

## BIRTHRIGHT

1.) This word denotes the special privileges and advantages belonging to the first-born son among the Jews. He became the priest of the family. Thus Reuben was the first-born of the patriarchs, and so the priesthood of the tribes belonged to him. That honor was, however, transferred by God from Reuben to Levi ([Num. 3:12, 13; 8:18](#)).

(2.) The first-born son had allotted to him also a double portion of the paternal inheritance ([Deut. 21:15-17](#)). Reuben was, because of his undutiful conduct, deprived of his birthright ([Gen. 49:4; 1 Chr. 5:1](#)). It was passed on to Joseph's son Ephraim (which, by the way, was the younger of the two boys.) Again, God's sovereignty)

Esau transferred his birthright to Jacob ([Gen. 25:33](#)).

(3.) The first-born inherited the judicial authority of his father, whatever it might be ([2 Chr. 21:3](#)). By divine appointment, however, David excluded Adonijah in favour of Solomon. Their father gave them many presents, including silver, gold, and other precious items, along with fortified cities in Judah. But he gave the kingdom to Jehoram because he was the firstborn.

(4.) The Jews attached a sacred importance to the rank of "first-born" and "first-begotten" as applied to the Messiah ([Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:4-6](#)). As first-born he has an inheritance superior to his brethren, and is the alone true priest. **Romans 8:29** *because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

**Colossians 1:18** *He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn<sup>1</sup> from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.<sup>2</sup>*

Sold by Esau, [Gen. 25:29-34; 27:36](#), with [25:33; Heb. 12:16; Rom. 9:12, 13](#).

Forfeited by Reuben, [1 Chr. 5:1, 2](#).

Set aside: That of Manasseh, [Gen. 48:15-20](#); Adonijah, [1 Kin. 2:15](#); Hosah's son, [1 Chr. 26:10](#).

Gradually the rights of the eldest son came to be more definite: (1) The functions of the priesthood in the family with the paternal blessing. (2) A "double portion" of the paternal property was allotted by the Mosaic Law. ([21:16-17](#)) (3) The eldest son succeeded to the official authority of the father.

**In all these Jesus was the first-born of the father.**

The firstborn became head of the family and thus succeeded to the charge of the family property, becoming responsible for the maintenance of the younger sons, the widow or widows, and the unmarried daughters. He also, as head, succeeded to a considerable amount of authority over the other members. Further, he generally received the blessing, which placed him in close and favored covenant-relationship with Yahweh. According to the accounts which have come down to us, all these gifts and privileges could be diverted from the firstborn son.

This could happen with his own consent, as in the case of Esau, who sold his birthright to Jacob ([Gen 25:29-34](#)), or by the decision of the father, as in the case of Reuben ([Gen 48:22; 49:3,4; 1 Ch 5:1,2](#))