

Fall 2012

# "Abba, Father" and the spirit of God's sons

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“Abba, Father” and the Spirit of God’s Sons

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A Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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by Kelly Abigail Jones

December 2012

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Religion, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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## **Dedication Page**

I dedicate this essay to both of my fathers. First, I thank my heavenly Abba who has given me His Spirit and friendship with Him—the one who I love above all else. Second, my Daddy on earth, Mark Jones, who has expressed his love to me in ways that surpass my understanding, but I think my heart knows just a bit, of what he has done for me. Thank you, Dad, for pointing me to the one who created me and representing him through your sacrifices for me, Alyson, Sam, Mike, and Mom. Words are not necessary.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my appreciation for my project advisor, Alan Kirk. I cannot thank him enough for sacrificing his time to help me come up with a topic for my research, counseling me in the research process, and always being available and willing to listen to my thoughts and ideas. I have a high regard for his hard work as a biblical scholar and for the way that he carries himself in humility.

I would also like to thank Dr. Frances Flannery and Dr. Iain Maclean for reviewing my thesis. Dr. Flannery's passion in her class on Apocalypticism and Mysticism in Early Judaism and Christianity stirred desire within me to study biblical scholarship. She also encouraged me in my writing abilities after I finished a difficult paper on penitential prayer and the Qumran community. Thank you to Dr. Maclean, who I greatly respect for his hard work and intelligence. I have taken Dr. Maclean's class on Truth and Reconciliation as well as his class on the History of Christian Theology. These classes have given me a glimpse of his brilliance as a scholar so I consider an honor that he would take the time to read my thesis.

## Introduction

Jesus' baptism inaugurates the new age of the Spirit. Mark's account describes the event in this way: the Holy Spirit descends on him as a dove and God speaks to him from the heavens saying, "You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased" Mark 1:10. According to Mark's record, Jesus' possession of the Spirit and his identity as a son directly correlate. One of the many places in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus' identity as God's son is reaffirmed occurs right before his betrayal when Jesus cries out to, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). The phrase "Abba, Father" occurs only two other times in the New Testament. In Galatians and Romans, Paul also uses the phrase "Abba, Father," but he identifies this cry as the cry of those who believe in Jesus rather than the cry of Jesus himself. The significance and purpose of the phrase "Abba, Father" is in debate among scholars. Joachim Jeremias made the most influential claim concerning "Abba, Father" by concluding that "Abba, Father" captures the fullness of Jesus' identity and his relationship with God. Although Jeremias makes a poor argument for this assertion, I will show that the cry "Abba, Father" relates to Jesus' identity because it is an outflow of the Spirit within him and confirms that he is God's son. However, it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit rather than the particular cry, "Abba, Father," that characterizes Jesus' identity as a son. In Galatians and Romans, Paul expands on this understanding by explaining that the cry "Abba, Father" is evidence that believers possess the Holy Spirit. Paul's dialogue in Romans and Galatians is centered on the believer's new identity in Christ as one who has been set free from the laws of the world by the Spirit (Galatians 5:18) and as one who has been set free from the "law of sin and death" by the Spirit (Romans 8:2). In this exegetical paper, I will examine the significance of the cry "Abba, Father" as the cry of the Holy Spirit that dwells within God's sons, in light of Jesus' initial usage of the cry in the Gospel of Mark and in light of Romans 8:1-13 and Galatians 4:1-7.

## **“Abba, Father” and the Spirit of Jesus**

It is important to establish the nature and experience of Jesus as the one who cries “Abba, Father” to see how Paul expands on the use of this cry in Romans and Galatians. Thus, before I establish why Paul refers to “Abba, Father” as a cry of the “sons of God” (Romans 8:14), I will examine the cry as it relates to Jesus himself. First, I will show that Jesus’ baptism establishes that Jesus is God’s son and that Jesus’ baptism opens the door for all people to receive the Holy Spirit. Then, I will look at “Abba, Father” as evidence of Jesus’ standing as God’s son (Mark 14:32-36) and product of the Spirit within him, rather than the essence of Jesus’ identity in and of the cry itself.

The Book of Mark opens with a description of John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus. According to Mark, John the Baptist is the messenger spoke of in the book of Isaiah the prophet that says, “Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mark 1:2-3). Mark interprets Isaiah’s reference to “The Lord” as Jesus—the one for whom John the Baptist prepared the way. John the Baptist prepared the way by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). As John was preaching he declared, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). “You” refers to anyone that would repent from his or her sins. Thus, John baptized with water in order to make way for Jesus, who would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit. John’s task came to completion when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan (Mark 1:9). Immediately, when Jesus came up out of the water, Jesus saw the Spirit descend on him and a voice came out of the heavens that said, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased” (Mark 1:10). Because

God's affirmation of Jesus as his Son occurs simultaneously with the Spirit's descent, it is clear that there is a correlation between Jesus' identity as a son and his possession of the Spirit. After the Spirit descended upon Jesus and came out from temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:13), Jesus began to preach, declaring, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Jesus' message was similar to John in that he called people to "repent and believe in the gospel." However, Jesus announced, "the time is fulfilled" along with the message of repentance. "The time is fulfilled," must mean, at least in part, that John's work was complete—Jesus had come to initiate believers into his own baptism as a son of God by baptizing them with the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

My point in this overview of Jesus' baptism is to show that the "fulfillment of time" entails that Jesus had come to baptize believers in the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the Spirit's descent upon Jesus demonstrates that Jesus is God's son and that God takes pleasure in Jesus as his son. Since Jesus possessed the Holy Spirit, his cry "Abba, Father" is an outflow of the Spirit within him. Although "Abba, Father" does not capture the essence of Jesus' identity and his relationship with God, it reveals that Jesus is God's son. Through an examination of the "Abba, Father" debate and the wider context of the prayer where Jesus calls God "Abba, Father," I will establish that this cry affirms that Jesus is God's son.

First, I will debunk the notion that "Abba, Father" alone captures the essence of Jesus' identity. In order to do so, I will focus on Jeremias' conclusion that "Abba" has paramount significance in characterizing Jesus' identity and his relationship with God the Father, and I will

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<sup>1</sup> Paul, the author of Romans and Galatians, was familiar with the distinction that Mark makes between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism. Acts 19 records Paul's interactions with about 12 disciples in Ephesus concerning the matter (Acts 19:1). Paul approached them and asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" The disciples answered, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2). Apparently, these disciples had been baptized with water under John's baptism of repentance (Acts 19:3-4). When Paul pointed out that John's baptism was intended to point the people to believe in Jesus who was coming after him, the disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they started to speak in tongues and began prophesying (Acts 19:6).



review the scholarly responses to Jeremias' conclusion. The purpose in addressing this argument is to show that "Abba, Father" does not characterize Jesus, but rather, "Abba, Father" is an effect of the Spirit, which is foundational in understanding Jesus' purpose and identity.

"Abba" is a transliterated Aramaic word<sup>2</sup> meaning "father." "Abba" is the determinative form (also known as the emphatic state) of the noun 'ab.<sup>3</sup> "Abba" is found three times in the New Testament (Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:5, and Mark 14:36) and is always accompanied with the Greek "ho patēr," meaning "the father,"<sup>4</sup> which is to be understood as a literal rendering into Greek of "Abba."<sup>5</sup>

Jeremias, author of *The Central Message of the New Testament* (1965), *The Prayers of Jesus* (1967) and *New Testament Theology* (1971) is popular for his proposal that a thorough understanding of Jesus' identity and mission lies in Jesus' use of "Abba."<sup>6</sup> Other scholars agree with Jeremias' findings.<sup>7</sup> For example, Hahn concluded that the use of "Abba" in contemporary Judaism was "unthinkable in the prayer language" and thus should be a unique trademark of Jesus' speech. Furthermore, Kittel agrees that the early Christian usage of "Abba" directly connects with Jesus' usage and shows a "father-child relationship to God [that] far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something entirely new."<sup>8</sup>

Although some scholars agree with Jeremias' view, his conclusions elicited a number of criticisms that I will outline alongside each point of Jeremias' argument. Jeremias' argument

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<sup>2</sup>Martinus C de Boer. *Galatians: a commentary*. Louisville, Ky : Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 266.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A Fitzmyer. "Abba and Jesus' relation to God." In *À cause de l'Évangile*, 15-38, esp. 17. Paris: éditions du Cerf, 1985 ; Richard S Hess. "Abba" In *Anchor Bible dictionary, vol 1*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 78. New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992, i7.

<sup>4</sup> Fitzmyer, "Abba and Jesus' relation to God,"30. ; Hess, "Abba," i7.

<sup>5</sup> James Barr. "'Abbā isn't 'daddy.'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (April 1, 1988): 28-47, esp. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," 449 ; Barr, James. "Abba, Father" and the familiarity of Jesus' speech." *Theology* 91, no. 741 (May 1, 1988): 173-179, esp. 174.

; Jeremias, Joachim. *The Prayers of Jesus*. Naperville, Ill: Alec R Allenson, 1967, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzmyer, "Abba and Jesus' relation to God," 28.

<sup>8</sup> Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," 449.

rests on several propositions:<sup>9</sup> (i) Jesus always addressed God as “Abba,” (ii) in the literature of early Palestinian Judaism there is little evidence that individuals addressed God as “Abba,” and (iii) “Abba” derives from child’s speech and is a term of familiarity that has a similar connotation as “Daddy.”

(i) Jesus always addressed God as “Abba.”<sup>10</sup>

Jeremias’ assertion that Jesus always addressed God as “Abba” is the basis of his argument. According to Jeremias, Jesus originally addressed God using the Aramaic “Abba” each time he referred to God as ‘Father.’<sup>11</sup> This means that every time the Gospel writers recorded Jesus addressing God as “ho pater, pater” (“Father”), pater mou, pater mou (“my Father”), and pater *emœn* (our Father), Jesus actually addressed God as “Abba.” If this is true then “Abba” must be a term that captures the essence of Jesus’ relationship with God the Father.<sup>12</sup>

Jeremias determines that the diversity of Greek forms of ‘father’ ascribed to Jesus’ lips must mean that there is one original form, “Abba”, from which all the other forms originate.<sup>13</sup> Jeremias defends his proposal by contending that the translation technique used where there is mention of “Abba” is forsook in all other instances where other forms of father are in record.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Jeremias made the case that there were no other words that Jesus could have used

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36) : Another Approach," 449 ; Mawhinney, Allen. "God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 181-189, esp. 181.

<sup>13</sup> Barr, "'Abbā isn't "daddy," 42.

<sup>14</sup> Barr, "Abba, Father" and the familiarity of Jesus' speech," 177.

besides ‘Abba.’<sup>15</sup> This entails that “Abba” could mean ‘Father!,’ ‘the Father,’ ‘my Father,’ and even ‘our Father,’ and that it displaced all forms other than “Abba” by the time of Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

James Barr strongly criticizes Jeremias’ claim that Jesus always addressed God as “Abba.” First, Barr rejects Jeremias’ proposition that the variations of ‘father’ must derive from “Abba.”<sup>17</sup> Barr points out that the drastic change of translation technique that is necessary to come to Jeremias’ conclusion undermines his argument. Instead, it would make more sense to say that some of these forms of ‘father’ address probably began with a word other than “Abba” or some of the variations came from the Greek Gospel tradition and did not directly originate from this sole word.<sup>18</sup> Based on Jeremias’ evidence, it does not make sense to conclude that in all instances where Jesus addressed God as Father “Abba” was always the word that Jesus used in conversation with God.

Barr also reasons that Jeremias’ claims that Jesus’ original word for ‘Father’ must have been “Abba” since no other word are able to be used in place of “Abba”<sup>19</sup> and that “Abba” displaced all other forms by the time of Jesus is very unlikely.<sup>20</sup> The *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran records ‘my father’ three times. Each instance is written *’by*, the traditionally Aramaic form with the possessive form, rather than “Abba.” Therefore, Jesus probably had forms other than “Abba” that he could have used to address God. Even though “Abba” would normally mean “my father,” the word in and of itself does not express this. For example, the word *pater* used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane means “Father,” not “my Father.” Furthermore, phrases like *pater mou* in Matthew 26:39, 42 specifically indicate who is being addressed, which

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<sup>15</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t “daddy,” 43.

<sup>16</sup> Barr, “Abba, Father” and the familiarity of Jesus’ speech,” 178.

<sup>17</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t “daddy,” 42.

<sup>18</sup> Barr, “Abba, Father” and the familiarity of Jesus’ speech,” 177.

<sup>19</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t “daddy,” 43.

<sup>20</sup> Barr, “Abba, Father” and the familiarity of Jesus’ speech,” 178.

is “my” in this case. However, if all Greek expressions went back to “Abba” then they would not have specified the possessive case. As mentioned before, it seems more probable that the Greek variations of “father” go back to a Semitic form that specified ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘our’, etc, which takes a form other than “Abba.”<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, it might be possible that each instance where Jesus addresses God as “father” took “Abba” as its original form, but the evidence that Jeremias gives is not enough to prove this. On the contrary, the one instance of “Abba” in the Gospels could mean that it was a term specifically reserved for Jesus’ prayer of agony in Gethsemane.

(ii) In the literature of early Palestinian Judaism, there is little evidence that individuals addressed God as ‘Abba.’<sup>22</sup>

Jeremias shows that during the first two centuries C.E., individual Palestinian Jews rarely addressed God as ‘Father.’<sup>23</sup> The use of “Abba” in early Palestinian Jewish literature is significant because the Palestinian Jews were Jesus’ contemporaries. If Jesus spoke to God as “Abba” and his contemporaries did not, then Jesus’ use of “Abba” must mean something special about his relationship with God.<sup>24</sup>

First, it is necessary to ask, are there any words or phrases that paralleled the meaning of “Abba” in Palestinian Judaism? The literature of Palestinian Judaism shows that when people call God Father, it is rarely in a familiar sense. Usually, the Palestinian authors use the term in a collective sense, in which God is the Father of his children, the Israelites.<sup>25</sup> Richard Hess, the

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<sup>21</sup> Barr, “Abbā isn't "daddy," 46.

<sup>22</sup> Willem A VanGemeren. "Abbā' in the Old Testament." *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 385-398, esp. 386.

<sup>23</sup> Fitzmyer, "Abba and Jesus' relation to God," 25-26. ; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 21.

author of the article “Abba” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, agrees with Jeremias, concluding that not only in the writings of Palestinian Judaism but in the entire literature of Jewish prayer there is no analogy for God as “Abba.”<sup>26</sup> Since “Abba” was commonplace for ordinary family life, Jesus’ contemporaries would not have used the term for God because they thought it disrespectful.<sup>27</sup>

However, Allen Mawhinney raises a few examples of individual understanding of God’s Fatherhood in Judaism to combat Jeremias’ assertion that Jesus’ usage of “Abba” had no contemporary parallel.<sup>28</sup> A few examples Mawhinney mentions are as follows:

- (i) Honi the “circle drawer,” described as “you who importune God and he accedes to your request as a son that importunes his father.”<sup>29</sup>
- (ii) In the Wisdom of Solomon (100-50 BCE) the righteous man “callesh himself the child of the Lord” and “maketh his boast that God is his father.”<sup>30</sup>
- (iii) In the Thanksgiving Hymns of Qumran God receives praise as a father: “My father knoweth me not and my mother hath abandoned me unto Thee. But Thou art a father unto all Thy true (sons).”<sup>31</sup>

In spite of these examples, Jeremias insisted that there is a difference between the depiction of God as the father of an individual and an individual addressing God as his or her

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<sup>26</sup> Hess, “Abba,” i7.

<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. “Abba.” In *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 5-6. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Mawhinney, “God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” 182.

<sup>29</sup> Mawhinney, “God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” 182.

<sup>30</sup> Mawhinney, “God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” 182.

<sup>31</sup> Mawhinney, “God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” 182.

father.<sup>32</sup> Still, there are two particular instances in Jewish literature where God is addressed as father:<sup>33</sup> (1) Eleazar, a priest, addressed God as “my Father in heaven” (*Sifra*, to Lev. 20:26)<sup>34</sup> and (2) God is address as “Lord, Father, and God of my life” (Sirach 23:1, 4). Jeremias dismisses these examples, regarding the prayer of Elezaer as Hellenistic in origin and Greek in influence and the prayer in Sirach as a mistranslation of the original text. Nevertheless, the intercessory spirit of Abraham (Gen 18:22-31) and Moses (Exod 32:7-14, 31-35, 33:1-3, 12-24) show that the Jews understood God’s people could confidently draw near to God as they would draw near to a father.<sup>35</sup>

From the discussion of these examples, it is clear that Jeremias does not deny that there was communal understanding of God as father in liturgy or an individual awareness of God as father in Judaism. Thus, it seems that Jeremias may be forcing evidence to support his conclusion that a special father understanding of God, exemplified in the word “Abba”, was unique to Jesus. Jeremias argues that “Abba” was unique to Jesus because it implies that Jesus shared a special childlike intimacy with his God.

(iii) “Abba” derives from child’s speech and is a term of familiarity that has a similar connotation as “Daddy.”<sup>36</sup>

Jeremias argues “Abba” derives from child’s speech,<sup>37</sup> and thus “Abba” must have a special meaning of dependency and intimacy that is unique meaning apart from ‘father’, much like the meaning of “Daddy.” Therefore, Jesus’ use of “Abba” implies that his relationship with

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<sup>32</sup> Mawhinney, "God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered," 182-183.

<sup>33</sup> Mawhinney, "God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered," 183.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Mawhinney, "God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered," 187.

<sup>36</sup> Barr, "Abbā isn't "daddy," 28. ; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*. Naperville, 58.

<sup>37</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 58-59.

God has the qualities of familiarity, intimacy, and dependency, much like the relationship between a small child and his or her father.

Even though Jeremias denies the claim that Jesus addressed his father, using the “chatter of a small child,”<sup>38</sup> it is important to look at this understanding of “Abba” because it seems directly related to Jeremias’ understanding that “Abba” derives from the speech of a child. Additionally, this understanding of “Abba” is prevalent beyond academia and has influence in the work of respected scholars like J.G.D. Dunn and M.J. Borg.<sup>39</sup> If “Abba” simply constituted the “chatter of a small child” then the “babbling sound” explanation clarifies the derivation of “Abba.”<sup>40</sup>

Barr points out that the “babbling sound” explanation seems to be the essential link in connection Jeremias makes between specific form of “Abba” and the speech of children specifically.<sup>41</sup> This relates to the Lallwort theory, which explains language as derived from nature, rather than from random factors.<sup>42</sup> This is an unpromising explanation—it is more likely that the adult compels the small child to say words such as “papa” or “daddy” as opposed to other sounds.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Benveiste showed that the original name “father” was a social classificatory term rather than the babbling of infants.<sup>44</sup>

There are several criticisms of the “babbling sound” explanation. James Barr contends that “Abba” does not come from the babbling of children but originates from the Semitic stem

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<sup>38</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Hess, “Abba,” i7.

<sup>40</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t ‘daddy,’” 29.

<sup>41</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t ‘daddy,’” 34.

<sup>42</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t ‘daddy,’” 32.

<sup>43</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t ‘daddy,’” 33.

<sup>44</sup> Barr, “‘Abbā isn’t ‘daddy,’” 33.

'*ab*, meaning "father."<sup>45</sup> The Targums show a couple instances where "Abba" should interpret as adult speech:

- (i) "And [Esau] said to his father, "Let *Abba* arise, and eat from his son's food" (Genesis 27:31)
- (ii) "The God of *Abba*, the God of Abraham" (Gen 31:42).

Finally, if the New Testament writers believed that Jesus used "childlike babbling" to address God, then it is more appropriate to use words such as "papas" or "pappas," which are found in the writings of Epicurus and Cornutus, instead.<sup>46</sup>

Next, we will examine Jeremias' claim that "Abba" is a term of familiarity that shares a similar meaning with "Daddy." Jeremias himself points out that at the time of Jesus it was common for grown children as well as young children to address their fathers as "Abba."<sup>47</sup> This being so, Jesus' use of "Abba" is not simply an expression of Jesus' familiarity with God but entails his deference to God.<sup>48</sup> However, the connection of "Abba" and children is simple to understand because young children are more dependent on their fathers and more likely to address their fathers than adult children.<sup>49</sup> Although it is reasonable to say that "Abba" is primarily a colloquial term of Jesus' time, it was not analogous to "Daddy."<sup>50</sup>

Jeremias' concern with the connotation of "Abba" seems to be that "Abba" should imply intimacy and familiarity. However, as Williem Vangemeren asks, are other words for "father"

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<sup>45</sup> Barr, "Abba, Father" and the familiarity of Jesus' speech," 175.

<sup>46</sup> Barr, "Abba, Father" and the familiarity of Jesus' speech," 176.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 60. ; Barr, "'Abbā isn't "daddy," 35

<sup>48</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> Barr, "'Abbā isn't "daddy," 36.

<sup>50</sup> Barr, "'Abbā isn't "daddy," 46.



less intimate than “Abba”?<sup>51</sup> Vangemeren finds that Jeremias is more interested in the specific term for father when he should be more aware of the context surrounding the use of “father.”

Although the criticisms of Jeremias’ view are plentiful, there are points where his views and the views of his critics line up. Conclusions concerning Jesus’ usage of “Abba” emerge based on these lines of intersection. For Barr, Mawhinney, Fitzmyer, and Vangemeren, Jeremias’ problem is that he cannot prove that Jesus’ usage of “Abba” encompassed his self-understanding and characterized his relationship with God the Father. They all agree that Jesus’ relationship with God was unique but concluded that “Abba” is not the source of this insight.<sup>52</sup> Rather, as Mawhinney asserts, Jesus’ special understanding of sonship comes from a broad exegesis of all the Gospel texts.<sup>53</sup>

However, “Abba” gives partial insight into the person of Jesus because it is a cry of the Spirit within him. According to the Gospel of Mark, the Holy Spirit captures Jesus’ purpose and identity. Earlier in this discussion, I established that John prepared the way for Jesus to baptize believers with the Holy Spirit. Jesus inaugurated this era of the Spirit when the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and God declared his pleasure over Jesus, his son. Jesus demonstrated his identity as God’s son through the power of the Spirit. One of Jesus’ first public acts after the Spirit came upon him was to use his power to cast out unclean spirits (Mark 1:21-28). Mark also records Jesus’ healing of the lepers (Mark 1:40-45), healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-13), and healing of the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-12). Furthermore, Jesus demonstrates the power of the Spirit by calming the sea (Mark 4:35-41) and walking on water (Mark 6:45-52). Even still, Jesus multiplied food to feed four thousand (Mark 8:1-26) and commanded a girl to

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<sup>51</sup> VanGemeren, “‘Abbā’ in the Old Testament,” 388.

<sup>52</sup> Barr, “Abba, Father” and the familiarity of Jesus’ speech,” 179 ; Fitzmyer, “Abba and Jesus’ relation to God,” 34-35. ; VanGemeren, “‘Abbā’ in the Old Testament,” 390.

<sup>53</sup> Mawhinney, “God as Father : Two Popular Theories Reconsidered,” 184.

“get up” who everyone thought was dead (Mark 5:35-43). After Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples and explained that “he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). From the previous discussion, it is evident that Jesus understood the baptism to be the repentance of sin, the immersion in water, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Astoundingly, Jesus instructed his disciples that the signs of power that Jesus demonstrated would accompany all of those who believe. Speaking of those who believe Jesus declared, “they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17). From the beginning of the Gospel of Mark to the end, it is unmistakable that the Holy Spirit is central to the understanding of Jesus. In the opening verses of Mark, John the Baptist declared that “Lord,” or Jesus, would come baptizing in the Holy Spirit. Throughout the book of Mark, Jesus performs miracles by the power of the Spirit that descended upon him at his baptism. The book of Mark concludes with Jesus commissioning his disciples to walk in the same baptism of the Spirit and demonstration of power of the Spirit through faith.

Since Jesus possessed the Spirit, we know that his cry “Abba, Father” resulted from the Spirit dwelling within him. Not only are the signs of power evidence that Jesus possessed the Spirit, but so is Jesus’ recognition of “Abba, Father.” Jesus’ cry “Abba, Father” takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-36).

*<sup>32</sup> They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.”<sup>33</sup> And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.<sup>34</sup> And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”<sup>35</sup> And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the*

*ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. <sup>36</sup>And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”*

When Jesus and his disciples came to Gethsemane, Jesus is “deeply grieved to the point of death” because he foresees his coming betrayal that would lead him to death on a cross. It is evident that this is what Jesus was grieving because in verse 35, the narrator reports that Jesus “began to pray that if it were possible, “the hour” might pass Him by.” Just a few verses later, in verse 41, Jesus told his disciples, “the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Jesus prophesied his suffering that would come from this betrayal beforehand, which is recounted in Mark 8:31: “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” In this moment of anticipation and struggle, Jesus cried out to “Abba, Father.” This phrase shows that Jesus recognized God as, not only the one that was Lord over his suffering, but Jesus recognized God as his father. Although Jesus experienced turmoil, his Spirit, crying “Abba, Father” directly connected to his Father in Jesus’ time of need.

In summary, the purpose of Jesus and his relationship with God the Father is evident through the reoccurring theme of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Mark. Although “Abba, Father” does not characterize Jesus’ identity as Jeremias supposes, his cry is an aspect of the Spirit. From the context of Jesus’ entire prayer where “Abba, Father” resides, it is clear that Jesus understood himself as God’s son. Jesus understood that as a son, his father was Lord over his suffering. Yet, as a son, Jesus cried out to his father and submitted to his father in the midst of his suffering.

## “Abba, Father” and the Spirit of Believers: Paul’s use of Abba in Romans and Galatians

Next, I will analyze Paul’s use of ‘Abba, Father.’ In the context of Galatians 4 and Romans 8, Paul puts “Abba, Father” on the lips of believers. Like Jesus, believers, both male and female (Gal. 3:28), are considered sons of God because they possess the Holy Spirit. In order to begin the discussion of Paul’s usage of “Abba, Father” in Romans and Galatians, I will establish whether there is a relationship between the exclamation “Abba, Father” of adopted sons’ cry and the “Abba, Father” that God’s son, Jesus, prays.

Jeremias argues that “Abba” is the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus, meaning “the very words” of Jesus,<sup>54</sup> which permitted Jesus’ followers to call on God as “Abba.”<sup>55</sup> According to Jeremias’ argument, the early Christians would not have called God “Abba” unless Jesus had done so originally, because it would have been an inappropriate and unusual name for God given Jewish usage of “Abba” at the time.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Richard Hess points out that even the one ascription of “Abba” to Jesus in Gethsemane reveals that the use of “Abba” in the early church could have come from Jesus’ prayer, which is supported by Galatians 4:6, where Paul links the prayer, “Abba, Father” of the Christian community with divine sonship in Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

There are a few responses to this proposition. For one, the Bultmann School contended that since New Testament theology came after the resurrection, the Christological tradition of Jesus’ sonship is not in direct connection with the person of Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Barr also maintains that it is unclear whether the cases in which Paul uses “Abba” in Galatians and Romans came from Jesus’

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<sup>54</sup> Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36) : Another Approach," 449.

<sup>55</sup> VanGemeren, "'Abbā' in the Old Testament," 386 ; Fitzmyer, "Abba and Jesus' relation to God," 31.

<sup>56</sup> Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly. "God the father in the Bible and in the experience of Jesus : the state of the question." In *God as father*, 95-162, esp. 98. New York: Seabury, 1981.

<sup>57</sup> Hess, "Abba," i7.

<sup>58</sup> Hamerton-Kelly, "God the father in the Bible and in the experience of Jesus," 98.

use in the Garden of Gethsemane since Paul rarely references Christ before his crucifixion.<sup>59</sup> In spite of these counterarguments, it is still uncertain why the use of the Aramaic “Abba” continued in Greek-speaking communities.<sup>60</sup> It seems that the clearest explanation for this is that the early Christian communities adopted “Abba” in Mark from Jesus’ original usage of the term.

Paul, the author of the letter to the Galatians and the letter to the Romans was a preacher and proponent of what he calls “the Gospel” message. Before his conversion, Paul was a fanatical Jewish leader and a persecutor of the “church of God” (Galatians 1:13-14). The account of Paul’s conversion to “the Way” involves a dramatic event in which Paul encounters the Incarnated Christ and becomes as an apostle of the faith (Acts 9). Whether “Abba, Father” was a bilingual adaptation that began with the Greek-speaking missionaries in Antioch or whether it was used in the baptismal ceremony for a period of time during Paul’s missionary years,<sup>61</sup> according to Paul, “Abba, Father” is the cry of the Spirit—the essence of a new identity in Christ that is free from the law and free from sin.

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<sup>59</sup> Barr, “Abba, Father” and the familiarity of Jesus’ speech,” 176.

<sup>60</sup> Hess, “Abba,” i7.

<sup>61</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 266. Baptism is a ritual where believers are recognized as God’s children and thought to be adopted into the family of God. Through being submerged in the water, believers are identified with Christ in the burial of his death and the resurrection of his life. Some historians believe that during the days of the early church, believers exclaimed “Abba, Father” as they rose out of the water—a sign of their adoption.

## “Abba, Father” in Galatians

The first mention of “Abba, Father” that I will examine is in Galatians 4. In order to analyze the specifics of this cry, I will first take a brief look at the purpose and broader context of the letter.

There is some disagreement over the dating of Paul’s letter to the Galatians,<sup>62</sup> but a realistic assumption is that Paul wrote his letter to the churches of South Galatia in the early 50s C.E.<sup>63</sup> The Galatians, located in Asia Minor,<sup>64</sup> initially welcomed Paul’s message that Jesus the Messiah had made the way for both Jew and Gentile to enter into God’s covenant community through faith rather than works (Gal. 2:16) by atoning for the sins of humankind. Paul writes that the Galatians’ reception of the faith was confirmed by their reception of the Spirit and testimony of the Spirit’s power (Gal. 3:2-5). Nevertheless, the Galatians turned to “false believers” (Gal. 2:4) who maintained that it was necessary for both Jew and Gentile to adhere to the Jewish entry rite of circumcision in order to inherit the blessings that God promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17). Against this view, Paul insisted that the descendants of Abraham’s seed (Gal. 3:16), the seed who is the Christ, are not those that practice the works of the law, but are those who are “born according to the Spirit” (Gal. 4:28). Paul wrote to the Galatians using reason and appealing to their experiences in order to defend this notion of sonship and to call the church back to Paul’s interpretation of the Gospel message that they first received.

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<sup>62</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 6.

The Galatians' desertion of the Gospel seems to directly link with their understanding of the Mosaic Law. Paul explains that the Law was added "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19), or more pointedly, "to provoke transgressions,"<sup>65</sup> and to "shut up everyone under sin" (Gal. 3:22). The Law was not given to give life; rather, its main purpose was to reveal the sinful nature of humanity so that the need for Christ would be realized.<sup>66</sup> In particular, circumcision was intended to be a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, not the covenant itself. The true covenant was that Abraham's "seed" would inherit God's promise, and Paul interprets "the seed" to be the Messiah (Gal. 3:16). Since the Law was always intended as an institution put in place only until Christ's coming, then adherence to the Law was no longer necessary. In fact, if one followed the Law in order to obtain righteousness and sonship, then he or she has missed the purpose of the Law altogether, and "Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21).

Now, Christ's followers are freed from the law, but paradoxically the purpose of their freedom is to fulfill the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) through loving others (Gal 5:14; 6:2).<sup>67</sup> As believers partake of the Holy Spirit through faith, they now mystically join with him as carriers of God's love. The law is important, but it is now the "whole law" (Gal. 5:14) or the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) that matters rather than the Mosaic Law. As Galatians 6:15 states, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation," the first seed of which was Christ. By practicing the tradition of circumcision, the Galatians sought to identify with and participate in the Abrahamic covenant. However, "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" because the law is fulfilled in Christ, who made participation in the Abrahamic

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<sup>65</sup> Hübner, Hans. *Law in Paul's Thought : A Contribution to the Development of Pauline Theology*. New York City, New York : T. & T. Clark, 2004, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> James L Boyce. "The Poetry of the Spirit: Willing and Doing in Galatians 5 and 6." *Word & World* 20, no. 3 (June 1, 2000): 290-298, esp. 295.

covenant a matter of faith resulting in new identity: a free son of God, fulfilling the “law of Christ,” through their possession of the spirit that cries, “Abba, Father.”



## An Exegesis of Galatians 4:1-7 – “Abba, Father”

Galatians 4:1-7 is the passage in Galatians where Paul mentions “Abba, Father.” This passage continues Paul’s argument that began with a question to the Galatians in chapter 3, verse 1: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?” Galatians 4:1-7 is part of Paul’s defense of the Gospel that the Galatians first heard and accepted, which centers on their powerful experience and reception of the Spirit.<sup>68</sup> These eight verses are focused on the analogy of the believer as an heir of the Holy Spirit which was promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:14-18, 29). Possession of the Holy Spirit, which cries “Abba, Father”, confirms the believer’s identity as God’s son (Gal. 4:6-7).<sup>69</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.*

Paul begins his point by using an illustration. A natural understanding of this illustration is that a man died leaving his wealth to his son, putting his son under the care of guardians until a set date that his son would receive the inheritance and full rights as the owner of the father’s estate.<sup>70</sup> While the child<sup>71</sup> is waiting for his inheritance, he has the same standing as a slave from the outsider’s perspective. Even though the son is the rightful owner of the property, his rights as the master of the estate are not in place.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 265. ; Dunn, “The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” 60.

<sup>69</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> Leon Morris. *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996, 126. ; Schreiner, Thomas R. *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010, 267.

<sup>71</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 266. The word ‘*nēpios*’ which is translated here as ‘child’ is probably better translated as minor, since a minor who has not reached the age to receive the inheritance, while child may have a stronger connotation of immaturity or youth.

<sup>72</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 126.

Guardians and managers<sup>73</sup> served a variety of functions in Hellenistic society.<sup>74</sup> Overall, guardians normally did not own the property but acted as though they did by distributing duties of management, making important decisions concerning the property and directing the workers.<sup>75</sup> Managers served the same purpose as guardians, but if there was a difference it would be that, the guardian's main responsibility was to look after the father's son, while the manager's tasks concerned the upkeep of the estate.<sup>76</sup>

These opening verses focus attention on the subject of slavery<sup>77</sup> and inheritance. Paul emphasizes slavery throughout the letter as, primarily, the state of living under law (4:3-5)<sup>78</sup> and inheritance in reference to God's promise to Abraham.<sup>79</sup> Paul's reference to slavery and inheritance anticipates an application of his illustration to the recipients of his letter in verse 3.

***<sup>3</sup>So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.***

In verse 3, Paul arrives at the purpose of his illustration by relating the child heir to the recipients of the letter. Since Paul uses the phrase "we were" he may have meant only Jews since he was once a Jew, but since Paul speaks of the "elemental things of the world" and warns the Gentiles against returning to the elements in other parts of his letter (Gal. 4:9), then "we" must include Gentiles as well as Jews.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Louis J Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*. New York : Doubleday, 1997, 387-388. The most probable reason that 'guardians' and 'managers' are plural is that Paul will compare them to the plural "elemental things of the world" mentioned in verse 3.

<sup>74</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 126.

<sup>75</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 127.

<sup>76</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 127.

<sup>77</sup> Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 387.

<sup>78</sup> Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 266.

<sup>79</sup> Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 266.

<sup>80</sup> Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 267.

The period of time, “while we were children” refers to the era of the Mosaic Law.<sup>81</sup> According to Paul, the entire human race lived under the “curse of the law” (3:13) during this era.<sup>82</sup> The preposition “under” is mentioned throughout the letter in reference to the time of the law. Each discussion of the law where “under” is mentioned is accompanied with a discussion on life under slavery and the power of sin (Gal 3:10,22,23,25;4:2,4,5,21;5:18).<sup>83</sup> Thus living “under law” entails a life of enslavement to sin.

If “we” includes Jews as well as Gentiles, then why would Jews be enslaved to the “elemental things of the world” rather than the Law, since the Law was the primary governing influence of their daily affairs?<sup>84</sup> In order to answer this question, I will first examine the meaning of “elemental things of the world.” This phrase historically refers to the ancients’ belief that there were four elements from which the world was made:<sup>85</sup> earth, water, air, and fire.<sup>86</sup> Although these elements refer to calendrical observances (cf. 4:8-11) and religious practices related to the four foundational elements of the world. Just as calendrical observances were part of pagan practice, they were also part of Jewish practice (e.g. Sabbath, Passover).<sup>87</sup> Paul highlighted “the elemental things of the world” to relate the cultural practices that the Galatian Gentiles knew they had been freed from to the laws associated with Jewish practice. Paul’s point was that by subjecting themselves to the Jewish law, the Galatians were returning to the “elemental things of the world,” that had once enslaved them (293).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 267.

<sup>82</sup> Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 388.

<sup>83</sup> Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269

<sup>84</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 256-257.

<sup>85</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 268. ; Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 388.

<sup>86</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 251.

<sup>87</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 256.

<sup>88</sup> David M. Hay "Galatians 4:1-31." *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (July 1, 2000): 293-296, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed September 18, 2012).

***<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,***

Verse 4 begins with the word “but,” which introduces a contrast.<sup>89</sup> Paul contrasts the time that the child was under guardians and managers to “the date set by the father.” In terms of the letter’s recipients, Paul is contrasting the believers’ limited time under the Mosaic Law and under the elemental things of the world<sup>90</sup> with their life under the rule of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

The time set by the child’s father is a metaphor for “the fullness of time,” when God initiated a new era<sup>92</sup> by sending His Son<sup>93</sup> to free the world from bondage. Paul may have used the phrase “fullness of time” for a couple of reasons.<sup>94</sup> “Fullness of time” can be understood as the moment when a will or testament takes effect (cf. Gal. 3:15-18) or when a container runs full.<sup>95</sup> These analogies fail because God does not have to die before his will takes effect and God’s action is not dependent on time or humanity.<sup>96</sup> In any case, “fullness of time” indicates that Christ’s being sent is a marker of the end of time and the beginning of a new era where humankind no longer lives under law, but lives by the Holy Spirit.<sup>97</sup>

Jesus is described as the Son of God, born of a woman, and born under the Law. The expression “born of a woman” simply means that he was born as a human (cf. Job 14:1, Matthew

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<sup>89</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 128.

<sup>90</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 128 ; Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269.

<sup>91</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 270.

<sup>92</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269.

<sup>93</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, Downers Grove, 128.

<sup>94</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 262.

<sup>95</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 261.

<sup>96</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 261.

<sup>97</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 262.

11:11).<sup>98</sup> In addition, Christ's birth "under the Law" is another indicator of Christ's humanity. The fact that Jesus lived "under law" means that he shared the "curse of the law" (3:10,13)<sup>99</sup> by subjecting himself to the world's dominion of sin.<sup>100</sup> In other words, Christ was "born of a woman" and "born under the law" so that he would "share in the human predicament completely."<sup>101</sup> As a human, Jesus lived in perfect obedience to God's law as the true offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:16)<sup>102</sup> in order to break the curse of sin that lay upon human beings, thus "redeem[ing] those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:5).

***<sup>5</sup>so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***

Paul begins verse 5 with 'so that,' indicating that God's act in sending forth his Son was in order to redeem humankind from the enslavement of the law<sup>103</sup> and adopt humankind as his son.

Those "under the Law" refer to all human beings,<sup>104</sup> not just the Israelites that received the Mosaic Law.<sup>105</sup> Paul uses "under phrases" to refer to the human condition apart from Christ under the power and oppression of sin.<sup>106</sup> Those who are "under law" are "under a curse" (3:10), 'under sin' (3:22) 'under [a] custodian' (3:25) and 'under the elemental things of the world'

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<sup>98</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 270 ; Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 390.

<sup>99</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>100</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 270.

<sup>101</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 263.

<sup>102</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 270.

<sup>103</sup> Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, New York : Doubleday, 1997, 390. ; Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>104</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>105</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 271.

<sup>106</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 270.

(4:3). God’s redemption of those under law entails that humankind is no longer subject to the Mosaic law, pagan law, or the curse of sin,<sup>107</sup> but are free as the adopted sons of God.

The purpose of Paul’s analogy is that the time of the law’s dominion, just like the time of the guardians and managers’ care of the child heir, is not eternal<sup>108</sup> (Galatians 3:25)—the ultimate goal being “adoption as sons.” The Greek word for adoption was used as a legal term, entailing that the adopted son has the same rights and inheritance as the son of a blood-relation.<sup>109</sup> Although the word “son” is used, it is an indication of inheritance and legitimacy as a child of God, rather than meaning, “adoption as males.” In other words, females are included in this inheritance along with males (Galatians 3:28)—both share the promise of Abraham, which is the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:14).<sup>110</sup>

***‘Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”***

Paul’s argument, that began by asking the Galatians if they “receive[d] the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith” (Gal. 3:2), ends with references to the Spirit—the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. Paul asserts that because believers are sons of God, they possess the Holy Spirit. It seems that Paul is suggesting that believers first become God’s sons and then God sends his Spirit to them.<sup>111</sup> However, the point that Paul is making is not about the chronological order; rather, it is that the Spirit within them confirms their identity as sons.<sup>112</sup> Martinus C de Boer paraphrases this verse well: “Because you are God’s sons, you also

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<sup>107</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>108</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 260.

<sup>109</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>110</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 264.

<sup>111</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 272.

<sup>112</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 265.

certainly know from your own experience that God sent the Spirit of his son into all of our hearts, enabling us to acknowledge and address him as Father.”<sup>113</sup> Just as Paul began in chapter 3, their experience of the Spirit is enough to show that their identity as sons is not based on the Law, but it is a result of Christ’s coming.

Just as God “sent” his Son (Gal. 4:40), he also “sent” his Spirit.<sup>114</sup> The close relationship between God the Father, Son, and Spirit is revealed in the phrase “God has sent for the Spirit of his Son.”<sup>115</sup> The presence of Christ’s Spirit indicates that he is still intimately active among humankind.<sup>116</sup> Because the sending of the Spirit is directly connected with the “fullness of time” when God sent his Son, the “fullness of time” could be not only the age of Christ but the age of the Spirit. The reception of the Spirit of God that brings prophecy was prophesied in Jewish history, and was an expectation of some communities who interpreted this Spirit to be the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ (e.g. Isaiah 32:15, Ezek 37:4-14, Joel 2:28-9).<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Paul interprets God’s promise to Abraham as the coming of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14).<sup>118</sup> The verification that the Galatians’ were God’s adopted sons is that they cried “Abba, Father” by the Spirit they had received as a result of Christ’s coming.<sup>119</sup>

God sent the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers. The heart of God’s son is the place of discernment and knowledge, which some exegetes believe refers here specifically to the believer’s relationship to God, according to the language that Paul uses.<sup>120</sup> In his reference to the heart, Paul may have had in mind the motif established by the Jewish prophets, who predicted a

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<sup>113</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 265.

<sup>114</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 271 ; Boer, Martinus C de. *Galatians: a commentary*, 266.

<sup>115</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 271.

<sup>116</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 266.

<sup>117</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 61.

<sup>118</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 61.

<sup>119</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 271.

<sup>120</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 265.

new type of humanity whose hearts were changed from stone to flesh (cf. Ezek 36:26, Jer 31:33-34).<sup>121</sup> Likewise, the new Spirit that the man or woman has received is like a new heart that enables him or her to cry “Abba, Father.”<sup>122</sup>

“Crying” is the act of the Spirit, but in the same way it is also an act of God’s adopted son.<sup>123</sup> The verb “to cry” conveys a “loud or earnest cry” (cf. Matt 9:27; Acts 14:14; Rom 9:27).<sup>124</sup> The believer cries “Abba, Father” which expresses certainty and confidence in God as his or her child.<sup>125</sup>

***<sup>7</sup>Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.***

In this closing statement, Paul wraps up his analogy with a resounding “Therefore.” Since the Galatians received the Spirit and became sons of God through faith, they are no longer slaves to the law and the practice of circumcision.

The phrase “no longer” recollects 3:25, which states, “now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (i.e. under the law).”<sup>126</sup> “No longer” indicates that believers were once slaves, but now have come into their rightful place as God’s sons who do not have to keep the law to receive the Abrahamic inheritance.<sup>127</sup>

This passage concludes with the concept of inheritance that is introduced in 3:15-18.<sup>128</sup> The “son” and the “heir” that receives the inheritance is both male and female (cf. Gal. 3:28).

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<sup>121</sup>Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 391-392.

<sup>122</sup>Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 266.

<sup>123</sup>Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 392.

<sup>124</sup>Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 272.

<sup>125</sup>Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 265-266.

<sup>126</sup>Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 267.

<sup>127</sup>Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*, 132.

<sup>128</sup>Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 267.



Men and women become heirs through God's act of adoption.<sup>129</sup> The phrase "through God" simply means the same as "through a promise" (Gal. 3:18) and "through the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16; 3:14,26), which refers to Christ's act of atonement.<sup>130</sup> It is through Christ,<sup>131</sup> not through the law, that adoption into God's family is possible.

In conclusion, Paul's use of "Abba, Father" in Galatians is significant because this cry shows that believers possess the Holy Spirit, that they are partakers of the Abrahamic covenant, and they are freed from living "under the law" because God has adopted them as his sons through the redemptive work of Christ.

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<sup>129</sup> Martyn, *Galatians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 392.

<sup>130</sup> Boer, *Galatians: a commentary*, 267.

<sup>131</sup> Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 132.

## **“Abba, Father” in Romans**

The second time Paul mentions “Abba, Father” is in Romans 8. In order to look at the specifics of this cry, I will first examine the purpose behind Paul’s letter to the Romans and the broader context of the letter.

In contrast to Paul’s letter to the Gentiles of Galatia, Paul did not have a particular issue that he was addressing in Roman community. Instead, Paul wrote to gather support for his missionary efforts in Spain since his efforts in the eastern Empire were complete (Romans 15:19)<sup>132</sup> and to prepare for his future visit to Rome on his way to Spain, where he would plan to encourage and be encouraged by the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:11-12, Romans 15:24). The large part of his letter is a presentation of the gospel, which is the heart of Paul’s ministry.

Paul saw himself as one commissioned by God in order to “bring about the *obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for [Jesus’] name’s sake” (Romans 1:5). According to this verse, the purpose of the death and resurrection of Christ, or the gospel, was to bring about the obedience and faith among all people, both Jews and Gentiles. In view of this charge, the obedience that the Christian is called to is rooted and developed through faith, rather than the law.

Paul opens up the letter to the Romans by illustrating humankind’s disobedient nature. Paul does so by depicting the disobedient Jews who claim to know the law but do not follow in heart (Rom. 2:17-29), and lawless Gentiles who suppressed the truth of God that was made evident in creation (Rom. 1:18-32). The most important point of Paul’s discussion on the disobedience of both Jew and Gentile is that man’s unrighteousness reveals God’s righteousness

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<sup>132</sup> Daniel Napier. "Paul's analysis of sin and Torah in Romans 7:7-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 15-32, esp. 16.

through the act of Jesus (Rom: 3:4-5).<sup>133</sup> .God’s righteousness is demonstrated in his faithfulness to the promise of Abraham, the “seed” of Christ, through which the inheritance of God’s blessing would come to the nations. Thus, as God’s righteousness was demonstrated through his faithfulness, his righteousness would be imparted to his people through faith—a covenant based not on keeping the commands of the Mosaic Law, but a covenant based on the faithfulness of God bringing forth the faith of man to join with Christ as an inheritor of the Abrahamic promise.

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<sup>133</sup>Paul L Owen. "The "Works of the Law" in Romans and Galatians: A New Defense of the Subjective Genitive." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 553-577, esp. 555.

## **An Exegesis of Romans 8:12-17 – “Abba, Father”**

Romans 8:1-11 set up verses 12-17, which begin by “so then.” The point that Paul makes in the first 11 verses of chapter 8 is that believers have been delivered from the Law by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2). Those that possess the Holy Spirit are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), which means that Christ dwells inside of them (Rom.8:10). Since Christ was sent as an offering for sin, condemning sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), believers join with Christ by fulfilling the requirement of the Law (Rom. 8:4), and like him, their bodies are dead because of sin but alive because of his righteousness and his spirit which dwells inside of them (Rom. 8:10).

*<sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—*

“So then,” or because of the reality that God’s children are alive because of Christ’s righteousness in accordance with the spirit that resides inside of them, believers are no longer obligated to live under the desires of the flesh, which is dead (cf. Rom. 8:10).

The word translated as ‘brethren’ shows that Paul views his relationships with other believers as being as strong as, or even stronger than blood relationships.<sup>134</sup> In view of the letter as a whole, ‘brethren’ includes the male and female members of the house and tenement churches in Rome and the larger Christian family scattered throughout the world.<sup>135</sup>

‘We are under obligation’ is the same noun that Paul used in 1:14 where he talks about his obligation to preach the gospel to all people.<sup>136</sup> According to the Roman legal context, obligation binds one person to give, do, or perform something for another person. Roman

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<sup>134</sup>Arland J Hultgren. *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich ; William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011, 312.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Jewett, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay Epp. *Romans : a commentary*, Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2007, 493.

<sup>136</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493.

ethicists taught that obligations were owed to everyone in one's social sphere: parents, friends, and patrons. Obligations were owed first to gods, then to country, and then to parents, etc. Thus, obligations would include all social and religious duties pertaining to the Roman world.<sup>137</sup>

The statement, we are not under obligation "to live according to the flesh" means that the Christian community has no obligation to allow their lives to be determined by the flesh, which also coincides with what was said in verses 1 through 11.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, "to live according to the flesh" means that one's life is based on the rule, standard, or regulative principle of the flesh<sup>139</sup>. In contrast to this, it is implied that they are under obligation to live according to the regulative principle of the Spirit,<sup>140</sup> which redefines all social obligations.<sup>141</sup> However, it is important to note that Paul does not instruct his brethren to withdraw from their obligations, but rather insists that the Spirit elicits a new form of obligation that is prompted by love and an identity that is determined by God rather than society.<sup>142</sup>

***<sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***

Paul's train of thought continues with the word, "for," expanding on his statement that the child of God is not under obligation to live according to the flesh by explaining that if one lives according to the flesh he will die. Here, in a paradoxical formulation,<sup>143</sup> Paul presents two ways of life that lead to two different endings: the life of flesh ends in death, while putting the

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<sup>137</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493.

<sup>138</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield and W. Sanday. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1994, 394.

<sup>139</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493.

<sup>140</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 393.

<sup>141</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493.

<sup>142</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493-494.

<sup>143</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 494.

deeds of the body to death results in life.<sup>144</sup> Death entails not merely dying, but dying without hope of life with God,<sup>145</sup> while life entails eternal life with God. This contrast seems to entail that, regardless of God's judgment, death and life are principles of nature: if you sow to the flesh then you reap death, but if you sow to the Spirit then you reap life. In other words, if your deeds align with the desires of the flesh then death is the consequence, but if your deeds align with the desires of the spirit, then life results. This idea is built upon from earlier parts of Romans: Adam's sin led to condemnation and death (5:12-21), but Christ's grace led to eternal life (5:21).<sup>146</sup>

Paul exhorts the "brethren" as "you" in the second person plural form, so that the community is addressed rather than the individual.<sup>147</sup> This means that Paul's command is entirely different from instructing individual ascetics on bodily mortifications. The 'deeds of the body' that he refers to are more likely social rather than sensual. The traditional ways of the flesh such as suppressing truth and competition (cf. Rom. 14-15) will destroy God's house unless they are put to death by the Spirit.

The meaning of "deeds of the body" is confusing. Some writers have translated "deeds of the body" as "deeds of the flesh"<sup>148</sup> in order to make the theme of this passage more congruent with chapter 8, where the flesh was contrasted with the Spirit.<sup>149</sup> However, the phrase is most accurately translated as "deeds of the body" rather than "deeds of the flesh." Some have attempted to explain Paul's word choice by relating it to the "sinful body" mentioned in 6:6 and

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<sup>144</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 312.

<sup>145</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 394.

<sup>146</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 494.

<sup>147</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 493.

<sup>148</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 310.

<sup>149</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 495.

the “body of death” in 7:24.<sup>150</sup> Despite the confusion, it is clear that Paul’s point is certain bodily actions should be put to death by the community, which in light of the previous arguments of Romans includes the practices of 1:29-32, the bigotry of chapter 2, and the misdeeds of chapters 3, 5, and 7.<sup>151</sup> Most certainly, Paul does not mean daily activities of the body such as sleeping, but the sinful deeds described in previous chapters which result in death.<sup>152</sup> Although the body itself is not sinful, it is vulnerable to sin and is the place where sin seeks to exert authority.<sup>153</sup> The command to ‘put to death the deeds of the body’ is a command to continually<sup>154</sup> stand in the face of temptation,<sup>155</sup> using the Spirit as the means of warfare.<sup>156</sup> Everyone that possesses the Holy Spirit is capable of coming out victorious in this struggle.<sup>157</sup>

***14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***

Verse 14 clarifies verse 13.<sup>158</sup> The point of verse 13 is that the Christian community is not under obligation to live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Verse 14 drives this home—the community is obligated to live under the Spirit because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Furthermore ‘being led by the Spirit’ coincides with ‘putting to death the deeds of the body’ by the Spirit. In other words, the continual putting to death of the sinful flesh by the Spirit

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<sup>150</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 495.

<sup>151</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 495.

<sup>152</sup> Cranfield, *critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 394.

<sup>153</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 312.

<sup>154</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 394. ; Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 495.

<sup>155</sup> Ernst Käsemann and Geoffrey William Bromiley. *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Eerdmans, 1980, 225.

<sup>156</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 394.

<sup>157</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 312.

<sup>158</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 393.

is to be “led, directed, impelled [and] controlled by the Spirit.”<sup>159</sup> The phrase “led by the Spirit” is more accurately translated as “driven by the Spirit.”<sup>160</sup> This “driven by” or “being led” is a common theme in magical texts where a person is supernaturally led by gods, spirits, or ghosts.<sup>161</sup> According to Jewett’s research, to be “led by the Spirit of God” is to be “constrained by a compelling force.. surrender[ed] to an overpowering compulsion, which implies divine intervention into decision-making process of the community, led by inspired leaders and tested by inspired and transformed minds of members (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).”<sup>162</sup>

“These” or “those who are led by the Spirit” are sons of God. In Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, heroes and rulers were often called sons of God and it was often used as a name for gods in Roman civic cult.<sup>163</sup> In any case, ‘son of God’ was reserved for people who sat in a position of high honor. In this statement, Paul redefines “sons of God” as those who are led by the Spirit, rather than those who held an exceptional status of authority and were greatly esteemed by the public.<sup>164</sup>

***<sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”***

Starting with the word ‘For,’ verses 15 and 16 are intended as a confirmation and clarification of the statement in verse 14, that all who are being led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 395.

<sup>160</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 226.

<sup>161</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 496.

<sup>162</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 496.

<sup>163</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 496-497.

<sup>164</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 497.

<sup>165</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 396 ; Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 227. ; Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 313.



In this verse, Paul contrasts the “spirit of slavery” with the “spirit of adoption,” which must refer to the Holy Spirit.<sup>166</sup> This contrast has been explained in multiple ways, but is mainly understood as having a connection with the law.<sup>167</sup> The fear that is connected with spirit of slavery is not fear meaning proper respect for God (cf. Rom. 3:18), but the fear of falling under God’s wrath and failing to meet the righteous requirement of the law (cf. Rom. 8:4).<sup>168</sup> In contrast, the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of bondage but the spirit of adoption.<sup>169</sup> God’s Spirit has not led them into the bondage of fear associated with the law, but the Spirit of God has granted his sons access to God’s peace because they are unconditionally loved as God’s adopted sons.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, the “spirit of adoption” unites men with Christ, making them sharers in his sonship.<sup>171</sup>

The legal practice of adoption was not practiced by Jews;<sup>172</sup> however, it was known for a man to bring up someone else’s child.<sup>173</sup> However, adoption was common among the Greeks and Romans.<sup>174</sup> Theologically, Israel was adopted as Yahweh’s son.<sup>175</sup> Likewise, those in Christ are adopted as God’s children by the power of the Spirit.<sup>176</sup>

The spirit of adoption enables the believer to cry “Abba, Father.”<sup>177</sup> “We” cry, which apparently refers to communal worship or a liturgical setting where a cry was heard that was

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<sup>166</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 313.

<sup>167</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 396.

<sup>168</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 498.

<sup>169</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 396.

<sup>170</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 227.

<sup>171</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Edinburgh, 397.

<sup>172</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 498.

<sup>173</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Edinburgh, 398.

<sup>174</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 397.

<sup>175</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 314.

<sup>176</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 490.

<sup>177</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 399.

thought to be a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence.<sup>178</sup> In the biblical tradition, the verb 'cry out' was used for fervent prayer,<sup>179</sup> weeping before God, shrieking of the insane, the cries of demons, outcries of mobs, and Jesus' death cry.<sup>180</sup> This cry has also been understood to be an indicator of believers under spiritual stress.<sup>181</sup> In any case, the word "cry" likely expresses urgent prayer since it is used in this way in the book of Psalms more than 49 times. This time of cry could be in any setting, whether loud or the soft cry of the heart.<sup>182</sup> The collective cry "Abba, Father" reveals that the believers within the community have received the spirit of adoption.<sup>183</sup>

The cry "Abba, Father" expresses the confidence as one who knows that he or she is a child of God.<sup>184</sup> The believer's honor and reputation is not based on the standards of the flesh, or the standards of their world, but they are honored simply because they are God's sons. Believers show that they are God's sons when they call God "Father." Because believers all God "Father" as Jesus called God "Father," they identify with him as sons, and in doing so share in Jesus' fulfillment of the law, which they were given freely through his atoning sacrifice.<sup>185</sup> To sincerely call God "Father" means that one is wholeheartedly devoted to God and desires to please him in every way of life—the particulars of this cry are seen in 12.1-15.3.

***16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,***

Because God's Spirit testifies along with the spirit of his sons, it is evident God's children are united with him in spirit. However, there is disagreement over the Greek word

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<sup>178</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 498-499 ; Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 399.

<sup>179</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 315.

<sup>180</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 499.

<sup>181</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 399.

<sup>182</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 399.

<sup>183</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 311.

<sup>184</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 500.

<sup>185</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 393.

*summarturei* which is used in this verse to portray the relationship with the Holy Spirit to the spirit of God's child.<sup>186</sup> There are two different interpretations: (1) the Holy Spirit testifies *with* the spirit of man or (2) the Holy Spirit bears witness *to* the spirit of man.<sup>187</sup> J.K. Parratt, M. Black, and A.A. Trites support the first position. As stated by M. Black, "two witnesses according to the Old Testament injunction estimate the truth of any statement and here the witnesses are first the Holy Spirit...and then the Christian himself." By way of explanation, it is common in Scripture for two witnesses to be necessary in order for the truth of a statement to be confirmed. Similarly, the Holy Spirit along with the spirit of the Christian testifies to the person's adoption into the family of God. The second translation is held by Calvin, Godet, Preiss and Cranfield. According to Cranfield, "the human spirit has no right at all to testify to our being sons of God." However, Cranfield's statement is not based on the content of the text, but rather a personal opinion of man's inability or unworthiness. Additionally supporting the first translation, there is evidence that Paul is informed of the two witness principle seen in the New Testament (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19). Furthermore, Paul's writings speak of the spirit praying in God's people as well as God's people praying in the Spirit, which reveals that the Holy Spirit works alongside of the spirit of man. In summary, it's preferable to accept the translation that the Spirit of God testifies alongside of the spirit of his children,<sup>188</sup> meaning God's children have become inhabited by and identified with God, both in human suffering and in glory.

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<sup>186</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 500.

<sup>187</sup> Obeng, "Abba, Father: The Prayer of the Sons of God," 363.

<sup>188</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 500.

The Spirit, crying “Abba, Father” testifies that the believer is God’s child.<sup>189</sup> Sonship is no longer defined according to ethnical, familial, imperial, legalist, or educational standards, but by the Spirit of God.<sup>190</sup>

***<sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him***

In conclusion, God’s children are heirs with Christ. To be an heir is a concept referenced in 4:13-14 where Paul argues that believers are the heirs of the Abrahamic promise.<sup>191</sup> Paul goes through a 3-fold expansion of inheritance is more in which we the inheritance is more in terms of relationship with God than in reference to physical property or wealth:<sup>192</sup> heirs without qualification, then heirs of God (Christ is called an ‘heir of God’ according to OT texts that declare the Messiah to be God’s son),<sup>193</sup> and finally ‘fellow heirs with Christ’ which comments on the spiritual and relational nature of the believer’s inheritance.<sup>194</sup>

According to Roman law, the eldest son was given the largest share of the father’s inheritance.<sup>195</sup> Biblical history and Greco-Roman accounts tell of struggles filled with deceit and shedding of blood between sons for their rightful share of the inheritance. In Romans 8:29, Christ is called the firstborn among brothers and sisters<sup>196</sup> but the story of sonship is much different. Christ willingly sacrificed himself so that humankind could share in his relationship with God the Father and in his inheritance of glory (Rom. 8:17).

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<sup>189</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 500.

<sup>190</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 497.

<sup>191</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 501.

<sup>192</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 501.

<sup>193</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 316.

<sup>194</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 501.

<sup>195</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 502.

<sup>196</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 316.

However, if one is united with Christ, sharing in his glorious inheritance, then suffering on earth is inevitable.<sup>197</sup> The suffering that Paul speaks of is not simply suffering as a normal phenomenon in the world, but it is an ongoing<sup>198</sup> suffering *with* Christ. The word *sympaschō*, translated “suffering with,” only occurs once in the letter to the Romans. *Sympaschō* means “to suffer or feel pain together” and “to suffer evils (troubles, persecutions) in the like manner with another. Just as Christ was rejected by the world, his sons will be rejected by the world—this specific suffering, as those obedient to their father’s will proves their union with him, which may or may not result in death. If one experiences the suffering of Christ, the confirmation of his or her union with Christ is confirmed, and endurance promises glorification.<sup>199</sup>

The time of glorification for the adopted child of God is disputed. Jewett contends that nothing in Paul’s formulation demands that glorification be only a future promise.<sup>200</sup> However, Jesus’ suffering ended on the cross and his glorification was initiated with his resurrection, which is still a future hope for human beings.<sup>201</sup> Regardless, the glorification of God’s adopted children has yet to reach its fulfillment until suffering has ceased.<sup>202</sup>

In conclusion, although Paul’s letter to the Romans is a very complex theodicy, filled with a plethora of controversial passages and doctrines that theologians have wrestled with for years, Paul clearly maintains that the “obedience of faith” is pertinent to the gospel message and the identity of God’s sons. Man is adopted as God’s child through the obedience of faith. “Abba,

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<sup>197</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 316 ; Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 408.

<sup>198</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 502.

<sup>199</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Edinburgh, 407-408.

<sup>200</sup> Jewett, *Romans : a commentary*, 503.

<sup>201</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's letter to the Romans : a commentary*, 317.

<sup>202</sup> Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 407.

Father” is the cry of those that walk in God’s obedience, which is not defined as following the law, but rather by admitting enslavement to the world and uniting to Christ by faith.

### **Conclusion: The Significance of “Abba, Father”**

The word “Abba” alone may not say anything special about Jesus or his relationship with God as Jeremias asserts. However, in the context of Jesus’ prayer, “Abba” is significant first, because it shows that Jesus is God’s son. Although Jesus struggled to submit to his Father’s will, by crying, “Abba,” Jesus exposed his struggles to his father while declaring his faith in his father. Secondly, “Abba” is significant because it is an outcry of the Holy Spirit. According to the context of Mark’s Gospel, the Holy Spirit is central to understanding Jesus’ identity.

Although we can only assume that Paul borrowed the phrase “Abba, Father” from Jesus’ lips, the context in which Paul uses “Abba, Father” is similar to the context in which Jesus uses “Abba, Father.” However, according to Paul, “Abba, Father” is the cry of God’s Spirit within God’s adopted sons—a cry which confirms their identity as God’s children (Gal. 4:6)(Rom. 8:16-17). Their spirit reflects their identity as redeemed (Gal. 4:4) heirs through God (Gal. 4:7) and joint heirs with Christ—their inheritance being his suffering and his glory (Rom. 8:17). They were once enslaved to the “elemental things of the world” (Gal. 4:3) which tied them to fear (Rom. 8:15), but they are now free from slavery to the law (Gal. 4:7). By the leading of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14), God’s adopted sons are under obligation to the Spirit rather than the flesh and are equipped to but to death the sinful deeds of the body (Rom. 8:12-13). “Abba, Father” is both the cry of Jesus and the cry of God’s adopted sons, which captures their identity as free sons of faith, no longer bound to the laws of the man or the law of sin.

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