

## The Doctrine of Adoption

### 1. The Idea of Adoption in the Old Testament

A. Nationally. Rom. 9:4. See Exod. 4:22 and Hosea 11:1. Apart from any greatness in the nation herself, God chose to treat Israel as His own son (Deut. 7:7-8).

B. Familial. There does not seem to be adoption in the sense we think of it in the Hebrew law. It is present in Roman law. Certainly the doctrine of adoption as we know it in the NT era (in its spiritual sense) was not revealed in the OT. However, there were some instances that seem to be family adoption in the OT:

1. Moses – Exod. 2:10, as a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. See Heb. 11:24.
2. Genubath – 1 Kings 11:20, as a son of Pharaoh.
3. Esther – Est. 2:7, 15.
4. Eliezer – Gen. 15:2. This passage may not indicate a full adoption, since Abraham had no children and Eliezer his servant may have been the customary one to whom the inheritance would fall in such a case. The case of the servant is also mentioned in Prov. 17:2 and 29:21 where it seems more like the owner would write the servant into his will rather than adopt him as a son. Still, the ideas of inheritance and adoption are closely related, as we will see.

C. Relation to care for orphans and widows. A number of OT texts commend the compassionate care for orphans, so it seems that adoption in the case of parents who died, for instance, would be the natural thing for relatives to do for a child. It might have “gone without saying” that this would happen.

### 2. Adoption in the Present Dispensation

A. Definition. Adoption is a judicial or declarative or legal act having to do with the believer’s relationship to God as his Father, namely, that the believer is placed as an adult son of God and giving all the rights and privileges of a son. It secures *sonship*. It is not experiential. On the other side of the coin, God becomes the Father of the believer. He is the father of all things in a creative sense (Acts 17:29; Eph. 4:6) but at salvation becomes Father in the redemptive sense. Illustration: Note the title of Michael Reagan’s book “Twice Adopted.”

B. The status or standing with God thus bestowed is what is emphasized, not the process of transference. That is, the emphasis on adoption in the Bible is (using a modern adoption proceedings as an illustration) not on the legal paperwork and court proceedings and fees, but is on the *resulting status that the child enjoys* with his new parents.

C. Contrasted to justification. Justification, while also judicial in nature, has to do with the believer’s righteous standing before God. Adoption secures the believer’s standing as a son. Certainly one comes with the other so that they cannot be separated! That is, there are no justified, non-sons, nor are there sons who are not justified. You are either both or neither.

D. Contrasted to regeneration. Regeneration provides spiritual life to the (formerly) spiritually dead person. Thus we can say that the person becomes a child of God by virtue of the fact that he has new life. *Simultaneously*, divine adoption proceedings occur and the child becomes a full-fledged, mature, adopted son with all the “rights and privileges” of a son of God. Thus the one does not happen without the other. Child by birth into the family, son by adoption in the legal realm. The terms *son* and *child*, however, are not always used in such a

technical sense. See the parallels in Gal. 4:6-7 (*son*) and Rom. 8:15-17 (*children*) for instance.

E. Texts using the word *adoption* (huiiothesia υιοθεσία).

Rom. 8:15 – here adoption is tied to the indwelling presence of the Spirit. This goes with freedom from bondage to fear, assurance and an inheritance of God with Christ. The assurance includes assurance of sonship, not just salvation in general because the Spirit helps your heart to cry out to God as Father. See Rom. 8:15-16, Gal. 4:6-7.

Rom. 8:23 – the ultimate end of adoption is called the redemption of our bodies.

Gal. 4:5 – adoption based on Christ’s redemptive work. This passage is parallel with Rom. 8:15 and so also teaches that there is assurance, freedom from the law, and an inheritance as a son.

Eph. 1:5 – God sovereignly originated adoption through election for his own glory (1:6).

F. Texts using the word *son* (huios υιος). There are a lot of these.

Gal. 3:26 – sonship received through faith.

G. Sometimes there is a contrast between “children” ( τέκνα) and “sons” ( υιος).

H. Note that the fatherhood God sustains with believers begins at salvation and must be distinguished from the eternal fatherhood relationship that He has with the Son of God Jesus Christ. The Bible overloads the term “father” to cover both concepts (2 John 3).

### 3. Implications of Adoption for Today

There are some texts that uses the idea of ‘sons’ or ‘my sons’ that show us the “standard of living” for sons:

1. Led by the Spirit – Rom. 8:14.
2. Separation – 2 Cor. 6:14-18.
3. Discipline – Heb. 12:5-8.
4. Out of place in the world – 1 John 3:1

### 4. Implications of Adoption for the Future

Rom. 8:18-25 says that full disclosure of the sons of God (their adopted status) will be unveiled or revealed at the time of our future redemption (v. 19). This will be accompanied by great glory (v. 18). The creation eagerly awaits to see this (do you?) (v. 19-22). This will come with the redemption of our body (v. 23; cf. 1 John 3:2). All of this we eagerly hope for (v. 24-25) though we do not yet see it.

Basically we are awaiting the complete experience of adoption and the rest of the inheritance that comes with it (Rev. 21:6-7). Oh what glory to be in the presence of our Heavenly Father as His own sons!

Please note that this does not degrade our current status as adopted sons of God. It is only meant to say that while things are good beyond measure now in this standing which we have, they will be even better then! It’s like salvation in itself. We have it without question now, but just wait until we enter into the eternal blessing of what we call “ultimate” or “final” salvation when we are with Christ. It will be “better,” as Paul says, Php. 1:21, 23.