

What does “ADOPTION” Really mean? Arnold Kennedy

The commonly accepted doctrine about *Jews and Gentiles* provides a basis for the popular thought that non-Israelites can be *adopted* into Israel. In the Old Testament it is claimed that *strangers* who became circumcised, kept the Passover and Law of Moses and became *as Israel*. On the surface this looks to be a reasonable case and appears to fit together in a unified view. However, these views are contested; the intention is to show:

[a] That *adoption* refers to the *adoption of Sons* out of the Children of Israel, ‘sons’ being *huios* and ‘children’ being *teknon*.

[b] That *strangers* in the Old Testament may often refer to Israelites who were resident among other nations, living apart from the main body of Israel. There are different words for “strangers” in both Testaments, some being foreigners and some being Israelites.

THE WORD “ADOPTION”

The word translated poorly as “adoption” is *huiiothesia* and it occurs only five times in the New Testament. It is not found in the gospels although the proper meaning or principle is there. Before we examine the five Scriptures, and the context in which they are used, it is better to first look at the word *huiiothesia* itself. Lexicons do not agree precisely on the meaning of the word. Typically, they give meanings such as, *adoption as a son*, but this is a vague compromise.

Vine states *huiiothesia* is a composite word consisting of: *Huios* = a son and *Thesis* = a placing, or setting. Hence it means, *the placing of a son or the placing of sons*.

From Bullinger’s comments::

Adoption = sonship. An adopted child may partake of all the privileges of the family, yet is not begotten and born in the family. But the subjects of this verse are begotten of the Spirit [John 3:6] and are, therefore, sons of God by spiritual generation. It is therefore a real sonship-spirit that enables them to cry ‘Abba Father’.

Once we can penetrate the religious explanation, we find Bullinger is close to the Bible’s truth. The Israelites, who were the subject of John 3:6, contain spirit from their conception. They are born with the potential as “children” to be “sons” of God. However, in their dispersed or caste-off state, due to their disobedience and disbelief, they are not acceptable as sons of God. They are still to be “placed” as sons of God and this happens when they prove themselves to be worthy – just as Abraham did – by demonstrating their belief. Until that time they are known merely as children of God.

Jesus made it crystal clear to Nicodemus that anyone not born of this “spiritual generation” cannot acquire it later in life: John 3:5 “*Except a man be born [begotten] again [from above], he cannot [is not able] to see [perceive] the Kingdom of God*” Jesus used *anōthen* [from above] not *deuteros* [a second time], as Nicodemus did.

This is why Jesus said that which is begotten of spirit is spirit and that which is begotten of flesh is flesh. Jesus is telling us there are two orders of human beings – those that are of the spirit and those that are of the flesh – spirit beings and natural beings. The spirit-carrying being contains the spirit from conception. The natural or non-carrying being does not contain the spirit at conception and can never acquire it.

The word *huiiothesia* is never used to mean *make anyone a son*. It is to *place a son*. Each son who is placed already exists as a son. The Greek does not suggest making anyone a son and some lexicons point this out. Strong G5206 also gives *the placing of a son*. Following this up in Thayer we find: “*That relationship which God was pleased to establish between himself and the Israelites, in preference to all other nations ... that blessed state looked for in the future life after the visible return of Christ from heaven ...*”

The word appears in five verses where we should read *placing of a son* rather than “adoption” and so let us look at the five verses where the word is used.

THE FIRST adoption VERSE

Rom 8:15 “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption (placing of a son), whereby we cry, Abba, father”.

It is this indwelling spirit which enables those who are begotten from above to cry [krazo] “Abba Father”. Dr. Bullinger’s comments: *Abba that is, father. Is said that slaves were never allowed to use the word Abba. Strictly therefore, it can be employed only by those who have received the gift of the Divine nature.*

Paul continues:

v16 *The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*

We must clearly recognise to whom this book of Romans is written. It was to those who had the Law Covenant. This is why it was necessary to understand that Paul was writing to Israelites only. Only then can we understand what Paul goes on to say in the next verse.

v17 *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ...* There is no “Jesus” in this verse.

It is further pointed out:

As xristos [christos] is in the genitive case, it means ‘of’ or ‘belonging to’ an anointed. There is no sound reason why the AV should alter this to ‘with Christ’. Surely He cannot be regarded as a joint-heir to these promises.

Consequently, verse 17 is better translated:

If we are children then we are heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs belonging to an anointed people.

The “joint” heirs refers to all of Israel, that is, the circumcised and the uncircumcised who constitute the two parts of the one anointed people.

THE SECOND adoption VERSE

Rom 8:22,23 “For we know that the whole creation (ktisis) groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption (placing as sons), to wit, the redemption of our body”.

In this verse we can see an explanation of what *adoption* is, namely the redemption of our body. It only remains to establish if this redemption is available to all and sundry. There is no way *huiothesia* refers to the popular concept of presently bringing non-Israelites into Israel.

Ktisis refers to the whole Israel nation or *the whole creation* that is groaning waiting for the placing as sons. This is confirmed in Isaiah 43:1 where we read, *But now saith the Lord [that is, Jehovah] that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel. Ktisis (creation) in the whole creation does not mean all races,* but means those of the two sections of God’s race who are waiting [together] for *the placing of Sons* – “and not only they” refers to the Uncircumcision or Dispersion and “but ourselves also” refers to the Israelites of the Circumcision in Judea.

THE THIRD adoption VERSE

Rom 9:3,4 “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh; who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption (placing as sons), and the glory, and the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.

If they are Israelites, then they do not include others than Israelites. This must be a difficult passage for those who want to insist on maintaining the traditional teaching that anyone of any seed can become an Israelite. The *kinsmen according to the flesh* and *brethren* [from the womb] are straight statements. So is, “**Who ARE Israelites**”.

To whom was this covenant made? The giving of the Law that pertained to Israel was given by the disposition of angels [Acts 7:53]. The new covenant was made with the same Israel that had the old covenant. Under “disposition” (*diatheke*), Thayer gives: “*As the*

new and far more excellent bond of friendship which God, in Messiah's time would enter into with the people of Israel".

Many lexicons also limit this to Israel, as does the context:

To whom was the giving of the Law? This law-giving was made to Israel alone.

To whom are the promises? These were the promises to Israel alone, as the children of the Fathers.

To whom is the service? Again, this Levitical law was exclusive to Israel.

In connection with the last point, see Rom 9:3 and Thayer's comment about "service" or *latreia* "The service, or worship of God according to the requirements of Levitical law".

The verse itself states *who ARE Israelites*. So, if they are Israelites only who are placed as sons, where is the scope for saying such placement could possibly refer to non-Israelites? To find any statement, anywhere in Scripture, saying that these things pertain to non-Israelites, is impossible. So, the *placing as sons* is not for everyone of every race and God sets the limits.

Exodus 33:19 ... and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Romans 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

God is always sovereign! God is gracious to those that He chooses! Hence this third adoption verse should read, "**WHO ARE ISRAELITES, TO WHOM BELONGS THE PLACING OF SONS**". This can never refer to a church made up from all races. The subject refers always to the redemption and restoration of Israel [Jacob]. There are no references to other than the re-gathering of Israel. The remnant is always the remnant of Israel, *who ARE Israelites*. There is no record of any remnant of others outside of Israel.

THE FOURTH adoption VERSE

Galatians 4:5 "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption (placing) of sons".

The annoying thing with the AV handling of this verse is that it adds "of sons" in this instance but not in the others. This is a very straightforward statement as to whom the Son of God came to redeem. It was those who were under the law [Israel only]. These also are the only ones who can receive the *adoption* [or placing] *of sons*. These are the *we* in the verse. Never is there a proposition in Scripture that others should be redeemed, or needed to be redeemed.

rescue purchasing a slave Strong G1805 *exagorazo* (redeem) *To buy up, that is, ransom; fig to from loss [improve opportunity] ... redeem ... [to buy out ek as of to free him].*

the power of the Mosaic law Thayer *exagorazo* (redeem) *By payment of a price to recover from another ... metaphoric of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of at the price of his vicarious death ... to buy up for one's self, for one's own use.*

It was Israel who was to be bought back by the Redeemer of Israel. The "receive" in this verse contains the prefix *apo* which makes "receive" mean *to receive back again what is due*. Therefore these are Israelites who are being re-instated to their former position with God. To receive back again therefore cannot include any who did not originally have this position; it cannot mean non-Israel.

Galatians 3:24 tells us that the child is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. *But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law*. There is a progression from childhood to sonship in this chapter. This sonship is fully realised at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God. 'Children of God' is not a title, but 'Sons of God' is a title. Rom 8:18-23 gives the connection with "adoption":

v18 ... the glory which shall be revealed in us
v19 ... the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God
v20 ... hope ...
v21 ... shall be ...
v23 ... waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body

The time of the manifestation of the sons of God is an important subject.

1 John 3:2 “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”.

It is pointed out that one does not become a man without first having been a child. The child is under the schoolmaster. The child is the man earlier in time. **He is still the same person. HE IS STILL OF THE SAME RACE AND BLOODLINE!** Today we are taught that anyone of any race can become a son. This is based on the presumption that every person of every race was given the Law of Moses and that all races are the same because, “they all came from Adam”. This is manifestly not true!

THE FIFTH ADOPTION VERSE

Eph 1:5 “Having predestinated us unto The adoption (placing as sons) of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”.

Strong G4309 *proorizo* (predestinate) -to limit in advance or to determine before.

Thayer: *proorizo* (predestinate) -To predetermine, decide beforehand, to foreordain, to appoint beforehand.

That there might be any limit in advance on who can become sons might find sentimental objections among sentimental Christians who think that *whosoever* has no limits. *According to the good pleasure of His will* might also find sentimental objections, but God is still sovereign and selective, and He is as unchanging as ever. The “good pleasure” (*eudokia*) is given as:

Strong G2107 *Satisfaction, delight, purpose* etc.

Thayer *Delight, pleasure, satisfaction*

God does choose according to His purpose! For *thelema* (His will), we find: Strong G2307 *is a determination ... desire ... will ... pleasure*.

Thayer *What one wishes or has determined shall be done ... of what God wishes to be done by us*.

The “us” in the verse is selective and not everyone of every race. Talking of God’s selection, the Apostle Paul also asks this question, *How is anyone able to argue with God?*

HOW CAN ANY ARGUE with god?

Rom 9:20-22 *Nay but, O man, who art thou who repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

Arguing with God is impossible. The *we* in this book of Romans is those to whom it is written. The relationship of this peculiar people, in particular, to the Law, is an issue in the books of Romans and Galatians. For this reason the argument Paul makes does not apply to all peoples but is limited to the two sections of God’s people, Israel.

Can any really argue with God about His selection and limiting in advance? Paul goes on to tell of the *vessels afore prepared unto glory*. This is referring to Israelites only in the Book of Life. God determined long ago that it would not be everyone of every race. No, in context, it is to *Jews and Greeks* [The Israelites in Judea and the Dispersion]. Paul again goes on to associate the “Greeks” with those to whom Hosea prophesied, namely the House of Israel.

WHAT IS THE TEACHING ABOUT ADOPTION?

In all five occurrences of the word adoption in the New Testament, each is associated with Israel. At this point some might say, *So what?, Israel is spiritualised in the New Testament*. If Israel was not spiritualised when the Apostle Paul wrote his epistles, when was this change made? Again, this is one of the reasons why this point had to be covered in an earlier chapter to show that the common view is not valid. The thrust of Scripture is that the change is within the Israel people who now may receive sonship - that is, be reinstated and placed as Sons of God. It is not a change of non-Israelites into Israelites, but of those sons of Jacob who become worthy to have such a title. 1 John 3:2 tells us that we are now the Sons of God and that when Jesus returns we shall be like Him.

WHO ARE THESE SONS?

In the New Testament there are two Greek words translated as “son” or “sons”. These words are not interchangeable. The Lexicons give enlarged coverage to these two words, so that the main points only can be presented here.

1. TEKNON [Strong G5043].

This is translated in the KJV as child 77 times, daughter 1 time and son 21 times and means *a child*.

Vine states: “*In contrast to huios, son, [see below] it gives prominence to the fact of birth, whereas huios stress the dignity and character of the relationship*”.

Acts 13:33... Thou art My son [huios], ...

All Israelites are *teknon* [children] of God but not all Israelites will be called *huios* [sons] of God. The word *huios* is used in a way that involves the character, orderliness and discipline of a particular group.

From Thayer’s compilation we find: “*Offspring, children, a male child, a son ... the name transferred to that intimate and reciprocal relationship formed between men by the bonds of love, friendship, trust, just as between parents and children ... in affectionate address, such as patrons, helpers, teachers and the like employ: my child ... in the NT, pupils or disciples are called children of their teachers, because the latter by their instruction nourish the minds of their pupils and mould their characters ... children of God: in the OT of "the people of Israel" as especially dear to God, in the NT, in Paul's writings, all who are led by the Spirit of God and thus closely related to God*”. ...

The religious tone of the comment almost buries the truth! When were the Children of Israel ever downgraded the status of being mere “dear” to God! But despite this bias, it seems they still cannot get away from the basic fact the Children of Israel were in a different relationship with God in comparison with all other races.

2. HUIOS [Strong 5207]

This word occurs 380 times, and is translated mainly as “son”, or “child”. It does denote kinship. [Note this well!]

Thayer “*A son; rarely used for the young of animals; generally used of the offspring of men ... in a wider sense, a descendant, one of the posterity of any one ... used to describe those who are born again ... and hereafter in the blessedness and glory of the life eternal will openly wear this dignity of the sons of God*.”

Vine *Primarily signifies the relation of offspring to parent. [John 9:18-20 and Gal 4:30”]*

Although Thayer’s comment reflect those of the church, the special nature of those are *begotten from above* (not *born again*) is nevertheless present. This goes to show how vigilant we have to be when we read the lexicons and other such references - they all have their in-built religious beliefs that colour their discussions.

Let us look at some of the verses where *huios* is found:

Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Rom 8:19 *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*
Gal 4:5 *... that we might receive the adoption of sons.*
Gal 4:7 *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*
2 Cor 6:18... *ye shall be my sons and daughters, ...*
Heb 2:10 *... in bringing many sons unto glory ...*

The important thing to establish is the origin of these *sons of God*. What is clear is that they come from a state of servanthood under the Law. From there they come to a state where they can be placed in sonship. That they do not originate from those who were never under the Law is clear. There is no possible way *adoption* can relate to the adoption of non-Israelites into Israel.

There is another point in Greek which might help understanding of this subject. If we consider Galatians 4:5 again, *That we might receive the adoption of Sons*, the word *apolambano* (receive) is a compound word. The prefix *apo* has the force of *back again*. These particular people must be receiving something back which they had possessed at some previous time. Hosea, prophesying to Israel, nails this:

Hosea 1:10 “... and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them [that is, Israel] ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God”. In this verse My people and sons are different terms.

HE CAME UNTO HIS OWN

John 1:11,12 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, ...

Once again, we need to determine the origin of the Sons of God. They are from among *His own*. Jesus came to His own possessions but those in control of these possessions did not receive Him as the owner. On the other hand, the common people there heard Him gladly and recognised His authority. Their belief enabled them to become the Sons of God once again. The rulers who questioned His authority are to be cast out. *As many* [that is, of Israel] *as are led by the Spirit, they are the Sons of God* [Rom 8:14]. This is the qualification. It is from this verse that the verses containing the word “adoption” follow on. We dare not change this context!