

Sunday, June 25, 2023—Galatians 4:5 Understanding Biblical Adoption

Galatians 4:5

- **To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.**
- Christ was made under the Law in verse 4 so that He could redeem them that were under the Law in verse 5.
- Galatians 4:5—notice again the use of the word “we”. It was through the work of Christ that Israel was going to receive the adoption of sons.
- Why was the Son “made under the law” in verse 4—so that he might “redeem them that were under the law” in verse 5. These are some people who were under bondage to “the elements of the world” in verse 3.
- The people that Paul is speaking of in Galatians 4:3-5 have a history of being under the law. According to the Biblical record, who had a history of being under the law? Israel. Who did Christ come to redeem in his earthly ministry according to everything that had been revealed up to that point? Israel. Who did the law pertain to?
 - Romans 9:4—“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;”
- At the outset, it is once again important to note that Paul is the only Biblical writer to speak about “adoption” (*huiiothesia* the Greek word occurs five times in the New Testament).
 - Romans 8:15—“. . . but ye have received the Spirit of adoption. . .”
 - Romans 8:23—“. . . waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”
 - Romans 9:4—“. . . Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption. . .”
 - Galatians 4:5—“. . . that we might receive the adoption of sons.”
 - Ephesians 1:5—“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself . . .”
- The Greek word *huiiothesia* is a compound word, *huiio-thesia*:
 - *Huiios*—son come of age
 - *Thesia*—a placing, or setting a person or thing in its place
- In his commentary Romans: Verse by Verse, William R. Newell states the following regarding the Greek word *huiiothesia* rendered “adoption” in the King James Bible.
 - “In earthly affairs, “adoption” is the term applied to the selection as child and heir of one not born of us; and the execution of legal papers making such child our own, inheriting

legal rights, etc. . . . But the word *huios* means, a child come of age; no longer “as a servant” (Galatians 4:7). And *huiiothesia* means God’s recognizing them in that position! This will be consummated fully at the coming of Christ, when our bodies, redeemed, and fashioned anew, shall be conformed to Christ’s glorious body. Meanwhile, because we are already adult sons (*huioi*), God has given us a spirit of adult-sonship! No Jew called God “Father,” or “Abba”; but “Jehovah.” (Indeed) fearfulness, even prevented, generally, the use by the Jews of God’s memorial-name—Jehovah—for that nation: they called Him *Adonai*—“Lord.” (Newell, 217-218)

- Adoption means the placing as a grown-up son. Biblical adoption, according to Paul, is not speaking about taking in and bringing up other people’s children as your own. Biblical adoption deals with the placing as sons those who were already children. Therefore, adoption does not simply bring acceptance into the family of God, but is a declaration of full sonship, with all its rights and privileges.

Israel & Adoption

- Romans 9:4—this is the first time we encounter the term “adoption” applied to Israel in Scripture. At first blush this is somewhat strange given that the term “adoption” does not appear in the Old Testament, the Gospels, or early Acts. Please recall that “adoption” is a strictly Pauline idea. However, here in Romans 9 Paul applies the term to Israel as her one key distinguishing characteristic.
- P.H. Davids stated the following regarding this phenomena in his entry on “Adoption” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter A. Elwell. Davids states the following regarding “adoption:”
 - “The term *adoption* does not appear in the OT. There were not provisions for adoption in Israelite law, and the examples that do occur come from outside the Israelite culture (Eliezer, Genesis. 15:1-4; Moses, Exodus 2:10; Genubath, I Kings 11:20; Esther, Esther 2:7, 15). For Israelites, polygamy and levirate marriage were the more common solution to infertility. Yet adoption was not unknown in their literature (cf. Proverbs. 17:2; 19:10; 29:21, which may all refer to adoption of slaves), and it may have been the means by which children, fathered by a master and a slave mother, inherited property (Genesis 16:1-4; 21:1-10; 30:1-13). Outside of Israel, adoption was common enough to be regulated in the law codes of Babylon (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi #185-86), Nuzi and Ugarit. Not infrequently, these refer to the adoption of a slave as an heir.” (Elwell, 25)
- Regarding Israel’s “adoption” P.H. Davids writes the following in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*:
 - “For Israel as a whole, there was a consciousness of having been chosen by God as his child (Isaiah 1:2; Jeremiah 3:19; Hosea 1:1). Since Israel had no myth of descent from the gods as the surrounding cultures did, adoption was the obvious category into which this act as well as the deliverance from slavery in Egypt would fit, as Paul indicates in Romans 9:4. Likewise the kings succeeding David were God’s “sons” (II Samuel 7:14; I Chronicles 28:6; Psalms 89:26-27). Psalms 2:7, for example, uses “You are my son,” which is probably the adoption formula used in the enthronement ceremony of each successive Davidic ruler. Together these ideas laid the basis for later NT usage of adoption imagery.” (Elwell, 25)

- According to Galatians 4, God intended to adopt Israel (“we”) and therefore, sent Christ, made of a woman, made under the law so that he could redeem them that were under the law and give them the adoption of sons. So God moves on Israel’s behalf by sending Christ under the conditions set forth in Galatians 4:4 for the purpose of accomplishing their redemption from the law in verse 5 so that they “might receive the adoption of sons.”
- What stood between Israel and their “adoption?” The law. Israel was under the law because she agreed of her own accord to keep it.
 - Exodus 19:1-8
- Consequently, God must act on Israel’s behalf in Galatians 4:4 in order to accomplish her adoption.
- Exodus 4:22—this does not signify that Israel was a full-grown son while in Egypt. It was in Egypt that the nation had been born. If this were so, God would not have sought to place the nation under the law following the Exodus.
 - Hosea 11:1
 - Jeremiah 31:32
- Until Israel came to the place where she could be given full sonship, God placed the nation under the tutors and governors of the law and its requirements. Israel, left to herself, would never have reached the place of adoption. Thank God that adoption does not depend primarily upon the son’s attainments, but upon the father’s will.
- Romans 11:7—Israel had become a rebellious son and even to this present time remains out of God’s favor. Consequently, Israel has yet to receive her adoption.
- Galatians 4:5—Jesus Christ was “made of woman, made under the law” in verse 4 so that in verse 5 he could redeem Israel out from underneath the law so that “we (i.e., Israel) might receive the adoption of sons.” The Greek verb translated “might receive” is in the subjunctive mood, i.e., the mood of possibility and potentiality. The action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances.
 - Acts 3:20—the verb translated “shall send” is also in the subjunctive mood. Whether or not God the Father would send Jesus Christ back to set up the kingdom was contingent upon Israel’s repentance in verse 19.
- Israel was offered her redemption from the law, i.e., her “adoption” during the early Acts period but refused it.