

The Church of the Firstborn

“Firstborn” is a term that appears quite frequently in the Scriptures. The Bible uses the term **“firstborn”** in many different contexts. In some contexts, **“firstborn”** definitely denotes a literal birth.

In many other uses of this phrase, **“firstborn”**, has a powerful spiritual meaning different from its literal meaning. This study will examine both the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning of the phrase **“firstborn”**.

Clearly, in the earliest parts of the Bible, **“firstborn”** indicates the eldest son. Esau is referred to as the first born of Isaac. (**Genesis 25:25**) The firstborn of Canaan was Sidon. (**Genesis 10:15**) The last plague against the Egyptians specifically targeted the literal oldest son of every household and the first born of the Egyptian livestock. (**Exodus 11:5**)

Within the Hebrew culture, the firstborn indicated a position of strength and the son to whom leadership of the family would pass when the father died. Thus, the firstborn was in a position of distinction.

As we travel through the Bible, we begin to see that **“firstborn”** did not always mean the person who is literally the first one born. An early example of this is when Abraham did not pass along the birthright to Ishmael, the one born first, but it was Isaac who received the **“firstborn”** birthright.

It was God who mandated this in **Genesis 17:19-21**. Abraham obeyed the voice of God and passed all his possessions and birthright covenant blessing to Isaac. (**Genesis 25:5**)

Another example of this is when Joseph received the birthright from Jacob. (**1 Chronicles 5:1-2**) Although Reuben was the literal first born son of Jacob, Joseph was the one to receive the birthright blessing.

This clearly shows that God Himself does not follow the traditions of Hebrew culture but awards this prominence to the one prepared for the responsibility. As we journey through the Bible, we see more and more examples of the use of the term **“firstborn”** flowing directly from God Himself.

We see many examples in the Bible when the term **“firstborn”** does not indicate a literal birth at all. This spiritual meaning of **“firstborn”** is different from its literal meaning.

An example of this spiritual meaning of **“firstborn”** can be seen as early as **Exodus 4:22**. In this verse, **“firstborn”** is used to denote a unique covenantal relationship highlighting Israel’s position of privilege, affection, and responsibility among the nations.

It implies that God has chosen Israel as His primary heir, designated to carry His mission, represent Him, and receive special blessing.

As the “**firstborn**”, Israel is set apart from other nations to carry forward God’s values and mission to the world. This identification of Israel as God’s firstborn was a direct demand to Pharaoh to release Israel from bondage because they were God’s treasured possession. Along with the God-given title of firstborn, came a tremendous responsibility to obey God and to serve as a holy nation distinct from the servitude of Egypt.

Another example of this use of the term “**firstborn**” in a spiritual sense is found in **Psalms 89:27**. This verse refers first to David, who himself was not a firstborn in the physical, but was chosen of God to occupy a place of supreme honor among all other rulers.

This title denotes preeminence and privilege with God. We can also see God’s promise of a coming Messiah through the bloodline of David. The one who is called the “**firstborn**” more than any other throughout the Bible is Jesus.

When “**firstborn**” refers to Jesus Christ, it implies a preferential status, priority, dignity, sovereignty, preeminence, and Oneness with God. Let’s look at some of these powerful Scriptures in which Jesus is named the “**firstborn**”.

Let’s read **Romans 8:29**. Here we read how God had a sovereign purpose to transform believers into the likeness of Jesus. This offers assurance that God has “**marked out**” in advance the destiny of believers which is to grow into the likeness of Jesus. The goal is transformation or becoming more like Jesus in character, holiness, and love.

Notice in this verse that Jesus is called the firstborn among many brethren.

The word “**firstborn**” comes from the Greek word “**prototokos**” which refers to supreme status, headship, and inheritance rights within the family of God. “**Among many brethren**” refers to Jesus as the pattern or model that believers are being conformed to.

Jesus is the “**prototype**” of redeemed humanity. The word “brethren” used here denotes the idea that believers are brothers and sisters to Christ. This is reinforced by the words of Jesus in **Matthew 12:48-50**. Doing God’s will is key to being a part of God’s family.

In **Colossians 1:15**, Jesus is called the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. Here the term “**firstborn**” is used to emphasize the preeminence and superiority of Jesus. Calling Jesus, the “**firstborn of every creature**” not only relates that Jesus existed before all things, but also that Jesus is the Creator of all things. This concept is explained in **Colossians 1:15-17**.

Here we have some of the most powerful straightforward Oneness Scriptures in the whole Bible. These verses name Jesus as the image of the invisible God and the Creator of all things.

As we read on in **Colossians 1:18-19**, we read another important title given to Jesus. Jesus is called **“the firstborn from the dead”**. As in all the other examples of the use of **“firstborn”**, this signifies His supremacy, His unique status as the first to rise with an immortal body.

This new glorified body will never die again. Jesus is the leader of a new redeemed humanity marking a transition from a world under death to a new immortal life. Because Jesus is the **“firstborn from the dead”**, He has abolished death and has brought life and immortality through the Gospel. **(2 Timothy 1:10)**

Now let's turn to **Hebrews 12:22-24**. Notice this passage of Scripture is in the present tense and is addressed to those first-century Hebrews who had accepted their Messiah by believing and obeying the Gospel message that Jesus brought.

The phrase Mount Zion is used here to draw a direct comparison to Mt. Sinai of the Old Covenant. In the New Everlasting Covenant, there is a New Jerusalem which is the city of the Living God which replaces the Old Jerusalem of the Old Covenant. In **verse 23**, we read who this New Jerusalem actually is:

“the general assembly and church of the firstborn”.

The use of **“firstborn”** in this context speaks volumes as to how God views His New Jerusalem, the Church. The Bible tells us that this **“assembly”** and church of the firstborn consists of just men made perfect.

The word **“perfect”** here means **“complete”**. Through believing and obeying the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, just men are made perfect, or complete. In true Biblical tradition, here the firstborn inherited the father's estate.

The firstborn in this verse implies that those who have believed and obeyed the Gospel are co-heirs with Christ in that they inherit the wealth of the Kingdom of God. **(Romans 8:17)**

The phrase **“written in heaven”** means that their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life which indicates their divine citizenship. We can clearly see that the phrase **“general assembly and church of the firstborn”** refers to a heavenly body of believers redeemed by God. This body of believers possess the status, rights, and inheritance of a firstborn son. This is accomplished when we believe and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **(Acts 2:37-41)**

Conclusion

When Israel broke the covenant God made with them, they chose not to be God's firstborn any longer. **(Isaiah 24:5)** Because Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, we now have an opportunity to believe and obey the Gospel message.

Because Jesus is the first born of every creature, the firstborn of many brethren, and the firstborn from the dead, we too can become a member of the general assembly and church of the firstborn.

By believing and obeying the Gospel message that Jesus brought to us, we can become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus. When we are born again, we are named the church of the firstborn.

The title **“firstborn”** highlights the unique covenantal relationship that God has with His Church. When God names His Church **“firstborn”**, He is placing them into a position of privilege, affection, and responsibility.

He has chosen His Church of the firstborn to carry the Eternal Gospel message to a lost and dying world. Let us never forget what our purpose truly is.

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