “begotten” is an English translation of the Greek word *monogenes*.

So what does *monogenes* mean? According to the respected Greek scholar W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, “The only begotten from the Father indicates that He was the sole representative of the Being (Godhead) and character of the one who sent Him. The term ‘only begotten’ does not refer to Christ’s birth in Bethlehem but that relationship as Son in which He stands alone, coequal and eternal with the Father, yet distinct in personality as the Son. The Christ did not become, he was not “generated” (begotten, created) by the Father but always and eternally the Son of God.”<sup>1</sup>

In summary, John sought to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God by using *monogenes* to highlight Jesus as sharing the same divine nature of God—Jesus is God’s “one, unique, and only begotten” Son, possessing complete deity. It does not mean “only Son,” or even “one and only.” It is worth noting that, although Christ is called the “Son” and/or “Son of God,” in the New Testament, He is never (original Greek) called the “only” Son of God.

### **Angels are Called the Sons of God**

The fact is, that to call Jesus the “only Son of God” would make the Bible contradict itself, for He is not the only Son of God, and certainly not the “one and only” Son of God. Angels are several times called the “sons of God” (Job 38:7) being directly created by God. Likewise, Adam was called the “son of God” (Luke 3:38). The term is also used in a spiritual sense, of course, for those who have become “new creations” in Christ Jesus by faith (2 Corinthians 5:17). In this sense, believers are “sons of God” by special creation—not physically, but spiritually.

But it is never applied in this sense to Christ, for He is not a created son of God (as Jehovah’s Witnesses and other cultists teach), but a begotten Son of God—in fact, *the* only begotten Son of God. He never had a beginning, for He was there in the beginning (John 1:1). In His prayer to the Father in the upper room, He spoke of “the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5).

In that wonderful Old Testament Christmas prophecy about His coming human birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), we are told that His “...going forth have been

from of old, from everlasting.” The emphasis here is the fact that Christ is eternal. Unfortunately, the New International Version in their rendering of Micah 5:2 detracts from the eternal deity of Jesus Christ. It reads, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins *are from of old, from ancient times*”(NIV1984). This last phrase “from of old, from ancient times”, portrays our Lord as merely an earthly king of ancient times instead of an Eternal Sovereign! This rendering will lead cultists to further deny the deity of Christ.

### **Eternally Begotten**

He is the *only begotten* Son of the Father, but He is also the *eternally begotten* Son of the Father. He is eternally “in His bosom,” yet always “going forth” to “declare” the Father—once as the creating Word, occasionally in pre-incarnate theophanies, also through the Holy Spirit conveying God’s written Word down to man through divinely chosen prophets, then ultimately appearing as the incarnate Word to live forever as the God-man. He did not *become* the only begotten Son by His virgin birth. He *was* ever and always will be the eternal divine Son of God. The doctrine of “eternal generation” taught that Christ was created by the Father. Concerning this error, W. E. Vine writes, “The doctrine of “eternal generation” finds nothing to correspond to it in Scripture. It does not help to explain eternal relationships in the Godhead.”<sup>2</sup> This doctrine taught by early church fathers and later by the reformers does not find support in Scripture.

### **The First Begotten from the Dead**

But that is not all! He was not just the only begotten Son, He soon would become the “first begotten from the dead” (Revelation 1:5). He was "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). When Paul at Antioch preached on the resurrection, he declared that God “hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33).

He is the only begotten Son eternally, and He is also the first begotten Son by resurrection, “the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). What a wonderful Savior is Jesus Christ, our Lord! The Lord Jesus is not only the unique only begotten Son of God and first begotten by resurrection, but also by divine inheritance, God has “spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed *heir of all things*” (Hebrews 1:2).

### **The Uniquely Incarnate Son**

His unique human birth, miraculously conceived with a divinely created body within a virgin’s womb, had also marked Him as the incarnate Son of God. To Mary, the angel had said: “Fear not...that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:30, 35). His unique righteousness, in both character and action, still further marks Him as Son of God. He said on one occasion: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19NKJV). He was even identified as God’s Son by heavenly proclamation. “And There came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

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***“He gave His only begotten Son.” In these words we see the divine sonship of Christ. This title, “His only begotten Son,” implies the absolute deity of Christ. This means that God, the Father not only had no other Son, but that Christ had every attribute of deity which the Father possessed.”***

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**J. Sidlow Baxter**  
(1903-1999)

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### INFORMATION

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The Lord Jesus Christ is thus Son of God by miraculous conception and virgin birth, by heavenly proclamation, by His uniquely perfect human nature, by divine inheritance, and by triumphant resurrection. But, most of all and first of all, He is the eternal Son of God—the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God!

### The Son Given

There is another great Christmas verse. "For unto us a child is born," known and beloved by every born-again Christian. That child was the infant Jesus, born of the virgin as prophesied hundreds of years in advance (Isaiah 7:14) in the little town of Bethlehem, as also prophesied (Micah 5:2). At the same time, "Unto us a son is given." That Son was (and is) the only begotten One, who eternally and ever existed as the Son of God. "And the government shall be upon His shoulder," for He holds the whole wide world in His hand! "And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

### Conclusion

As one with the everlasting Father in the triune Godhead, He is also the mighty God. He is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Resurrected Savior, our King of kings and Lord of lords. "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

### Endnotes

1. W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981), p. 140
2. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Topical Commentary: Christ*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2010), p. 13

### Suggested Reading

George Zeller, Showers, *The Eternal Sonship of Christ*, Neptune, NJ : Loizeaux, 1993  
John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, Chicago, IL : Moody, 1969