

Adoption and Grafting

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

Adoption as a doctrine is not frequently discussed but is important for the believer to understand. The scriptures speak of adoption as both a present and future condition of the believer, the future inferring the return of Christ and our resurrection. Paul said, *"We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23); "Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5, NKJV).*ⁱ

Thus, adoption occurs first in the spiritual realm when we are born again of the Spirit, here, "the firstfruits of the Spirit." But also a physical adoption when we are resurrected into our eternal, incorruptible material bodies, "the redemption of our bodies," our spirits, and our bodies predestined to be conformed to the likeness and image of His Son that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brethren.ⁱⁱ

In Romans chapter 9, Paul says that God's promise of adoption pertains to Israel. This should not be surprising as he also says the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises all pertain.ⁱⁱⁱ We surmise that also the Kingdom belongs to Israel, as the disciples asked Jesus: *"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).* For Israel's rejection of her Messiah, Jesus warned, *"The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12).*

While Israel was revealed as God's firstborn amongst the nations,^{iv} her promise to receive the "Spirit of adoption" through Christ remained a mystery until her Messiah would come and fulfill the law of atonement regarding sin and death.^v It is written, *"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7).* Paul affirmed this promise to Israel when he said, *"...my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises..." (Romans 9:3-5).*

The sons of Jacob were to become rightful heirs to the Kingdom of God through Christ. Therefore, all who are in Christ have received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out "Abba Father," and not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.^{vi} This was another great mystery hidden from Israel, God's sovereign work of salvation amongst the nations, as it is written, "To

them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

However, the promise of adoption, the New Covenant, and God's Kingdom were not exclusively for Israel. They are received through Israel. Hence Jesus said, *"Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22)*. This reveals another unique perspective. No person, Jew or Gentile, can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born again of the Spirit. Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders for naively believing they could enter God's Kingdom without Him, telling them: *"Do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3:9).*

Adoption is required for everyone.^{vii} And since all humanity was orphaned at the time of the fall from the Garden of Eden, all must be adopted as children of God so that we can inherit His Kingdom. This implies equality, in terms of our salvation, between Jews and Gentiles. But we are not all the same. Equal but also uniquely different. Hence, Paul said, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28); "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5)*. Each stone has a distinct shape and appearance. Still, all are needed to complete God's Temple.

Paul's definition of "adoption," as used in his epistles, differs greatly from our human understanding of adoption practices worldwide. The word means "to take voluntarily as one's own child." After their new birth, an adopted child in God's family is advanced to maturity of their standing before the Lord, constituted as an adult son by legal placement. In other words, adoption in God's eyes makes us the same as a natural-born heir and inheritor of God's covenant promises and Joint-heir with Christ in His Kingdom. We are completely restored to the position of sonship before the fall, as though our separation from God had never happened.^{viii}

In other words, adoption does not mean son-making but rather son-placing. Thiessen says, "In regeneration, we receive a new life; in justification, a new standing; and in adoption, a new position." Far too many Christians live more like servants than children of God.^{ix} Not that we should avoid serving God, but our service should be of wanting choice, not some obligation of debt. Jesus said, *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15)*. And Paul said:

"The heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave... But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:1-7).

Therefore, to be heirs with God and joint heirs with Christ and His Kingdom, every Jew and Gentile require the adoption by the Holy Spirit to become a son of God. We must be born again of the Spirit. But positionally also means that Israel forever remains God's firstborn son, yet firstborn implies that God has *other* children.^x Jesus said to His disciples, *"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16). One flock again, affirms equality between Jews and Gentiles.

While Paul speaks in several places about our adoption, he also makes another interesting statement in Romans 11, saying, *"You [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them [Israel], and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree"* (Romans 11:17).

Paul makes a distinction between adopting and grafting. Notice that Paul is careful not to use a physical object to metaphorically represent something spiritual, as in our adoption by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul is inarguably referring to something tangible and physical when he speaks of grafting, namely the Kingdom of God. Yes, the Kingdom of God is spiritual, but it is also material. The Olive Tree is scripturally used to depict Israel. But in Hosea, God uses it to represent Israel in the future, meaning after their redemption and being brought into the Kingdom. We read, *"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, And lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree"* (Hosea 14:4-6).

In contrast, Jesus used the analogy of a fig tree to represent Israel in the present age before His return. Seeing how little faith there was in Israel, Jesus walked by a fig tree. When He came to it and found no fruit on it, He said: *"Let no fruit grow on you ever again"* (Matthew 21:19). Jesus used this miracle to demonstrate to His disciples that Israel had missed her calling to bring the Gospel, meaning Israel's fruit to the world. This declaration would begin what is called in scripture "the time of the Gentiles." But Jesus gave His disciples hope that God would one day turn His face back towards Israel, saying, *"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near"* (Matthew 24:32).

Understanding the words of the prophets and Jesus, Paul encapsulated God's work with the Gentiles until the time of Jesus' return. And he used the analogy of a cultivated Olive Tree to represent the Kingdom and show how God, for this season, would cut away natural branches, Israelites for their lack of faith, and graft in wild olive branches, implying Gentiles who have faith in Christ into His Kingdom. We read:

"If some of the branches [Israelites] were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree [Gentile], were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree [i.e., covenant promises], do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You

will say then, Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either" (Romans 11:17-21).

This is a remarkable statement because Paul says God removed unfaithful branches so that the Gentiles might be grafted into His Kingdom. We further read, *"Through their [Israel's] fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (Romans 11:11-12).* And notice the Gentiles are grafted in "among them," meaning they become part of the commonwealth of Israel, the fulness of the promise given to Abraham, the father of all who believe.^{xi} The Lord declared: *"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4).*

So, what does the grafting of wild olive branches into natural ones imply spiritually? Grafting brings two types of trees together as one species. Wild olive trees are known for having bitter-tasting fruit with large stony pits. While cultivated olive trees, on the other hand, produce fleshy, juicy, and pleasant-tasting fruit with smaller pits.^{xii} But there is another advantage.

"In the olive oil industry, grafting extracts the hardy roots of one variety with the fecundity [fertility] of another variety. The whole point of grafting is that each part of the grafted tree keeps its original character." "[For example] the variety used for the rootstock may be resistant to fungus or other pests. The [grafted tree, on the other hand] may have weak roots but large fruit with high oil content. The resulting tree has the best of both varieties."^{xiii}

Our adoption enables us to walk and be led by the Holy Spirit and to have intimate fellowship with our Heavenly Father. And our grafting brings us together as one family of God and one new man in Christ. We are delivered from the corruption and bondage of sin and all fear, especially the fear of death. And we are made heirs with God and joint heirs with Christ, awaiting the fullness of our adoption in the resurrection. So, let us walk with confidence and the assurance of knowing who we are in the Lord, sons and daughters of God, fellow heirs of the same body with Israel, jointly partaking of His promise in Christ through the Gospel, and recipients of our inheritance in Christ of all the nations in His eternal Kingdom.^{xiv}

Amen!

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:29. Ephesians 1:4-5. Philippians 3:21.

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 9:1-5.

^{iv} Exodus 4:22, Jeremiah 31:9.

^v Luke 2:22-23.

^{vi} Romans 8:15, 9:24.

^{vii} Galatians 4:4-5.

^{viii} Duffield, Guy P. and Van Cleave, Nathaniel M. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. Foursquare Media. 1910.

^{ix} Luke 15:29-31.

^x Exodus 4:22.

^{xi} Romans 4:11. Ephesians 2:12.

^{xii} Metcalfe, Dan. *Wild Olive Trees and Good Olive Branches*. AskaBiologist.org.

^{xiii} What if you grafted a wild olive branch onto a cultivated olive tree? OliveOliSource.com.

^{xiv} Ephesians 3:6.