

## JESUS THE FIRSTBORN

Jesus is referred to as the one person who sits at God's right hand meaning he is next to God. For Christians he is God and the Son of God. Some think he is Son of God but not God. The Bible calls him God's firstborn which some take to mean he was just the most important person ever or was the first to be created. Jesus as firstborn of the dead is said to describe how he was either the first person to resurrect from the dead to eternal life or the first in terms of supremacy. He then would have been the supreme person to resurrect.

Scholars sometimes argue that:

The texts that tell us Jesus was the firstborn just mean that he was the most important person to be born and not necessarily the first (Hebrews 12:23). He was the most important to rise from the dead (Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5). He was the first in importance so he was the firstborn in that sense but not literally.

The evidence for this affirmation that firstborn means having the unique privileges of the firstborn at times and not always being born first can be read in Concise Guide to Today's Religions, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, pages 68-74. But it gives no real proof that the non-literal meaning was in the Bible at all. Hebrews 1:2 seems to be an exception for there God says he will make Christ his heir which matches Psalm 89:27 where God says he will make somebody his firstborn. But you could talk that way of a first son who has not been treated as firstborn with its privileges yet. The Church of the Firstborn is the title for the Church given in the Letter to the Hebrews (12:23). That could be because it was the Church of the firstborn Christ who shares his benefits with the Church and treats them as firstborns though they are not. The book assumes that the firstborn of the poor (Isaiah 14:30) means the poorest of the poor and the firstborn of death does not mean the first killer disease but the worst in Job 18:13. But there is no need for this assumption at all – take the references literally. Israel was called the Lord's firstborn for it was the first race chosen by God. It was the first race to be born into God's covenant family. The Christian Church is the firstborn of God as regards being born into the covenant of redemption. Yet this book argues that firstborn does not mean born first but the benefits of being a firstborn on this basis. It's wrong.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection. He meant that Christ was the first to rise to a glorious and blissful life with God. This is reconciled with earlier Biblical resurrection reports by saying that the people who rose before did not rise the same way – they were more or less resuscitated (page 268, The Truth of Christianity). So we are told that resurrection and resuscitation though similar were not the same in Paul's thought. Or were they? We have no proof in Paul that he made this distinction. When you see that he was writing to defend the resurrection against those "Christians" who said it never happened and to people who had only the basics of the gospel you see that he would have made it clear what he meant by firstborn from the dead if his meaning wasn't straightforward. He did not so he did not see the resurrections reported in the Old Testament as a problem for Jesus rose from the dead before they happened making him the first to be resurrected.

This refutes the raising of the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus and the widow's son and the saints at the time of the crucifixion from the dead which Jesus was responsible for according to the Bible. Paul did believe that Jesus' resurrection had different results from the resurrection of the others but you don't write Jesus was the first to rise from the dead just because Jesus' was different. A resurrection is a resurrection whatever the mode. A resurrection is a resurrection whether the body is restored wholly or whether it is turned into a spiritual body.

Paul may be saying that Jesus as man was made first and could have lived in Heaven while Adam was the first man to be made on earth. If Jesus was the firstborn he had to have been made first. Even if Jesus is God his humanity perhaps his body or soul or both could have been the first creation of God. Jehovah's Witnesses argue that Jesus was the first-created person so he was not God but that is not a valid argument.

Read the way Paul writes about the logical order of things in 1 Corinthians 15. "Just like every human being dies in Adam so everyone will be made to live in Christ; but all this must happen in the proper order with Christ as the first fruit and then after the coming of Christ those who belong to him. After that the end will come and that is when he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father." Paul is not arguing here that since Christ got this new life first and nobody else has that this is the proper order. Rather, he is saying what the logical order is. But he is lying here. His order would mean Christ has to rise from the dead before he can give life to others. This is wrong for God can see the future meaning he could apply the salvation won by Christ to people before Christ was born. Paul however knew that God had a clear vision of the future. Paul indicated elsewhere that there were prophets saved by foreseeing Christ. Why would he lie? Because he wants to be able to say that Jesus must have lived so we can look forward to salvation if we follow him. To paraphrase Paul he is saying, "Because it is the logical order Jesus must have got everlasting life first and then his people will be saved and he will hand the kingdom he makes of them over to his father." He is not saying Jesus lived because he saw him in visions but

using a separate argument for Jesus' existence altogether. He is saying there is no evidence that Jesus lived but visions and theological arguments.

Romans 8:29 tells us that God chose his saved children to be like his son so that his son would be the firstborn among many brethren. The Church says he means that God chose the brethren to be like Jesus so that Jesus would be the best of them. That is accusing God of showing off. And why would it matter? Jesus would not need to be shown as the best of his brethren by God creating inferior copies of him. A more sensible interpretation is that God chose them to be like his son in such a way that his son would be the first ever of his holy children. For his brethren to be like Jesus, Jesus has to be around before his brethren so that they can become like him by observing and practicing his example. Paul believed that some Old Testament figures were saved by seeing a bit of the gospel so his Jesus lived in Old Testament times. Moreover, there was no need to have a written record of this Jesus' life for he communicated with his people through his Holy Spirit about the right way to live.

Colossians 1:18 says that Jesus was the beginning of all things and the firstborn from the dead for the purpose of supremacy in all things. Now if we take firstborn to mean not first made but first in importance this verse makes no sense. You don't say, "I made this the most important so that it would be the most important." Then it says, Jesus was the most important from the dead for the purpose of supremacy. You don't say the king is a king for being king. So what it said was that Jesus was the first to come back from the dead which puts him in another time and place altogether and not the time and place that we have been led to believe. Jesus was made at the start of creation so that he would be supreme in every sense including being the first thing to be made. The first thing is always special.

Revelation 1:5 does not link the title firstborn from the dead which it applies to Christ to importance when the next title it gives him, that of ruler, takes care of designating Jesus as important which adds weight to the literal interpretation of firstborn. If it did link it would say in case firstborn would be taken in the literal sense and it had to be clear for it claimed to be written for a time of persecution in which the truth would get the worst battering it would ever get.

Acts 26:23 has Paul saying that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and was the first so that he could give light to the Jews and the Gentiles. The Church says this means, "Jesus was the most important to rise from the dead or the first in importance so that he could give light to the Jews and the Gentiles". But this obviously makes no sense for Christ could have done this through his Church without being the most important and what has being important to do with giving light? And it would make no sense to say that Christ was the first to rise from the dead as a sign for them for he himself said that the word of God was enough of a sign when he told the story of Dives and Lazarus and also the times he raised others from the dead would also be signs. In fact the other resurrections would be more convincing than his own because he knew he would end up on a cross and could have been prepared or had a look-alike to take his place after death who scared away the guards by posing as Jesus and then robbed the tomb and masqueraded as Jesus but there is no reason to think that the others would have been prepared to work out a deception. What Paul meant was that Jesus was simply the first person to rise from the dead and that he did it so that he could guide his Church. We know from this verse that it was not claimed that by saying Christ was the first to rise that it was only meant that he was the first to rise in a changed magic body thus allowing belief in previous revivals of the dead that were not of this nature. Why? Because had he risen without being transformed he could still have done the same job which was guiding the Church to enlighten everybody on earth. This tells us how to interpret the phrase, firstborn from the dead, it means simply the first to rise from the dead. If what Paul said was not made up by the author of the book of Acts it might be a hint that Paul may have equated Jesus with Enoch from Genesis who might have risen from the dead. Genesis says that Enoch walked with God which may mean he died and then it says he was not for God took him perhaps referring to an ascension which would require a resurrection otherwise there would be nothing to take up into Heaven. Perhaps Jesus was the widow's son who was raised from the dead by Elijah – the first certain record of a return from the dead. The author of the Book of Acts never thought about what he was putting into his book on this subject. We can be grateful for his slip.

Paul stated that Jesus was the first good man that God made in Romans 8:29. Paul stated that God turns everything into a benefit for those who love him and that these are the ones he chose long ago to be images of his son so that this son would be the first of many brothers. Many translations use the words oldest or eldest instead of the first. The New Jerusalem Bible says eldest. How does the Church interpret this? It says the verse means that Jesus was chosen to be the prime or the best son of God among many sons of God who accept God as their father. But Paul could have meant that God made Jesus and Jesus was accepted as his son by God and God made other people after that so that Jesus would be the first of many sons and have the honour of getting there first as well. Why bring in that they were chosen long ago? There is no need to unless Paul's meaning is that because God wanted Jesus to be the first good man he had to choose other people to be saints but after him so that he would be the first. The mention of brothers means that Jesus was a man for he could not be our brother otherwise. Paul is clear: Jesus was the first good man. Paul's Jesus did not live in the first century for he believed that the Old Testament saints were just as holy as the Christian ones in his Church.

The Bible says that Jesus was the firstborn in time not just in rank. He was also the first to rise from the dead. The gospels never say that Jesus' rising was different from that of other people who rose such as Lazarus. Thus there is no historical

support for saying Jesus did more than rise he resurrected to eternal life. There is no reason to argue that the others just rose from the dead while Jesus was different when he rose for he rose to salvation and eternal life. The term about the firstborn Jesus contradicts the gospels. Jesus was the first made creature and the first to die and come back. Jesus then did not live in the first century at all though they say he did.