

Adoption

Becoming someone's child by a legal process.

Sometimes the Bible refers to adoption on a human level, but the image of adoption as our relationship to the Father is far more important. Three main pictures of adoption are: (1) Israel becoming God's adopted son in the Old Testament. (2) Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ become family as children and heirs. The Spirit leads them to become children of God and confirms that reality in them. (3) Believers looking forward to their full adoption at the resurrection of the dead.

I. From the human point of view

A. Abram considered adoption – [Gen. 15:2-5](#)

B. Moses was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter – Ex. 2:10

C. Mordecai adopted his orphaned cousin, Esther – Est. 2:7

D. A wife adopts a maid's son – [Gen. 16:1-3](#), [30:3](#); 9-12

II. Adoption in relationship to God

A. It is rooted in God's eternal love – [Eph. 1:4-5](#); [Rom. 8:29](#); [1 Jn. 3:1](#)

B. Israel is God's adopted son – Ex. 4:22-23; Dt. 14:2; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Rom. 9:4

C. Christians are God's adopted children.

1. We become children by God's grace – [Eph. 1:5-6](#)

2. We become children through faith in Jesus Christ – [Jn. 1:12-13](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)

3. We can call God Father – Mt. 6:9; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6-7
4. We become brothers & sisters of Jesus – Mk. 3:34-35; Heb. 2:11-12
5. We are united as one body in Christ – Eph. 2:11-13, 19; 3:6
6. Our adoption is completed at the resurrection – Rom. 8:19, 23; 1 Jn. 3:2

D. Results of being God’s children.

1. We receive the rights of inheritance – Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7
2. We must walk in light – Jn. 12:35-36; Eph. 5:8-10; 1 Th. 5:4-5
3. We must live as obedient children – 1 Pet. 1:13-16
4. We must live in peace – Mt. 5:9; Eph. 2:17-19
5. We must live in love – Mt. 5:44-45; Lk. 6:35
6. We must separate ourselves from evil – 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Phil. 2:15
7. We are subject to God’s discipline – Heb. 12:5-11
8. We can expect suffering, but the glory will be far greater – Rom. 8:18-28; 2 Cor. 4:17; Mt. 5:11-12

Adoption (*huiiothesia*, “placing as a son”), was a Roman, not a Jewish, practice; not all offspring were heirs. You do not get into God’s family by adoption—you get into His family by regeneration: the new birth (Jn. 3:1-18; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His “born ones” an adult standing in the family, so that we can immediately begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our spiritual wealth! An infant cannot legally use this inheritance (Gal. 4:1-7), but an adult son can—and should. The future aspect of adoption is in Romans 8:22-23.

In regeneration a Christian receives the nature of a child of God; in adoption he receives the position of a son of God (Jn. 1:11). The moment he believes (Gal. 3:25-26; 4:6; 1 Jn. 3:1,2), the full manifestation of this sonship awaits the resurrection, change, and translation of saints, called the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 1 Thess. 4:14-17; 1 Jn. 3:2). There is no procedure to become “un-adopted.”

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GEN. 15:2-5 NOTE:

Abram Considered Adoption

Eliezer was the heir of his house.

Gen. 15:2-5 (NKJV) But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” [3] Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” [5] Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Gen. 15:2 Note: “**heir**” (“steward” KJV) **ben**, pronounced bane. Used many times and translated several ways, is from the Hebrew word (*banah*); a son (as a builder of the family name). The Lord had promised Abram seed before and was repeating His promise here. Yet, Abram brings up the fact that he was still childless. This could be a request for clarification but I think it is just plain old doubt.

Gen. 15:3 Note: The Lord had given seed to Abram, but it was still in the form of a promise (Gen. 12:2 and 13:14-16). Since we know that all the promises of God are yes and amen (2 Cor. 1:20). We see here that Abram was looking at things in the natural.

Gen. 15:4 Note: The Lord had promised Abram before that his seed would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16). But this is the first time He had specifically said that Abram’s seed would be from his own body. In those days, a servant could be adopted and so become the seed that would receive the inheritance. Abram was questioning to see if this is what God intended. I’m sure Abram was very blessed to learn God planned on fulfilling His promise through Abram’s own seed.

Gen. 15:5 Note: The Lord had previously told Abram that his seed would be as numerous as the dust of the ground (Gen. 13:16). Now He gives Abram another analogy. His seed would be as numerous as the stars in heaven. Both of these would be impossible to number. This painted quite a picture for Abram.

The very fact that the Lord took Abram outside and told him to look and see if he could count the stars tells us that this discourse took place at night. It continued until the evening as can be seen in Genesis 15:12. So this whole encounter could have taken place from 12 to nearly 24 hours.

Abram didn't have the same type of shoes that we have. He wore sandals, and every day he got dust on his feet. He didn't live in a city but dwelt in tents, and every evening he looked at the stars. So, the Lord was reminding Abram day and night of His promise.

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[<< Go Back](#)

GEN. 16:1-3 NOTE:

Adoption Causes Problems

Gen. 16:1-3 (KJV) – Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. [2] And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. [3] And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

Gen. 16:1 Note: Abram's whole purpose in life revolved around producing the promised seed. It would have been easy for him to have justified leaving Sarai and getting a wife that would fulfill his dreams. Or, as he did here, add a wife that would further his purpose. But that produced nothing but trouble for his family and the world ever since.

The end does not justify the means. This example from Abram's life proves conclusively that there is a right and a wrong way to accomplish God's directions. We not only need to know God's will, but God's plan for accomplishing that will.

Gen. 16:2 Note: Sarai blamed her barrenness on the Lord. God gave men and women the ability to procreate, and if those laws are acted on, a child results. If Sarai's statement was true and they really believed that the Lord is the one who had kept her from having children, why would they want to gain children in some other way? Against God's will? The logic of this whole situation is wrong.

It doesn't appear from this account that there was any resistance on Abram's part to this suggestion. If he would have inquired of the Lord about this as Mary did when she received a promise of an impossible birth (Lk. 1:34), he might have been told that Sarai was the one who would bring forth this promised seed, and this whole Arab-Israeli conflict could have been avoided.

Gen. 16:3 Note: Abram was 85 at this time (Gen. 12:4). Sarai was about 76. The Scripture doesn't give Hagar's age. She may have been one of the slaves Pharaoh had given to Abram over the incident where Pharaoh nearly took Sarai to be his wife (Gen. 12:16).

This is prior to God healing Abram and/or Sarai so they could have children. Quite a testimony to Abram's physical state to still be able to have children at the age of 85.

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[<< Go Back](#)



GEN. 30:3 NOTE:

Adoption, Not Always the Answer

Gen. 30:3 (KJV) And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.

Jacob's grandmother Sarah had done this same thing with Hagar and produced Ishmael (Gen. 16:2-5). It didn't work then, and it didn't work here. It's a shame when one generation learns nothing from the older ones.

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[<< Go Back](#)

Adoption is Predetermined

Eph. 1:4-5 (KJV) – According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: [5] Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Eph. 1:4 Note 1: The phrase “according as” means “corresponding to the way in which” (American Heritage Dictionary). Paul was explaining to what degree we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). It goes beyond our ability to conceive.

We were chosen in Christ before the world began. We are holy and without blame because God sees us through Christ. We have had it predetermined that we will be God’s children (Eph. 1:5). We have been accepted by God (Eph. 1:6). We are redeemed and forgiven (Eph. 1:7). We have all of God’s wisdom and prudence (Eph. 1:8). The mysteries of God have been revealed to us (Eph. 1:9). We are truly blessed!

Eph. 1:4 Note 2: The Lord did not choose us on our merit, but solely on our acceptance of Christ. His foreknowledge (*see* Rom. 8:29 note) allowed Him to make before that choice the foundation of the world. In the strictest sense, we were not personally chosen; Christ was chosen, and all those who are “in Christ” partake of His being chosen by His Father. Just as we are the beneficiaries of the covenant between God the Father and His Son, Jesus (*see* Gal. 3:29), so are we chosen because we chose God’s chosen; i.e., Christ. The Father would no more reject us than He would reject Jesus, because we are accepted by the Father through Christ (Eph. 1:6).

Eph. 1:4 Note 3: This verse reveals that God the Father had the plan of salvation worked out before He even created the world. Most of us would not have created the world and man if we knew the heartache and terrible sacrifice that act would cost. God is not man, and in His judgment (which is the correct judgment), the prize was worth all the cost.

Eph. 1:4 Note 4: None of us can claim that we are without blame in the sight of man, because man looks on the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7) and all of us have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The Lord looks on

our born-again spirits, which have been regenerated in Christ, and He sees us holy and without blame.

Eph. 1:5 Note 1: The Greek word that was translated ‘predestinated’ here was used twice in Ephesians (this verse and Eph. 1:11) and twice in Romans (Rom. 8:29-30). Predestination and foreknowledge go hand-in-hand, and there are detailed notes on these words in my note at Romans 8:29. A misunderstanding of predestination being based on God’s foreknowledge has led some people to believe God predestines some to damnation. That is not so (*see Rom. 9:11; Jn. 12:39; Lk. 22:22 concerning predestination.*)

Eph. 1:5 Note 2: “Adoption” was a term used only by the Apostle Paul in Scripture. It found its roots in Roman culture rather than Jewish. Through adoption, old ties were severed, and the new father became full owner of the child with all legal rights. In Rome, a slave could have the full rights as that of a Roman citizen through adoption. Through adoption, believers now have had all ties severed from their old master and have now become the property of their heavenly Father as heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:5 Note 3: The Lord didn’t just save us out of pity or a sense of obligation as our Creator. He saved us because He loved us (John 3:16). It was the “good pleasure of his will” for us to become adopted sons. We are wanted and accepted (Eph. 1:6) by our Father!

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[<< Go Back](#)

God's Predetermined Love

Rom. 8:29 (KJV) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Rom. 8:29 Note 1: This verse is the key to predestination (1 Peter 1:2). God only predestinates those who He foreknew would accept Him. He has never predestinated anyone to hell. Those He knew would accept Him as Savior are predestinated to become just like Jesus. As we renew our minds, this can happen to a degree in this life, but every true believer will be exactly like Jesus when we see Him (1 Jn. 3:1-2).

Rom. 8:29 Note 2: The word “foreknowledge” refers to God knowing who would accept His offer of salvation in advance of them actually doing it. The Scriptures teach that we (believers) were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). That’s how infinite God’s ability is to know our choices in advance.

The Scriptures also reveal that there are some things God does not know. Twice in the book of Jeremiah, God said the fact that people would offer their children as sacrifices to demon gods never even came into His mind (Jer. 19:5, 32:35). There are some things that God Himself said He had never foreseen.

It is most probable that the Lord has the ability to know everything in advance, but He simply doesn’t choose to exercise that ability in every situation. He told us to be wise concerning that which is good, and simple (or innocent) concerning that which is evil (Rom. 16:19). He also told us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and things that have virtue and praise (Phil. 4:8). That’s the way He desires us to be because that’s the way He is.

Therefore, when God acted surprised that Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden tree, He probably was. As we have already pointed out from Eph. 1:4, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He knew there would be a transgression and a need for redemption before man was even created. But apparently, He did not utilize His foreknowledge to the extent that He knew every move that man was making. No reason is given for this, but certainly one reason

is that an absolute use of God's foreknowledge would hinder His relationship with man.

God sent two angels to Sodom and Gomorrah to see if their actions were really as bad as had been reported to Him (Gen. 18:20-19:29). The Lord tested Abraham (Gen. 22:1-10). After the test, He said, "For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Gen. 22:12). The Lord repented for choosing Saul to be king when He saw the way he turned out (1 Sam. 15:11). The Scripture contains many other examples besides these.

God's ability to know all things in advance is limitless, but by His choice, God does not know every detail. Understanding foreknowledge provides the foundation for understanding predestination (*see note 2 at this verse*), calling (Rom. 8:30), and election (1 Pet. 1:2).

Rom. 8:29 Note 3: This verse provides the key for unlocking the answer to the doctrine of predestination. Predestination is dependent on foreknowledge (*see note 1 at this verse*).

The word "predestinate" means to predetermine. "Predestinate" and its variant "predestinated" are only used four times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11). People have interpreted this doctrine as saying that God predetermines everything in people's lives, including whether they will be saved or lost. This interpretation is not consistent with other doctrines or examples in Scripture. This belief will destroy people's motivation to fight evil and do good. If God predetermines everything that happens in people's lives, then everything that happens to them is God's will—even sin. That is not true.

This verse limits God's predestination to only those whom He foreknew. This means that only those people who God knew would accept His offer of salvation have been predestined. He does not predestine people to be saved or lost. Those whom He foreknew in Christ have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. As we can tell by observation, God doesn't even force that to happen. With some Christians, this will not occur until they receive their glorified bodies, but it will occur.

God gave all people free will, and God will not violate that free will except in judgment. Even in judgment, God is only enforcing the choices that people have already made of their own free will. All

people have a God-given right to go to hell if they want to.

Just as in Romans 8:28, God works everything together for good for those who already love Him. And even then He does not take away their free will. Everything that happens to them is not good, and it is not from God. However, God, in His infinite wisdom, can work it together for good (*see Rom. 8:28*). Romans 8:29 is simply continuing to develop the truth that God is for man and has predetermined that those who have come to Him for salvation will be saved to the uttermost.

Understood correctly, this verse provides great reassurance to believers that God is for them and working with them to bring them to the complete stature of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Rom. 8:29 Note 4: This English word “firstborn” was translated from the Greek word “PROTOKOS.” According to Strong’s Concordance, this is a compound Greek word comprised of “PROTOS,” which means “foremost (in time, place, order or importance),” and “TIKTO,” which means “to produce (from seed...).” Therefore, this word “firstborn” could refer to either first in order or importance. Both of these applications are true of Jesus.

Although others were raised from the dead before Jesus (*see Mk. 16:6*), Jesus was the first one to be raised from the dead never to die again. Jesus was also the firstborn in the sense of importance, since His resurrection made all other resurrections possible.

In context, Paul was stressing that we believers are predestined to be just like Jesus, then he drew from scripture that prophesied Jesus being the firstborn (Ps. 89:27). Therefore, the point being made is the extent that we will be conformed to the image of Jesus. There are other children who will become just like Jesus, and it is in this sense that “firstborn” is used here.

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[<< Go Back](#)

1 JN. 3:1 NOTE:

The truth that God is our heavenly Father

1 Jn. 3:1 (KJV) – Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

The fact that we are God’s children is one of the greatest revelations in the New Testament. Being a child of God is the highest privilege of our salvation (Jn. 1:12; Gal. 4:7).

Being a child of God is the basis for our faith and trust in God (Mt. 6:25-34) and our hope of glory for the future. As children of God, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17; Gal. 4:7).

God wants us to continually realize by the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15), that we are His children. The Spirit produces the cry “Abba” (Father) in our hearts (*see* Gal. 4:6, note) and gives us the desire to be “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14).

Being a child of God is the basis for our discipline by the Father (Heb. 12:6-7,11) and the reason we live to please God (1 Jn. 3:9; 4:17-19). God’s ultimate goal in making us His children is to save us forever (Jn. 3:16) and to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29).

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[<< Go Back](#)

Adoption is Predetermined (Eph. 1:4-5)

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[<< Go Back](#)

JN. 1:12-13 NOTE:

Jn. 1:12-13 (KJV) – But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: [13] Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Jn. 1:12 Note 1: This verse speaks of the privileges of those who receive Jesus. Jesus gives His supernatural power to all those who believe on His name. This power enables them to become sons of God. This isn't speaking only of eternal son-ship in heaven, but it denotes victory in this life, too, as Jesus experienced it. In John 10:10, Jesus said, *"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."* This is present tense, The thief is here now, and abundant life is here now – choose life!

So, those who are truly born of God do have the power of God to enable them to win in life. They may not use that power, but it is there. Christians shouldn't deny this power by coming to the Lord as pathetic beggars.

Jn. 1:13 Note 1: This is the same truth Jesus expounded to Nicodemus in John 3:1-8. Those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior are born from above or of God. This isn't just a natural birth. It's supernatural, and without it no one can enter into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3-5).

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[<< Go Back](#)

GAL. 3:26 NOTE:

Gal. 3:26 Note 1: Paul was continuing the comparison begun in the previous verses. In the same way that children grow out from under the authority and control of their “PAIDAGOGOS” (“schoolmaster” - see Gal. 3:24), so have we come out from under the authority and control of the Law. We now have liberty, privileges, and rights as full-grown children.

This does not mean that we are lawless any more than it means that children no longer do what is right once they are on their own. But it does mean we have the right to choose now without being motivated by fear of punishment prescribed by the Law. We should live righteously because it's the best way to live, not because we'll be punished if we don't.

Children are taught to look both ways before crossing the street for their own safety. But until the children are on their own, disobedience to that rule is dealt with by punishment. So, at a young age, children follow this rule, not to keep from getting hit by a car, but to keep from being punished. As adults, they should continue to walk by the same rule, but fear of punishment should not be a part of their reasoning.

Likewise, the Old Testament Law gave standards that were enforced by punishments. Many interpreted these punishments as God's hatred for sin instead of His love for His children. We all heard our parents say “This spanking is going to hurt me more than it hurts you”; the reason the Lord gave the punishments of the O.T. Law was to turn us from self and sin for our own profit. Now that we are full-grown sons, He is not punishing us. We may punish ourselves through bearing the consequences of our sins, but our heavenly Father is not punishing us.

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[<< Go Back](#)