

# What Does the Bible Teach About Adoption?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

## Introduction:

- A. Giving children up for adoption can be a caring alternative for parents who may, for various reasons, be unable to care for their own children.
  - 1. It can also be an answer to prayer for many couples who have not been able to have children of their own.
  - 2. Adoption is the legal, covenant act whereby one leaves the natural family and enters into the privileges and responsibilities of another, by invitation of the parentages of the second family
- B. Bible adoptions
  - 1. Jochebed surrendered the care of Moses to God, Who, providentially placed him in the care of Pharaoh's daughter to be raised  
Ex. 1:15-22, 2:1-10
  - 2. Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai after her parents' death -  
Esther 2:7
  - 3. Jesus was not a biological son of Joseph, but Joseph raised Him as his own - Matt. 1:18-25
  - 4. God joyfully adopts obedient believers into His family through Christ -  
Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5
- C. Adoption, both physical and spiritual, is approved in Scripture.
  - 1. Mutually, those who adopt and those who are adopted are blessed.
  - 2. Adoption is more than legal, even though it is a legal process. Adoption is a relationship of promise that makes the bond mean much more to both the adoptive parents and the adopted children.
  - 3. Law and promise are different in principle, the one pivoting on reward or punishment for conduct, the other on acceptance of an unconditional gift - Rom. 4:13-14
  - 4. Interestingly, according to a Roman-Syrian law book, a man might be able to disown his biological son if he had good reason, but he could never disown his adopted son.
- D. Adoption: Jewish vs. Roman law
  - 1. Illustration: Paul wrote that the Spirit of God prompts us to call God Abba, the intimate Aramaic word for Father.
    - a. The Greek word for adoption, huiothesia, means "the placing as a son, adoption; figuratively, Christian son-ship in respect to God" (Strong's). It is used only by Paul five times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15, 23, 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).
  - 2. Roman, not Jewish, not Greek, adoption law parallels New Testament teaching. There was no structured Jewish adoption law; when a man died without male offspring to continue his line, his closest male relative was commanded to marry his widow and produce an heir (Levirate Marriage Law). Roman law, in contrast, allowed a man to create an heir from outside his family. (Scottish law professor Francis Lyall; Legal Metaphors in the Epistles: Slaves, Citizens, Sons; Zondervan, 1984).

- a. Old Testament Legal adoption was not prescribed in Jewish law or practiced by the Israelites. The term “adoption” does not occur in the Old Testament.
  - b. The Biblical foundation for the act of adopting children is primarily in the New Testament.
  - c. The adoption metaphor was understood by Israel - Isa. 1:2; Hosea 11:1; Ex. 4:22; Psalm 2:7; 2Sam. 7:14
3. Legal adoption in Roman law was not for the sake of the child. Children could always be fostered, but adoption was to preserve the family. The Roman household was a worshiping unit, and it needed a male leader at its head to offer prayers and sacrifices to the “family gods.” Worshiping families were the building blocks of Roman society. In adoption, the adoptee got a new identity. His old obligations and debts were wiped out, and new obligations were assumed. (Lyll)
4. The second reason is the matter of inheritance. In modern law, we do not become heirs until someone dies. Paul's metaphor is not compatible with modern laws which suggest that we couldn't be God's heirs without God's death. But in Roman law, all the members of a family held their property jointly with the father of the family. This is the legal background to Paul's saying that “if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). In other words, “Birth, not death, constituted heirship.” (Lyll)
5. Therefore, we must try to understand adoption in scripture in the context of its time and setting rather than seeing it through the lenses of contemporary adoption law.

## **I. FUNDAMENTALS OF ADOPTION**

- A. The deepest and strongest foundation of adoption is not in the act of humans adopting humans, but in God adopting humans. Divine adoption is not part of His general providence in the world; it is at the heart of the gospel
  - 1. Gal. 4:4-5; John 1:12-13
  - 2. Human adoption of human children imitates and follows the model of Divine adoption of humans
- B. Scriptural purposes of adoption
  - 1. Adoption upholds marriage as fundamental to parenting. Families are an extension of the marriage covenant - Gen. 1:24; Mal. 2:16
  - 2. Adoption upholds scriptural emphasis on the role of the father - Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:19
  - 3. Adoption is a scriptural metaphor that emphasizes the permanence of our relationship with God, the rights we have as His children and His redemption of us.
  - 4. Adoption is the expression of God's grace and love - Heb. 4:14-16; John 1:12-13; 1John 3:1
  - 5. Adoption is for the well-being of children - Psalm 68:5-6

## **II. ADOPTION AS AN EXPRESSION OF BENEVOLENCE TOWARD ORPHANS**

- A. Welcoming and accepting children - Matt. 18:5
  - 1. Christians view children and their needs with the same love and deep concern as that of Jesus.
  - 2. The needs and concerns of adults are NOT more important than those of children; in fact, they may be less so, as an adult is less vulnerable than a child.
- B. Actively caring for children at risk and in need - James 1:27
  - 1. One can practice every matter of the doctrine of Christ diligently and soundly, except that he does not actively care for children in need, and he is as lost as if he were a Denominationalist, Buddhist, or Muslim
- C. Adoption is an excellent means of keeping God's command for Christians to care for orphans.

## **III. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN DIVINE ADOPTION AND HUMAN ADOPTION**

- A. Adoption was (for God) and is (for us) costly - John 3:16; Gal. 3:13
- B. Adoption did (for God) and does (for us) involve the legal status of the children Gal. 4:6
- C. Adoption was blessed and is blessed by God's affirmation of our official relationship - Rom. 8:15-16
- D. Adoption was (for God) and is (for us) marked by transformation - Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:10-11, 5:8
- E. Adoption brings us the rights of being heirs of the Father, and brings our children the rights of heirs of their adoptive parents - Gal. 4:7
- F. Adoption was (for God) and is (for us) deliberately and carefully planned - Eph. 1:4-6
- G. Adoption was for us, and often is now for children, a form of deliverance from terrible conditions. God's love would not allow Him to abandon us to suffer in those conditions, nor are loving, potential adoptive parents willing to leave orphans to suffer without care - Eph. 2:3; Hosea 11:1
- H. Adoption meant (for God) and means (for parents) that parents sacrifice and suffer now and experience glory later - Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:22-23
- I. Adoption for God and humans becomes a permanent relationship - Rom. 9:8; Gal. 4:28; Eph. 2:19

## **IV. ADOPTION IS AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL**

- A. God will always receive, cherish, and keep His children
  - 1. Psalm 27:10; John 14:18; Isa. 49:15; John 8:35
- B. God gives His adopted children all of the privileges, and more, that are given to biological children
  - 1. Heb. 12:7; Num. 6:27
- C. God has revealed the means whereby His adoption is accomplished
  - 1. Matt. 12:50; Eph. 3:6; Rev. 21:7; 2Cor. 6:17-18; Matt. 5:9, 45