

PART ONE



SECTION TWO

THE FIRSTBORN. I want to show how the Hebrew concept **bekhór** (“firstborn,” בְּכוֹר) develops as it moves linguistically and theologically into Aramaic and then into Greek—especially how *bekhór* becomes **prōtotokos** in the Septuagint, and how its meaning expands even further in the writings of the Renewed Covenant. This progression creates a compelling bridge between the Hebrew TaNaK and early Christian theology. By tracing the idea of “firstborn” from **Hebrew → Aramaic → Greek → the Renewed Covenant**, we can observe not only the translation process but also the deepening of the concept itself—from a term grounded in family order and inheritance, to a covenantal designation, and ultimately to a title carrying messianic and resurrection significance. Finally, this study also raises an important question: **how does the concept apply in situations where there is no male heir?**

THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRSTBORN

1. Hebrew: בְּכוֹר (*bekhór*) – “firstborn”

Language family: Northwest Semitic (Biblical Hebrew)

Root: בכר (*b-kh-r*) — “to bear first,” “to be firstborn”

Basic meaning:

“One who opens the womb” — *peter rechem* (פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם) — Shemoth (Exodus) 13:2
i.e., the first male born of a woman or animal.

Expanded meanings in the Hebrew Bible:

- **Biological:** First male offspring (Beresheeth (Genesis) 4:1; Shemoth (Exodus) 13:2)
- **Legal:** Heir with double portion (*bekhorah*, בְּכוֹרָה)
- **Cultic:** Belongs to YHWH, must be redeemed (*pidyon ha-ben*)
- **Metaphoric/Theological:** Yisra’el as YHWH’s firstborn (Shemoth (Exodus) 4:22); royal title of preeminence (Tehillim (Psalms) 89:27)

Bekhór thus combines **birth order + inheritance + sanctity + election**.

2. Aramaic: בּוּכְרָא (*bukhra*) / בְּכוֹרָא (*bekhora*)

When Hebrew evolved into **Biblical Aramaic** (used in parts of Daniel, Ezra, and later Targums), *bekhór* became בּוּכְרָא (*bukhra*).

Examples:

- In the **Targums** (Aramaic paraphrases of the Torah), *bukhra* is used exactly like *bekhór*.
- Aramaic idiom also retains the same symbolic meaning: the **firstborn son** as “chief,” “beloved,” or “elect.”

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So, in **Aramaic-speaking Judaism** (1st century BCE–CE), *bukhra* was understood both literally (the first son) and metaphorically (**the chosen one, or chief among peers**).

Yeshua and his disciples, who spoke **Galilean Aramaic**, would have used *bukhra* for “firstborn,” linking directly back to the Hebrew *bekhór*.

2. Greek: πρωτότοκος (*prōtotokos*)

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (the **Septuagint**, 3rd–2nd c. BCE), translators chose the Greek word **πρωτότοκος** (*prōtotokos*), literally:

prōtos (πρῶτος) = first

tokos (τόκος) = birth, offspring

→ “firstborn.”

This Greek term is a **precise translation** of *bekhór*, but it eventually gained **cosmic and theological depth** when used for Yeshua in the Renewed Covenant.

3. Hebrew → Greek Shifts in Meaning

Level	Hebrew (<i>bekhór</i>)	Greek (<i>prōtotokos</i>)	Meaning/Emphasis
Literal	First child to open the womb	Same	Biological Firstborn
Legal	Heir, double portion	“Chief heir” (metaphorical)	Rights of inheritance
Sacred	Belongs to YHWH; redeemed	Dedicated to Eloah	Divine ownership
National	Israel = YHWH’s firstborn (Ex 4:22)	Applied to “people of Eloah”	Election, covenant
Royal	Davidic king = “firstborn” (Ps 89:27)	Applied to Messiah	Supremacy, kingship
Eschatological Expectation of chosen heir Yeshua = “firstborn of all creation / from the dead” Preeminence, resurrection			

Thus, by the time of the **Septuagint and early Christianity**, *prōtotokos* carried both **Jewish theological weight** and **Greek philosophical overtones** — linking **order, supremacy, and creative origin**.

4. The Renewed Covenant Reinterpretation

The shlichim (apostles) intentionally use *prōtotokos* to **connect Yeshua with the Hebrew concept of the firstborn**:



Verse	Phrase	Meaning in Hebrew context
Luke 2:7	"Her <i>firstborn son</i> " (<i>ton huion autēs ton prōtotokon</i>)	Mary fulfills the <i>peter rechem</i> law — Yeshua consecrated to YHWH
Romans 8:29	"Firstborn among many brothers"	Yeshua as <i>Bekhór</i> of the new covenant family
Colossians 1:15	"Firstborn of all creation" (<i>prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs</i>)	Like Psalm 89:27: preeminence, not creatureliness — the heir over all
Colossians 1:18	"Firstborn from the dead"	Heir of resurrection life — inaugurates new creation
Hebrews 1:6	"When He brings the firstborn into the world..."	Echoes <i>Bekhór</i> YHWH (Ps 89:27; Ex 4:22)
Hebrews 12:23 "Church of the firstborn [plural]" Believers share in the <i>bekhorah</i> (inheritance) through the <i>Bekhór</i> (the Messiah)		

In short: In Hebrew, *bekhór* = one consecrated to Eloah by birth and redeemed by sacrifice. In Greek, *prōtotokos* = one preeminent over creation and death. In Yeshua, these merge: He is **born**, **sacrificed**, and **raised** — the perfect Firstborn.

5. Aramaic Echoes in Early Christianity

The **Peshitta** (Syriac Aramaic Bible, 2nd century CE) translates *prōtotokos* as ܒܚܝܪܐ (*bukhrā*), same as Hebrew *bekhór*. So in the earliest Christian Semitic tradition, Yeshua is still called: ܒܚܝܪܐ ܕܟܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ (*bukhrā d-kol baritha*) — "the firstborn of all creation."

This keeps the Jewish nuance of "**heir and representative of Eloah**" rather than implying "first created being." The *bukhrā* is **the rightful heir, the one through whom the Father's house is continued** — exactly what Yeshua claims in the Gospels.

1. Summary: The Journey of the Word

Language	Word	Pronunciation	Core Meaning	Expanded Theological Meaning
Hebrew	בְּכוֹר	<i>bekhór</i>	Firstborn, heir, consecrated	Belongs to Eloah; Yisra'el's identity
Aramaic	ܒܚܝܪܐ / ܒܚܝܪܐ	<i>bukhra</i>	Same	Chosen one; eldest son

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Language	Word	Pronunciation	Core Meaning	Expanded Theological Meaning
Greek	πρωτότοκος	<i>prōtotokos</i>	Firstborn	Supremacy, preeminence, resurrection
Latin	primogenitus	<i>primogenitus</i>	Firstborn	Later theological term in the Vulgate
English “firstborn” — Inherited full spectrum of meanings				

7. Theological Arc (Hebrew → Greek → Christian Thought)

1. **Hebrew:** The *bekhór* is consecrated and redeemed — Eloah’s possession.
2. **Aramaic/Jewish:** The *bukhra* is both the heir and the chosen representative.
3. **Greek/Christian:** The *prōtotokos* is supreme over all creation and death — Yeshua as divine heir and redeemer.
4. **Believers:** Through Messiah, all become *bekhorim* — “firstborn ones,” heirs with Him (Ivrim (Hebrews 12:23)).

So the “firstborn” theme, rooted in ancient Hebrew family law, becomes a **cosmic and redemptive truth**: The *Firstborn of Eloah* redeems the Firstborn of the world, making all who believe **sons and heirs** with Him.

THE CONCEPTUAL APPLICATION OF THE FIRSTBORN

This brings me now to an interesting question. Can a woman become a firstborn if there are no sons in Hebrew? The answer is yes, the **status of “firstborn”** (*bekhór*, בְּכוֹר) in Hebrew law and culture is primarily **male-centered**. Still, the TaNaK *does* contain nuances and exceptions that show how inheritance and “firstborn” rights could be **adapted** when no sons were present. Let’s unpack this carefully from **Hebrew, legal, and narrative** perspectives.

1. The Hebrew Word *Bekhór* Is Grammatically Masculine

- בְּכוֹר (*bekhór*) literally means *firstborn male*, derived from the root בכר (*b-kh-r*) — “to bear first.”
- The feminine form בְּכִירָה (*bekhirah*) or בְּכוֹרָה (*bekhorah*) appears rarely, since the legal and cultic systems were centered on **male heirs**.

In the Torah, the *bekhór* refers to:

- “the firstborn **son** who opens the womb” (*kol peter rechem zakhar*, כָּל־פֶּטֶר־רֶחֶם זָכָר) — Shemoth (Exodus) 13:12.
→ The masculine qualifier **zakhar (male)** shows that the ritual *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the Firstborn) applies **only to sons**.
- So, formally in Torah law, a **daughter is not a “firstborn” in the ritual or legal sense of *bekhór***.



2. Legal Rights When There Are No Sons

Even though the *bekhór* privilege applied to sons, **the Torah provides for daughters to inherit** when no male heirs exist. Bamidbar (Numbers) 27:1-11 — The Daughters of Zelophehad

- Five women — **Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah** — came before Moses because their father died with **no sons**.
- They argued: “Why should our father’s name be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s brothers” (v. 4).
- YHWH replies that **their claim is just**, and commands that **daughters may inherit** when no sons exist.

This case established a **legal precedent** in Hebrew law: **If there are no sons, daughters inherit the father’s estate.**

This effectively **extends the “firstborn” function** — continuity of name and inheritance — to women **in the absence of male heirs**. So, while a daughter isn’t *called* a *bekhór*, she **functions as the firstborn heir** if she inherits the estate.

3. Broader Biblical and Rabbinic Understanding

a. No Ritual “Firstborn” Ceremony for Daughters

- The **redemption of the firstborn** (*pidyon ha-ben*) applies only to **male offspring**.
- Daughters were **not “redeemed”** because the ritual had to do with males set apart for priestly service (Bamidbar (Numbers) 3:40-51).

b. Inheritance Law Allows Female Substitution

- The Torah’s hierarchy of inheritance (Bamidbar (Numbers) 27:8–11) is:
 1. Sons
 2. Daughters
 3. Brothers
 4. Father’s brothers
 5. Nearest kin
- So, daughters were legitimate **heirs**, even if not *bekhorim*.

4. Rabbinic Thought

a. Mishnah (c. 200 CE)

The **Mishnah**, compiled around 200 CE, codifies inheritance law from the Torah with rabbinic clarifications.

Relevant tractates: Bava Batra 8:1-2

- **Primary rule:** “The sons inherit before daughters. If there are no sons, daughters inherit. If there are no sons or daughters, brothers inherit, and if none, then the next closest kin.”



- **Implication for the firstborn:**
 - The **firstborn male** still receives the **double portion** (*bekhorah*, Devarim (Deuteronomy 21:17)).
 - A daughter can inherit only **one portion**, even if she is the eldest.
 - Therefore, legally, she is **heir**, but **not a “firstborn” in the Torah sense**.

Example in Mishnah Bava Batra 8:3–4:

If a man dies leaving only daughters, the inheritance is **divided equally among them**, but the “double portion” of the Firstborn is **not applicable**, even if one daughter is older.

b. Talmudic Discussion (c. 3rd–5th century CE)

The **Babylonian Talmud** elaborates on this Mishnah principle:

- **Bava Batra 118b:**
 - Confirms daughters inherit **only when no sons exist**.
 - Emphasizes that **firstborn rights (double portion, priestly redemption)** are **strictly male privileges**.
- **Exceptions / rabbinic flexibility:**
 - In cases where **all sons are deceased**, a daughter can **functionally step in** to maintain the family line (name and estate).
 - Rabbinic commentary sometimes uses the term **“heir of the firstborn”** (*morashat ha-bekhor*) for eldest daughters in practical terms, though not in ritual law.

c. Second Temple Literature (c. 3rd century BCE – 1st century CE)

Key texts:

- **Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 4.8-9:**
 - Josephus retells the story of the **daughters of Zelophehad**, emphasizing that **Eloah’s law allowed daughters to inherit**. He frames it as a divine recognition of **equity**, even in a male-dominated system.
- **Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 42:15-17):**
 - Mentions **the importance of the firstborn**, but also the role of **righteous daughters** in preserving the family heritage.
 - Shows **ethical concern** for female heirs, even if legal ritual privileges remain male-only.
- **Qumran / Dead Sea Scrolls (4QXIc, 1QpHab):**
 - Commentary on the **Zelophehad daughters** is preserved in some fragments.
 - Highlights **community recognition** of daughters’ rights when no sons exist — supporting the idea that Hebrew inheritance law had built-in flexibility.

5. Narrative Echoes and Theological Symbolism

Even though Hebrew law is patriarchal, the **Word’s narrative voice** sometimes elevates **firstborn daughters** symbolically:



- **Leah**, as the *firstborn daughter* of Laban (Beresheeth (Genesis) 29:16), is explicitly called *habeckhirah* (הַבְּכִירָה) — “the elder” or “firstborn” daughter.
→ She represents *status* within her household, even if not a legal heir.
- **Miriam**, the eldest of Moses’ siblings, functions as the “firstborn” in leadership among her people — though not by title.
- **Yisra’el**, as “**Daughter Zion**” is called **Eloah’s firstborn** (Shemoth (Exodus) 4:22), showing that **gendered imagery is flexible** when used symbolically.

In other words, **the theology of firstbornness** — being chosen, redeemed, and consecrated can apply **to women and nations**, even if the **legal title** does not.

6. Later Theological Development

In later Messianic and Christian thought, “firstborn” came to mean **preeminent** or **chosen**, not strictly male.

- The *ekklesia prōtotokōn* (“assembly of the firstborn,” Ivrim (Hebrews) 12:23) includes **men and women** equally, all share the “firstborn inheritance” and double portion through Yeshua.
- Thus, **spiritually**, there is **no gender barrier** to the “firstborn” identity and “double portion” in the redeemed family of Eloah.

In Summary:

- In *legal and ritual* Hebrew terms, a woman cannot be a *bekhór* — that title and its privileges are masculine.
- But in *inheritance practice*, if no sons exist, a daughter can inherit as the **functional heir**, carrying forward the father’s name.
- And in *theological and prophetic* language, “firstborn” status (meaning chosen, consecrated, or beloved) and the double portion (meaning double blessed) — **can and does apply to women** and to **the whole community of Eloah’s people**.

Aspect	Sons	Daughters
Hebrew Term	בְּכוֹר (bekhór)	הַבְּכִירָה / בְּכִירָה (bekhirah) – rare
Legal “firstborn” status	Yes	No
Ritual redemption (<i>pidyon ha-ben</i>)	Yes	No
Inheritance rights (if no sons)	Yes	Yes (by special provision, Num 27)
Double portion privilege	Yes	Yes (Through Yeshua, Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17)
Symbolic/Spiritual application	Yes	Yes (e.g., “Daughter Zion,” Heb 12:23)