EXEGESIS OF EPHESIANS 1:1 – 14
JEWISH & GRECO–ROMAN CONTEXTS
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ADOPTION & INHERITANCE: EPHESIANS 1:5, 11, 14

Jewish Context	Greco-Roman Context
The primary thought behind 'adoption' and 'inheritance' is the royal king of Israel. In the Jewish mind, **Adam** was originally God's 'son.' God gave Adam an inheritance: the whole earth in an unspoiled state of paradise. Since Adam and Eve sinned, Adam forfeited his position and inheritance, and God chose to 'adopt' another heir, the nation **Israel**, who became God's 'son' (see especially Rom.9:4 but also Ex.4:22, Dt.32:10, Hos.11:1). God adopted Israel and gave them a promised land inheritance flowing with milk and honey, something similar to what humanity had in the original paradise. By doing this, God was saying that Israel would be His true humanity, His chosen people, the people Adam and Eve were supposed to be. (The notion was preserved in Israel's family inheritance laws once Israel settled the promised land: Land inheritance was passed down from father to sons, as God gave Adam the land as his inheritance). Then, each **king of Israel** was 'adopted' as a son by God. Every new king coming to the throne had Psalm 2 read to him, which reads, 'You are My son, today I have begotten you.' His 'inheritance' was the Gentile nations. Given that Jesus is the ultimate king of Israel, the one who rebuilt a new Temple (Eph.2:11 – 3:21), I think 'royal kingship' is the primary locus of meaning here.	Distilling all William Barclay's research on Roman adoption: In Roman society, the father had ultimate authority in his household. This was called the 'patria potestas,' the absolute ownership of the father. Adoption in Roman society was incredibly serious, then, because the son had to pass out of the patria potestas of the natural father, and into the patria potestas of the adopting father. There were three steps to this. The first was known as 'mancipatio,' which is where we get our word 'emancipate.' The adopting father approached the natural father with seven witnesses. He brought a scale and copper weights and purchased the son from the old family with a ceremony. Twice the adopting father bought the son, and twice the natural father bought him back. Then on the third time, the natural father did not buy him back. The 'patria potestas' of the natural father was held to be broken. After the sale there followed a ceremony called 'vindicatio.' The adopting father went to the 'praetor,' one of the Romans magistrates, and publicly argued his case for the adoption of this son. Then, third, is the party, during which the adopting father publicly announces to all his friends and family that there is a new son and a new heir.[1] Roman history: In the year 50 AD, the Emperor Claudius adopted a young man to succeed him on the throne. That young man changed his name to Nero. To cement the alliance, Nero wanted to marry the natural daughter of Claudius, Octavia, who was already his legal sister. They were in no sense blood relations but by law, they were brother and sister, and they couldn't get married. Nero had to get the Roman Senate to pass special legislation to enable him to marry a girl who was legally his own sister. That is how serious and life changing adoption was in Roman society.

[1] The movie *Ben Hur* illustrates this. Charlton Heston plays Judah Ben Hur, the young Jewish galley slave who rescues the Roman Admiral Arius from drowning during a naval battle on the Mediterranean. The Romans won the battle, so Arius returns to Rome a hero. During his victory march through Rome to the throne of the Emperor Tiberias, Arius has Judah Ben Hur ride beside him on the victory chariot. Then, Arius appears before the entire Roman senate and the Emperor to plead the case that Ben Hur be released from being a slave and placed by adoption as an adult son into Arius' family. The Emperor and the Senate acquiesce and next comes to huge gala celebration thrown by Arius. Into the main hall and courtyard in Arius' enormous house come dancers, musicians, and guests: Arius' friends and colleagues. In the middle of the party, Arius commands that the music stop, and he calls Judah Ben Hur forward. He tells the whole audience of his great joy at finding such a young man who rescued him at sea and then won the Roman chariot races in the Circus of Rome. He then tells the audience his reason for throwing this huge celebration in the first place: to recognize, honor, and publicly state his love for his adopted son, Young Arius. Ben Hur, or Young Arius, steps forward, and Arius puts his ancient family signet ring on his finger. From that moment onward, all of the father's wealth, land, power, and honor belong to and will be inherited by Young Arius. Young Arius is publicly identified with his father by a powerful public statement of love.

Application of Adoption/Inheritance Language:
How do we apply this to ourselves today? First of all, the Jewish connotations take priority, and the Roman connotations, as secondary, can be considered as long as they reinforce the main ideas from the Jewish context. Secondly, we must remember again that this picture is not for men only. The cultural picture was of the adoption of *adult sons*. Paul is therefore saying that God adopts men, women and children in a way similar to how God adopted Israel as a nation, or how a Roman father adopted a son to be his heir. Young men, you are adopted as a son into God's family. Young women, you are adopted as a daughter into God's family. Regardless of your gender or your age, this picture of adoption applies to you if you have faith in Christ.

Next, we can list the important points that can be pastorally applied to us:
1. **The adopting father does everything in public**. In the Jewish context, God brought Israel out of Egypt 'before all the nations,' in public. Also, the anointing of each new king was public. In the Roman context, the father publicly purchases the adult son, publicly argues for the adoption before a judge or a magistrate, and publicly presents the new son as a full-fledged adult member of the family. **In both cases**, the PUBLIC nature of this commitment is highly significant. It parallels the fact that God sends Jesus publicly to live and die, and then publicly. This Father WANTS this Son!

2. **The adopting father created a whole new identity for the son.** In the Jewish context, God brought Israel out of slavery and misery into a whole new identity. The Israelites did not have to listen to their former masters any more! In the Roman context, the father purchases the son out of the previous family, making a permanent and irrevocable legal break with the old family. If you had debts to pay, they were cancelled out! New relationships began! **In both cases**, the old life was totally cancelled out. A new identity was assumed. This is truly newness of life.

3. **The adopting father gave his son an incredible (royal) inheritance**. In the Jewish context, God gave Israel the status and inheritance of an adopted 'son,' in continuity with the themes begun with Adam in the original creation. Also, adoption as God's son into kingship is royalty, but adoption into Jesus is ultimate royalty. In the Roman context, the adopted son was accepted as a full-fledged heir in the family, guaranteed regardless of blood line or whether there were any other sons.

4. **The adopting father's love could not be broken**. In the Jewish context, God's covenant with Israel could not be broken, even by their unfaithfulness. In the Roman context, the new son was a part of the family permanently, totally, and eternally. There was no way to break the tie between the adopting father and the new son, except possibly through another adoption agreed to by the new father, which is ridiculous to imagine!

5. **The new son assumed new family responsibilities.** In the Jewish context, this meant living by God's rule. In the Roman context, this meant representing the Roman father's person and interests.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING PAUL'S LANGUAGE IN EPHESIANS 1:1 – 14
JEWISH & GRECO–ROMAN CONTEXTS

REDEMPTION: EPHESIANS 1:7

Jewish Context	Greco-Roman Context
When the Jews spoke of 'redemption,' they primarily thought of the Exodus, when God delivered them by the blood of the Passover lamb. The entire nation of Israel was in the grip of their tyrannical slavemasters in Egypt. In their sweat and sorrow they cried out for God to redeem them. God then moved Israel from one place to another, from being slaves in Egypt, to being in the promised land, 'by the blood of the Passover lamb.' Every Passover celebration and sacrifice since then reminded them that redemption occurred by the shedding of blood. Redemption does not necessary mean 'payment of a debt.' It certainly can involve a payment, as shown by Israel's redemption-legislation. But it seems to be possible to speak of redemption as a deliverance or transfer independently of a payment, as when Paul speaks of the future redemption of our physical bodies (Rom.8:23, Eph.1:13) without the notion of a payment being attached to that. It means being moved from one realm or dominion to another. The concept of switching authorities is central to the Jewish notion of 'redemption.' Isaiah took the first Exodus as the model for which the second Exodus would be patterned. So Isaiah looks ahead to God's deliverance of Israel out of exile, especially in Isaiah 40 – 55. In particular, Isaiah saw God making a new way through the wilderness for Israel (Isa.40:3 – 6), and God's deliverance of Israel as being through water and fire (Isa.43:1 – 2ff.; 44:27). God describes Himself as Israel's 'Savior' (Isa.43:3, 11) and 'Redeemer' (Isa.41:14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4) in contrast to powerless idols, who commands Cyrus to release Israel (Isa.44:28ff.), just as He did Pharaoh of old. It is very notable that God's wrath is not averted from falling on Israel. In fact, God says that Jerusalem has suffered double for her sins (Isa.40:1). Hebrews concurs that every transgression and disobedience already received a just penalty (Heb.2:2). Nevertheless, to sum up, Isaiah still describes the deliverance from exile as a redemption event like a second Exodus.	The word 'redemption' was not associated with Roman adoption practices. 'Redemption' (apolutrosis) referred primarily to the slave trade. Some scholars estimate that there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, about two thirds of the entire Empire. People in Rome sometimes became slaves by being sold into slavery in an auction. When they were bought out of slavery (by a relative, perhaps), they were 'redeemed.' The word meant 'deliverance by the payment of a debt.' It comes from the verb 'lutoun,' which means 'to ransom.'

Application of Redemption Language: Jesus, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism lived in a world that was dominated by questions of when and how God would fulfill His covenant promises. Enslavement by foreign power, including Babylon, Persia, Greece, and then Rome, naturally gave rise to the expectation for God to initiate a new Exodus redemption (e.g. Isa.43:1 – 21) from this new 'Egypt.'

'Redemption' means a deliverance from enemy powers. Just as Mosaic Israel was once under the authority of Pharaoh but was 'redeemed' by God to come under His own authority, so Messianic Israel (and Messianic Gentiles) was under the authority of Satan (not simply Nebuchadnezzar) but was 'redeemed' by Christ to come under his own authority. Paul is thinking of these enemy powers as evidenced by the immediate context in Eph.1:21 – 23 ('rule, authority, power, dominion') and 2:2 (the 'prince of the power of the air'). Paul's point is that God's resurrection power, which raised Jesus and us from the dead, is ours, and, because 'in Christ' we are above the other 'rulers and authorities' of Eph.1:21 – 23 and 2:2, Christ has delivered us from their influence. This framework seems to be why Jesus was called 'the [new Passover] Lamb of God' and why he instituted the Lord's Supper on top of the existing traditional Passover meal. That Paul in Ephesians is referring to the Exodus is further supported by the phrase 'redemption through his blood' (Eph.1:7), a parallel between Jesus and the Exodus Passover lamb.

'Redemption' as a concept is coordinated with the more fundamental concept of being moved from outside Christ to within him. Elsewhere in Ephesians, Paul is perfectly happy to use words other than 'redemption' to denote this movement. For example, in the second poetic section (2:11 – 22), he says we Gentiles were 'in the flesh' and 'in the world' and strangers to the covenants made to Israel (2:11 – 12). But 'in Christ Jesus' we were brought near (2:13), etc. I think the language shift matches the conceptual shift: When the issue is no longer our transfer from other

'rulers and authorities' but rather our inclusion in the communal and covenantal household of God, 'redemption' is not the appropriate word to use there. Similarly, in the section stressing our personal transformation in Christ and responsibility to not sin (4:17 – 19), Paul's first language is baptismal ('you were taught to lay aside the old self…and put on the new' in 4:20 – 24, just like Rom.6:1 – 11). However, the most precise way to say that God has brought us 'into Christ' from out of the other rulers and authorities, is categorically 'redemption.'

In Galatians and Colossians, Paul also uses the word 'redeem' to describe Christ's authority displacing other authorities. Christ redeemed Jewish Christians from the authority of the Law and its curse (Gal.3:13). Paul portrays the Law of Moses as a type of Pharaoh. Implicitly and by extension, Christ redeemed Gentile Christians from the authorities of the Gentile world, the 'weak and elemental things of the world' (Gal.4:3 – 9). This understanding of Christ's redemptive work for the Gentiles finds more explicit form in Colossians. In Colossians, the twin sister letter to Ephesians, the phrase 'in Christ' is central also, and Paul's first way of entering into the significance of that identification is once again 'redemption, the forgiveness of sins' in Colossians 1:13 – 14. 'Redemption' from one realm ('the domain of darkness') to another ('the kingdom of His beloved Son') is God's decisive act of forming His people; He brings people out from one authority and into Jesus' authority, to be 'in Christ.' 'Redemption' itself is one word out of many others that signals this shift, and Paul uses the particular word 'redemption' precisely when he is also referring, explicitly and implicitly, to other authorities that we were once under.

The Jewish Exodus connotation associated with 'redemption' does not carry the sense of 'payment of debt.' It simply means a powerful act of God to 'move' or 'deliver' a people from a place of slavery to an entirely new place of being under His reign. It is true that in Old Testament usage concerning land, 'redemption' is referred to as requiring a payment. But I believe the payment is incidental to the core meaning of 'redemption,' which can take place without a payment being made in any sense. Note the New Testament usage of 'redemption' does not always involve a payment being made, but simply a transferral or transformation taking place: 'the redemption of God's own possession' (Eph.1:14); 'the redemption of our body' (Rom.8:23). Even in common parlance, we say today, 'That awful situation was redeemed because good came out of it.' No third party is 'paid off' in this redemption; rather, the situation itself is 'moved' or 'transferred' from one state to another. Likewise, Paul says in Colossians 1:13 – 14, 'For he delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' 'Redemption' for a Christian is being moved by God from being a slave 'in sin' to being a child of God 'in Christ.' Thus for Paul, the death of Jesus does not stand by itself (apart from his resurrection) nor do we regard it from a distance (apart from ourselves). We are intimately joined with Jesus at his death on the cross and raised with him into his new life at his resurrection; this is how we are 'moved' or 'delivered' out of one realm to the other (Rom.6:1 – 11, Col.2:12 – 13; 2:20 – 3:1).

How do we apply this to ourselves today? The Jewish connotation of Exodus is to be prioritized over the Roman one of debt-payment. This subtle difference is significant in ministry. The Roman understanding of 'redemption' as a debt-payment is heard in the common cliché, 'Jesus died for your sins *so you didn't have to*.' Pastorally, I feel that this is harmful to Asian Americans because debt-payment reinforces guilt: After all, if Jesus takes the punishment meant for you, how does that produce freedom from guilt? In fact, it doesn't – it makes one feel worse, and this has had negative effects. 'Jesus died for your sins so you didn't have to' means that all that changes is God's attitude towards us, that we are fundamentally unchanged, and that we never really experience 'resurrection' for ourselves because supposedly the cross stands fundamentally separate from the resurrection in accomplishing our salvation. Scholars have debated whether this is the right way to understand the death of Jesus; many have decided against it.

'Jesus died and rose for us; we died with Jesus and we rose with him is what Paul actually says in many places (e.g. Rom.6:1 – 11, etc.). That phrase refers to the transformation of a person's identity, the profound reorientation of that person's relationships and ethics, and the experience of being empowered to live life in that way.

We can list some of the important points that can be pastorally applied to us:
1. **'Redemption' reinforces 'adoption' as changing our family identity.** God moves us from one family to His. We are no longer defined by our previous identity, our previous sin, or our previous way of relating. We are defined by being in Jesus!

2. **'Redemption' means being delivered out from under the authority of sin, Satan, the spiritual powers of the world, and the Mosaic Law.** In the Jewish context, God brought Israel out of slavery and misery into a whole new identity. The Israelites did not have to listen to their former masters any more! Likewise, God delivers us, if we

truly have faith in Jesus, out of the domination of sin. We are freed from it, and are now in the realm of the lordship of Jesus. It is a move from one realm to another.

3. **Being redeemed means being delivered out of guilt**. Guilt is one of those hidden forces at work within us and between us. We get so used to hearing, 'You should work harder! You should get up earlier! You should speak up more!' that we get used to feeling guilty. So we either shut down, tune out, passively or actively rebel, try harder, get more frustrated, or get upset. Sometimes we get so used to hearing guilt that we pass it along, too. Naturally, we think that guilt ultimately comes from God, who is in the perfect position to wag His finger at us and say, 'You should.' But being redeemed out of our previous identity means that (1) God does not hold that against us; and (2) God does not operate in that realm; He does not motivate us in guilt-producing ways (cf. Rom.8:1).

4. **Being redeemed means being delivered out of shame.** Shame is different from guilt. Shame goes deeper, because often we internalize negative feelings so deeply that we feel bad not just about our actions, but about ourselves fundamentally. Shame is feeling bad about who we are, not just what we do. For instance, we feel like we're a constant disappointment. We keep listening to the voices that say, 'I'm ashamed of you. You are a burden to me.' Those voices may be voices from the past that we replay like a bad record over and over in our mind. Or those voices may be voices in our present, like a condescending spouse who makes you feel like a failure, parents who criticize you all the time, or even your own voice, which keeps saying in a constant sigh, 'If only I was more…' And again, we think that God is ashamed of us, and that we're shameful before God. Being redeemed by Jesus means that we are fundamentally new; we have a new identity, not a negative, shameful one.

5. **Being redeemed provides the basis for our continual experience of God's power.** Just as God's first Exodus redemption out of Egypt provided Israel with a sense that His power will be present with them (e.g. Ex.15:1 – 19; Ps.34:4 – 8; Ps.77, etc.), so Paul prays that we will experience the power of God's redemption, His resurrection power to deliver from death, in a continual sense (Eph.1:15 – 2:10).

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FORGIVENESS OF SINS: EPHESIANS 1:7

Jewish Context	Greco-Roman Context
The Jewish sacrificial system was supposed to represent God dealing with human sins. However, already in the Old Testament there is an emphasis on the sacrifices cleansing the worshiper symbolically, as opposed to appeasing God symbolically. P.P. Waldenstrom, in his book, *Be Ye Reconciled to God*, gives an excellent exegetical analysis of the sacrifices with that conclusion. Gordon Hugenberger adds that what mattered in the sacrifices was who ate the sacrifices (Lev.6 – 7). There were three types. The Israelite ate the peace offering. God ate the burnt offering, symbolically, through fire. The priests ate the sin offering, and the 'sin' symbolically accumulated within the priests until the high priest sent the sin into God in the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16). Taken together, the sacrifices represent God consuming sin within Himself, drawing it from the worshiper through the sacrificial animal, and giving peace back to the worshiper. The sacrifices themselves only cleansed 'the flesh' symbolically and temporarily for the purpose of maintaining Israel's position in the promised land (Heb.9:13). They were important, but as a foreshadowing of Jesus cleansing 'the conscience' (Heb.9:14). The New Testament says the sacrificial system would 'remind' people of sin (Heb.10:4), rather than actually take it away. The sins of Israel eventually piled up and resulted in the Babylonian Exile, when Israel was expelled from their promised land, just as Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. Even though Israel returned to the land under Nehemiah and Ezra, they were still slaves under foreign captors (Dan.9:24-28; Neh.9:36). This meant they were not truly 'forgiven' their sins. Thus, 'forgiveness of sins' also means 'being restored from exile.' It is to be welcomed back home.	Greek and Roman religious systems had some sense of 'appeasing the gods' in their sacrificial ceremonies. But it is unclear whether we can say anything that seems true across the board.

Derivation of 'Forgiveness of Sins' Language: This is definitely a Jewish concept. It is derived from images from Jewish institutions, history, and expectation. The confrontation extends towards both Jewish and Gentile concepts. 'Forgiveness of sins' brought about by Jesus confronts the Jewish concept because Jesus challenged the Temple system. Jesus' 'forgiveness of sins' also confronts the Gentile temple sacrifices on numerous counts: God is not like the 'gods.' He is not arbitrary and arbitrarily 'appeased.' The object of His wrath is not the human being but the corruption in human nature – the 'flesh' as Paul and John called it; the 'heart' as Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jesus referred to it. The objective result of 'forgiveness' is not the changing of God's mind from anger to acceptance, but the changing of the person from being identified with sin to being identified with Christ.

We can list the important points that can be pastorally applied to us:
1. **'Forgiveness of sins' means 'welcome home.'** It is moving from a state of exile to a state of restored intimacy, like the prodigal son. Like a child exiled to the time-out chair, we were exiled away from home and fullness of relationship. Now that time is over!

2. **'Forgiveness of sins' means 'innocence regained.'** It is when one's sins are no longer counted against you, and no longer remembered. We are freed from that awful burden! One of our primal urges is to be innocent. Just look at all the ways we try to justify ourselves! But God does it for us by placing us in Jesus.

3. **'Forgiveness of sins' happens not by something Jesus does separate from us, but by us being brought into Jesus.** Only Jesus is sinless; only by being 'in Jesus' can we be considered sinless from God's perspective. Sin is counted against you everywhere else.

SUMMARY OF NOTES, EPHESIANS 1:1 – 14

Jewish Context	Greco-Roman Context
Echoes of Israel's story from its Exodus beginning to Babylonian exile. This would mean that the church is the renewed, restored Israel.	A collection of terms that had powerful connotations, but no single storyline.

Systematically, the Jewish connotations take priority, and the Roman connotations, as secondary, can be considered as long as they reinforce the main ideas from the Jewish context.

I believe this position is substantiated by considering other echoes of Isaiah in Ephesians. I have already highlighted Isaiah's use of exodus and redemption language in Isaiah 40 – 55, and how Paul uses the same language in Ephesians 1:3 – 14. Here are other direct quotes, as well as allusions, that I can detect.

Passage in Ephesians	Passage(s) in Isaiah	Topic
1:3 – 14	40:3 – 6; 43:1ff	God redeems His people in a new exodus
1:19 – 23	9:1 – 7; 11:1 – 10	Rule of the Messiah, son of David
2:1 – 10	25:6 – 7; 26:19	God will bring life out of death
2:11 – 22	57:15 – 19	Peace to those near and far, new Temple
3:1 – 13	56:3 – 7	Gentiles will be included in the renewed Israel/new Temple
5:7 – 14	60:1 – 11	Arise, light shines in darkness, nations drawn into the new Jerusalem (Ephesians quote conflates 26:19, 51:17, 52:1, and 60:1)
6:10 – 24	59:14 – 19	God's warrior will wear the armor of righteousness to bring justice and righteousness to the world