

"ADOPTION" (Romans 8:12-17)

(The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

The voluntary process of granting the rights, privileges, responsibilities, and status of child or heir to an individual or group that was not originally born to the adopter. While birth occurs naturally, adoption occurs only through the exertion of will.

At least two significant figures in the OT were adopted. After Moses' birth mother kept him alive despite Pharaoh's command to drown every newborn Hebrew boy in the Nile (Exod. 1:22), Moses was, ironically, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (2:10). Esther, or Hadassah, was adopted by her uncle (or cousin) Mordecai upon the death of her parents (Esther 2:7)—this adoption played an important part in Esther's ability to prevent the Jewish extermination intended by Haman.

Although adoption is fairly uncommon in the OT, God's adoption of Israel is of the utmost importance. It demonstrates God's willingness to initiate relationship with humankind, a truth that later culminated in Jesus Christ. God chooses to adopt the nation of Israel as his child (Deut. 7:6; Isa. 1:2; Hos. 11:1) and more significantly as his firstborn son (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). Thus God singles out Israel among the nations of the earth, bestowing the highest possible honor.

The concept of adoption is more prevalent in the NT, primarily in the apostle Paul's writings. Based on the belief that Israel's exclusive position as the adopted firstborn son of God the Father is no longer deserved, the NT includes those who believe in Jesus Christ as adopted children of God's eternal family (John 1:12; 11:52; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:1). The adopted children of God enjoy all the rights of a natural-born child, including the opportunity to call God "Father" as Jesus did (e.g., Matt. 5:16; Luke 12:32). Paul in particular uses adoption to describe the Christians' new relationship with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:15-16, 21-23; 9:25-26).

