

The Revelation of God as Father (1)

The revelation of God as Father in the Bible is progressive. The seeds of the revelation of God as Father are present in the Old Testament, developed in more detail in the New Testament especially in the ministry of the Son and the apostles, and ultimately consummated in the experience of the believers through the transforming and glorifying work of the indwelling Spirit as the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God the Father and His sons for eternity.

The Bible reveals that God is the Father of all mankind in a limited and natural sense, that God is the Father of Israel in a more specific sense, especially in the use of theophoric names, and that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus as the incorporation of the Father and Son in humanity and the Father of the New Testament believers in the most intimate, intrinsic, and spiritual sense.

Father of All Mankind—Image and Purpose

There are a few verses that indicate in a limited sense that God is the Father of all mankind. The fatherhood of God is implied in Acts 17:28 where Paul quotes two Greek poets who say that we are His race (γένος), or offspring, showing that God is the source of mankind. The genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Luke 3:38 also implies divine fatherhood of every human being when it links Adam back to God as a son of God, indicating the divine source of Adam and hence all the descendants of Adam.¹

Since God is the Creator, the source, of all men, He is the Father of them all (Mal. 2:10) in a natural sense, not in the spiritual sense in which He is the Father of all the believers (Gal. 4:6), who are regenerated by Him in their spirit (1 Pet. 1:3; John 3:5-6). (Recovery Version, Acts 17:28, note 4)²

Malachi 2:10 also ties the notion of fatherhood to God the Creator, saying, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?”³ Ephesians 3:14-15 indicates that the Father is the Father of every family in the heavens and on earth. As Witness Lee states,

The “Father” here is used in a broad sense, signifying not only the Father of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), but the Father of every family in the heavens and on earth

(v. 15). The Father is the source, not only of the regenerated believers, but also of the God-created mankind (Luke 3:38), of the God-created Israel (Isa. 63:16; 64:8), and of the God-created angels (Job 1:6).⁴ (*Ephesians* 2:7)

These verses indicate God’s fatherhood in a limited and natural sense, perhaps indicating that God is not an indifferent, distant, and disinterested Creator but that He has an intimate, fatherly concern for His creation. His creation of mankind in His image and His placement of mankind in front of the tree of life to fulfill His purpose of dispensing Himself into us, however, is a strong indication that His desire to be a Father by imparting His very life into mankind through regeneration is a deeper, more intrinsic, reflection of His fatherhood. However, the fall of mankind prevented the fulfillment of His purpose at that time and necessitated God’s redemption at a later time.

Father of Israel—Calling and Promise

With the calling of Abraham and the giving of His promises to Abraham and His descendants, God became the Father of His people Israel in a more intimate sense. A number of verses indicate that Jehovah is considered the Father of His people Israel. He is the Eternal Father (Isa. 9:6), who formed them as the clay; they are the work of His hand (64:8; cf. Mal. 2:10). He is their Redeemer from eternity (Isa. 63:16); He bought (acquired), made, and established them (Deut. 32:6), and He guides Israel (Jer. 3:4; 31:9; 3:19). As a Father, He should be honored by them (Mal. 1:6).⁵

A number of verses also indicate that God viewed Israel as His son(s) and daughters or children. God charged Moses to tell Pharaoh to let Israel as His firstborn son go out of Egypt to serve Him (Exo. 4:22-23). This notion of delivering, or calling, God’s son out of Egypt is reiterated in Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, / And out of Egypt I called My son,” and applied by Matthew to the infant Lord Jesus on His journey with His parents to and from Egypt as a fulfillment of this prophecy (Matt. 2:15).

Deuteronomy 14:1 speaks concerning the living and conduct of Israel as children of Jehovah, “You are the children of Jehovah your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor

shave your forehead for the dead.” Later on in Deuteronomy Moses refers to the origin of the children of Israel and to their neglect and forgetting, which provoked Jehovah’s anger, “You have neglected the Rock who begot you / And have forgotten the God who travailed with you. / And Jehovah saw and held them in contempt, / Because of anger provoked by His sons and daughters” (32:18-19). Isaiah continues the same sentiment, “Hear, O heavens, and hearken, O earth, / For Jehovah has spoken: / I have brought up children, and I have raised them; / And yet they have rebelled against Me” (1:2), which is continued, “Woe to the rebellious children, / Declares Jehovah, / Who devise counsel, but not of Me, / And who make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, / In order to add / Sin upon sin” (30:1); and “For this is a rebellious people, / False children, / Children who refuse to hear the instruction of Jehovah” (v. 9). They will endure His chastising by being carried off into captivity, and yet He also promises their return: “I will say to the north, Give them up, / And to the south, Do not keep them back. / Bring My sons from afar, / And My daughters from the end of the earth” (43:6). So also, “Thus says Jehovah, / The Holy One of Israel and the One who formed him, / Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, / And concerning the work of My hands, command Me” (45:11). Jeremiah also continues in the same tone, “Return, O apostate children” (3:14); “For My people are foolish; / They do not know Me. / They are stupid children / And have no understanding. / They are wise to do evil, / But they do not know to do good” (4:22); and

Is Ephraim a precious son to Me? / Or a child of My good pleasure? / For as often as I speak against him, / I surely remember him more; / Therefore My bowels moan for him; / I will surely have mercy on him, declares Jehovah. (31:20)

Hosea also promises a better future for Israel:

But the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, / Which cannot be measured or numbered; / And in the place where it will be said to them, You are not My people, / It will be said to them, You are the sons of the living God. (1:10)

This verse implies Israel’s regeneration, when God fulfills His new covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:31-34), in which He puts Himself into them as their life to make them sons of God.

In Romans 9 Paul indicates that sonship (the position and place of a son) belongs to the Israelites. They are positioned to be sons of God by God’s selection and calling, and out from them comes the promised seed of Abraham, who can regenerate them to be the genuine sons of God with His life and nature. As he states in Romans 9:4-8,

Who are Israelites, whose are the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service and the promises; whose are the fathers, and out of whom, as regards what is according to flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has fallen away, for not all who are out of Israel are Israel; neither is it that because they are the seed of Abraham, they are all children; but, “In Isaac shall your seed be called,” that is, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are accounted as the seed.

Paul distinguishes between two kinds of children: those among Israel who are children according to natural birth and those who appreciate and care for the fulfilling of the promise, according to divine birth. He also indicates the need for the children of Israel to be redeemed out of the curse of the law according to Galatians 4:5: “That He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship.” God’s chosen people were shut up by the law under its custody (3:23). Christ was born under law in order to redeem God’s chosen people from the custody of the law so that they might receive the sonship and become the sons of God.

A number of verses use human fathers as a metaphor of God in His relationship to Israel. He carried or bore His children: “In the wilderness, where you have seen that Jehovah your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place” (Deut. 1:31). He is a compassionate father: “As compassionate as a father is toward his children, / So compassionate is Jehovah toward those who fear Him” (Psa. 103:13). He is sparing, or tender, with His son: “They will be Mine, says Jehovah of hosts, a personal treasure, in the day that I prepare; and I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him” (Mal. 3:17). He is a loving discipliner: “Whom Jehovah loves He disciplines, / Even as a father, the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:12; Deut. 8:5).

In addition to Israel’s being referred to as God’s son, the

God’s desire to be a Father by imparting His very life into mankind through regeneration is a deeper, more intrinsic, reflection of His fatherhood.

King's son (the seed of David) is also referred to as God's son: "I will be his Father, and he will be My son" (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13); he calls upon God as his Father (Psa. 89:26); and he is the one who will build God's house, the throne of whose kingdom God will establish over Israel forever (1 Chron. 22:10; cf. 28:6). This seed of David, who came forth in time as Jesus Christ the son of David, according to His humanity was also begotten (Psa. 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5), or designated, God's Son through His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:3-4).

In Theophoric Names

In the Old Testament God is also revealed as Father of the people of Israel in theophoric names (i.e., names bearing a title for God). The earliest occurrence of the notion of God as Father occurs in theophoric names. There are almost thirty different theophoric names containing the element 'Ab (Father) either as a prefix or a suffix in the Old Testament.⁶ The names first appear in Genesis 10 (Abimael) and Genesis 17 (Abram/Abraham).

Some names explicitly mention God as Father, e.g., Abijah (Yah(u) is (my) Father—1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Kings 14:1; 1 Chron. 2:24; 3:10; 6:28; 7:8; 24:10; 2 Chron. 11:20, 22; 12:16; 13:1-4, 15, 17, 19, [20, 21 long spelling] 22; 14:1<13:23> (angle brackets indicate the verse number in the Hebrew text when it differs from the English); 29:1; Neh. 10:7; 12:4, 17; Matt. 1:7; Luke 1:5); Joab (Jehovah is father—145 times); Abiel (El is (my) Father—1 Sam. 9:1; 14:51; 1 Chron. 11:32); Abimael (El is father—Gen. 10:28; 1 Chron. 1:22); Eliab (a father is El—Num. 1:9; 2:7; 7:24, 29; 10:16; 16:1, 12; 26:8, 9; Deut. 11:6; 1 Sam. 16:6; 17:13, 28; 1 Chron. 2:13; 6:27<12>; 12:9<10>; 15:18, 20; 16:5; 2 Chron. 11:18); and perhaps Abihu (He is my Father—Exo. 6:23; 24:1, 9; 28:1; Lev. 10:1; Num. 3:2, 4; 26:60, 61; 1 Chron. 6:3<5:29>; 24:1, 2). Other names assign a particular attribute or quality to the Father, e.g., Abiram (the Exalted One is my father—Num. 16:1, 12, 24, 25, 27; 26:9; Deut. 11:6; 1 Kings 16:34; Psa. 106:17); Abram (the father is exalted—62 times), cf. Abraham (the father of a multitude—Gen. 17:4-5, 251 times); Abiathar (the Great One is father—1 Sam. 22:20-22; 23:6, 9; 30:7; 2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24, 27, 29, 35-36; 17:15; 19:11<12>; 20:25; 1 Kings 1:7, 19, 25, 42; 2:22, 26, 27, 35; 4:4; 1 Chron. 15:11; 18:16; 24:6; 27:34); Abigail (my father is joy—1 Sam. 25:23, 36, 40, 42); Abinoam (my father is delight—Judg. 4:6, 12; 5:1, 12); Abihud (my father is majesty—1 Chron. 8:3); Abihail (my father is might—Num. 3:35; 1 Chron. 5:14; Esth. 2:15; 9:29); Abitub (my father is goodness—1 Chron. 8:11); Abinadab (my father is noble—1 Sam. 7:1; 16:8; 17:13; 31:2; 2 Sam. 6:3, 4; 1 Kings 4:11; 1 Chron. 2:13; 8:33; 9:39; 10:2; 13:7); and Abishalom and Absalom ((my) father is peace—1 Kings 15:2, 10). Additional names present the Father as a particular agent, e.g., Abidan (my father is judge—Num. 1:11;

2:22; 7:60, 65; 10:24); Abimelech (my father is king or Molech is my father—66 times, especially in Genesis 20—21 and Judges 9); Abiezer (my father is help—Josh. 17:2; Judg. 8:2; 2 Sam. 23:27; 1 Chron. 7:18; 11:28; 27:12); Abishua (my father is rescue or salvation—6:4<5:30>; 6:5<5:31>; 6:50; 8:4; Ezra 7:5); Abital (my father is (the) dew—2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chron. 3:3); Abner (father is Ner, or is a lamp); and Abishur (my father is a wall, i.e., protection—1 Chron. 2:28, 29); Abiasaph or Ebiasaph (my father has gathered—Exo. 6:24; 1 Chron. 6:23<8>, 37<22>; 9:19); Abida (my father took knowledge—Gen. 25:4; 1 Chron. 1:33); and Abishag (my father is a wanderer?—1 Kings 1:3, 15; 2:17, 21, 22).⁷ These names give us a window as to the Israelites' view of God as a Father; not only is He the source of their human life as the Creator, but He is also a Father, being more intimately concerned for their well-being and as well as a source of many positive attributes, virtues, and benefits to His people.

The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Father is most particularly revealed in the New Testament in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. The relationship between the Father and the Son can be expressed as an incorporation. The Son and Father coinhere mutually, and they work together as one.⁸ Coinherence has two aspects: first, a "mutual interdependence of existence, whereby the Son is the Son and can act as the Son because there is a Father in the Godhead, and the Father is the Father and can act as the Father because there is a Son in the Godhead" (Robichaux, "Johannine Jesus (2)" 14). This mutual interdependence is called in Latin *circuminsession* (circum-in-sidere—that which is around to be remaining or sitting). Second, there is "a mutual interpenetration of hypostases and a dynamic fellowship in the divine life that exists among the three of the Trinity" (15). This is indicated by the terms *perichoresis* in Greek and *circuminsession* (circum-in-cedere—that which is around to move into) in Latin. There is also "the hidden mutual operation of the Father and the Son in the open actions of the Son on the earth" (15). This also applies to the Spirit so that "the mutual operation of the three in the Godhead manifests and depends on the other two aspects of incorporation, circuminsession (coinherence) and circuminsession (perichoresis)" (15). The Son came as the eternal only begotten Son with the Father (and by the Spirit) to declare, reveal, and testify concerning the Father and to prepare a way for the believers to be begotten of God the Father through His death and resurrection so that they may become sons of God.

The Eternal Begetting Father and the Eternally Begotten Son

While it is difficult to say much concerning the eternal

relationships in the Godhead, in the Bible, particularly in the Gospel of John, there are some clues. According to His divinity Jesus is the eternal only begotten Son of God. John uses a particular term *μονογενής* to indicate the eternal status of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. The word is a compound of *μόνος* meaning “only” and *γενής*, an adjectival ending from *γένος*, meaning “kind, species, race, offspring.” The word *γένος* comes from *γίνομαι* (become) and is related to the verb *γεννάω* (beget). While there may be a case for not always understanding a notion of begetting in the use of the word *μονογενής*,⁹ *μονογενής* is more than an emotionally-charged word expressing attachment to the uniqueness of an only child (this depth of feeling is itself sourced in the impartation of life from a father to a child).¹⁰ The most logical way for a son or daughter to become a unique offspring or *μονογενής* is through the process of begetting. The action of begetting is what produces and brings into existence both a father and a son. Indeed, there cannot be a son without a father and there cannot be a father without a son. There is an eternal Son since there is an eternal Father. If the Son is not eternal, then neither is the Father.

John’s presentation of Christ as the only begotten Son refers to His eternal status.¹¹ It refers to the eternal relationship in life, which exists between the Father and the Son and the eternal transmission of the divine life from Father to Son. As Kerry S. Robichaux states,

The Son is He who is begotten of the Father with the divine essence, while the Father is the one who begets the Son with the divine essence. (...we are speaking not of an event but of an eternal relationship.) ...The Father is ever dispensing the divine essence into the Son and thereby begetting Him eternally; the Son is ever receiving and expressing that dispensing and is thus eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit is ever dispensed as the divine essence by the Father and eternally proceeds from Him. (“Axioms” 11)¹²

The understanding of *μονογενής* as an eternal designation was reinforced by the Nicene Creeds of A.D.325 and especially 381 (also known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed), which developed the notion of the Son being begotten of the Father even before all the ages (*τὸν οὐδὲν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων*). The authors of the Nicene Creed wanted to counter the Arians’ temporal notion that the Son was in some way begotten only in time as a created being and was not a preexistent Son.

This notion of the Son being begotten was continued in Jerome’s translation of *μονογενής* as “only begotten” (*unigeniti*) in the Vulgate, and this in turn was followed by “only begotten” in other English versions such as the King James Version, Darby, and the ASV. The rejection of the notion of begetting by more recent translations is a moot point since an only son by virtue of being a son is begotten by a father. The reluctance to use the word *begotten* may be driven by other factors such as wanting to avoid temporal notions associated with begetting in the natural realm and applying them to the Trinity. However, rather than considering begetting in the divine and mystical realm as a metaphor, it is better to understand that the begetting relationship of Father and Son exists in the Godhead as a divine reality and that the natural experience points to this reality.

This notion of eternal begetting is reinforced by key verses indicating the dispensing of life, the use of the word *μονογενής* referring to the Lord Jesus, and by the use of prepositions and verbs in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

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This notion of begetting involves the dispensing of life from Father to Son, which unlike our human begetting is continual. Not only does the Son have life in Himself, “just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself” (John 5:26), but He even is life (1:4).

This dynamic sense of motion from the Father is also expressed in the five places where *μονογενής* occurs when it refers to the Lord Jesus (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). The Lord Jesus is the only Begotten coming forth in time in His incarnation for the purpose of declaring the unseen God (John 1:18) and expressing His glory in His coming from and with (Greek *παρά*, “from beside” or “from with”) the Father (v. 14; cf. *παρά* 16:28; *μετά*, “with” 8:29; 16:32).¹³ This is the Father’s sending the only begotten Son (1 John 4:9) as a gift to the perishing world so that everyone who believes into His name may have eternal life and live through Him (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).

This notion of eternal begetting, or of dispensing of life, is reinforced by the use of prepositions and verbs that indicate the motion of the Son from the Father as the source. As the only begotten Son coming forth in time in the person of Jesus Christ, He had His source in the Father. He is (*ἐκ*) from beside/with (*παρά*) God the Father (John 6:46; 7:29), He came out (*ἐξέρχεται*) from beside/with

(παρά) God the Father (16:27, 28; 17:8), from (ἀπό) God (13:3; 16:30), and out of (ἐκ) God (8:42). The Father also sent Him. The verb *send* is used forty-two times (twenty-five times using aorist active participles of πέμπω with God the Father as the Sender and the Son as the object—4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:38, 39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:16, 20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5 and seventeen times using indicative forms of ἀποστέλλω—3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21).¹⁴

The Living of the Son in the Incorporation with the Father

The eternal dispensing within the Godhead prepares us for the living of the Lord Jesus on earth. The Father is His source, both in His being and in His living. He lived His human life by the divine life of the Father.

[The] Son...constantly lives and moves in conjunction with the divine Father...whose every action appears to be also the action of the Father with whom He fellowships in secret...This Son of God is not at all separate from the Father who sent Him but so involved with the Father that His open actions on the earth are the hidden operations of the Father whom He manifests and expresses. (Robichaux, "Johannine Jesus (2)" 14)

The Son incorporated the Father, which can be seen both in what the Father and Son are and in what they do. Their mutual coinhering is seen in Jesus' divine yet human living: the Father is with Him (8:29; 16:32), and the Father and Son are in one another (14:10-11); in the divine life: the Father has life and gives to the Son to have life in Himself (5:26), the Son lives because of the Father (6:57), and the Father and the Son both give life (5:21); in the divine love: the Father loves the Son and gives all into His hand and shows Him all that He is doing (3:35; 5:20), and the Son abides in the Father's love (15:10); in the divine glory: which the Son had before the world was (17:5), the Son glorifies the Father on earth (v. 4), He is glorified as the Son of God (11:4) and as the Son of Man (13:31), and both Father and Son are mutually glorified (v. 32; 17:1; 12:23, 28); in the divine fellowship: the Son sees the Father and operates (5:19; 6:46), and the Father hears the Son (11:41-42); and in the divine expression: the Son's seeing and hearing result in His testimony (3:32; 5:31). In what they do—by working together as one—is seen in the divine will: the Son seeks and does the will of Him who sent Him (5:30; 6:38-40; 4:34); in the divine actions: the Son came forth out from God (8:42), He came in the name of the Father (5:43), He and the Father are working (v. 17), He does what He sees the Father doing (vv. 19-20), working in the Father's name (10:25), and doing the works of the Father (vv. 37-38; 14:11); in the divine speaking: the Son speaks the things which He

has seen (8:38) and has been commanded (12:49-50) and taught by the Father (8:28; 7:16), He speaks the Father's words (14:24), and thus the Father works (vv. 10-11); and in the divine judgment: the Father has given judgment to the Son (5:21-22), which He executes together with the Father (8:16), and as He hears He judges justly according to the will of Him who sent Him (5:27-30).¹⁵ Through these utterances the Lord Jesus gave us a view into the dynamics of His relationship with the Father.

He also indicated His personal relationship with the Father in His use of the first person singular pronoun. He referred to the Father as "My Father" about forty-nine times. In Matthew *My Father* is very frequently followed by *who is in the heavens*, indicating His intimate relationship with the Father who is at the same time His heavenly source yet abiding in Him on earth (7:21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19). Other instances of *My Father* are 1:27; 20:23; 25:34; 26:29, 39, 42, 53; Luke 2:49; 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; John 5:17, 43; 6:32, 40; 8:19, 28, 38, 49, 54; 10:18, 29, 37; 14:7, 20-21, 23; 15:1, 8, 15, 23, 24; 20:17; Revelation 2:27; 3:5, 21. He also referred twice to Himself in the third person as the Son of Man coming in the glory of His Father with His reward (Matt. 16:27; Mark 8:38). In the record of a few of His prayers He addressed the Father in the vocative case, in teaching the disciples to pray to the Father (Matt. 6:9 "our Father"; Luke 11:2). While He rebuked the cities that rejected Him, He extolled the Father for His way of revelation in His economy (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21). He prayed to the Father for God's glory in Lazarus's resurrection (John 11:41, cf. vv. 4, 40). He prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of His crucifixion would pass away from Him yet not according to His will (Matt. 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42). On the cross He prayed to the Father to forgive those who crucified Him (23:34) and to commit His spirit into the Father's hands (v. 46). He also prayed to the Father to save Him from the hour of His death but also that the Father would be glorified by His death (John 12:27-28). He prayed to the Father for their mutual glorification through His death (17:1, 5) and the oneness of the believers in the divine human incorporation (vv. 11, 21, 24-25). At the time of His crucifixion He also called on the Father as *Abba* Father—*Abba* being the Aramaic word for "Father"—(Mark 14:36; cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). He used the generic title *the Father* many times when He referred to Himself as the Son (Matt. 11:27; 24:36; 28:19; Mark 13:32; Luke 9:26; 10:22; John 3:35; 5:19-23, 26; 6:27; 10:36; 14:13). Outside of these examples *the Father* is mostly used in John's Gospel: a few times in the narrative sections (1:14, 18; 8:27; 13:1, 3), or in others' speech (14:8; 16:17), but mostly the Lord Jesus' speech (Luke 11:13; John 4:21, 23; 5:36-37, 45; 6:37, 44-46, 57, 65; 8:16, 18; 10:15, 17, 30, 32, 38; 12:26, 49-50; 14:6, 9-12, 16, 26, 28, 31; 15:9, 16, 26; 16:3, 10, 15, 23, 25-28, 32; 18:11; 20:17, 21; Acts 1:4, 7).

The Father is also referred to in His attributes of righteousness, holiness, and glory as the Righteous Father (John 17:25), the Holy Father (v. 11), and the Father of glory (Eph. 1:17). He is also the Father of compassions (2 Cor. 1:3), and the Father of spirits of the regenerated believers (Heb. 12:9).

Finally, as the consummation of the Lord's earthly ministry was His journey back to the Father bringing His humanity through death and resurrection into the glorious expression (Luke 24:26; John 8:54) that He had before He laid it aside to become a man (17:5; 1:14; cf. Phil. 2:6-7). Three different Greek verbs are used to indicate this journey πορεύομαι (go, proceed, travel, journey, John 14:12, 28; 16:28), ὑπάγω (go away, go back, go home, 14:28; 16:10, 17), and ἀναβαίνω (go up, ascend, 20:17). Through this process He also becomes the way for the believers to come to the Father (14:6).

In addition, in the process of resurrection His humanity was begotten or brought forth into divinity (Psa. 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). As a result of this birth He became the firstborn Son of God, the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29), and the life-giving Spirit as the means to beget many sons of God as the brothers of the Firstborn.

The revelation of the Father in the Bible is indicative of the process God went through in His economy. In the initial stages God created mankind in His image with a view to mankind receiving Him as life. In this way He is the Father of all mankind, as the source of humanity and with the expectation of begetting humanity as His sons. Due to the fall sonship was postponed, and there was a need of redemption. God also turned from the created race to the descendants of Abraham, giving them the promise of sonship (appreciated in a few verses and in theophoric names containing the word *Father*), and that a descendant, or seed, would be His Son. The Lord Jesus came as the fulfillment of the promise as the incarnation of God's only begotten Son, whose eternal being is an incorporation of the dispensing of the divine life and essence from the Father to the Son. His utterance, particularly in the Gospel of John, shows how the Son manifests and lives out the Father in the divine-human incorporation. He passed through death and resurrection and became the life-giving Spirit to regenerate those who believe into Him in order to produce the many sons of God as His reproduction to live out the life of the Father in the divine-human incorporation in the same way that

He did. Through the indwelling of Christ as the Spirit, there is a base for the believers' experience of the Father, a matter that will be addressed in the following issue of *Affirmation & Critique*.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹Some consider that Ephesians 4:6, which says, "One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all," also indicates universal Fatherhood. But in context, *of all* is better taken to refer to all the believers as members of the Body of Christ with the Father's life.

²Luke 3:38 can also be understood that Adam was unique in the sense that God directly created him whereas his descendants were begotten by their parents. See Watchman Nee, "Universal Fatherhood: A Fallacy," in *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*. Vol. 2, Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1992: 99-122.

³From the context of Malachi *we* and *us* refer to Israel (Mal. 1:1), so this also can be taken to refer to Israel.

⁴There are a number of other places in the Old Testament where sons of God refer to the angels (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 2:1; 38:7; Psa. 29:1; cf. 82:6 and 89:6; Dan. 3:25). Another verse that ties God's fatherhood to creation is James 1:17. God is called "the Father of lights."

Lights refers to the heavenly luminaries. The Father is the Creator, the Source, of these shining bodies, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets.

⁵Also in the Old Testament He is a Father to the orphans (Psa. 68:5). First Chronicles 29:10 has also been considered a reference to God as a Father to Israel, "David said, You are blessed, O Jehovah, God of Israel our Father, from eternity to eternity." Most English versions and commentaries treat the reference to father as referring to Israel. The language is similar to verse 18, "O Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of Your people's heart and establish their heart toward You," in which *fathers* is plural. However, the Septuagint has *Father* agreeing with *God*, placing *Father* in the nominative case in apposition to *God* rather than in the genitive case agreeing with *Israel*, ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν. The notion of the fatherhood of God is also seen with the Jews in New Testament times in Jesus' debate with them in John 8:38-44.

I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; so then, you also do the things which you have heard from

In resurrection His humanity was brought forth into divinity. He became the firstborn Son of God, the Firstborn among many brothers, and the life-giving Spirit as the means to beget many sons of God.

your father. They answered and said to Him, Our father is Abraham. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You do the works of your father. They then said to Him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, God. Jesus said to them, If God were your Father you would love Me; for I came forth out from God and have come from Him; for I have not come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speaking? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it.

⁶*Ab* occurs most commonly as a prefix *'abi-* (my father). The *-i-* has been considered as the first person singular pronominal suffix *my* in many glosses to the names. However, it could also be the *hireq compaginis*, the "joining," *hireq* reflecting a construct state before a genitive, or an adjectival affirmative, e.g., Abijah (fatherly-Jah).

⁷Two other names with *'ab* include Oholiab (father's tent) and Ahab (father's brother). Some of these names may also refer to human ancestors and have been interpreted this way by commentators.

⁸See Witness Lee, *The Issue of Christ Being Glorified by the Father with the Divine Glory*, Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1996, 24-25.

⁹Most modern translations and commentaries prefer a less theologically loaded *only one* or *only son* for *μονογενής*, considering that the notion of begetting is not present according to the use and most basic etymology of the word *μονογενής*. Perhaps they consider that the church fathers read too much into this expression, and perhaps they also shy away from attributing the natural process of begetting, with its temporal notions, to God in the divine and mystical realm.

Part of their reason for interpreting *μονογενής* as "only" is its use by the Septuagint translators to translate the Hebrew word *yachid* meaning "only." *Μονογενής* is used four times to translate *yachid*, once when it refers to Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11:34) and three times when the psalmist refers to himself (Psa. 22:20[21:21]; 25:16[24:16]; 35:17[34:17] (square brackets indicate the verse number in the Septuagint Greek text when it differs from the English). Interestingly, when Isaac is referred to as *yachid*, the Septuagint translators translated the three references ἀγαπητός (beloved, Gen. 22:2, 12, 16), rather than *μονογενής*, perhaps to avoid the problem that Abraham had other children. Interestingly, Hebrews 11:17 refers to Isaac as *μονογενής*, perhaps reflecting the fact that only Isaac was counted as the promised child (Gal. 4:22-28; Rom. 9:7). In the New Testament *μονογενής* occurs four times, referring to only or unique sons or daughters: the widow's son (Luke 7:12),

Jairus's daughter (8:42), the demon-possessed epileptic child (9:38), as well as Isaac (Heb. 11:17).

While most modern translators and interpreters avoid making the connection between *γένος* and the verb *γεννώω*, some acknowledge the connection with the cognate *γίνομαι* (become). For example, see Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: the Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72.4 (1953): 213-219; and Richard N. Longenecker, "The One and Only Son," *The Making of the NIV*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 117-124. The natural way that fathers and sons "become" is through the process of begetting. There is also some redundancy in understanding *μονογενής* simply as "only." The prefix *μονο-* carries the notion of "only" adequately enough. Some translate *μονογενής* as "only son" or "only child," but this also results in redundancy when *μονογενής* occurs with *υἱός* (son) (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9, and John 1:18 in some MSS; many MSS read *θεός* in place of *υἱός* in John 1:18, which can be translated "the only begotten God" or "the only begotten One, God"). The following articles argue for the restoration of the understanding of *only begotten* to the word *μονογενής*: F. Büchsel, "μονογενής"; John V. Dahms, "The Johannine Use of Monogenes Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 222-232; Adele Reinhartz, "And the Word Was Begotten: Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John," *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, ed. Adele Reinhartz (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999) 83-103; and Michael Marlowe, "The Only Begotten Son (ὁ μονογενής υἱός)" 2006. *Bible Research*. Ed. Michael D. Marlowe. 6 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/only-begotten.html>>. See also commentaries by Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, who states, "The phrase of the Father [in John 1:14]...is decisive for 'only-begotten'" (96), and F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), both of which speak more favorably of understanding *μονογενής* as "only begotten."

¹⁰Büchsel considers the two aspects of the word *μονογενής* in terms of God's love and God's life, stating,

Because Jesus is the only Son of God, His sending into the world is the supreme proof of God's love for the world. On the other side, it is only as the only-begotten Son of God that Jesus can mediate life and salvation from perdition. For life is given only in Him, Jn. 5:26. (740)

He then goes on to state,

In Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Jn 4:9 *μονογενής* denotes more than the uniqueness or incomparability of Jesus. In all these verses He is expressly called the Son, and He is regarded as such in 1:14. In Jn. *μονογενής* denotes the origin of Jesus. He is *μονογενής* as the only-begotten. (741)

¹¹His status as the only begotten Son is not to be confused with two other occurrences of begetting—of His divinity being begotten in humanity and His humanity being begotten in divinity—which occurred in time and both of which use the verb

γεννώ. The verb is used in the process of the Lord's human conception and birth. Luke 1:35 says,

The angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born [or is begotten τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον] will be called the Son of God [υἱὸς θεοῦ].

Matthew 1:20 says,

While he pondered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife, for that which has been begotten [γεννηθὲν] in her is of the Holy Spirit [ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου].

The fact that the begotten One is called the Son of God and is literally out of the Holy Spirit indicates His divine source and the mingling of divinity with humanity from the standpoint of His human conception. The verb γεννώ is also used to refer to His being begotten in resurrection. This refers to His humanity being designated, or marked out, as the Son of God on the day of His resurrection (Rom. 1:4). This is the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7, "You are My Son; / Today I have begotten [γεγέννηκα] You," which is quoted in Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, and 5:5.

The language of Zechariah 12:10 is quite suggestive of Christ's dual statuses as Son of God, that of the only Begotten (in His divinity) and of the Firstborn (in His humanity):

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they will look upon Me, whom they have pierced; and they will wail over Him with wailing as for an only son and cry bitterly over Him with bitter crying as for a firstborn son.

¹²In his other article, "The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity (1)," Kerry Robichaux argues that the terms *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* reinforce the fact that "the divine life appears to be the most basic characteristic of the relationship among the three of the Godhead" (43).

¹³There is debate as to whether παρά (from with) the Father modifies μονογενής or glory, and if it modifies μονογενής, does it indicate that He came from the Father or that His begetting was sourced in the Father (or both). Perhaps we can understand both notions since the Father is the source in the divine birth and also the source of Jesus' coming to this earth as the Sender, cf. Boismard, *St. John's Prologue*: "The phrase 'from God' (παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ) or 'from the Father' (παρὰ τοῦ πατρός)...indicate[s] the mission of the Son by the Father, which is based on his eternal generation" (53).

¹⁴Eleven times *the Father* is the expressed subject of the verb *sending*, seven times with πέμπω and four with ἀποστέλλω. See Paul W. Meyer, "'The Father': The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel," *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 255-273, in which he deals with these two words for *send* (263-264).

Other prepositions indicate motion from the Son to the Father. John 1:1 states that the "the Word [the Son] was with [πρός] God [the Father]." Πρός more commonly has the notion "toward" and not just "with." In 1:18 the Son is "in the bosom of the Father" but the Greek preposition εἰς more commonly carries the sense of "into" and not simply "in." This notion of motion is also indicated by the term *perichoresis*. See my article on "The Trinity and the Prepositions" in *Affirmation & Critique* I.1 (1996): 50-52, in which I speak concerning the Son's relationship with the Father in the Trinity as constantly proceeding παρά the Father, being constantly in motion, fellowship, and communion πρός the Father and εἰς the Father's bosom, while at the same time coexisting or being incorporated ἐν the Father and the Father ἐν Him.

¹⁵I am indebted to and follow Kerry Robichaux in his presentation of the incorporation of the Father and the Son in what the Father and Son are and in what they do in his article, "Johannine Jesus (1)," 38-51.

*He passed through death
and resurrection and became the
life-giving Spirit to regenerate
those who believe into Him to
produce many sons of God to live
out the life of the Father.*

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