

I'm Dead, Now What? Part 2 by Rabbi Baurch

The Firstborn From the Dead

The Bible states in several places that Messiah Yeshua is the Firstborn from the dead. Just what does this phrase mean? There are some who say that although others were raised from the dead that they all eventually died again; like Lazarus, the widow's son, etc. ; therefore Yeshua was the first to rise from the dead never to taste death again. Although this is true, this expression is much more involved than this. In the previous article we showed Biblically that the doctrine of "soul sleep" is errant and after Yeshua emptied Abraham's bosom in Sheol there are only two possibilities for the dead. The first is in hell and the second is to be with Yeshua in heaven. In both places there is a consciousness.

The term "firstborn" is a technical one in Judaism. It does not refer to just any child born first to a set of parents. The firstborn had to be a male; therefore if a daughter was born first, that family would not have any firstborn. The Bible makes it clear that this term is a right or privilege more than a description of an order of birth. We all know the story of how Esau sold this right to Jacob and how Rueben forfeited the same to the son's of Joseph (see I Chronicles 5:1). So again just what does the term "firstborn" mean and why was it applied to Yeshua?

The first thought that should enter one's mind when the term "firstborn" is employed is **heir**. This is the foundational idea of the right itself, the firstborn would receive a double portion of his father's estate (see Deuteronomy 21:17). What does this concept have to do with the Messiah? Let's look at Colossians 1:15 to assist in answering this

question.

“And He (Messiah Yeshua) is the image of the invisible G-d, Firstborn of all creation”

What is this verse revealing? That Messiah Yeshua will inherit all creation. This idea of inheriting and the purpose inherent to it becomes clearer when one considers a similar text,

*“And from Messiah Yeshua, the Faithful Witness, **the Firstborn of the dead**, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth, for He is the One that has loved us and freed us from our sins in His blood.” Rev. 1:5*

When Yeshua is called the Firstborn of the dead, the phrase is instructing the reader that not only will He inherit all creation but that He will also rule over all of creation. It is by His death, which He freely chose that He received the right to be given the name that is above all names and to which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess (Philippians 2:8-11). This passage shows that Yeshua, Who eternally being the very nature God i.e., divine (see Philippians 2:6), humbled Himself and received (inherited) the right to rule over all creation. It is not an accident that those who believe in Yeshua are also called firstborn,

*“To the assembly and congregation of the **firstborn** having been written in the heavens,...” Hebrews 12:23a*

This verse declares that believers will inherit the right to live eternally in the Kingdom of G-d. Not only will Messiah's followers be in the Kingdom, but also we will share in a portion of Messiah's rule.

*“...they lived and **ruled** with Messiah a thousand years.” Rev.20:4b*

Therefore the usage of the phrase “Firstborn from the dead”

in regard to Messiah emphasizes His authority and relationship to all those who have died. What type of death is being referred to here? The same type of death, which is referred in Romans 6,

“Do you not know that all of us who were baptized in to Messiah Yeshua, that into His death we were immersed. We baptized with Him into an immersion of death.” Rom. 6:3-4a

And why were we united with Him in the likeness of His death?

“...in order that we should walk also in new life.” Rom.6:4b

How does this “new life” look? What is its character? It is the life of Yeshua we are called to embrace; it is His character that must become our character. Therefore the fact that the term “firstborn” is used for Messiah and His followers teaches that there ought to be a unity between Him and us in every aspect of life. As believers this is our biblical destiny.

It is a shame that all too often one focuses on what he expects G-d to do for him; rather than how one can serve Hashem and carry on the work of the Kingdom. The concept of the “firstborn” is related to the Kingdom. How so? The Kingdom represents a new reality, which is superior in every way to the world in which we now reside. This idea of superiority is seen in the term “firstborn” in the following verse,

*“He (Messiah) is the head of the body—that is the congregation. He is the beginning, the **Firstborn** from the dead, in order that in all things He should have **Preeminence**.”* Col. 1:18

Although these two words are translated with two very different words in English, firstborn and preeminence; the two Greek words are inherently related to one another:

πρωτότοκος and πρωτεύων. Hence the Messiah Who is superior in all things calls the believer to share in this same quality of life, i.e. His life. It is this Kingdom life that the believers are called / commanded to live now in this world. It is this quality of life that is superior to the life that nonbelievers live that will cause the glory of G-d to be manifested in the believer and through him. It is this manifestation that bears witness to the change that has happened to the believer by means of the Gospel message.

Also related to these concepts is the idea of victory. The term "firstborn" obviously is related to the resurrection. Both in Judaism and in the New Covenant resurrection is based on the idea of victory over death. Since death and sin are parallel concepts, what is being referred to is a victory over sinful behavior. Messiah Yeshua died as an outcome of sin, but **not** His sins (**as He never committed any sin**); rather the sins of humanity. When He rose from the dead He demonstrated His victory over sin in which the believer is commanded to share. It is this victorious lifestyle (apart from sin) that is superior and what the believer inherits. There is another term that refers to this type of life; it is eternal life.

It is wrong to think that this is something that the believer receives after he dies physically. Rather he receives this eternal life the moment he accepts the Gospel. The concept of eternal does not imply any interruption. That is, one does not begin to demonstrate this life for a while and then die and enter into a state of "soul sleep" for an undetermined period of time only to wake up and continue this quality of life. Rather physical death only changes the location of where one lives a life focused on serving / worshiping the Living G-d. Those who have died in Messiah are in the heavens worshiping HaShem. For one reads in the book of Revelations about those who were in the heavens and were waiting for their fellow believers to join them (see

Rev. 6:10-11).

For many believers there is a lack of knowledge of this great potential one has now through Messiah Yeshua to begin to live a victorious life inheriting the resurrection power to turn away from sin and embrace the superiority of Messiah so that we can demonstrate our relationship with Him now and forever more.

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