

daughters. Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died. When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of..." — and on it goes for the rest of the chapter, all the way to Noah.

Numbering was done by counting the firstborn males.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Count all the firstborn Israelite males who are a month old or more and make a list of their names. Take the Levites for Me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites. I am the Lord.' So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the Lord commanded him. The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273." (Numbers 3:40-43 NIV)

Firstborn sons received a double portion of the inheritance.

"But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn." (Deut. 21:16-18 NASB)

Just from *these* verses, it's easy to see that the firstborn *sons* had great significance to God. We might also note that in addition to these points, the firstborn son also carried the responsibility for the family.

So now, let's combine these principles from the Scriptures that we've just read with the order of creation relating to man and woman, the pattern that God was establishing had to be consistent. The male had to come first. Since His plan would place such great *significance* on the firstborn *male*, the firstborn had to be a male. We should also note that while God named Adam, Adam was the one who named Eve (Gen. 2:23 and 3:20). So from the very *beginning* God planned for the male to have extra responsibility. So the status of Adam — the firstborn male — or the first created — would carry certain requirements of responsibility. Adam was simply the "prototype" for the leadership God was to establish in the Church thousands of years later and in succeeding families. It's very important to note here that the role of the firstborn as leader (or the *responsibility* of leadership) did not guarantee spiritual superiority nor was it given because of superior spiritual strength. *It was a responsibility — not a reward or a recognition of ability.*

We've only scratched the surface here. Perhaps however, it's already becoming apparent that the concept of male leadership in the family and in the church was established by God — from the very beginning, with the creation of the first man and first woman. But we'll continue with more thoughts on this subject in the next issue.

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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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Firstborn

In the previous issue of *Diligence*, we discussed the subject of leadership. At the end of that article we stated: "there are serious compromises being made in the teaching of Truth in congregations of the New Testament Church these days. Those compromises are being advanced because of an extremely low regard for the *authority* of the Bible and a lack of knowledge of the Word." *One* of the more serious compromises being advanced in recent years concerns the subject of whether or not females can hold positions of leadership within the Church of the New Testament. While women can certainly hold positions of leadership in the secular world, the Church is unique and allows only male leadership. This is one of the ways in which the Lord's Church differs from organizations in the world. It is fairly certain that anyone who has been a part of the Body of Christ for very long at all has either heard questions about this subject or been involved in a discussion concerning this matter.

Misunderstandings regarding this discussion are often fueled by those who take one or two verses from the Scriptures and use them as "proof texts" to teach that the church has for centuries, not taught accurately about this subject. Unfortunately, those individuals not only fail to accept the *context* of those so called "proof texts" but also take into account Biblical teachings *in their entirety*. The concepts that establish male-only leadership in the church are a pattern that God began establishing from the very creation of mankind. In fact, those concepts have their roots deeply embedded in the importance that God placed on the firstborn human being — Adam. From the beginning of time, there have been principles apparent in the Scriptures that teach a pattern of male leadership in His church and in the home.

Many years ago we were involved in teaching a Sunday School class on this very subject. Those of you who knew us "back then" and were participants in that class will recognize that this is basically a verbatim re-run of that material. Since we have noticed however that the subject comes up over and over again, we feel that it's worth repeating. So in this issue, we're going to begin taking a look at a few principles taught in the Scriptures that will provide some insight concerning the subject of male leadership in the Church and in the home.

The first principle we will discuss is the matter of the importance of "firstborn" throughout the Scriptures. One need not go very many pages into the Bible to discover the first use of the word "firstborn." The term is used throughout the

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Scriptures in reference to animals as well as to humans. Depending on the Bible translation being used and the particular verse being studied, the word “firstling,” “eldest,” eldest son” or “birthright” may also be used instead of the word “firstborn.”

The first mention we find in the Scriptures of a firstborn is in Genesis 4:4 and is in reference to animals.

“But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering,” (NIV)

Of course, the term “firstborn” was also often used to identify the birth order of individuals in the family. Some examples of this are —

“Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn,...” (Genesis 10:15)

“Uz the firstborn,...” (Genesis 22:21)

“These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael,...” (Genesis 25:13)

“Jacob said to his father, ‘I am Esau your firstborn....’” (Genesis 27:19)

“His father Isaac asked him, ‘Who are you?’ ‘I am your son,’ he answered, ‘your firstborn, Esau.’” (Genesis 27:32)

“The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.” (Genesis 35:23)

This list could go on and on but as we progress through this study we will see that the special significance of the firstborn (particularly the firstborn *male*) was designated by God — not created by man’s custom or culture.

We can get a sense of just *how* important the birthright (or being the firstborn) was when we read this one exchange between Jacob and Esau.

“When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.’ Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ Esau said, ‘Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?’ And Jacob said, ‘First swear to me’; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.” (Genesis 25:29-33 NASB)

There is of course a lot more to that story of Jacob and Esau. Genesis chapter 27 records the account of how Jacob was able to deceive his father Isaac and receive the blessing intended for Esau, the firstborn. That entire account surely demonstrates just how very important the place of firstborn was in the family.

So to help better understand the pattern that God methodically established for leadership in the Church, we need to first understand more about the importance that He placed on the firstborn males. Let’s look at some Scriptural facts about that subject to get started.

The firstborn male was to be consecrated to God.

“Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to Me, whether man or animal.” (Ex. 13:2 NIV)

“Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats. You must give Me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to Me on the eighth day.” (Exodus 22:29-30 NIV)

Israel is referred to as the Lord’s firstborn son.

“Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is My firstborn son’” (Exodus 4:22 NIV)

The birthright or the right of inheritance came through the firstborn.

“If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father’s strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.” (Deuteronomy 21:15-17 NIV)

Throughout the Old Testament, the firstborn was associated almost exclusively with males or sons. There were special regulations to be followed if a man had no sons.

“Say to the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers.’” (Numbers 27:8-9 NIV)

“Every daughter who inherits land in any Israelite tribe must marry someone in her father’s tribal clan, so that every Israelite will possess the inheritance of his fathers. No inheritance may pass from tribe to tribe, for each Israelite tribe is to keep the land it inherits.” (Numbers 36:8-9 NIV)

Family lineage was most often traced through the firstborn sons.

Adam was the firstborn on this earth and his lineage — all the way to Noah is recorded in Genesis Chapter 5.

Genesis 5:1-9 — “This is the written account of Adam’s line. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, He called them ‘man.’ When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and