



The Only-begotten Son of God: Its Meaning and the Background of Its Use in the Gospel of John

Paul Sato

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In the Johannine literature, the Greek adjective *monogenēs* is used exclusively to describe Christ's unique relationship to the Father (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). And, following the time-honored tradition, KJV consistently translated it as "only begotten." This word also occurs three times in Luke's Gospel and once in Hebrews. In these books, however, it is always used for an only child other than Christ, and KJV translated it variously: i.e. "only" (son or daughter) in Luke 7:12 and 8:42, "only child" in Luke 9:38, and "only begotten son" (referring to Abraham's son Isaac) in Heb 11:17. However, the prevailing opinion among scholars today is that the correct meaning of *monogenēs* is "one of a kind" or "unique," and that it has nothing to do with begetting. As a result, "only begotten" has virtually disappeared from recent English versions of the Bible,² and almost all recently-published commentaries of John's Gospel use some space to remind the readers that the word does not mean "only-begotten," some in passing, others in greater detail

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