

Born Again or Begotten Again?

Why 'Begotten' Captures the True Meaning of 1 Peter 1:23

A Linguistic and Theological Exploration for the Everyday Reader

Introduction

In many modern English Bibles, the phrase 'born again' is widely recognized. It conjures up the immediate image of physical birth applied to spiritual life. However, when studying the foundational text of 1 Peter 1:23, a closer examination of the original Greek language suggests that the phrase 'begotten again' provides a much deeper, more accurate, and more illuminating picture of what happens during spiritual regeneration.

The Scriptural Baseline (King James Version)

To see the full structural architecture of Peter's argument, we look to the standard text of the King James Version (KJV). In this chapter, Peter uses the exact same root concept twice, framing our spiritual identity:

1 Peter 1:3 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

1 Peter 1:23 — Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

While the KJV translates the Greek concept as **“begotten us again”** in verse 3, it shifts to **“being born again”** in verse 23. Translating both verses as **“begotten again”** preserves the profound literary harmony that Peter originally intended.

Linguistic Breakthrough: Why 'Begotten' is Superior

The underlying Greek verb in both verses is *anagennaō*. The table below breaks down why choosing the word 'begotten' matters over 'born' for structural and literal accuracy:

Evidence Category	Translation Option	Impact on Meaning
The Biologic Metaphor	Begotten Again (Paternal / Seed)	Matches Peter's explicit reference to 'seed' (spora) in verse 23. In ancient biology, the father begets life via seed; the mother gives birth. 'Begotten' aligns perfectly with the seed imagery.
Contextual Harmony	Begotten Us Again (Verse 3 equivalence)	Maintains structural balance across 1 Peter chapter 1. It directly links the divine action of God in verse 3 with the practical manifestation of that seed in verse 23.
Theological Depth	God as Initiator / Father	Highlights God's legal and paternal role as the direct initiator of spiritual life. We inherit His spiritual traits directly through His indestructible Word.

Conclusion

For the average reader, 'born again' is a deeply familiar phrase that captures the overall sense of starting a new life. Yet, when we dig into the rich biological and parental imagery that Peter sets up, 'begotten again' proves to be the superior translation choice. It anchors our new life directly to the spiritual seed planted by God our Father, giving us a robust assurance that our spiritual heritage is built on an eternal, incorruptible foundation.

In this understanding, believers are begotten again now through God's incorruptible Word, but the process of actually being born again occurs at the resurrection. At that time, God will transform us completely into the image of His Son, bringing the life begun by His seed to its full and incorruptible expression.