

"The only begotten Son" or "the one and only Son"?

There are some today who argue about the meaning of the phrase "only begotten Son" and tell us that the King James Bible translators got it all wrong and it really should read something like "the one and only Son" or "the unique Son". Let's look at the Greek text for the first part of John 3:16 "God so loved the world that he gave his ONLY BEGOTTEN Son". In Greek this looks like - Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν. The word in question is μονογενῆ

According to numerous Greek-English lexicons the meaning in reference to the Son of God is "only begotten". It is so translated by a multitude of English Bible versions. It also appears that some of the more modern lexicons are changing the meaning of the word from what others in the past have said about the meaning of this word is, particularly in reference to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have a hard copy of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, 17th edition, dated 1887. On page 451 it tells us that the word has one primary meaning and one secondary meaning. The first meaning listed under the word monogenes is "ONLY BEGOTTEN". The second meaning is "born from one and the same mother". Those are the only definitions it gives.

I also have a modern Greek-English Dictionary. It is not a Bible reference book in any way; it is just a secular dictionary called Divry's Modern English-Greek and Greek-English Desk Dictionary by D.C. Divry, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1974. If you look up the Greek word monogenes on page 594 it has only one definition listed - ONLY BEGOTTEN.

I also have Gerhard Kittel's massive work, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. In volume IV on pages 737 through page 741 it discusses the meanings of the word monogenes. It says on page 739 - "In the New Testament monogenes occurs only in Luke, John and Hebrews. It means "ONLY-BEGOTTEN". On page 741 he says: "In John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:19 monogenes 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 John 1:14. In John monogenes denotes the origin of Jesus. He is monogenes as THE ONLY BEGOTTEN." (caps are mine).

Likewise Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words discusses the meaning of monogenes on page 822. He says: "It is translated "only begotten". We can only rightly understand the term "only begotten" when used of the Son, in the sense of unoriginated relationship. The "begetting" is not an event of time, however remote, but a fact irrespective of time. The Christ did not *become*, but necessarily and eternally *is* the Son. He, a Person, possesses every attribute of pure Godhood."

Vine also continues: "In John 1:18 the clause "the Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," expresses both His eternal union with the Father in the Godhead and the ineffable intimacy and love between them, the Son sharing all the Father's counsels and enjoying all His affections."

Now let's compare some English Bible versions through the centuries. We will be looking at John 3:16

Wycliffe 1395 - "For God louede so the world, that he yaf his `oon bigetun sone"

The Great Bible (Cranmer) 1540 - "For God so loue þe worlde, that, he gauē is only begotten sonne,"

Bishops' Bible 1568 - "For God so loued the worlde, that he gauē his only begotten sonne"

The Geneva Bible 1587 - "For God so loued the worlde, that hee hath giuen his onely begotten Sonne"

The Douay-Rheims 1610 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"
King James Bible 1611 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"
Whiston's Primitive New Testament 1745- "his only begotten Son"
John Wesley's translation 1755 - "he gave his only begotten Son"

Living Oracles 1835- "his own begotten Son"
Darby 1870 - "his only-begotten Son"
The Revised English Bible 1881 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"
The ASV of 1901 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"
Young's literal 1898 - "that His Son -- the only begotten -- He gave"
Lamsa's translation of the Syriac Peshitta - "that he even gave his only begotten Son"
NKJV 1982 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"

NASB 1995 - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son"
Knox Bible 2012 - "God so loved the world, that he gave up his only-begotten Son"

But we begin to see a change in many of today's versions

The first major modern English Bible version that began to change the phrase "the only begotten Son" to "the only Son" was the liberal RSV which reads- "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"

The printed Greek Lexicons also began to change. I have a hard copy of what they label as "A Greek-English Lexicon compiled by Liddell and Scott" dated 1968 and it now lists under the meaning of monogenes "the only member of a kind; unique." But Liddell and Scott were not alive in 1968 and their Greek Lexicon written in 1887 when they WERE alive says that monogenes means "only begotten". So who is changing the Lexicon that now bears their names? It certainly was NOT Liddell and Scott!

Holman Standard 2003 - "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son"
The NIV 2011 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"
ESV 2003-2011 - ""For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son"

The ISV - ""For this is how God loved the world: He gave his unique Son"

The Catholic bible Versions

What is of interest is to see how the Catholic bible versions have been changing over the centuries. The Douay Rheims of 1610 and the Catholic Douay of 1950 both read "God so loved the word that he gave his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON". But the 1970 St. Joseph New American bible and the 1985 New Jerusalem bible both read like so many other modern versions - "God so loved the world that he gave HIS ONLY SON"

Jesus Christ is NOT God's ONLY Son. There are the "sons of God" in the book of Job who are angels of God - See Job 1:6; 2:1 and 38:7. And the believing people of God in both the Old and New Testaments are also called the sons of God. As far as being "unique", or "one of a kind", God has made every individual who has ever lived on the face of this earth "unique" and one of a kind. No two of us are exactly alike in our mental, physical or spiritual makeup. For much more detail on the meaning of monogenes as "only begotten" and NOT something like "unique" see Scott Jones' article "The Definition of Monogenes" here-

http://www.lamblion.net/Articles/Textual%20Criticism/Scott%20Jones/monogenes_definition.html

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