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ADOPTION RATES AMONG EVANGELICALS:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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ADOPTION RATES AMONG EVANGELICALS:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To Torey, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Esther

My God-given wife, sons, and daughter

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PREFACE

The journey to arrive at this research has contained the gamut of emotions. God has shaped me through the research and the process. The Lord brings people into one's life, and this thesis demonstrates that fact. God has allowed my journey to fellowship with dear people who have demonstrated the wonderful doctrine of adoption through their Christ-like love. As my family hopes to adopt in the future, I hope that this research reflects our hearts for God and the gift of adoption.

The first honorable mention must go the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom I was made new in order to accomplish the purpose of God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Everything in this endeavor is for the sole purpose of making his name great among the nations and to give my life and time as an act of worship.

Humanly speaking, I could not be where I am today without the God-sent blessing of my wife, Torey. She has believed in me when I did not believe in myself. She has been a daily display of the realities of the love and forgiveness of Christ. She is a true example of the Proverbs 31 wife and mother. I love you more than words can express, and I am excited to continue on this journey with you. To our children, Ezekiel and Esther, God has truly blessed our family with wonderful children. Though you are young, your infectious smiles and personalities have always brightened my day. To Ezra, though you are not born yet, you are already a blessing to our family. I love you all very much, and I pray that God uses you to glorify himself.

I also want to thank my family, especially my mom, Sherry, for all of the love and support throughout my life and educational journey. Your encouragement has helped to guide me and push me to finish this journey in order to give my best to God.

Even more than your encouragement, your love and sacrifice have helped enable me to get this far and become the person that I am today.

An obvious part of my education has been my professors. I want to thank you not only for the knowledge that you have given me, but also for the compassion and encouragement you have shown in and out of the classroom. I want to thank Dr. Wilder for the opportunity to continue my education and for encouraging and pushing me when I was ready to give up. You saw in me what at times I could not see in myself. I cannot thank Dr. Pettegrew enough for your shepherding me throughout my seminary career. From times of meeting at Starbucks or in your home, you have always taken an interest in me. Dr. Richardson deserves thanks for his investment in my life and for inviting me into his life. Even though we have yet to play a game of basketball, I look forward to seeing him on the court. Dr. Jones and his family have taken a constant interest in my family, and for that I am grateful. He has tried to help me inside and outside of the classroom with life and ministry. Dr. Trentham has been a valuable friend and committee member as we journeyed through this process together as students and friends. Finally, to Dr. Foster, my supervisor and friend, I want to thank him because of his knowledge and genuine care for students. He has offered his time and help even when he was not compensated for it. Thank you for the opportunity to pursue such a worthy topic.

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I would like to thank my church family, Bloomfield Baptist Church, for the love and support that they have shown to my family and me since coming to serve at

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Other individuals I would like to express my appreciation to include Betsy Fredrick for her assistance with formatting, and my fellow cohort members, especially Dr. Scott Douglas and Dr. Danny Bowen, for their constant encouragement and availability as I journeyed through this process. I am indebted to Scott and Danny for their friendship.

Finally, all the glory for this endeavor goes to the Lord Jesus Christ, because of who he is and his marvelous deeds. To God be the glory, through his son, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no better way to pay tribute to him than through his own word.

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!
Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! (Ps 150 ESV)

Matthew Thompson

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The devastating reality that orphans exist is not a new discovery. This problem has plagued creation since the fall of mankind. Scripture is clear that believers are to “visit orphans and widows in their affliction” as a manifestation of “pure and undefiled religion” (Jas 1:27).¹ In light of what Scripture says, the discussion of adoption has increased in recent years among evangelical Christians, and in particular among Southern Baptist Christians. The concern is whether or not evangelical Christians have responded and the way in which they have responded to the raised awareness of the ministry of adoption.

Introduction to Research Problem

In 2009, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) adopted a resolution entitled “On Adoption and Orphan Care.”² The resolution seemed to arise from an awakening to the Church’s failure to follow the biblical mandate to care for orphans and widows. Since then, numerous publications have been written, and there has been an adoption fund established by the SBC to aid ministers, missionaries, and other agency personnel, who feel called to adopt. The adoption fund was founded in close connection with the SBC’s

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version.

²See appendix 1.

resolution.³ The resolution briefly summarized biblical foundations for adoption and encouraged Southern Baptist Christians to act in care for orphans.⁴ Almost five years later, the question remains as to whether or not the resolution had a lasting impact on the local church.

An article from CNN, “International Adoptions in Decline as Number of Orphans Grows,” claims that international adoptions have decreased between 2004 and 2011. The article includes two visual graphics: a graph which displays the number of international adoptions from 2003 to 2011 and a graphic chart that demonstrates the changes in the sending and “receiving” countries.⁵ Additionally, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that as of 2011 there were approximately 151,000,000 orphans internationally. Only 18,000,000 orphans of the estimated number have lost both parents.⁶ The term “orphan” is often broken down into two categories: single orphans and double orphans. A single orphan is a child that has only lost one parent, whereas a double orphan has lost both parents.⁷

³North American Mission Board, “SBC Minister’s Adoption Fund,” accessed July 16, 2014, http://www.namb.net/sbc_adoption_fund_for_ministers/. Those who qualify can apply through the North American Mission Board’s website.

⁴Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution 2: On Adoption and Orphan Care,” June 2009, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1194>.

⁵Kevin Voigt and Sophie Brown, “International Adoptions in Decline as Number of Orphans Grow,” accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/16/world/international-adoption-main-story-decline/>.

⁶UNICEF, “Orphan Estimates,” accessed April 14, 2014, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html. It should be noted that UNICEF adheres to a broader definition of the word “orphan.” UNICEF defines an orphan as having lost at least one parent. This definition is due in part to the focus of UNICEF, which is namely HIV/AIDS infected countries. However, the general principle for the needs of the orphans is not diminished by this definition.

⁷The data in table 1 was adapted from UNICEF, “Africa’s Orphaned and Vulnerable Generation,” accessed April 14, 2014, http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Africas_Orphaned_and_Vulnerable_Generations_Children_Affected_by_AIDS.pdf.

In the United States alone, the Administration for Children and Families, a subset of the US Department of Health and Human Services, estimates that there were 402,378 children in the foster care system in 2013. In most categories, the numbers demonstrate a decrease from 2009-2012 with an increase from 2012-2013. This resulted in a 10.5 percent decrease in the number of children waiting to be adopted.⁸

Table 1. Orphan estimates

Location	Children who have lost one or both parents due to all causes, 2011	Children who have lost one or both parents due to AIDS, 2011			Children both of whose parents have died due to any cause, 2011	Children both of whose parents have died due to AIDS, 2011
		Estimate	Low estimate	High estimate		
Africa	57,500,000	15,300,000	13,900,000	16,700,000	8,800,000	3,100,000
Middle East and North Africa	6,000,000	160,000	120,000	200,000	430,000	18,000
Asia	71,300,000	1,100,000	850,000	1,300,000	5,600,000	250,000
Latin America and Caribbean	9,500,000	600,000	360,000	910,000	510,000	130,000
CEE/CIS	6,500,000	170,000	120,000	230,000	340,000	33,000
World	151,000,000	17,300,000	16,300,000	20,000,000	17,900,000	3,500,000

In contrast to the statistics reported by Voigt and Brown in their article, Michael Foust reported in 2010 that Bethany Christian Services was seeing an increase in placements and in inquiries about adoption:

International adoption placements through Bethany are up 66 percent this year compared to last year while inquiries about international adoption are up 95 percent,

⁸Administration for Children and Families, “The AFCARS Report, No. 21,” accessed October 3, 2014, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport21.pdf>. Table 2 was adapted from The AFCARS Report, no. 21.

the agency reported July 19. Domestic infant adoption interest also is up: Applications are up 23 percent and home studies up 15 percent.⁹

Table 2. The AFCARS report

Preliminary FY 2012 Estimates as of November 2013 No. 20					
	2009	20010	2011	2012	2013
Number in foster care on September 30 of the FY	418,672	404,878	397,827	396,892	402,378
Number entered foster care during FY	524,896	256,092	251,365	251,539	254,904
Number exited foster care during FY	277,606	257,806	246,438	240,936	238,280
Number waiting to be adopted on September 30 of the FY	113,798	108,746	106,352	101,737	101,840
Number waiting to be adopted whose parental rights (for all living parents) were terminated during FY	71,381	65,747	62,786	59,063	58,887
Number adopted with public child welfare agency involvement during FY	57,187	53,547	50,901	52,042	50,608

While no precise numbers were reported, at least at a cursory glance the statistics show some doubt on whether or not adoptions, by in large, are in decline among evangelicals. While adoptions overall may be in decline, adoptions among evangelical Christians may be moving in the opposite direction. In regard to the numbers, it is appropriate to interject and present an issue. Orphan estimates have a slight flaw, because the numbers tend to reflect orphans who live in homes. For the purpose of this research project, orphans will be defined in terms of those children that can be identified as orphans. However, it is worth noting that there are orphans who are considered “social orphans” who do not possess a place of residence.¹⁰ Another type of orphan to take into account is

⁹Michael Foust, “An Adoption Movement? Agencies Say Interest on Rise,” accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=33378>. I contacted Bethany Christian Services to verify the claim made in the article. Joe DiBenedetto, who works as a public relations representative for Bethany Christian Services, confirmed that the claim presented in the article is accurate.

¹⁰Christian Alliance for Orphans, “White Paper on Understanding Orphan Statistics,” accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.christianalliancefororphans.org/wp-content/uploads/Christian-Alliance-for->

that of the legal orphans. These orphans did not become so through abandonment by or the death of the parents. They became orphans when the state or some agency intervened and terminated the rights of the parent(s).¹¹ The numbers from the ACF include legal orphans in the reported data. The combined data of the United States and UNICEF seem to indicate that the overall number of orphans is increasing, while the overall number of adoptions is decreasing. According to the Christian Alliance for Orphans, “Global orphan statistics significantly underestimate the number of orphans worldwide and fail to account for many children that are among the most vulnerable and most in need of a family.”¹² The trend of the world seems to demonstrate a diminished passion for orphans at an alarming rate. It appears that among evangelical circles, there is an increase in placements, or at least there is an increase in perceived interest from select adoption agencies. Determining the rates for adoptions by evangelicals is crucial in examining the Church’s response to the pandemic of orphans. The church’s response to the issue of caring for orphans is vital in the global gospel ministry. While the SBC’s commitment to adoption and orphan care has been initially demonstrated through its resolution on the subject, simply writing publications, preaching sermons, or promoting adoption ministries is not sufficient. The next measure of commitment can be found in the question, “Are adoptions by Evangelicals on the rise?” The answer to this question is of the utmost importance in assessing how the Church is handling its responsibility to orphans. Adoption rates among evangelical Christians are on the rise, despite the world’s response to the orphan crisis.

Orphans-_On-Understanding-Orphan-Statistics_.pdf.

¹¹Sharon McCully, “Legal Orphans Permanent Families,” National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, accessed May 15, 2014, http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/LEGAL%20ORPHANS%20Webinar%20PP_Final.pdf.

¹²Christian Alliance for Orphans, “White Paper.”

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to quantify the rates of adoptions among evangelical Christians and to examine what factors, if any, have had an effect on the adoption rates over the last five years.¹³

Delimitations

The following delimitations were applied to the proposed study:

1. Only agencies that self-identify as evangelical, as defined, were included in the study.
2. The selected agencies must participate in adoptions, foster care, and/or home studies.
3. Agencies that have been in existence for at least five years were eligible to participate in the study.
4. The selected expert panel must have some participation in adopting or in an adoption-focused organization.

Research Questions

1. What is the correlation of the number of adoptions, foster placements, and home studies to past benchmarks from select evangelical adoption agencies in the US within the last five years?
2. What factors, if any, contribute to the rate of adoptions among Evangelicals?

Terminology

Adoptee. The *adoptee* is the person who has been adopted into a family,

¹³This research study is a part of ongoing scholarly research on adoption and orphan care at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS). The researchers are members of research pods that focus on a particular subject in order to address a particular problem. See “Doctor of Education” at www.sbts.edu. For additional research in the areas of adoption and orphan care, see Eun-Sung Roh, “An Analysis of Adoption Ministry Programs for Adoptive Parents in Korean Churches” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); Emmanuella Nsang Nyam, “Essential Post-Adoption Services for the Local Church: A Multi-Case Study” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming); Seth Alan Stillman, “Parental Practices of Discipline with Re-Adopted Children: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming); and Randall Damon Burns, “Creating and Nurturing a Culture of Adoption and Orphan Care in the Local Church: A Multiple Case Study” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming). The last two works are forthcoming and will be published at a later date.

wherein the person is granted the full rights as a family member of the adoptive family.¹⁴ In the spiritual sense, the adoptee is the one who, through the atoning work of Christ, has been grafted into the family of God, restored into right relationship with God, and has been made a co-heir with Christ in suffering and in glory (Rom 8:15-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

Adoption. The definition of *adoption* can be seen in two regards: legal and spiritual. First, *adoption* is seen as the spiritual act in which God predestined and purchased believers, through the sacrifice of Christ, to be grafted into the family of God (Eph 1:5). The result of this *adoption* is that believers are sons of God and have been granted the spiritual and familial rights and privileges as co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:15-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5).

Second, *adoption* is seen as

a legal act that changes the personal status of a child in relation to his natural parent(s) and constitutes the relationship of parent and child between him and some other person or persons. Though it is, therefore, technically a legal *act*, it is also spoken of as a device, and is to be thought of as having a continuing effect in the changes it brings about in the statuses of several persons: the natural parent(s), the child, and the “new” parent(s).¹⁵

Domestic adoption. *Domestic adoption* is the process in which the adoptive family adopts a child from within the adoptive family’s country of residence.¹⁶

Double orphan. A child that has lost both parents.¹⁷

Evangelical. The term *evangelical* has come to have a varied semantic range. One definition, though basic, is that of David Bebbington. His definition is a good

¹⁴Mardie Caldwell, *Called to Adoption: A Christian’s Guide to Answering the Call* (Nevada City, CA: American Carriage House, 2011), loc. 2140, Kindle.

¹⁵Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 67.

¹⁶Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Nashville: Crossway, 2009), 177.

¹⁷UNICEF, “Orphan Estimates.”

starting point and summarizes the four main tenets of what it is to be evangelical: biblicism, crucicentrism, activism, and conversionism. First, biblicism is a high view of Scripture as the ultimate authority (2 Tim 3:16-17). Second, crucicentrism places emphasis on the work of Christ on the cross as the way of redemption for humanity (Phil 2:8; Col 1:20). Third, activism is the participation in the mission of the church to evangelize through actions (Jas 1:22-25). Finally, conversionism is the belief that people need to be converted and sanctified by the Spirit as a life-long process (John 3; 1 Pet 1:23; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:12).¹⁸ In more recent times the most widely accepted definition is that of George Marsden. He summarizes evangelicalism with five main tenets:

The essential evangelical beliefs include (1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelism and missions, and (5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.¹⁹

Marsden's definition has some similarities with Bebbington's definition; however, one noticeable emphasis is that of God's historical character in salvation.

Foster care. Foster care is defined as follows:

Foster care means 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and preadoptive homes. A child is in foster care in accordance with this definition regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed and payments are made by the State or local agency for the care of the child, whether adoption subsidy payments are being made prior to the finalization of an adoption, or whether there is Federal matching of any payments that are made.²⁰

¹⁸D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-19.

¹⁹George M. Marsden, *Understanding Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 4-5.

²⁰"Federal Definition of Foster Care and Related Terms," accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Primary&allowInterrupt=1&noSaveAs=1&dDocName=dhs_id_027331

Home study. A *home study* is the initial evaluation process for families interested in adoption.²¹ The process length varies but usually ranges from three to six months. The *home study* process varies by agency and will include elements such as orientation, training, interviews, and home visits. During the *home study* process, the potential adoptive family will submit personal information including income statements, health statements, and references. All information is then evaluated by a social worker or some type of agency representative, who will report the findings of the study.

International adoption. *International adoption*, or intercountry adoption, is the legal process by which a family adopts a child from a country other than the country of the adoptive family's residence. Another form of *international adoption* is the simple action of bringing a child to the country for permanent residency.²²

Legal orphan. "A legal orphan is a child whose parents' rights have been terminated and who has no legal permanent connection to a family."²³

Orphan. "A child may be considered an orphan for any of several reasons, including the death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation or loss from, both parents."²⁴

Single orphan. A child that has lost one parent.²⁵

²¹Administration for Children and Families, "The Adoption Home Study Process," accessed April 17, 2014, https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm.

²²Bureau of Consular Affairs, "What is Intercountry Adoption," accessed April 18, 2014, http://adoption.state.gov/adoption_process/what.php.

²³McCully, "Legal Orphans Permanent Families."

²⁴Bureau of Consular Affairs: Intercountry Adoption, "Glossary," accessed April 18, 2014, http://adoption.state.gov/adoption_process/glossary.php.

²⁵UNICEF, "Orphans."

Procedural Overview

In order to gather information for the purpose of answering the research questions, I utilized two methods of data collection: legacy documentation from select evangelical adoption agencies and an electronic survey.²⁶ The first step in the research process was to identify at least ten adoption agencies that self-identify as evangelical through publications, purpose statements, ascription to an evangelical organization, or some other biographical information. In particular, I used the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability's membership list to determine an appropriate pool of agencies. I contacted and sought permission from the adoption agencies to view legacy records ranging from 2008 to 2013. The data requested is primarily numerical, containing figures for the number of adoptions and foster care placements within the selected timeframe. The data was gathered and analyzed to determine the trends of the adoption rates.

In addition to requesting legacy data, I distributed an electronic research instrument containing survey questions that was completed by a representative of the agency and members of adoption-related ministries and organizations. I designed the instrument to ask questions with the goal of determining what factors contribute to the rate of adoptions among evangelicals. An expert panel, comprised of members who meet the criteria, was given the survey for critique.²⁷ The criteria for the expert panel are that the members self-identify as evangelical and participate in adopting or in an adoption organization. Per the suggestions of the panel, I modified the survey. The survey questions were derived from the precedent literature and provided the framework for identifying potential factors that affect adoption rates, from the perspective of the participants. The answers were collected and compiled for analysis. The common findings are reported in chapter 4 in order to address the second research question.

²⁶See appendix 4.

²⁷See appendix 3.

Research Assumptions

This study functioned under the following assumptions:

1. All data reported by the selected evangelical adoption agencies is reliable and accurate.
2. The adoptions reported were successful adoptions in regards to placement.
3. The majority of adoptions, foster care placements, and home studies that are determined through the evangelical agencies will result in placement in evangelical homes.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

This chapter presents the precedent literature for the study of evangelical adoptions in order to build a framework for adoptions and orphan care. Each section of this chapter addresses the biblical and theological foundations and the practical implications for adoption.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Oftentimes, adoption has been reduced to a legal action whereby an individual or a group of individuals become a part of family in an official capacity. Contrary to popular thought, the concept of adoption has eternal value that extends beyond being a mere legal or social construct. Legal adoption is birthed out of the concept of spiritual adoption: God's adoption of believers in Christ is the standard of perfection in adoption because it reflects the heart of God.¹ In the act of adoption, both legally and spiritually, the status of the adoptee is changed.² Earthly adoption is temporary and can be made void should the parents decide that they no longer desire to care for the child. In contrast, the adoption of the believer by the Father is a permanent adoption, made possible through Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Adoption is first and foremost a theological issue. Ultimately, adoption epitomizes God's desire to care for orphans as a display of his glory.

¹Gary M. Senna, "The Doctrine of Adoption" (M.A. thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2006), 22.

²John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 132-33.

Old Testament Foundations— Origins of Adoption

The Old Testament contains foundational concepts for understanding the doctrine of adoption. Genesis and subsequent Old Testament literature reveal the origin and placement of adoption in God’s redemptive plan. The act of adoption, though good by design, finds its origins in the fact that orphans exist due to the fall of mankind. Genesis 3 records Adam and Eve’s disobedience that resulted in perpetual consequences about which God warned them in his prohibition in Genesis 2: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen 2:16-17). Adam’s original sin brought about death in two forms, namely physical and spiritual. In his exposition of the passage, Leupold defines dying as “separation from God.” The spiritually vertical separation from God is that which produces a horizontal separation between humanity, physically and spiritually.³ In both senses of death, the formation of orphans occur. Whether by the loss of a parent due to physical death or the loss of a parent due to sinful nature which causes abandonment, sin has brought about a “world of orphans.”⁴ Regardless of the causation of orphaning, it is apparent that the root need for adoption is negative by nature. If something that is so valued in culture, such as adoption, has heinous origins, then how could anyone see any redemptive value in adoption?

The answer to the previous question is found in a proper understanding of God and his purposes. Timothy Jones writes, “Adoption would never have occurred apart from the Fall, but at the same time adoption expresses something good.”⁵ The Bible is clear

³H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 128.

⁴Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2011), 61.

⁵Timothy P. Jones, “A Picture of Adoption,” in *A Guide to Adoption & Orphan Care*, ed. Russell D. Moore (Louisville: SBTS Press), 17.

that throughout history, God has allowed and brought about great calamity in order to fulfill his purposes. For example, the story of Joseph's life, imprisonment, and rise to power is wrought with tragedy permitted by God himself. Joseph summarizes his entire life in his response to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 50:20). Joseph recognized that sin was at the core of his plight; however, God's power and purpose were displayed in spite of evil. While God's purpose for Joseph was to save Israel and his family, the same events were part of an even greater purpose of bringing God's people into captivity in Egypt. Again, God's purpose was to display his glory for the nations to see.⁶ God's ultimate display of glory was found in the most atrocious event in all of history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It would seem that no one would deny that the events surrounding the cross were horrendously evil in nature, but it was through this event that God displayed his greatest act of love: Christ's death for sinners (Rom 5:8). The point is not that the existence of orphans is good, but that adoption is good, because it is a part of God's plan, and God is the ultimate good. Much like Joseph's life and Christ's sacrifice, the circumstances behind adoption may be evil, but God accomplishes a greater good in the act of adoption.

Old Testament Foundations— Positive Examples

The doctrine of adoption is an important concept in Scripture; however, nowhere in the Old Testament does a word for "adoption" appear.⁷ It was not until the twentieth century that a word for "adoption" existed within the Jewish legal system.⁸ The newly

⁶Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1994), 493.

⁷Timothy P. Jackson, ed., "Suffering the Suffering Children," in *The Morality of Adoption: Social-Psychological, Theological, and Legal Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 190.

⁸Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills,

added term for the concept of adoption comes from the root “אָמַץ.”⁹ The word is found in the Psalms and carries the meaning “to hold strong.”¹⁰ The Jewish people may have had an understanding of adoption because of the legal systems of surrounding cultures.¹¹ Historically, the idea of adoption was unnecessary in Jewish culture. The rationale behind the lack of the terminology and concept of adoption is rooted in the belief that “mother and father . . . once determined by birth, remain parents . . . and cannot have that status removed.”¹² No Jewish family would have wanted to break the family relationship, because the common view of children (or heirs) was for the sole purpose of perpetuity. That being the case, by definition, adoption is the idea of bringing an “outsider” into the family and bestowing all rights and privileges on the adoptee, which would have usurped the notion of lineage and broken the familial relationship. The idea of bloodline was a foundational component of the Jewish culture. According to examples in Scripture, Jewish families who lacked offspring would have sought to perpetuate the lineage in one of two ways. The first method would have been for the male in the family to procreate with another female, such as a slave.¹³ This pattern can also be seen in extrabiblical literature, such as Assyrian marriage contracts and Hammurapi’s code.¹⁴ The most prominent example of this in Scripture is Abraham and Hagar:

MI: Keter, 2007), s.v. “adoption,” accessed April 17, 2014, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0001_0_00486.html.

⁹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* [BDB] (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 54-55.

¹⁰ Berenbaum and Skolnik, s.v. “adoption.”

¹¹Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 67.

¹²Michael J. Broyde, “Adoption, Personal Status, and Jewish Law,” in *The Morality of Adoption*, 130.

¹³Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 70.

¹⁴Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 1-17*, *The New International Commentary on the Old*

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. (Gen 16:1-4)

Abram and Sarai, despite God's verbal promise of a child, sought progeny through Abram's impregnating Hagar.

The second method of perpetuating one's bloodline would have been through levirate marriage. The law concerning the levirate marriage is found in Deuteronomy 25.¹⁵

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (Deut 25:5-6)

As part of the command, the child that the former widow and brother conceive will bear the name of the deceased brother so that his name and lineage might live on in the community of Israel.¹⁶ The passage continues with regulations on addressing the refusal of the living brother. The most well-known instance regarding a refusal to fulfill the obligation of the levirate marriage is Judah's son, Onan. Er, Judah's other son and Onan's brother, was struck down by the Lord, having no children. Naturally, Judah commanded Onan to fulfill his duty as a brother to which Onan refused to adhere:

Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. (Gen 38:8-10)

Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 444-45.

¹⁵Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 72.

¹⁶Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 327.

Onan's wasting of his seed demonstrated his own sinful desire for personal gain rather than obedience to God through performing the levirate duty.¹⁷ Refusal to participate in the levirate marriage was a serious offense not only to the Jewish culture but to God himself.¹⁸ Either option of perpetuating the bloodline nullified the need for the idea of adoption among the Jewish people.

The lack of terminology surrounding adoption does not negate its existence, at least in part, within the Old Testament. For example, the word "trinity" never explicitly appears in Scripture; however, there are clear teachings that God exists in three persons.¹⁹ In order to examine the Old Testament concept of adoption, one must look to related terminology. In the case of the Old Testament, there are both positively charged and negatively charged terms relating to the concept of adoption.

There appears to be a handful of adoption-type examples within Scripture. Chronologically, the first example seems to be Abram's conversation with God regarding the promise of a child. In the conversation, Abram questions God about the fact that he remains childless, pointing to the fact that Eliezer is his heir apparent (Gen 15:2). At a cursory glance, one might extrapolate that Abram would have been succeeded by Eliezer, but Francis Lyall points out that it appears Eliezer would only have been connected with the disposal of material goods.²⁰ Also, Abram's question does not indicate that Eliezer is viewed as a legal son and has any actual familial rights. Scholars, such as C. H. Gordon and E. A. Speiser, compare Abram's relationship with Eliezer to that of an adoption

¹⁷Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 436.

¹⁸Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 314-15.

¹⁹Example Trinitarian passages include Gen 1; Matt 28:19; John 10:22-30; 17:11, 21.

²⁰Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 74.

procedure described in the Nuzi texts. Contrary to the Nuzi texts, nowhere in Scripture does it reference Abram's paternal care for Eliezer or his status within the household. At most, Eliezer could inherit property, but he still would not be the legal son or heir.²¹ Based on this, the Abram-Eliezer story cannot be seen as an example of adoption.

Three other Old Testament passages seem to imply an adoptive relationship. The next potential adoptive relationship is that between Moses and Pharaoh's daughter. The background to the story is that Pharaoh had ordered the execution of all male Hebrew children (Exod 1). Amram and Jochebed, Moses' birth parents, attempted to hide Moses as long as they could. When he could no longer be hidden, he was placed in a basket in the river. By God's providence, Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and decided to provide care for the child. Of this event Scripture records, "When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, 'Because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water'" (Exod 2:10). Here the text explicitly states that Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter. This is seen in the fact that Pharaoh's daughter named Moses, which by some is considered an adoptive act.²² Philo of Alexandria presupposes that legal adoption proceedings took place to formalize the adoption of Moses. In his work on the life of Moses, Philo explicitly states that Moses was adopted and refers to him as the grandson of Pharaoh.²³ Lyall contests that in spite of being raised in the Egyptian palace, Moses did not identify himself as an Egyptian, as recorded in Hebrews 11:24. Lyall reduces Moses' story from adoption to fosterage, which would be a similar concept to foster care. Since there were no legal proceedings recorded,

²¹Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 420.

²²Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 93.

²³Philo Judeaus, *The Works of Philo Judeaus*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1854), 856, 858, 860.

and there was a refusal by Moses to be considered an Egyptian, the care was temporary at best.²⁴ William Lane understands Philo's own argumentation as reflecting the Roman understanding of adoption. The Roman practice of adoption abolished the relationship of the adopted son and his natural family.²⁵ Moses's relationship with his natural family might appear to have been abolished, but Moses himself chose to identify with the Hebrews rather than the Egyptians. Together, with the lack of recorded proceedings, it stands to reason that Moses was in a fosterage situation.

One issue that needs to be addressed revolves around the fact that, because Acts 7:21 is also part of Stephen's speech, it seems to indicate that Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses: "And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son" (Acts 7:21). The English Standard Version (ESV) translates Acts 7:21 using the term "adopted" for the action on the part of Pharaoh's daughter. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates the action as taking Moses away and "nurturing" him. This concept is different than what is portrayed in the ESV; however, the NASB's footnote states that it can also be translated as adopted. The King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), and the New International Version (NIV) translate the term as "nourishing" (KJV) and "bringing him up" (NKJV and NIV). In order to solve this problem, the original Greek helps to define the intended meaning. The word used in Acts 7:21 is ἀνεθρέψατο, derived from the word ἀνατρέφω, which carries the idea of providing nurture. The semantic range for the term can be to provide nurture in a physical sense or in a mental and spiritual sense.²⁶ John Polhill argues that

²⁴Lyll, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 74-75. Lyll estimates that the time Moses spent in the Egyptian circles was approximately forty years on the basis Stephen's account (Exod 2:11; Acts 7:23).

²⁵William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 371.

²⁶Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG], rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

the term was used by Hellenistic Greek in reference to formal adoption and is permissible in the context of Acts 7:21.²⁷ The actual word for adoption occurs later in the New Testament. In contrast, Paul uses the term *υιοθεσία*, which would be translated as adoption.²⁸ The meaning and context of the Greek term *υιοθεσία* is discussed in the next section on New Testament Foundations. The ESV's translation of the idea is not the most accurate idea, because as is seen later, the term adoption is a legal term that emphasizes the nature of the relationship between the child and the parent in regard to familial and legal rights. The idea behind the word *ἀνατρέφω* seems to focus only on nurture, whereas the idea of adoption carries the idea of a complete status change. Lyall's argument is valid in viewing the nature of Moses' and Pharaoh's daughter's relationship as temporary, broken by Moses' action of killing the Egyptian and based solely on nurturing.

Another supporting argument for Lyall's view is based on the Lukan authorship of the book of Acts. Traditionally, Luke, a physician and historian, has been viewed as the author of Acts. His role as a historian has played a key role in many apologetic arguments. Like the other authors, Luke wrote in a distinct style, and in particular he wrote with historical accuracy as an important emphasis:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

Luke emphasizes to Theophilus that he is writing a detailed and orderly account of

2000), 74.

²⁷John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 194.

²⁸BDAG, 1024.

historical events. The recording of events involves the use of trustworthy sources, as well as historical accuracy.²⁹ Furthermore, Luke would have chosen specific language in describing what events took place, even to the point of recording what word, in the Greek language, Stephen used in describing Moses' upbringing. Based on the precision of Luke's detailed description, Moses' familial ties with Pharaoh's household should not be viewed as adoption, at least not in the fullest sense. Further review of the Old Testament is necessary to examine other perceived examples of adoption.

Another commonly referenced, supposed example of adoption is that of Genubath. Again, in a historical book, this obscure instance must be analyzed to see if this passage provides a foundation for adoption. The historical context of Genubath is that Hadad, his father, fled to Egypt and was raised there. Eventually, he married the sister of Tahpenes, who was the queen. She raised Genubath with the other sons of Pharaoh.³⁰ The story is recorded, "And the sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house. And Genubath was in Pharaoh's house among the sons of Pharaoh" (1 Kgs 11:20). Genubath was weaned and lived in Pharaoh's house.³¹ The account appears to resemble the story of Moses in that much like Moses, Scripture does not record any official action taken to declare Genubath as Pharaoh's son. He was simply raised among Pharaoh's sons and was *like* a son. The other factor to consider is that Genubath was already a relation of the pharaoh, which would have made him a part of the family. Again, the definition of adoption is specific that the child is grafted into the family as a member, which is not the case in this story.

²⁹I. Howard. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 39-40.

³⁰Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 150.

³¹Lyll, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 75.

While other cases could be examined, Lyall focuses on Esther. He argues that Esther and Mordecai's relationship appears to display an adoption-like formula.³² The foundational verse for establishing their relationship is Esther 2:7:

He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

In the ESV and many other translations, the word “adopted” does not appear. The Revised Standard Version, however, does translate the second half of verse 7 using the word “adopted.” While in many cases, exegetical and syntactical rules allow for words to be translated differently, the Hebrew language lacked a term for adoption. Granted, the Jewish people may have had knowledge of adoption from surrounding cultures, but the idea of adoption carried legal underpinnings not found in Jewish law. A case could be made that given Israel's circumstances, namely the Babylonian diaspora, they might have adhered to the cultural and legal practices, including adoption.³³ In particular, the Nuzi texts might have been familiar to the Jewish people, which does include the concept of adoption. Familiarity with cultural practices of adoption did not necessarily impact Jewish thought on this matter, though Israel's relationship with God would have been depicted in this way. In fact, throughout Scripture the pattern seemed to be that extended family was involved in “adoption” stories.³⁴ The absence of a formal proceeding seems to indicate that Mordecai's care for Esther was more likely a family arrangement than a legal act.³⁵

³²Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 76.

³³Frederic Bush, *Ruth and Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 363-64.

³⁴Mervin Breneman, *Ezra Nehemiah Ruth*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: B & H, 1993), 315-16. Genubath is an example where Pharaoh would have been his relation. Esther and Mordecai were related, and as an act of familial duty love, he took her into his care. The lack of formal declaration and status change does not provide the full picture of adoption.

³⁵Bush, *Ruth and Esther*, 364.

Lyall raises two objections to considering Esther as adopted by Mordecai. The first objection is that as a eunuch, Mordecai would have been ineligible to adopt on the basis of the legal system. Lyall quotes Justinian's institutes claiming that the phrase, "adoption imitates nature" excludes eunuchs from adopting.³⁶ The full phrase of Justinian Institutes 1.11.4 is as follows: "It is settled that a man cannot adopt another person older than himself, for adoption imitates nature, and it would be unnatural for a son to be older than his father."³⁷ Justinian argues that adoption can only take place in parent-child relationships with the parent being the elder member of the relationship. Lyall incorrectly uses Justinian's Institutes to validate his assumption that Esther was not adopted. The legal systems of ancient times may not have permitted eunuchs to adopt, but Mordecai's inability to adopt Esther would not have been based on an argument from nature.

Lyall's second objection is that Esther would not have continued Mordecai's lineage.³⁸ Surrounding cultures, like Babylon, might have used adoption as a means in providing a male successor and not for benevolent care of the orphan.³⁹ Esther, being a Jewish woman, would not have had much value during this time period. With the exception of Matthew 1, the normal style of genealogy in Scripture was to include only males.⁴⁰ Though it seems that Esther's story falls short of being considered an adoption,

³⁶Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 76.

³⁷Justinian, *The Institutes of Justinian*, 5th ed., trans. J. B. Moyle. (1913), 357, Kindle.

³⁸Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, 76.

³⁹Judith Schaffer and Christina Lindstrom, *How to Raise an Adopted Child: A Guide to Help Your Child Flourish from Infancy through Adolescence* (New York: Crown, 1989), 3.

⁴⁰Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 48-49. The inclusion of women in Matthew's genealogy has been the topic of much discussion. According to Hagner, the inclusion of women might not have been completely absent; however, it would have been a rare exception.

her relationship with Mordecai demonstrates one of the closest resemblances to that of an adoptive family situation.

None of the Old Testament examples seem to truly reflect a clear picture of adoption at its fullest. The lack of adoption terminology is consistent with the Jewish culture. A further support for this line of reasoning can be found in that of Jewish law. Any concept of adoption in Jewish culture was seen as “quasi-adoption.” The adoptive family may provide care for the adoptee, however the legal status of the parent-child relationship remained unchanged.⁴¹ This fact does not negate the picture of adoption in the Old Testament, rather it points to the fact that adoption is more than a social, judicial construct. Adoption entails a greater and deeper meaning which is rooted in something greater, namely in God’s character and deeds.

The ultimate example of care for the orphans is found in God himself. He acts according to his character and consistently does what he commands of his people. He commands for his people to care for the orphans and to do no injustice to them.⁴² Aside from his emphasis on caring for the orphan, there is a stronger demonstration of adoption, namely in the idea of God as Father and his people as sons. When God describes his people, there is not simply a peripheral care given, as one would give to an outsider.⁴³ There is more possessive language that gives identity to Israel as belonging to God’s family. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 is an example of such language:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all

⁴¹Broyde, “Adoption, Personal Status, and Jewish Law,” 139.

⁴²Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 61-67.

⁴³H. W. Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. G. Stansell, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 198-99. Wolff argues that the use of “son” in Hos 11:1 bears the implications that God reared and educated Israel. To rear and educate a child would have required loving, intentional, and providential care on the part of the father. God’s care is substantial and sustaining for his children.

peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

In this passage it is evident that God “chose” and “loved” Israel. This is more than just an occasional and provisional love. The idea is that Israel is God’s people and is in some type of relationship where God has taken possession of them. He closely identifies himself as their God and they as his people. This is seen through God’s providential care in every act of Israel’s history, through which God maintains his faithfulness to the covenant.⁴⁴ Moreover, in other passages, God clearly calls Israel his son or addresses his behavior towards Israel as fatherly (Hos 11:1-4; Ps 103:13).⁴⁵ A specific example of this is found in God’s promise to David. Nathan tells David of the vision that the Lord gave him. The Lord says, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men . . . my steadfast love will not depart from him” (2 Sam 7:14-15). God clearly reveals the relationship he is going to have with David’s offspring. God will be a *father* and David’s offspring will be a *son*. God says that he will demonstrate this relationship by showing discipline and sustaining his love. The phrase used to describe God’s relationship with David’s offspring is strong parental language—a person would not discipline someone in such a way and give steadfast love to them, unless there was a strong and permanent bond between the two parties.

Old Testament Foundations— Negative Examples

The concept of adoption is usually viewed in positive terms, however, there is a negative aspect to adoption, as has been mentioned. The need for caring for orphans is prevalent throughout the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “orphan” is אִתּוֹם. The term may also be interchangeably translated as fatherless. It should be noted that the

⁴⁴Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 179-80.

⁴⁵For more discussion on Hosea see Wolff, *Hosea*, 198-99.

popular thought in modern thinking, in regard to the denotative meanings of the words “orphan” and “fatherless,” is that each term is similar yet nuanced enough to differentiate between them. The usage in the Old Testament does not distinguish between the two terms in regard to meaning. Furthermore, whether or not the subject of the title “orphan” or “fatherless” is a single orphan or a double orphan is unclear.⁴⁶ Over the course of the Old Testament אָרוֹם appears forty-two times throughout all genres of biblical literature. Often times, the term is found in the same passage or surrounding passages as the terms “poor” and “needy.”

The uses for “orphan” can be categorized into approximately five main types. The first instance where the term orphan is used can be seen in positive commands to act on behalf of the fatherless. For example, in the book of Psalms the Psalmist writes, “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute” (Ps 82:3). There is a clear command to seek justice for the orphan. In a similar passage, Psalm 10:18, the focus is on the way in which God acts on behalf of the orphans.⁴⁷ In other passages, God prohibits certain actions with the intention of provision for the orphan. For example, in Deuteronomy, Moses records God’s statute on the extent of harvesting the field: “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut 24:19).⁴⁸ In this passage God prohibits certain positive actions, namely harvesting the field in order to provide for the fatherless. In these commands, there is a mirroring of the way in which God acts on behalf of the orphans. God is not passive in his care for

⁴⁶BDB, 450.

⁴⁷Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 126. Similar passages carrying this notion include Ps 10:18 and Isa 1:17.

⁴⁸Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 311. Similar passages include Deut 4:29; 16:11, 14; 24:21; 26:12-13.

those who are in need. He does not simply forbid mistreatment, but instead he commands his people to act on the behalf of the needy.

The second instance is seen in the opposite of the positive commands, because God is clear on what not to do concerning orphans. Again, Moses writes, “You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child” (Exod 22:22). Proverbs warns a person not to move a landmark or trespass upon the field of the fatherless. (Prov 23:10). The theme of prohibition of the mistreatment of the fatherless can be seen in both the major and minor prophets, as well: “Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart” (Zech 7:10).⁴⁹ Since the afflicted had no one to defend him, no one was to oppress him, and God’s people were to act rightly as an outpouring of their relationship with God.⁵⁰ These prohibitions are important because God’s people are to reflect his character and be consecrated. The mistreatment of orphans and widows were characteristic of the pagan cultures, which were the antithesis of God’s nature.⁵¹

The third instance is that of simple description. The simple description passages use the term “fatherless” to describe an individual or group. For example, Solomon records a lament wherein he says, “We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows” (Lam 5:3). There is no command concerning the orphan, but it is simply providing a description. The description that they provide is of the people they had ignored, namely the orphans, widows, and aliens.⁵² The use of the term, as a simple

⁴⁹Other prohibition passages are Deut 24:17; Isa 10:2; Jer 5:28 7:6; 22:3.

⁵⁰Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 226.

⁵¹Stuart, *Exodus*, 515-16.

⁵²F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah-Lamentations*, The New American Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 486.

description, bore substantial meaning. In the book of Job, Job attempts to provide a defense for his case through his care for the afflicted, including orphans. The Israelites would have been aware that God had special concern for the “powerless of society,” namely the poor, needy, and orphans. Since Job would have understood this, it is logical that he used them in a list concerning his actions.⁵³ In the case of the Lamentations passage, the people describe themselves as orphans. The only hopes that the orphans had were appeals made to God.⁵⁴ Israel would have known of God’s compassion, so when they described themselves as “orphans, fatherless” they were making an appeal for God’s mercy and compassion.⁵⁵

The fourth instance seems to occur as the most frequent context in Scripture. In this instance, there is a tone of indictment on those who have failed to execute justice for the orphans, whether by intentional or unintentional means. The failure to care for orphans is based more on manipulation and oppression rather than ignorance. God takes the command to care for the poor and needy, including orphans, seriously: “Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut 27:19). The mistreatment of orphans and the other afflicted people was mentioned previously, however the importance of the issue is seen in the repetition within the passages on curses.⁵⁶ Often, God uses the prophets to pronounce judgment on the nations due to their sinful neglect and abuse of the fatherless:

Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who

⁵³John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 390-91. For other examples, see Exod 22:24; Job 29:12; 31:17-18, 21; and Ps 109:12.

⁵⁴Ibid., 391.

⁵⁵Huey, *Jeremiah-Lamentations*, 486.

⁵⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 349.

oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:5)

God demands social justice for the orphan as a spiritual act of obedience to his commands and will punish those who fail to obey.⁵⁷ Malachi includes the oppression of the orphans and needy in a list of sin including sorcery and adultery, which were punishable by death. The inclusion of orphan mistreatment with other sins punishable by death is just another example that demonstrates its severity.⁵⁸ Ezekiel recounts the Lord's indictment against Sodom, which is surprising given the history and pervasive sin of Sodom: "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy" (Ezek 16:49). In this passage Ezekiel does not mention the fatherless by name, however as stated before the ideas of "orphan/fatherless" and "poor and needy" often appear together. Sodom's sexual sin was horrible and was the manifestation of her "pride, excess of food and prosperous ease" that led to the neglect of those in need.⁵⁹

The final instance in which the concept of orphans appears is in regard to God's loving-kindness for them. Scripture reveals that God "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow" (Deut 10:18), "upholds the widow and the fatherless" (Ps 146:19), "keeps the fatherless children alive" (Jer 49:11), and is "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps 68:5). In all three cases, there is a clear statement that God acts on behalf of

⁵⁷Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 330. In the context of this passage, it should be noted that Yahweh would deal out his justice swiftly on those who were not in right relationship with fellow man. The human to human relationship should always been seen as a reflection of the human's relationship with God. Other passages with a judgment tone include Job 6:27; 22:9; 24:3, 9; Ps 94:6; 109:9; Isa 1:23; 9:17; Ezek 22:7.

⁵⁸Pieter A. Verhoeff, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 293.

⁵⁹Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 509.

those who need divine action.⁶⁰ It is in the final instance where the idea of God's providential care for the orphan is seen. Throughout the Old Testament there are examples of God's emphasis on the fatherless through his commands to care for them. Though God expects his followers to care for the needy, ultimately, it is God himself who provides care and justice for the orphan and widow.⁶¹ More than simply requiring these works, God has demonstrated his love for the fatherless as he upholds them and displays continual care for his children.

Adoptive Language

Apart from the examples given in Scripture of adoption, three additional ideas indicate a Father-son relationship between God and his people. The first is that of fatherly language in how God interacts with Israel. God interacted in a paternal way with the nation of Israel as a whole and with certain individuals within the nation. For example, Isaiah records, "For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name" (Isa 63:16). God is viewed as a redeeming Father by the writer. The source of Israel's identity and being is rooted in that God is Father. Both his name and reputation are intimately linked with his relationship with Israel. Israel was chosen for a purpose, namely to glorify God as his chosen son.⁶² Other writers, primarily prophets, address God as Father, especially concerning his providential care.⁶³ Of God as Father, one commentator writes,

⁶⁰H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 492.

⁶¹Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 206.

⁶²John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 612-13.

⁶³For other references to God as Father, see 1 Chr 17:13; Pss 68:5; 89:26; Isa 9:6; Jer 3:4, 19; Mal 1:6; 2:10

Father here signifies the One who brought the nation into existence. . . . In the Old Testament designation *Father* for God is comparatively rare and possibly does not convey the wealth of meaning found in the New Testament *our Father*; nevertheless, it is a word of tender comfort, and shows that the theocracy was a work of God and not of man.⁶⁴

The idea of God as Father is important to the nation of Israel in a historical and providential sense. Israel's history is saturated by God as Father through his acts and in the minutest detail such as in the meaning of names. For example, Abijah is a combination of the shortened versions of the terms for "father" and "Yahweh." The translation would have been "God is my Father."⁶⁵ One point of clarification is that the commentator wrote that the Old Testament idea of God as Father does not convey the same depth as the New Testament concept. This is not to say that God is less fatherly in the Old Testament; however, in Christ the fatherly nature of God is manifested more when the Son is visible.

If God reveals himself as Father and acts accordingly, then it stands to reason that Israel was viewed as a son of God. God explicitly calls Israel his son when he instructs Moses on what to say to Pharaoh: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, Let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son'" (Exod 4:22-23). God promises to destroy the firstborn of Egypt if his firstborn is not released. As Father, God calls his son by name and brings him out of slavery. Later in Hosea, God recounts his relationship with Israel and how he acted towards them as Father: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11:1).⁶⁶

⁶⁴Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 3:487-88.

⁶⁵James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 153.

⁶⁶Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 19A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 219-20. Garrett notes that it is rare that God refers to the entire nation of Israel as "son." In most cases, the plural form, "children," is used. In either case, God has revealed himself as Father to Israel and the church. This is important to see because if God acts fatherly to his children, all who are brought into God's family should be viewed as having the rights and responsibilities of a full family member.

The idea of being grafted into God’s family appears in Hosea’s prophecy. There is a definitive notion that those who were not part of God’s family will one day be grafted in as rightful children: “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hos 1:10). God is foreshadowing the extent to which Christ’s work will extend beyond the nation of Israel with the inclusion of the Gentiles. The immediate context refers to the “already” aspect of Israel’s redemption and the “not yet” of the Gentiles adoption.⁶⁷ This particular passage is one of the clearest examples of adoption found within the Old Testament.

The key term that supports the idea of adoption is “called.” One writer describes the term “called” as “an election verb.” The idea is that God is summoning Israel into a relationship that did not exist prior to the event of calling. The passages in Hosea (11:1) and Exodus (4:22-23) equate the liberation from Egypt as an official adoptive act.⁶⁸ This action demonstrates that God chose Israel to be his son in an adoptive relationship.⁶⁹ To be called a son was not a right that inherently belonged to Israel by natural rights or because Israel chose to be adopted. He had to be given the right to be called “son” through a covenantal and spiritual act of God.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Stuart, *Exodus*, 61. Paul interprets this passage and applies it in the context of the Gentiles. See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 331, for further discussion of this matter.

⁶⁸Ibid., 177-78. Stuart argues that the Hosea and Exodus passages, the term “called” implies the ideas of election and adoption in part and must be seen in light of God’s protection and provision. This does not mean that the two meanings are opposed to each other, but that the intents of election and adoption are a part of God’s purpose and provision.

⁶⁹Mays, *Hosea*, 153.

⁷⁰Verhoeff, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 265. The author’s comment is in the context of Mal 2:10 when God is referred to as Father.

There is another aspect in which “called” is used. One of the most quoted passages includes the idea of being called by God’s name. The chronicler wrote, “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14). To this point, “called” has referred more to the act of being “called.” In this particular passage, Israel is *called* by God’s name. They are identified as God’s chosen people. In essence, Israel’s adoptive calling leads to a *calling* in nomenclature. This *calling* is specific to Israel and is not granted to all nations of the earth, because there is a special covenantal relationship between God and his people.⁷¹ Being called ceases solely being a past action but morphs into a present identity. Another instance where *called* is used in this regard is when Israel is being identified as God’s people: “Why should you be like a man confused, like a mighty warrior who cannot save? Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; do not leave us” (Jer 14:9). In this passage, God’s people identify themselves as being *called* by God’s name. They recognize it as a descriptor of their identity. In ancient cultures, a person’s name was more than just a formality but rather they would have seen the name as a marker of a person’s essence.⁷² This concept applied for God and his chosen people. God revealed himself in a variety of ways to display who he was. Likewise, by calling Israel by his name, they were to display who God was and who they were as his adopted people.

New Testament Foundations

The New Testament is vital in understanding the doctrine of adoption. Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament explicitly uses the word “adoption.” The term for

⁷¹Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1998), 248.

⁷²Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 1:151-52.

adoption, as mentioned earlier, is the Greek word *υιοθεσία*. The term is a compound word consisting of *υιός* (son) + *θέσις* (placing), which gives the meaning of placing a person as a son.⁷³ This term only occurs five times in the New Testament and is only used by one biblical author, Paul. He uses the term three times in Romans (8:15, 23; 9:4), one time in Galatians (4:5), and one time in Ephesians (1:5).⁷⁴

New Testament Example

The New Testament does use the term for adoption; however, it appears as if the only example of human adoption mentioned is in reference to the Old Testament account of Moses and Pharaoh's daughter (Acts 7:21). Upon further investigation, there is one example of human adoption: Joseph and Jesus. The relationship between Joseph and Jesus seems to be the epitome of adoption, humanly speaking. The adoptive relationship between Joseph and Jesus is clearly seen in three ways. First, the genealogy of Jesus, found in Matthew and Luke, includes Joseph's name. Luke's account is especially important because he is recording Joseph's genealogy in regard to the line of David.⁷⁵ Second, Joseph acts paternally toward Jesus through obeying God's instructions, such as naming Jesus and following Old Testament rituals, which demonstrated that Jesus was Joseph's legal son.⁷⁶ Third, in the birth accounts found within the Gospel of Luke, Joseph is referred to as the father of Jesus or as one of the parents of Jesus.⁷⁷ In Matthew

⁷³BDAG, 1024-25.

⁷⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 25. It should be noted that some second-century writers, such as as Diodorus Siculus and Nicolaus Damascenus, used the term.

⁷⁵Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 352.

⁷⁶Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 59. See Matthew 1:21-25; 13:55; Luke 2:22-52

⁷⁷Ibid., 352. Bock argues that Jesus relationship to Jesus is strictly legal in nature due to Luke's

13, when Jesus is rejected at Nazareth, people in his hometown refer to him as the carpenter's son (v. 55).⁷⁸ Though the word "adoption" is never used in regard to Joseph and Jesus, through relationship titles and Joseph's actions, it is clearly seen that Joseph cared for Jesus as his own son.

Paul and Adoption

Paul, the only author to use the term for adoption, uses the same term in various contexts to refer to different dimensions of adoption. The first context is the Christian's present sonship.⁷⁹ Paul's first use of the terms occurs in Romans, where he writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (8:15). The term *υιοθεσία* is seen by many scholars as a legal term derived from the Greco-Roman traditions. Many scholars and commentators believe this based on the lack of adoptive terminology in Jewish culture and law.⁸⁰ The term bears gendered language, especially since the root is the Greek word for a male child.⁸¹ In contrast, the general Greek term for the children is *τέκνον*, which does not specify the gender of the child. This is not to say that the *τέκνον* cannot be used in an adoptive context, in fact as will be seen later, the adoptive language used necessitates the use of *τέκνον* to identify a believer's relationship

qualifying statement "(as was supposed)." Nonetheless, see Luke 2:27, 33, 48; 3:23.

⁷⁸Blomberg, *Matthew*, 227-228.

⁷⁹Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 172.

⁸⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 425.

⁸¹Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 25. The Greco-Roman culture, like other cultures of that day, fostered an environment where childlessness was viewed negatively. The core issue is that the lineage would have been broken, so a male heir would have been necessary to continue the family line. Since the term has origins in the Greco-Roman law, it stands to reason the term would focus on a son as the object of adoption.

to God. Paul himself uses the terms “adoption” and “children” within the same context: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father.’” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15-16). In the same passage Paul uses the terms in an interconnected thought. It remains that at the core of adoption is the idea of becoming a son.⁸² The legal tone to the word stems from the cultural traditions of the son perpetuating the bloodline of the father’s house.⁸³ As a son, a person would have had the full rights and responsibility of a family member, especially the firstborn son:

An adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father’s affection more full and reproduce the father’s character more worthily.⁸⁴

Paul’s understanding would have been grounded in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. Hence, Paul uses the term in both a legal and essential sense. The legal sense is that whoever is selected as the adoptee would continue the family line and receive the inheritance. The essential sense in which Paul uses the term is based on his understanding of God’s loving-kindness and provision for his chosen people.⁸⁵ Paul’s understanding of the term is primarily spiritual in nature. The idea of providing for and nurturing the believer is present. However, in contrast to the idea of adoption in Acts 7:21, Paul

⁸²Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, New Studies in Biblical (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 110. Paul’s usage of different terms to describe the adoptive relationship is coupled with the connection to being an heir. This demonstrates that other adoptive language is used to reiterate Paul’s argument. The topic of heirs which will be discussed later. Other writers use the theme of children of God, which is discussed later, as well.

⁸³ Hendriksen, *Romans*, 259. Hendrikson states that the Roman view of adoption would have characterized as egocentric in its focus with the end results of perpetuity. The rights of adoptions would not have been extended to females.

⁸⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 166.

⁸⁵Hendriksen, *Romans*, 259.

emphasizes the importance of God's choice and the identity of the one who is adopted. The idea of adoption is more about identity and less about provision.

Interestingly enough, Paul does not emphasize the engendered idea behind the term. In chapter 10, Paul clearly states, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him" (Rom 10:12). He has not negated gender or ethnicity, but is emphasizing that those who believe in Christ, regardless of characteristics, will be saved. The theological and historical implications of this idea are crucial, because women were viewed as inferior. After all, women would not have been adopted due to their lack of value in continuing the bloodline. By the very fact that God adopts all those who believe and bestows on them all of the rights and privileges of heirs, there is a distinct value placed on both men and women as believers.

The second context is the future bodily resurrection of the believer.⁸⁶ Adoption is viewed by Paul in one sense as a past action. He also views adoption as having a future tone. Paul uses the past tense in reference to the adoption that believers have already received based on the sovereign choice of God⁸⁷: "He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:5). The past tense is stated in Romans 8:15, as well. The act of adoption is complete and believers have received the rights and privileges as legitimate children. On the other hand Paul writes within the same chapter, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). Paul echoes that the "firstfruits" have been received, although he is awaiting some future event surrounding his adoption. Those

⁸⁶Longenecker, *Galatians*, 172.

⁸⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 25.

who have been adopted anxiously await the future event when the body is resurrected and made perfect, because sin and death have been eradicated.⁸⁸ Hendriksen states, “The very fact that God’s children even now possess . . . the Holy Spirit, arouses within them a painful sense of lack. What they already have makes them hungry for more; that is, for salvation in all its fullness.”⁸⁹ Many other doctrines, such as sanctification, possess an “already, but not yet” theme that is also seen in Scripture surrounding the theme of adoption. God has adopted believers, but their adoption will be made complete in the day of Christ’s return, when the fullness of the inheritance will be realized.

The third context is that of Israel’s relationship with God in the past.⁹⁰ In speaking of God’s sovereign choice Paul writes, “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Rom 9:4). The concept of Israel’s adoption is foundational for Paul’s understanding of God’s plan from eternity past. God graciously chose Israel and granted to them the status of “son.” As mentioned earlier, Paul’s understanding of adoption would have stemmed from his citizenship as a Roman, but as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5), the Old Testament account of Israel’s history would have also influenced his thoughts on adoption.⁹¹ This is important because Paul’s reference to Israel’s adoption demonstrates the consistency with which God has acted in his purposes to adopt a people for his glory. Schreiner explains,

It is not as if gifts in the past actually contain the promise of future blessing. The point is that the people upon whom God has lavished his favor in the past have also

⁸⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 439.

⁸⁹Hendriksen, *Romans*, 271.

⁹⁰Longenecker, *Galatians*, 172.

⁹¹Hendriksen, *Romans*, 259-60.

received saving promises with respect to the future. Thus the former gifts are not mere historical relics, for there is continuity between the past and the future.⁹²

Israel's relationship with God, even to the point of being renamed from Jacob, displayed God's purposes. Israel's identity was in who they were in relationship to God. The idea of being an Israelite was an honor, not because of ethnic superiority but because of God's gracious election. As a part of his choosing, Israel reaped the benefits of being in sonship with God.⁹³

The final context is that adoption was predestined in Christ before the foundation of the world.⁹⁴ Paul's final use of adoption is a further capitulation of what he has said in the previous adoption passages: "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). The adoption that both Israel and believers received was foreordained from before the foundation of the world.⁹⁵ God had purposed to send Jesus Christ in to the world that those who were enemies of God would be transformed and become his children. Adoption is a basic component in the foundation of the church. This idea is a part of the blessings that come as a result of adoption. God's election from eternity past is the source of blessings through adoption. The previous aspects of adoption, namely sonship, future blessings, and Israel's relationship with God find their foundation in the election of believers in eternity past.⁹⁶

⁹²Schreiner, *Romans*, 485.

⁹³Hendriksen, *Romans*, 311. As Hendriksen observes, this thought is based on the titles given to Israel, such as "firstborn" (Exod 4:22), "own possession" (Exod 19:5), "son" (Hos 11:1), and "people" and "chosen" (Isa 43:20).

⁹⁴Longenecker, *Galatians*, 172.

⁹⁵Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 76. The eternal election of God's children provides a clear statement that the adoption into God's family is not on the basis of any earned status before God. Rather, a believer's position is grounded only in the divine purposes of God through his fulfilled plan in the life and work of Christ.

⁹⁶William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New

There are past, present, and future implications for those who have been called by God. There is an eternal focus in the understanding of adoption, demonstrated by the fact that God planned the adoption in eternity past, God will keep those whom he has adopted, and He will complete the adoption in the return of Christ.⁹⁷

Other Adoptive and Familial Language

Though Paul is the only author to explicitly refer to adoption, there are other passages that use adoptive language when talking about God's relationship with the believer. Paul, uses the word τέκνα, which is the generic term for children. The term is derived from the root, "to give birth to."⁹⁸ Paul continues the theme of adoption by using one of three compound phrases. The first phrase is explicit in nature because he addresses believers as τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ or "children of God." The phrase "children of God" appears in the epistle to the Romans (8:16-17, 21; 9:8) as a part of the adoption passages. He uses the term again in his letter to the Philippian Christians: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:14-15). In all four cases, the idea of adoption is clearly defined. As with most adoptive passages, there is always an intention or purpose behind the adoption, namely to glorify God. Additionally, Paul uses their status as children of God as a reminder of what effect adoption through Christ should have on the believer.⁹⁹ Some interpreters translate the first section of verse 14 as "that you may become . . . children of

Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 75-77.

⁹⁷Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 196.

⁹⁸Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 144-45.

⁹⁹Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 144-46.

God.”¹⁰⁰ At a glance, this interpretation, without proper context, could indicate a works-based salvation. However, the idea behind the terminology is that of perseverance and the nature of those who are children of God. As stated previously, τέκνα has its roots in birth language, meaning that the child should share the parent’s nature.¹⁰¹ This will mean that the child will both look and act accordingly. It echoes James’ sentiment that faith will foster good works. A child of God should “do all things without grumbling or disputing” in order to display the character of the Father.

Paul uses another phrase to describe the believer’s adoption relationship with God. He calls Christians “children of light.” This occurs in two places within Paul’s epistles. The first instance is that of Ephesians 5:8 where he uses τέκνα φωτός, which is literally translated as “children of light.” In the second instance he uses υἱος φωτός, which would have a literal translation of “sons of light.” The word υἱος, in this case, is translated as children, which is permissible in the Greek as the male plural would have been used to refer to children in general. The second occurrence is found in Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica. Again, the literal translation in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 is “sons of light.” In Semitic language and culture, to be the son or child of something was to be identified with that object.¹⁰² Being identified with that object or person would have meant that there was an expectation on the child to act like the identifying object. John writes that “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The reference to light, found in 1 Thessalonians, focuses on the behavior that the believer displays, which is ultimately tied to who they are in Christ.¹⁰³ As sons of light, God

¹⁰⁰Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 242-43.

¹⁰¹Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 144-45.

¹⁰²Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 156.

¹⁰³F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word,

desires that believers walk in the light and exude light-like characteristics in a dark world.

The final title that Paul uses is that of *ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα* translated as “children of promise” (Rom 9:8). This idea is connected to the eternal purpose of God to call out a people for himself, beginning with Israel (Rom 9:4) and culminating with the incorporation of the Gentiles to possess a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7:9). As stated previously, this notion would have been very influential in Paul’s writing. Paul would have viewed adoption through the lens of Jewish history and the promises that God made to his people. God is faithful to remember his promises that have past, present, and future implications.¹⁰⁴

The other primary author that uses familial language is John. The other gospel writers address God’s providential care, however, John is the primary one that explicitly uses children-family language.¹⁰⁵ He uses the basic wording of “children,” “children of God,” “God’s children,” or simply stating that believers are “of God.” In Caiaphas’ prophecy, he proclaims that Jesus “would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51-52). There is a global view of the children of God, because many nations are a part of Caiaphas’ prophetic utterance. The “children of God” are going to be gathered as a result of Christ’s work on the cross. Much of 1 John revolves around the identity of Christians in Christ displayed through their obedience as God’s children. Several times John addresses the believers simply as “children” or “little children” (1 John 2:18; 28; 3:10). In other instances he uses some form of possession, for example God’s children or children of God (1 John 3:2; 5:2).

1982), 111.

¹⁰⁴Schreiner, *Romans*, 485.

¹⁰⁵Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 26-27. Other passages included Matt 6 and Luke 13:34.

At this juncture, Burke raises a point of clarification. John’s language is focused primarily on spiritual rebirth or regeneration, whereas Paul is focused on adoption. The idea is that Paul and John are expressing the entrance to God’s family in two different metaphors.¹⁰⁶ The two ideas are connected to each other, but adoption is a legal term, whereas regeneration focuses on the rebirth of a person. A good summary can be seen in R. A. Peterson’s description: “Adoption is a legal action, taking place outside of us, whereby God the Father gives us a new status in his family. Regeneration is a renewal of our nature, occurring within us, in which the Father imparts regeneration.”¹⁰⁷ The idea behind the inclusion of this objection is to demonstrate that adoption and regeneration should not be viewed as the same idea. In fact, adoption carries with it the presupposition of regeneration.¹⁰⁸ This discussion does not negate the inclusion of John’s familial language in the discussion of adoption. Once a part of God’s family, the children of God look and act like those who bear God’s name.

Further explanation of adoption can be found in the language of benefits. As children of God, Scripture refers to believers as heirs (*κληρονομέω*) who have an inheritance. The only way a person could have had an inheritance was to have close ties to the one leaving the inheritance. In most cases, inheritance was a right more than it was considered a privilege. This thought is countercultural to modern thinking. The New Testament contains at least seven references to believers as heirs or coheirs with Christ. Paul writes, “And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17). Paul uses this theme in other letters and both James and the author of Hebrews echo the

¹⁰⁶Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 26-27.

¹⁰⁷Peterson, *Adopted by God*, 109.

¹⁰⁸Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 27.

same idea (Rom 8:12, 17; Gal 3:29; 4:1; Eph 3:6; Titus 3:7; Heb 6:17; Jas 2:5). In addition to being explicitly called heirs, many writers simply discussed the inheritance that believers have in Christ (Gal 3:18; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4).¹⁰⁹ The idea behind Christians being heirs is that they are entitled to some type of benefit as a result of God's gracious choice to graft them into the family.¹¹⁰ In one sense believers have a realized care in God's provision in life, and on the other hand their inheritance will be fully realized in the day of consummation.¹¹¹ Peter tells the believers that they have been resurrected "to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4). They are assured that they have the inheritance because of Christ's power, yet it will be perfected on the day of Christ. The inheritance language, tied to the salvific language, reaffirms that a believer's status in God's family has been realized, is being realized, and will be realized.¹¹²

In addition to the positive adoptive language used by some of the New Testament authors, the word "orphan" is mentioned, much like in the Old Testament. Again, the idea behind orphans is negative, because of the fall of mankind. The term ὀρφανός or a derivative of the word only occurs in the New Testament two times. Like the Old Testament definition, the word carries the meaning "fatherless" or the loss of parents. The first use is by Jesus when he tells of his departure and of the promise of the Holy Spirit: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). Jesus' tone mimics the Old Testament theme of God's care for the orphans. He promises his

¹⁰⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 62.

¹¹⁰John Murray, *The Epistles to the Romans Chapters 1-8*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 299.

¹¹¹Schreiner, *Romans*, 428.

¹¹²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 62-64.

return and assures his people of their relationship with him.¹¹³

The second instance is when James, writing of the outpouring of the believer's faith, writes, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27). According to James, one of the marks of a true believer is how a person displays the heart of God to those who are in need.¹¹⁴ As representatives of God's family, Christians are to care for those for whom God cares. The thematic pattern of Scripture seems to be God's care for the orphans and their adoption, the manifestation of that adoption in Christ, and the emulation of God's care and adoption to other human beings. The point of orphan emphasis is to focus on God's character and directive to live out one's adoption.

Theological Implications

There is sufficient scriptural evidence for the doctrine of adoption. The topic of adoption is more than just an abstract theological construct. There are major theological implications that stem from how Scripture portrays the role of adoption in the believer's life. Theology primarily examines God, his character, his actions, and his purposes; his actions and purposes are an extension of his character. As a result of studying who God is, one can see who man is in light of God's revelation. As a part of that, the theological implications of adoption can be broken down into at least two categories: God (his nature, his actions, and his purposes) and relationship or identity.¹¹⁵

¹¹³George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 258. Jesus is referring to his death, resurrection, and return. The emphasis is not on orphan care, however the passage reemphasizes the faithfulness of God to his plan and promises.

¹¹⁴James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 85-86.

¹¹⁵Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 739.

Adoption, primarily, reveals the fatherhood of God. The language and imagery surrounding adoption can give no other clear revelation of God's character than that of his fatherhood. This is one of the primary ways believers relate to God due to its intimate nature. John Murray emphasizes this point:

By adoption the redeemed become sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God's family. . . . It concerns a relationship and not the attitude or disposition which enables us to recognize and cultivate that relationship. . . . Adoption, as the term clearly implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege. It staggers imagination because of its amazing condescension and love. Adoption is concerned with the fatherhood of God in relation to men. God becomes the Father of his own people by the act of adoption.¹¹⁶

God's fatherhood is displayed in adoption, because God acts out of who he is. God performs fatherly acts to his children. Wayne Grudem sees at least four different actions that demonstrate this notion. First, God loves his children (1 John 3:1). The mere fact that God allows believers to be his children demonstrates his perfect love. It is love that is foreign to humanity, especially since the manifestation of this love is the divine purpose of bringing sinners into God's family for his glory.¹¹⁷ Second, God understands his children. God has an intimate knowledge of his children and their innermost being, failures, thoughts, and desires. The Psalmist writes, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Ps 103:13-14). The context of the passage deals with forgiveness. Here the Psalmist addresses forgiveness in terms of a fatherly forgiveness. God understands his children, and acts accordingly with discipline and forgiveness.¹¹⁸ Third, God provides for the needs of his children. Jesus explained this to

¹¹⁶Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 132-33.

¹¹⁷Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, The New American Commentary, vol. 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 132-33.

¹¹⁸Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 22.

his disciples, reminding them that God watches over all of creation, and that his children have value to God and will receive his provision (Matt 6:25-34). The category of provision is closely tied to the previous mention of the fact that God understands his children. God provides for his children as a loving Father.¹¹⁹ Fourth, God gives to his children. Grudem breaks this concept down into three actions: giving good gifts, giving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and giving an inheritance.¹²⁰ God provides physical and spiritual gifts for His children. The most important gift that God has given is his Spirit. God gives generously in the believer's earthly journey and promises to give them an inheritance that is yet to come.¹²¹ This relationship is foundational for all of the blessings that a child of God receives.¹²² The relationship between God the Father and his children is not one-sided. Through Christ, children of God can address God and speak to "Abba! Father!" Paul, in Galatians and Romans, emphasizes that the indwelling of the Spirit allows and causes Christians to cry out to God as Father (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:1). A Christian cries out to God as "Abba," because the term best depicts the reverent and intimate aspects of God's fatherhood.¹²³ His children know of God's nature and actions, as mentioned, which is something that only true children of God can know.

Adoption is Trinitarian in nature. Each person of the Godhead plays an important role in redemptive history, including the work of adoption. First, as seen from the previous discussion, God the Father is primary in the work of adoption. The primary involvement of God the Father is in the election of his children.¹²⁴ The clearest passage

¹¹⁹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 163-66.

¹²⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 741.

¹²¹See Matt 7:11; Luke 11:13; Gal 4:7, and Rom 8:17, respectively for each action of giving.

¹²²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 741.

¹²³Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 94.

¹²⁴Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 22-24. The importance and primacy of God's role as the electing Father

on the Father's involvement is found at the beginning of Ephesians. Paul writes,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

In dealing with this passage and God as Father, Trevor Burke writes, "At the outset of this passage Paul stresses that the life of God's family of adopted sons is grounded solely in the action of the Father's electing individuals . . . and this choice, Paul informs us, is the sole prerogative of our Father-God."¹²⁵ The Father blessed his people, chose his people, and predestined his people for adoption on the basis of his gracious plan. No human merit is involved in the Father's choice.¹²⁶ God, based on his character, plans and directs history to fulfill his purpose, namely redeeming a people for himself in the work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The role of Jesus Christ, God the Son, in adoption is seen primarily in the work of the cross and the character of Christ. Christ is both the means for adoption and the example of true sonship.¹²⁷ Paul describes both aspects of Christ's work in adoption in Colossians when dealing with the topic of the supremacy of Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated

is demonstrated as Paul uses a variety of terms referring to the concept of election. For example, in Eph 1:3-11 Paul uses terms such as "predestined," "good pleasure," "chose," "purposed," "appointed," etc.

¹²⁵Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 75.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), 144.

and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col 1:15-23)

Christ as the perfect image of the invisible God accomplishes in one man, what no other person or group of people could accomplish, namely, fulfilling the role of God's ambassador to creation. Christ reflected the Father's character, which is what a child should do. As the example, Christ displayed what it meant to perfectly live out the sonship of God and to truly display the image of God.¹²⁸

The second aspect of Christ's involvement in adoption is the most fundamental one. Through his sacrifice, Christ ransomed a people for God. Christ exchanged his righteousness for the sin of the believer: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Christ bore the wrath of God in order to be the propitiation for sin (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The writer of Hebrews is concerned with Christ's role as the High Priest. As part of their role, the priests were concerned with reconciliation between God and the people. Christ fully satisfied the wrath of God, so that those who were chosen could be reconciled back to God.¹²⁹ In summary, Christ mediated and still mediates on behalf of the believer (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15; 12:24). Christ's mediation is necessary because only he who atoned for the sin could provide advocacy.¹³⁰ When God looks at one of his children, he sees the life, ministry, work, and blood of Christ, which identifies him as a part of God's family.

¹²⁸Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 43. Christ's perfect reflection of God is significant, because the image of God is badly marred. Christ's work accomplished reconciliation and through sanctification, the believer is being conformed to the image of Christ. See the discussion of the Holy Spirit's role in adoption).

¹²⁹William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 66.

¹³⁰Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 82.

The Holy Spirit, just like the other persons of the Trinity, is involved in the adoption of the believer. The Spirit testifies of or identifies with the internal reality of the believer's adoption. Scripture says, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:16). The Spirit declares what he knows about the child of God, because he indwells him. Another way in which the Spirit is involved in adoption is through sanctification. Through the process of sanctification, the Spirit conforms the believer to the image of Christ, in whom his identity is found. The Spirit empowers the believer to walk as a child of God, protecting him from sin and pointing him toward repentance when sin is present. The Spirit aids in the mortification of sin and ability to follow the commands of God.¹³¹ The believer will not experience perfection in the present life, because adoption will be completed only in glorification. This is the ultimate goal of adoption, namely the conformity of the believer to the image of the perfect Christ.¹³²

Adoption is about identity. The Christian's identity has four components: the image of God, the sinful nature, restored right relationship to God, and the future glorified state.¹³³ Every human being that has ever existed, exists in the present, or ever will exist has an undeniable commonality: the *imago Dei*.¹³⁴ The image of God is the basis for the theological understanding of anthropology and for the value placed on mankind.¹³⁵ Though the image of God was not completely eradicated by the fall, it was severely

¹³¹Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 144-45.

¹³²Ibid., 151.

¹³³This idea is similar to that of Anthony Hoekema's four stages of mankind. For the believer, the original state of the image of God was never possessed. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 82-95.

¹³⁴Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 138-39.

¹³⁵O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 43. The image of God is not solely about the value of humanity, but is ultimately about God's glory. God glorifies himself through the creation of people who bear his image (Isa 43:7).

marred. It was marred to the point that every person is at enmity with God and is not a natural member of God's family. Paul clearly states this in his letter to the Romans:

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. . . . This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. (Rom 9:6-8)

Paul is delineating between "spiritual Israel" and "ethnic Israel." Not all who claim to be a part of God's family are indeed true members. The Jews would have seen no difference between the spiritual and ethnic, however Paul is clearly writing to refute the notion that salvation apart from faith in Christ is possible.¹³⁶

Faith in Christ is based on God's sovereign choice, so being a part of the human race does not guarantee salvation any more than being born of Israel guarantees salvation. Therefore, all of humanity has a need for a savior. Mankind cannot be reconciled back to God on the basis of human works, because only God can bridge the chasm caused by sin. Of this thought, Millard Erickson writes,

Man's adoption also involves reconciliation. Not only has God forgiven him, but man has also been reconciled to Him and no longer carries enmity toward Him. God has shown His love for humanity by taking the initiative in restoring the fellowship damaged by sin.¹³⁷

Paul, to the Corinthian church, declares,

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18-19)

He is clear that God is the author and finisher of reconciliation. The writer of Hebrews echoes the idea of Christ as "the founder and perfecter" of the believer's faith. God, the offended party, initiates and completes the reconciliation of the believer. It is only in

¹³⁶Douglas Moo, *The Epistles to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 574-76.

¹³⁷Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 976.

Christ that the fullest expression of this act is seen.¹³⁸ Coupled with this is the bestowing of the message of reconciliation to be spread throughout the world.

Once a believer has been adopted, his identity is solely rooted in Christ. As an adopted member of God's family, Christ, the believer's brother, is the sole source of identity, with conformity to his image as the goal of adoption.¹³⁹ Paul would have understood this concept because on the Damascus road, Christ spoke to him. The question is asked of Paul, Saul at that time, as to why he was persecuting Christ. Paul did not persecute Christ personally or physically. Instead, he persecuted the church, and it is understood by Christ's question that the church is closely identified with Christ, so that to persecute or bless the church is to do the same to Christ.¹⁴⁰ Paul later goes on to proclaim this idea to the churches. To the Galatians he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This identification with Christ's crucifixion demonstrates that there is a transfer of one state to another. The old self was mortified, and a new life, rooted in Christ, is present, which provides a new identity.¹⁴¹ Paul identifies his source of strength, hope, and life as Christ, because it is not Paul who lives, but Christ who lives within him. He can only find his identity in Christ, because of the love and sacrifice of Christ. Christ's work transformed the believers from the sinful, old creation into the redeemed, new creation (2 Cor 5:16-21).

A believer's adoptive identity affords to him certain benefits. This notion

¹³⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 411-12.

¹³⁹Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 52.

¹⁴⁰Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 357.

¹⁴¹Douglas Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013). 171.

primarily manifests itself in two ways: sharing in Christ's suffering and sharing in Christ's glory. Though counterintuitive, suffering for the sake of Christ is benefit. The benefit is not that suffering is a pleasant event; it is, however, that a person suffers because they are identified with Christ.¹⁴² The goal of suffering is ultimately to glorify God, which is accomplished in that as believers suffer they are conformed to the image of Christ and the image of God is restored.¹⁴³ The believer also experiences the glorification of Christ, in which the image of God is fully restored and the believer is made perfect. In glorification, God's adoption of the believer is also made complete. The believer perfectly reflects his new identity as a child of God.¹⁴⁴ Though the final adoption is a guaranteed promise for the future, the believer is still being conformed to the image of Christ, and the current process of conformity to Christ results in an external and a practical display of God's adoption.

John Piper, in his sermon on Ephesians 1:1-6, provides clear examples of how earthly adoption mirrors God's adoption. First, adoption is about God's glory and not man's glory. God's adoption is done "to the praise of his glorious grace" according to Ephesians 1:6, which means God's ultimate purpose in adoption is to bring glory to himself, which leads to the second implication. The second implication is that adoption should not focus on the value of the child, but rather it should focus the child on the value of God. Adoption is not about man's glory, but rather adoption finds its purpose as an instrument of God's glory. Third, those families who adopt demonstrate some of God's attributes, namely that he is merciful and just. God's mercy is displayed through the act of grafting an outsider into the family with the full rights and responsibilities of being a

¹⁴²Moo, *Romans*, 505-6. Suffering in connection with the believer's identity is seen not as an optional path, but required to receive the inheritance of the believer.

¹⁴³Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 192.

¹⁴⁴R. A. Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 171.

member of the family. Though all of mankind deserves to be orphaned, because of their sin, God in his mercy and grace made a way of reconciliation in Christ. This fact does not displace the need for justice, because while he is merciful, God is also just. As adoptive parents, justice is a necessary component that needs to be fulfilled in order to point the child to Christ, in order to glorify God. Finally, adoption brings pain, just as God's adoption of believers brought pain. In order to be reconciled back to God, Christ had to pay the painful price at Calvary. His death brought life and adoption to many, and earthly adoption might also cause the adoptive families to suffer.¹⁴⁵ In another sermon, Piper states, "Those who love God more than life, more than successful adoptions and orphan ministries, and suffer willingly in the service of the fatherless, are God's great gifts to the world."¹⁴⁶ The people to which he is referring are God's gifts, because they practically display God's heart for his own glory by demonstrating his love and justice for the orphan.

Adoption, rooted in God's nature and focused on his glory, is primarily a theological issue. All of the biblical foundations and theological implications of adoption cannot be seen as only theological. Theology always has practical implications, which cannot be separated from one another, especially when it comes to the human act of adoption.

Practical Implications

As a child of God, adopted into his family, a believer practically and externally displays this theological, internal truth. This occurs in two ways: walking in the Spirit and participating in the act of caring for the orphans. The idea of walking in the Spirit is

¹⁴⁵John Piper, "Predestined for Adoption to the Praise of His Glorious Grace: Reflections on Being Adopted by God and Adopting Children" (sermon delivered at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, June 20, 2004).

¹⁴⁶John Piper, "What Does It Mean to Live by Faith in the Service of the Fatherless?" (sermon delivered at the Christian Alliance for Orphans, Summit VI, Twin Cities, MN, April 30, 2010).

consistent with what has been discussed in regard to reflecting the calling that has been placed on the believer. Theologically, the believer finds his identity in Christ, and practically, he lives his life in a way that reflects that identity. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-6)

He emphasizes that the manner in which a believer is to walk is based on the believer's status in Christ. Paul uses the three forms of the word "calling" to emphasize that their adoption is a calling to live out the commands of God as a child of God.¹⁴⁷ There is a similarity among all believers, however, each believer is designed differently and faces individual challenges in their walk. On the basic level, a believer must realize that he is no longer a part of the old family, because he has been adopted into God's family and should act accordingly. In the following chapter, Paul clearly commands believers to "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph 5:1). Peter addresses the same idea when he quotes from Leviticus and reminds Christians, as children of God, to pursue holiness, because God is holy (1 Pet 1:14-16). The call to pursue holiness as children of God, cannot be accomplished apart from faith in God. God's children must rely on their heavenly Father in order to be obedient.¹⁴⁸ Just as in the natural world, children imitate their fathers, Scripture is clear that believers should imitate their Heavenly Father.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 234-35. The idea of calling implies that God's divine election requires the object of the calling, namely the believer, to have a continual responsibility to uphold the characteristics of the calling.

¹⁴⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 79.

¹⁴⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 741-42.

The second practical implication of adoption is that all believers should participate in orphan care. In many cases, God desires and commands his people to imitate his actions. Examples include, but are not limited to, the command “be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2), the role of the husband (Eph 5:25-32), and forgiveness (Matt 6:14-15). As an outpouring of the eternal reality, Christians should lead the way in caring for the orphans through some type of involvement in the act of adoption. As children of God, Christians are expected and commanded to love what God loves. Believers are to care for the fatherless, because God cares for the fatherless.¹⁵⁰ James writes to the believers and tells them to care for the orphans and widows and to be untainted by the world, which is pure and undefiled religion (Jas 1:27). In the next chapter, he continues to exhort Christians to show their faith through their works:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jas 2:14-17)

James’ entire point is that faith and works are inseparable. If a believer separates his faith from works, then his faith is dead and useless. To simply wish peace upon a person and instruct a needy person to go and have his fill, is insufficient for the believer. The believer must do more than encourage the other person; instead the believer is to take action to meet the present need.¹⁵¹ To use the same logic in regard to adoption would mean that it is insufficient for a believer to tell an orphan, “Go in peace, be adopted and loved.” First and foremost, the believer should prayerfully consider whether or not God is calling for him to adopt. Part of this step is to count the cost in regard to what is required in order to adopt.¹⁵² If the believer senses God’s direction toward adoption, then

¹⁵⁰Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 66-67.

¹⁵¹Daniel J. Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 64-65.

¹⁵²Johnny Carr, *Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans beyond Adopting* (Nashville: B &

he must prayerfully continue on the journey to adoption. If the believer does not sense God's calling to engage in adoption, then he must still seek how to live out his faith in helping the orphan. Russell Moore writes, "The Father adopts children, and we're called to be like him. Jesus cares for orphans, and we're being conformed to his image. If you're in Christ, you're called to be involved in this project somehow."¹⁵³

At first glance, a person might object on the basis of not sensing a call by God to adopt a child. While, adopting a child is at the forefront of how Christians should be involved in adoption, there are other ways in which a person can be involved. Moore continues, "That doesn't mean, though, that your family, personally, is equipped to adopt a child right now."¹⁵⁴ Much like the International Missions Board's (IMB) "Pray, Give, Go," the event of adoption requires and permits three similar elements.¹⁵⁵ Believers are called to pray and to pray for not only themselves but for others, as well. Paul tells the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17) and writes to Timothy "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Tim 2:1). Paul desires for the church to pray for everyone, because all people need prayer.¹⁵⁶ In particular, those who are considering adoption need prayer support from the church. One of the characteristics of the early church was a devotion to prayer, which should

H, 2013), 191-92.

¹⁵³Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Nashville: Crossway, 2009), 111.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵International Mission Board, "Pray, Give, Go," accessed on April 24, 2014, <http://www.imb.org/main/lead/default.asp>.

¹⁵⁶Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2, Timothy Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 91. Primarily, this passage is concerned with the narrow scope in which the false teachers would pray. Paul discusses God's desire for "all men to be saved." The emphasis on prayer for everyone demonstrates a call to exercise the Christ-earned privilege to go before the Father. See Matt 6; 14:23; 19:13; 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 6:28; 10:2; 11:1-4; Acts 8:22; Col 1:3, 9; 1 Thess 5:17; 25; 1 Tim 2:1; Jas 5:13-16 for additional passages on prayer. This list is not exhaustive, but rather, representational.

continue to be a mark of the church.¹⁵⁷ Prayer must guide every decision, especially when it is a decision that bears gospel implications.

Another way in which Christians can be involved in adoption is to provide financial support. Oftentimes, one of the major barriers to Christian couples wishing to adopt is the lack of funding. God has generously blessed people so that in turn they might glorify God through giving financial assistance to those intending to adopt. At the foundation of the church, Luke describes the characteristics and behavior of the early church:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:42, 44-45)

The idea behind the communal possession was more in line with the Old Testament idea of sharing with and providing for the poor and needy.¹⁵⁸ The characteristics of the church were that they were devoted to sound, biblical truth, their commonality and relationship in Christ, and to prayer. As a result of these foundational qualities, they shared in all things and if a person had a need, the church met that need. The same can be true of believers in all areas of need, including adoption. The parties involved, the potential adoptive family and potential adoptee, are both in need. The adoptee needs a family, while the adoptive family needs financial assistance in order to fulfill the orphan's need. For Moore, the question is not whether or not a Christian should adopt, but how they should participate in adoption.¹⁵⁹ To reiterate this point, the three-part motto from the IMB can be adapted for adoption participation and summarized as "Pray, Give, Adopt." In each of these, believers have the opportunity to aid in the spread of the gospel, because earthly adoption is a clear picture of God's work in spiritual adoption through the sacrifice of Christ.

¹⁵⁷Polhill, *Acts*, 119-20.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 121.

¹⁵⁹Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 111.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Since believers' identities are rooted in their adoption into God's family, Christians need to be concerned about the practical display in the life of the church. I sought to identify and quantify the adoption rates of evangelical Christians within the last five years. The purpose of this research was to provide data for evangelicals in their efforts to promote the cause of adoption. This task was accomplished by determining whether or not adoptions have increased among evangelicals, and if so, determining what factors have contributed to the rate of adoptions among evangelical Christians.

Research Question Synopsis

Scripture is clear that orphans exist, and data from secular institutions also echo this problem and the need for a solution. Believers are called to act upon the commands of God in regard to caring for the poor, needy, orphan, and widows. An example of responding to this command came at the 2009 Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC's 2009 resolution marked a definitive moment in the history of the SBC, as well as evangelical history with its emphasis on orphan care and adoption. Additionally, both the Wesleyan and United Methodist Churches have drafted similar documents concerning orphan care.¹ The United Methodist document calls for the church to "make every possible effort to aid in the elimination of the Adoption/Orphan Crisis by prayer, awareness, education, mission, ministry, and funding."² Likewise, the Wesleyan Church calls for

¹See appendices 5 and 6.

²Orphan Sunday, "RS-210—Crisis of the Orphans of the World," accessed May 15, 2014,

participation in a broader effort among evangelicals and to focus on “our common burden for the orphans of the world.”³ The question remains as to whether or not there has been a significant impact on adoption rates as a result of the resolutions. The scope of the research is to examine the legacy data from evangelical adoption agencies within the last five years. The current year of 2015 places the timing of the SBC’s resolution approximately as a halfway point for the timeframe of the research. The following research questions will be used to determine the findings for the research:

1. What is the correlation of the number of adoptions, foster placements, and home studies to past benchmarks from select evangelical adoption agencies in the US within the last five years?
2. What factors, if any, contribute to the rate of adoptions among Evangelicals?

Design Overview

The research design for this study was a single-phase approach, containing quantitative and qualitative components. I sought to determine the rates of adoptions from select evangelical adoption agencies to determine if there has been an increase. The survey questions were designed to determine if any common factors contribute to adoption rates that were calculated in the first part. The following components were used: documents of the historical data of adoption rates and an electronic survey instrument, via QuestionPro, that measured the perceptions of evangelical adoption agency personnel, employed by the participating agencies, and other personnel of adoption-related organizations and ministries.

A mixed-methods research design was used in this study. Mixed-methods research is defined as the methodology in which the researcher

http://orphansunday.org/wp-content/uploads/RS-210-Crisis_of_the_Orphans_2LMJQJGH.pdf.

³Orphan Sunday, “Orphan Care Proposal,” accessed May 15, 2014, http://orphansunday.org/clergy/orphan_care_proposal/.

collects and analyzes persuasively and rigorously both qualitative and quantitative data (based on research questions); mixes (or integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them), sequentially by having one build on the other, or embedding one with the other; gives priority to one or to both forms of data (in terms of what the research emphasizes); uses these procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study; frames these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses; and combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study.⁴

Both narrative and empirical components informed the research in order to provide objective foundations, as well as allowing for an array of perspectives in the study.

The initial phase consisted of identifying adoption agencies that self-identify as evangelical. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) membership list of agencies and ministries was used to determine the sample population.⁵ All members of the ECFA must adhere to the Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship, which includes Standard 1—Doctrinal Issues: “Every organization shall subscribe to a written statement of faith clearly affirming a commitment to the evangelical Christian faith or shall otherwise demonstrate such commitment and shall operate in accordance with biblical truths and practices.”⁶ The ECFA has a statement of faith, to which all members must adhere.⁷ After the evangelical adoption agencies were identified, I contacted the agencies to request legacy data of adoption rates from 2008 to 2013. At first glance, it appeared that many agencies could provide numerical data, provided they have sufficient staff. Initially, it was thought that some limited demographic data would be provided to

⁴John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 5.

⁵Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, “Find Member,” accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.ecfa.org/>.

⁶Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, “ECFA’s Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship,” accessed May 27, 2014, http://www.ecfa.org/PDF/ECFA_Seven_Standards_of_Responsible_Stewardship.pdf.

⁷See appendix 8.

me.⁸ Unfortunately, as the research progressed, I discovered that many of the agencies, if not all of them, retained very little demographic information, if any. As a part of the initial step, the appropriate person, if available, was contacted. When the appropriate contact could not be determined, as was the case with some larger agencies, I contacted each agency via phone to either communicate with the appropriate person or obtain the correct contact information. If the phone call proved unsuccessful in obtaining the desired information, I utilized generic inquiry or information submissions to communicate with the organizations. In the majority of these cases, a response was received. All communication and gathering of data was accomplished electronically, and no physical mail was used in order to communicate with any agency.

A second part of the initial phase was to identify members of the expert panel. The expert panel was comprised of self-identifying evangelical Christians, who work in an adoption ministry or related organization. With the assistance of my doctoral supervisor, three possible expert panel members were identified. Each candidate was sent an introduction to me, the purpose of the research, and information regarding the expectations and criteria for an expert panel member. After each person agreed to serve on the panel, I submitted a draft of the survey questions to each member for critique. The survey questions were initially based on the precedent literature in order to ascertain the perception of contributing factors to the number of adoptions among evangelical Christians. Each expert panel member reviewed the questions. Per the suggestions of the panel, I modified the survey. Once the survey was complete, the selected agencies were contacted via e-mail containing the request for the numerical data and the link to the survey.

Upon receiving the data, I analyzed the data looking for the number of adoptions. After the data had been collected, the rates of adoptions were calculated for

⁸I made initial contact with select adoption agencies in order to discover what kind of data could be provided. This step was taken with permission from the Director of the Doctor of Education program, John David Trentham, and my doctoral supervisor, Anthony Foster.

each selected agency. In addition to each agency's individual rate, I examined the average and overall rate of adoptions for all participating adoption agencies for the purpose of generalization.

In addition to receiving the numerical data, the interview responses were collected, organized, and reviewed to determine what common factors exist in contributing to the adoption rate. The data from the interviews were subjective in nature based upon the individuals being interviewed. It should be noted that I did not receive enough responses, and multiple attempts were made to contact evangelical agencies through repeating the outlined process.

Population

The research population consisted of two specific populations. The first population was evangelical adoption agencies, who self-identify as evangelical based on a mission statement or some other form of identity statement. The second population was personnel from the participating adoption agencies and other adoption-related organizations and ministries.

Samples and Delimitations

Purposeful sampling was used, whereby the participants were intentionally selected due to their experience or relationship to adoption, for the two populations.⁹ The sample size of population 1 consisted of approximately six evangelical adoption agencies. These agencies were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate and provide legacy data concerning the placements of children. The legacy records for adoptions, foster care placements, and home studies were examined from a six-year span (2008-2014). Initially, the goal was to obtain historical data within the range of 2008 -2013, however I was able to obtain data from 2014 to provide a more complete and current analysis. The

⁹Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting*, 173.

following delimitations for population 1 were applied to the proposed study:

1. Only agencies that identify as evangelical, as defined, were included in the study.
2. The selected agencies must participate in adoptions, foster care, and/or house studies.
3. Agencies that have been in existence for at least five years were eligible to participate in the study.

The sample size of population 2 consisted of personnel from the participating adoption agencies and other adoption-related organizations and ministries. The personnel included, but was not limited to, administration or any available staff. Two delimitations were applied to population 2:

1. Only leaders that identify as evangelical, as defined, were included in the study.
2. The personnel must be currently employed by the evangelical adoption agency.

Limitations to Generalizations

The study was limited in generalizability in the following ways:

1. Evangelical agencies that were not members of the ECFA.
2. Evangelical agencies that did not have adequate staff to participate.
3. Evangelicals who adopted through non-evangelical adoption agencies.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this research study, I employed the use of 2008 to 2014 numerical data gathered from the adoption agencies and one research instrument, an electronic survey to determine what factors, if any, have contributed to the rate of adoptions among evangelical Christians.

Documents (Quantitative)

The foundational element of the research design was numerical data from the evangelical adoption agencies. The research required legacy data, primarily from 2008 to 2013, from each of the selected agencies. The legacy data was gathered via electronic

interaction with the selected adoption agencies.¹⁰ Through the e-mail responses and survey questions, I was able to obtain legacy data for 2014 as well. The information included, but is not limited to, the number of completed adoptions or placements within each year. In all cases, the adoption agencies only provided numerical data and responses to the survey questions. No additional demographic information, such as the denominational affiliation of the adoptive family, was obtained.

Qualitative Survey Questions

The instrument for phase 2 used survey questions. The interview questions were crafted based on the precedent literature and initial research findings. An expert panel, using the delimitations of the study, reviewed the interview questions. I made modifications to the survey questions and resubmitted the appropriate Ethics Committee Documents to obtain approval to conduct the research. The survey consisted of simple questions with answer of “yes” or “no,” Likert-scale based questions (four-point scale), and an open-ended question. The interviews were sent to select recipients who had been identified as personnel from the participating adoption agencies and other adoption-related organizations and ministries. In particular, the personnel member who reported the legacy data received the survey question link. The goal of each question was to identify contributing factors to the adoption rates, based on the perceptions of the participants. The selected instrumentation allowed the participants to freely express their answers through the use of the Likert scale and the final open-ended question.¹¹ The perceptions measured by the survey pertained to the listed potential factors that may contribute to the adoption rates. The questions were based on the participants’ perceptions and the data provided by the adoption agencies. Due to the nature of the

¹⁰See appendix 2.

¹¹Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting*, 176-77.

research, apart from the responses provided by those involved directly in the adoption cause, it was difficult to determine what factors contribute to the adoption rate.

Procedures

Before I could complete my required ethics documents, the survey questions were crafted based on the precedent literature. The survey questions were included in the required documentation to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to beginning the research, all procedures, required by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were completed. Only initial contact was made with evangelical adoption agencies prior to approval from the Ethics Committee. Permission to make initial contact was granted by Anthony Foster and John David Trentham. In the initial phase, it was communicated to each agency the purpose of the research, as well as how the data would be used. In about half of the cases, the initial e-mail was resent to ensure that the agencies had properly received it. Several organizations responded, indicating that they did not directly handle adoptions and/or foster care. Those organizations who did not meet the criteria were eliminated from my contact list. Another issue arose when a couple of agencies declined to be a part of the study as a result of inadequate staffing. As a part of this initial step, the appropriate person, if available, was contacted. When the appropriate contact could not be determined, as was the case with some larger agencies, I contacted each agency via phone to either communicate with the appropriate person or obtain the correct contact information. If the phone call proved unsuccessful in obtaining the desired information, I utilized generic inquiry or information submissions to communicate with the organizations. In the majority of these cases, a response was received. All communication and gathering of data was accomplished electronically, and no physical mail was used in order to communicate with any agency. Ten agencies agreed to participate in the study, which was the minimal number required for the sample size.

Another step taken prior to initiating the research was to identify potential expert panel members. I e-mailed three individuals that met the criteria for expert panel membership beginning on August 25, 2014. However, all three candidates, who had initially agreed to serve, failed to respond in a timely manner after several attempts to make contact over the course of a month. A new group of individuals was selected as potential members. I encountered an issue with one of the prospective expert panel members, because she served as a part of one of the evangelical agencies. In the research criteria, data from agencies where an expert panel member was employed was to be excluded. In order to protect the research sample, I discussed the nature of the agency in question and how each branch operated. It was initially determined that data could be used from other branches of the agency while excluding the particular office where the expert panel member was employed. After the issue was resolved, I e-mailed the candidates and all three individuals agreed to serve on the expert panel.

After receiving approval from the Ethics Committee, each expert panel member was e-mailed the link to the survey designed in QuestionPro. After one month's time, all three members reviewed the survey and made suggestions for modification. In order to follow protocol, I modified the survey and resubmitted the required ethics documents for approval. The Ethics Committee granted approval, and I was notified in March 2015 that I could proceed with the study.

All agencies who had agreed to participate were contacted with an official e-mail requesting their legacy data from 2008 to 2013. During this step, four agencies either did not respond or declined to be a part of the study. I began to receive data in April 2015. The final set of data was received in June 2015. All agencies included legacy data from 2008 to 2014, which included an additional year of data. The information from 2014 was included to provide a more current analysis. Two participating agencies reported a total amount of adoptions from the requested years. A follow-up e-mail was

sent requesting each year's number of adoptions to be separated out by the respective year.¹²

The data was collected and inputted into Microsoft Excel to be statistically analyzed. Each agency was assigned a number, ranging from 1 to 6, in order to provide anonymity. Each agency's data was then recorded based on the year in which the adoptions were completed. In addition to the individual agency yearly totals, the aggregate data for each year was calculated to determine an overall rate for the participating agencies. All information was saved electronically either to a hard drive or on a cloud-based storage. The final step, analyzing the numerical data, was to report the findings of the research, which is contained in chapter 4. I consulted with a statistician to determine what measures were required to analyze the data. Once the findings were presented, each participating agency received the information for their records.

A statistician determined the most effective statistical measure for the research study.¹³ In order to analyze the adoption agencies' data, I employed the use of descriptive and inferential parametric statistical measures. Parametric statistics required

¹²An issue arose when dealing with one agency because it had multiple offices, which employed one of the expert panel members. As a part of the research guidelines, data from agencies that employed any of the expert panel members could not be used. As stated, the agency in question has multiple offices, which meant a possibility of including the data from the offices where the expert panel member was not employed. Through various e-mail conversations, the understanding was that each office operated independently of each other, which meant that I could obtain and use the data from the agency, with the exception of one office. As a part of the process, this agency required that I obtain approval from the agency's ethics committee. Along with documents from the prospectus and The Southern Seminary's Ethics Committee approval, I completed the research request for the agency. Throughout the process, the expert panel member acted as the liaison between the agency's committee and myself. A few points needed clarifying, which were resolved, however, the committee determined that it was a conflict of interest to use the data from the agency due to the expert panel member's involvement. After conversations with my doctoral supervisors, it was determined that I should proceed without the data from this particular agency.

¹³The statistician for this research was Ken Walker. He is a former Vice President of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), where part of his duties included the supervision of Business and Finance departments of KCTCS. Additionally, he possesses a master's degree in statistics.

that the population being studied have a normal distribution.¹⁴ Since I was attempting to measure the number of adoptions and the trend, a normal distribution was needed. The statistical measures used were descriptive in nature because I sought to analyze and describe the distribution of data.¹⁵ The statistical measures were also inferential because I used a sample of evangelical adoption agencies in order to make generalizations for the larger populations of evangelical Christians who adopted through services of evangelical adoption agencies.¹⁶ For the qualitative portion, I utilized a simple, nonparametric statistical measure to analyze the data from the survey questions. The nonparametric statistics, unlike the parametric statistics, do not have any requirements concerning the distributions of the samples, which are beneficial as they pertain to the categorical data in the survey responses.¹⁷ The first part of the analysis determined the number of adoptions and the trend of the reported numbers. The data from the agencies appeared to be within a wide numerical range. The data was observed in regard to each agency's data, the total number of adoptions among the agencies, and a specialized grouping. The specialized grouping was determined by each agency's mission. As categories for grouping were determined, each group, with the exception of one, had one agency as its member.

After the numerical data was analyzed, I analyzed the survey responses. As a part of QuestionPro's services, a report was generated containing the aggregate data for the survey. Only three surveys were incomplete and unusable for the purpose of the research. Each question was reviewed and an analysis was reported in chapter 4 for a more conclusive set of research findings. The statistician was consulted to determine the significance of each response from the survey.

¹⁴Mario F. Triola, *Elementary Statistics Using the TI-83/84 Plus Calculator* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2011), 666.

¹⁵Joseph F. Healey, *Statistics: A Tool for Social Research* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷Triola, *Elementary Statistics*, 666.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Numerical data from participating adoption agencies were gathered in order to measure the rates of adoptions from 2008 to 2013. Data for 2014 were provided, as well, and have been included in the findings for a more current report. In addition to the quantitative data gathered, qualitative data from the survey responses of adoption agency personnel were collected and analyzed to determine what factors, in any, contributed to rates of adoptions between 2008 and 2014. All data were collected electronically via e-mail communication or a web-based survey, which was administered through QuestionPro. The following sections discuss the completion protocols for the collection and analysis of the research data.

Compilation Protocol

Adoption agencies that are members of the ECFA were contacted to participate in the research study. Formal e-mail communication was sent out requesting legacy data from 2008 to 2013. The legacy data was gathered via e-mail and compiled in Excel. The data included the years ranging from 2008 to 2014 along with the number of adoptions separated by each year for 6 participating agencies. In Excel, each agency's data was separated onto different tabs, where a graph was created for visual representation of the quantitative data. All data from the participating agencies were compiled in Excel, where a graph was created in order to visually demonstrate the overall rate of the total number of adoptions. Several forms of statistical measure were used, such as simple, nonparametric and parametric statistics, as well as descriptive and inferential statistical measures. In

order to provide another form of measurement, the average number of adoptions for each year was also calculated and graphed.

Compilation of the Survey Data

The survey data was collected using a web-based survey created in QuestionPro. QuestionPro, an online survey resource, was used because of the user-friendly design and cost factors.¹ The survey link was disseminated with the formal e-mail communication that was sent to the adoption agencies. A member of the participating agencies' personnel completed the survey, which was designed to identify potential contributing factors to the adoption rates. The survey consisted of simple answer questions, Likert scale questions, and an open-ended question. The responses were compiled electronically using QuestionPro, and reports were generated and downloaded for review. After the data was reviewed and categorized by question, I grouped the data according to the research questions. As a part of the categorization of the data, I consulted with a statistician on what statistical measures to use.

Demographic Data and Sample Data

No demographic data were obtained from the participating adoptions. In most cases, the adoption agencies indicated that they did not require or record this information. On occasion, a couple of adoption agencies could not provide the data due to staffing issues. Though the demographic information would have provided another element for this study, the absence of this data did not affect the findings.

Table 3 displays the number of responses for the research study. A total of 6 evangelical adoption agencies participated and provided numerical data from the years 2008 to 2014. Nine personnel members from the participating adoption agencies

¹QuestionPro, "Adoption Rate Factors," accessed August 1, 2014, <http://questionpro.com/t/ALCB0ZRWQJ>

responded to the survey. Of the 9 responses, 7 surveys were completed in their entirety. The data from the 2 incomplete surveys were able to be used. No question was required to be answered in order to provide the survey participant the ability to decline participation.

Table 3. Responses

Participating Agencies	Participating Adoption Agency Personnel	Total Surveys	Completed Surveys	Useable Surveys
6	9	9	7	9

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to determine trends of adoptions by evangelical Christians, and what factors, if any, contributed to the numbers of adoptions from 2008 to 2014.

Quantitative

The quantitative component of the study was the legacy data gathered from the participating adoption agencies. Table 4 displays the numerical data provided by each agency for the range of 2008 to 2014. The last line of table 4 contains the yearly combined totals from all of the participating agencies. The data of several of the agencies were within the same numeric range. One agency appeared to possess numeric data that was substantially larger than the rest.

In order to establish a trend line for measuring the number of adoptions, a benchmark year was determined. For the purposes of the study, 2008 was used as the benchmark year. The data indicated that each agency saw a combination of increases, decreases, and plateaus between 2008 and 2014, though the trends did not always align.

From 2012 to 2013, every participating agency experienced a decrease.² Of the 6 participating agencies, 2 experienced an overall decrease (Agency 1 and Agency 5). One agency did not see any change between 2008 and 2014 (Agency 3). The remaining 3 agencies had an increase from 2008 to 2014.

Table 4. Data by agency

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Agency 1	10	10	5	9	12	8	6
Agency 2	5	7	8	14	7	5	8
Agency 3	20	22	7	10	13	7	20
Agency 4	26	32	51	42	41	23	28
Agency 5	23	19	19	24	29	23	18
Agency 6	56	147	147	171	167	94	98
Total	140	237	237	270	269	160	178

In order to complete the study, I calculated the total number of adoptions for each year. The data indicated the pattern for the number of adoptions for evangelical adoption agencies. Collectively, the agencies' numbers increased by 27.1 percent. From 2008 to 2009 there was a large increase, with a plateau from 2009 to 2010, which increased to another plateau from 2010 to 2012. As stated, 2012 to 2013 saw a decrease, then the data ended in an increase from 2013 to 2014. Only Agency 6's trend was identical to the trend of the total number of adoptions. Despite an unsteady pattern, the

²Based on the survey data, which is discussed later in this chapter, a number of factors could have affected or caused the decrease in adoption numbers during the period between 2012 and 2013. The data provided no explanation as to the reason for the decline in the number of adoptions during this period. The decrease from 2012 to 2013 for all participating agencies demonstrates that there is a need for further research in regard to what factors might have caused such a drastic change.

data shows that the number of adoptions among evangelicals has not declined, but has in fact increased.

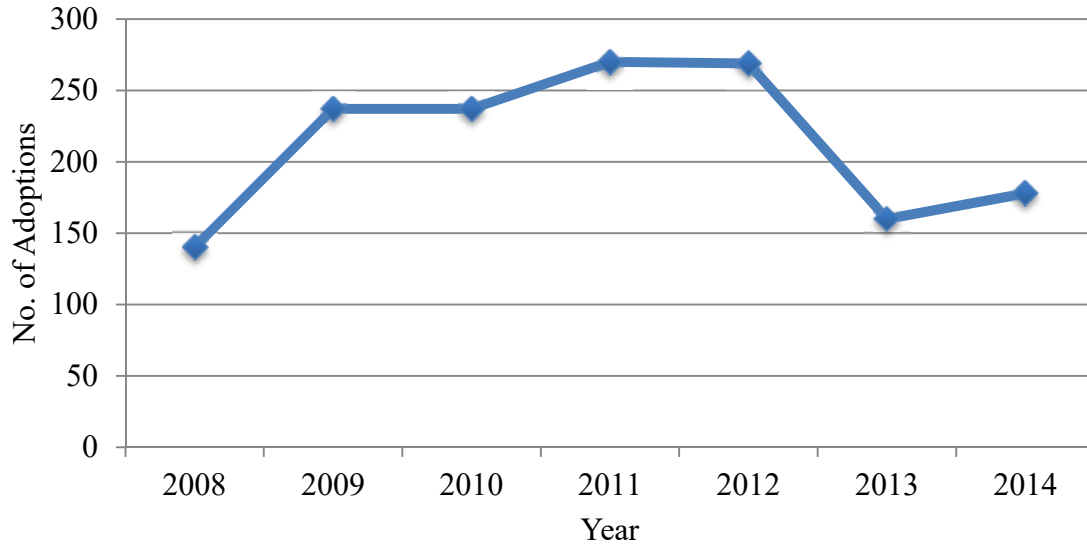


Figure 1. Total number of adoptions for all participating agencies

The 6 adoption agencies were grouped together based upon the mission of each organization as a further part of the analysis. Grouping the agencies allowed for a more even distribution of the data. Upon review, four categories of agencies emerged: large adoption agency, orphanage, mid-size adoption agency, and pregnancy counseling centers. Each category, with the exception of the pregnancy counseling centers, contained one agency per group. Table 5 displays the breakdown of agency by category of mission. The purpose of the grouping was to categorize the data to more effectively compare and contrast the number of adoption agencies who were similar in focus.

Table 5. Adoption agencies grouped by mission

Large Adoption Agency	Agency 6
Orphanage	Agency 3
Mid-size Adoption Agency	Agency 4
Pregnancy Counseling Centers	Agency 1, Agency 2, and Agency 5

Figure 2 displays the trend of the large adoption agency, Agency 6. The pattern shows an increase from 2008 to 2009, a plateau from 2009 to 2010, an increase from 2010 to 2011, a slight decrease from 2011 to 2012, a drastic decrease from 2012 to 2013, and a slight increase from 2013 to 2014. Agency 6 saw an increase of 175 percent between the years 2008 and 2014. This particular category was the only one in which the agency's data was identical to the trend of the total trend of the participating adoption agencies. This similar nature of Agency 6's pattern to that of the total trend is more than likely due to the fact that the large adoption agency data was substantially more, numerically speaking, than the other agencies in the majority of years within the selected timeframe.

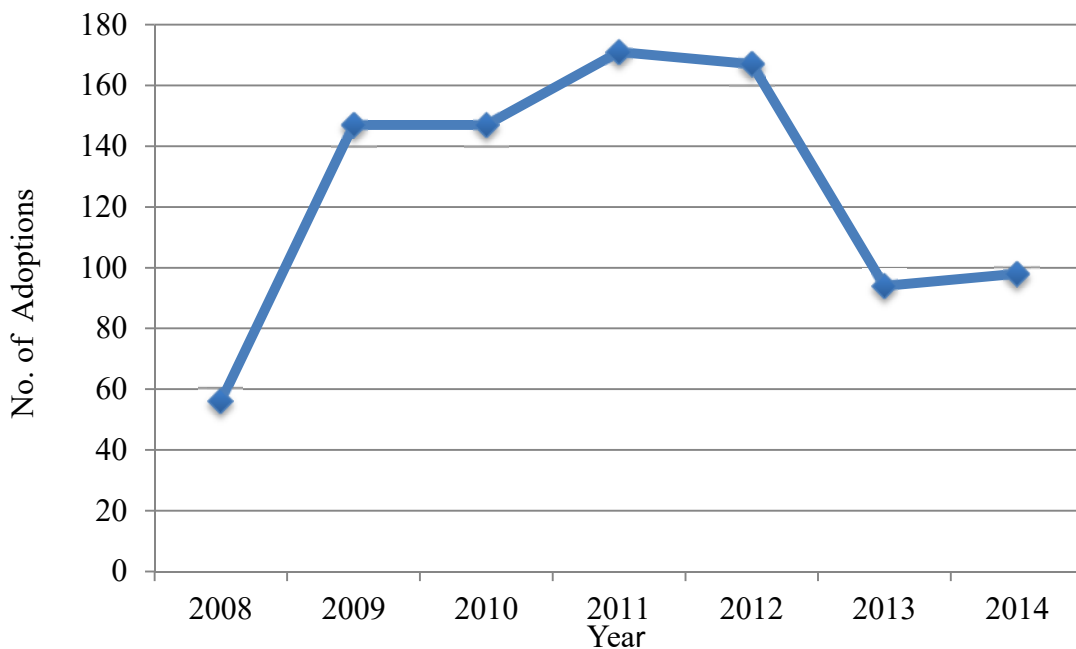


Figure 2. Large adoption agency number of adoptions

Figure 3 displays the trend for the number of adoptions for the agency whose mission was that of an orphanage, Agency 3. The pattern for Agency 3 shows a slight increase from 2008 to 2009, a drastic decrease from 2009 to 2010, an increase from 2010 to 2012, a slight decrease from 2012 to 2013, and a drastic increase from 2013 to 2014.

Overall, Agency 3 saw no change in the number of adoptions between the years 2008 and 2014.

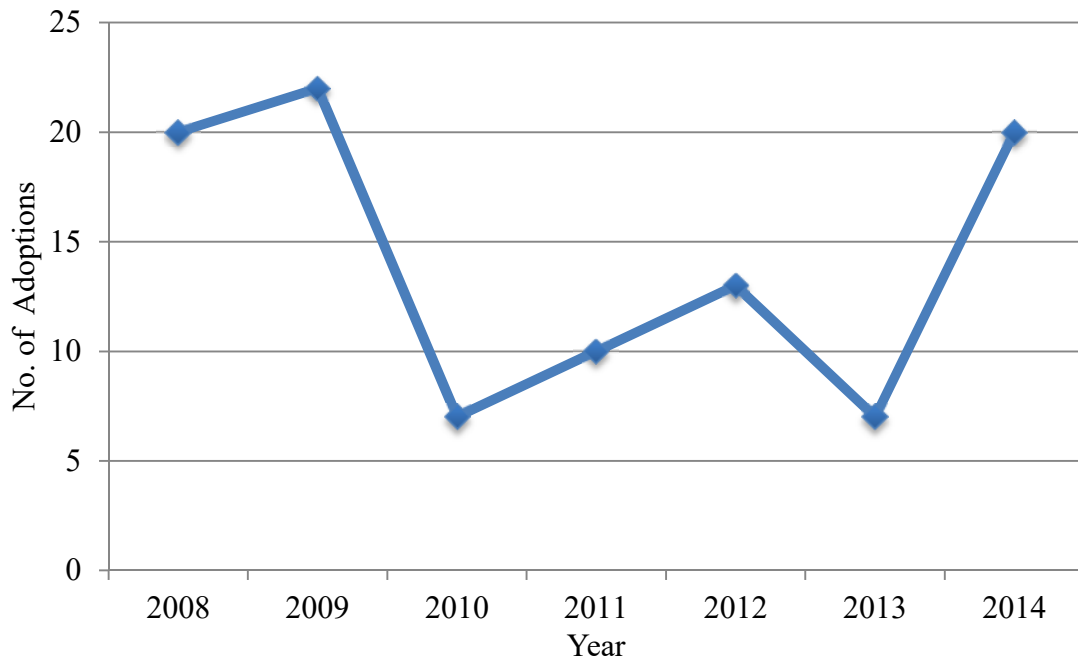


Figure 3. Orphanage number of adoptions

Figure 4 displays the trend for the number of adoptions of the mid-size adoption agency, Agency 4. The pattern for Agency 4 shows a large increase from 2008 to 2010, a decrease to a plateau from 2010 to 2012, a large decrease from 2012 to 2013, and an increase from 2013 to 2014. Agency 4 saw a slight increase of 7.7 percent in the number of adoptions between the years 2008 and 2014.

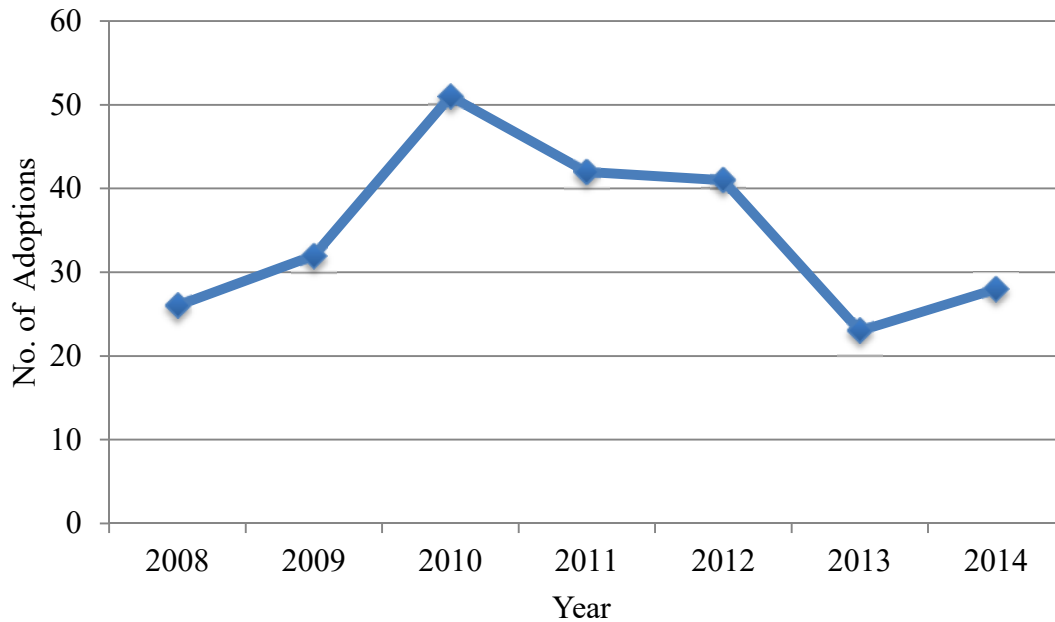


Figure 4. Mid-size adoption agency number of adoptions

The combined data for the final group, which contains agencies 1, 2, and 5, are displayed in figure 5. Each agency's primary mission deals with pregnancy counseling centers. The pattern for Agencies 1, 2, and 5 shows a steady decrease from 2008 to 2010, an increase from 2010 to 2011, a slight increase from 2011 to 2012, and a drastic decrease from 2012 to 2014. The fourth group saw a decrease of 15.8 percent in the number of adoptions between the years 2008 and 2014.

The data in figure 6 displays the trend for all of the groups of participating agencies along the same scale. The data shows that primarily the large-size and mid-size adoption agencies were the only groups that had any sort of overall increase. The orphanage saw no overall change, while the pregnancy counseling centers saw an overall decrease in the number of adoptions. The data could indicate that the mission of an organization who administers adoptions could actually affect the number of adoptions. This could be due to many factors, such as the mission of the organization being focused in multiple directions, the number of personnel, as well as the number of locations that each agency has.

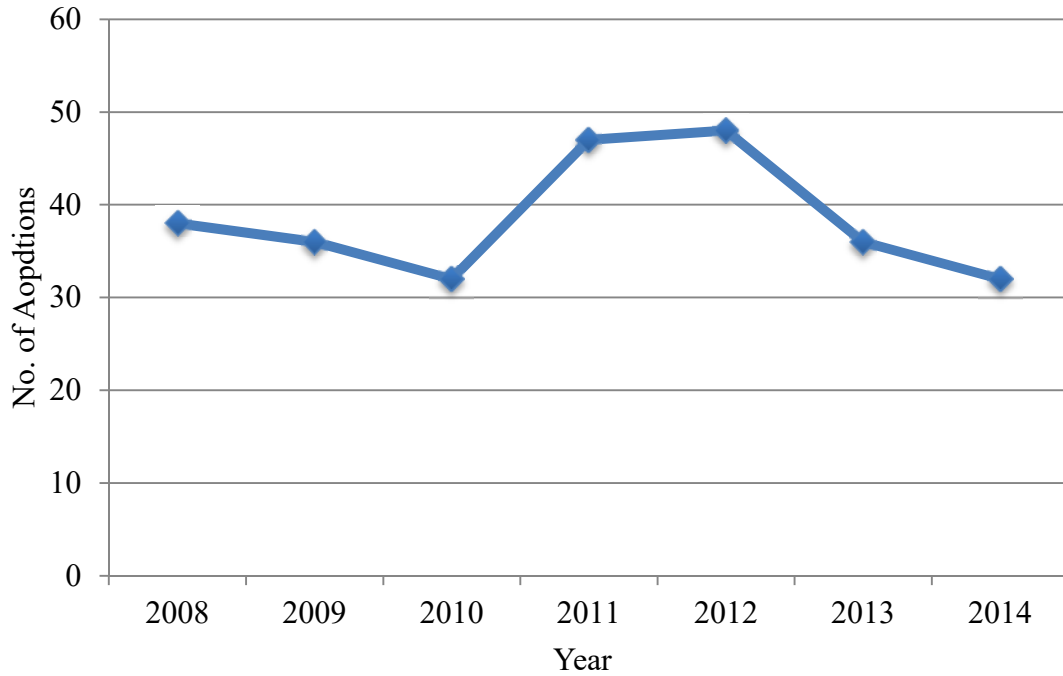


Figure 5. Pregnancy counseling centers number of adoptions

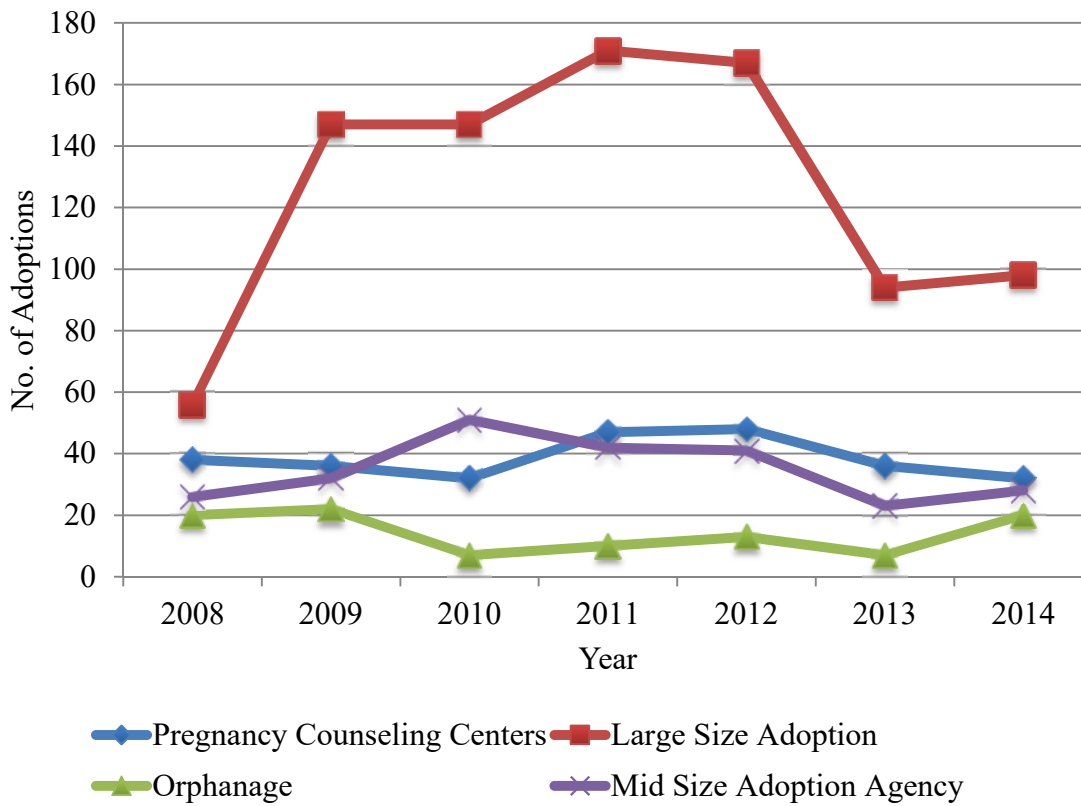


Figure 6. Number of adoptions for all groups of agencies

There was one point of intersection between the qualitative and quantitative data. As a part of the analysis for the number of adoptions, the cumulative yearly total was calculated. Likewise, the survey participants were asked to provide their perspective on the orphan crisis in terms of (1) the number of adoptions and (2) the number of orphans. When responding to the question of their perception of the orphan crisis in terms of the number of adoptions, participants were given the following choices: improved, declined, or plateaued. To indicate their perception of the orphan crisis in terms of the number of orphans, they could choose from the following responses: improved, intensified, or plateaued. In terms of adoptions, 44.4 percent perceived that the orphan crisis had declined, 33.3 percent indicated that the orphan crisis had improved, and the remaining 22.2 percent perceived that the orphan crisis had plateaued in regard to adoptions. Depending on whether or not plateauing is viewed as declining due to the lack of increase, one could argue that the overarching view is that the number of adoptions has declined.

Another component to this section of data is whether or not the perception is that the orphan crisis has improved, intensified, or plateaued in terms of the number of orphans. Only 7 participants responded to the question, but the responses indicated that by in large the orphan crisis had intensified. Of the participants, 71.4 percent responded that the number of orphans had increased. The other participants were divided with 14.3 percent responding that the orphan crisis had improved and the other 14.3 percent responding that the orphan crisis had plateaued. If the orphan crisis has plateaued, it is not any worse, per se, but it has not improved, which can be viewed as a negative trend. Table 6 displays the trend of the total number of adoptions for the 6 participating agencies.

Table 6. Participating adoption agencies totals

Year	Number of Adoptions
2008	140
2009	237
2010	237
2011	270
2012	269
2013	160
2014	178

Overall, there was a slight increase of 27.1 percent in the totals of the participating agencies between 2008 and 2014. The majority perception was that there was a decline in adoptions. At first glance, the perceptions do not match the actual trend of adoption numbers, however, the trend saw an increase (2008-2009), a plateau (2009-2010), an increase (2010-2011), a slight decrease (2011-2012), a sharp decrease (2012-2013), and a slight increase (2013-2014). While the agencies collectively saw a slight increase over the six-year period, there were enough drastic decreases to support the perception that the orphan crisis has intensified in terms of the number of orphans and declined in terms of the number of adoptions.

Qualitative

The qualitative portion of the study focused on the perceptions of participating adoption agency personnel of potential contributing factors to the adoption rates measured in the quantitative portion of the study. The research utilized a web-based survey, which consisted of simple answer questions, a Likert-scale with a 1 to 4 rating, and an open response question to determine if any factors affect the adoption rates.

The first question presented in the survey addressed qualifying information to ensure that a participant's responses could be used. As outlined in the research study, the participants must self-identify as evangelical. All of the participants answered that they identified as evangelical, which resulted in the ability to use all survey responses.

Question 5 listed 18 potential factors that might affect the number of adoptions. The participants were given 4 choices: "1" definitely not a factor, "2" unlikely a factor, "3" likely a factor, and "4" definitely a factor. Of the 18 factors, 17 ranked 55.6 percent or higher, indicating that each of these factors was at least likely a factor. "Adoptee's country of origin" ranked under 50 percent, indicating the majority of participants did believe that it had an effect on the number of adoptions. Table 7 displays the sum of "3" and "4" ratings from the Likert-scale, in rank order, from the highest percentage of a "3" rating or higher to the lowest percentage.

Based on rank percentages, the factors of religious communication, motivations of adoptive families, and personal relationships with someone who has adopted, emerged as the highest ranking contributing factors. The top three contributing factors were tied at 88.9 percent. A further analysis revealed that motivations of adoptive families had a higher percentage in terms of the number 4 rating (66.7 percent) than religious communication (55.6 percent). There was no difference between the first, second, and third rankings. Sources of funding were within 4 percent of the third ranking. While the top three factors were close percentage wise, overall, the motivations for adoptive families appear to be the highest factor that contributes to the rates of adoptions.

Table 7. Potential contributing factors in rank percentage order

Rank	Potential Contributing Factors	%
1	Motivations of adoptive families	88.9
1	Religious communication, such as literature, sermons, etc.	88.9
1	Personal relationships with someone who has adopted	88.9
4	Sources of funding for adoptive families	85.7
5	Media (e.g. publicity, perception, etc.)	77.8
5	Leadership of the adoption agencies	77.8
7	Governmental restrictions/influence	71.4
7	Visibility of high profile adoptions (i.e. well-known Christians who adopt)	71.4
7	Adoption conferences/workshops	71.4
10	Number of adoption agencies	66.7
10	Agency funding	66.7
10	Number of adoption-related organizations	66.7
10	Marketing	66.6
10	Agency personnel	66.7
10	Recruitment of eligible adoptive families	66.7
16	Economic concerns	57.2
17	Methods of locating orphans	55.6
18	Adoptee's country of origin	44.4

The rest of the factors could be divided into smaller percentage ranges. The category consisted of factors whose rating was 71.4 percent to 77.8 percent. These factors, ranked fifth and seventh, included media, the leadership of the adoption agencies, governmental restrictions/influence, visibility of high profile adoptions, and adoption conferences/workshops. The next percentage ranking group was between 66.7 percent.

These factors were ranked as tenth and included number of adoption agencies, agency funding, number of adoption-related organizations, marketing, agency personnel, and recruitment of eligible adoptive families. The final three factors, which were ranked sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth, fell within a range of 44.4 percent to 57.2 percent. The majority of factors fell between the second and third categories ranging from 66.7 percent to 77.8 percent, with only four factors having a percentage above 80 percent.

In rank order, the last three factors, namely economic concerns, methods of locating orphans, and the adoptee’s country of origin, had inconclusive data. In figure 7, 57.2 percent of the participants indicated that economic concerns were likely a factor, however, 42.9 percent indicated that economic concern was more than likely not a contributing factor. Though the majority perception showed this factor as likely, there was not a substantial difference in opposing opinions. Therefore, it stands to reason that economic concerns could or could not be a factor, and would require further research.

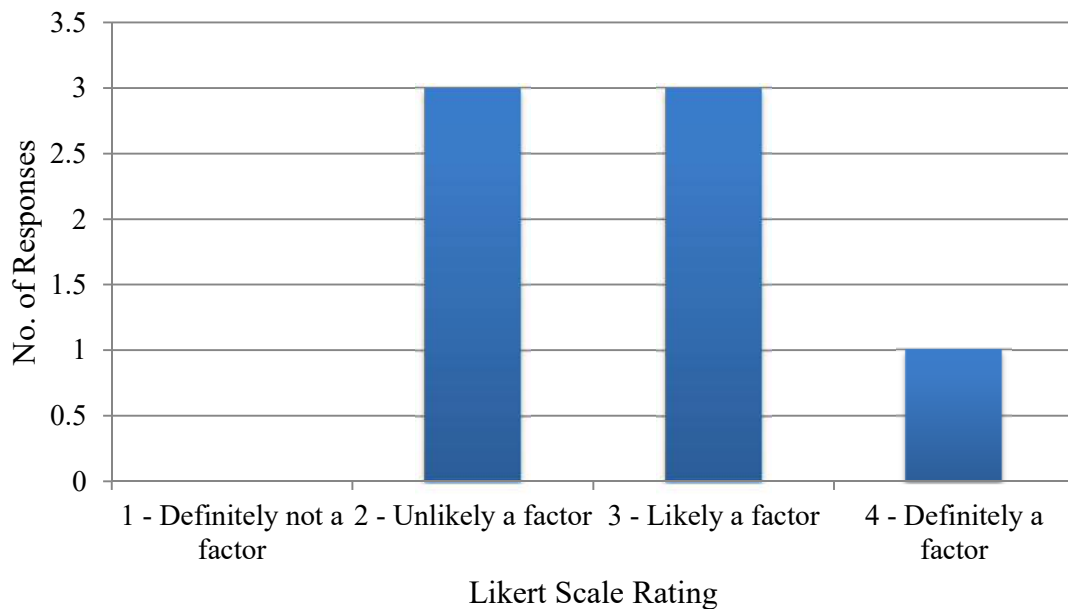


Figure 7. Economic concerns

Figure 8 shows that methods of locating orphans had less of a difference between the two ends of the scale. Of the participants, 55.6 percent responded that the factor in question could likely be a factor, whereas 44.4 percent did not feel it was a contributing factor. This mere 11.1 percent difference could indicate that more research is required to determine whether or not methods of locating orphans are truly a contributing factor.

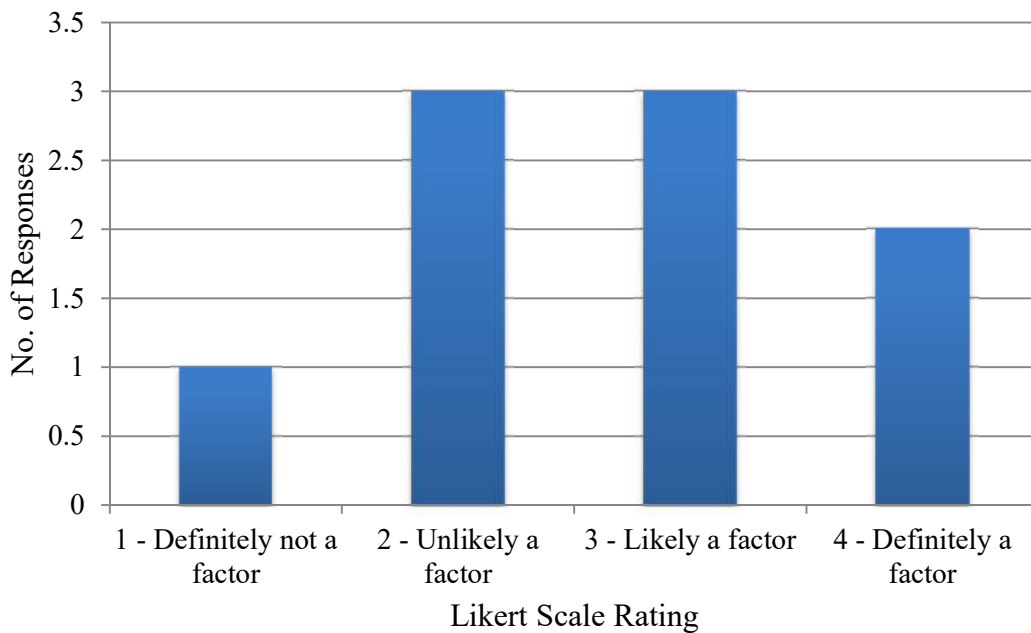


Figure 8. Methods of locating orphans

Figure 9 displays an inversion of the percentages from figure 7. The majority perception concerning the adoptee's country of origin was that it was unlikely a factor. Of the participants, 55.6 percent did feel that this was a contributing factor, while the remaining 44.4 percent responded that it was indeed likely a contributing factor. Unlike the other potential factors, the adoptee's country of origin was the only factor where the majority responded that this factor was unlikely.

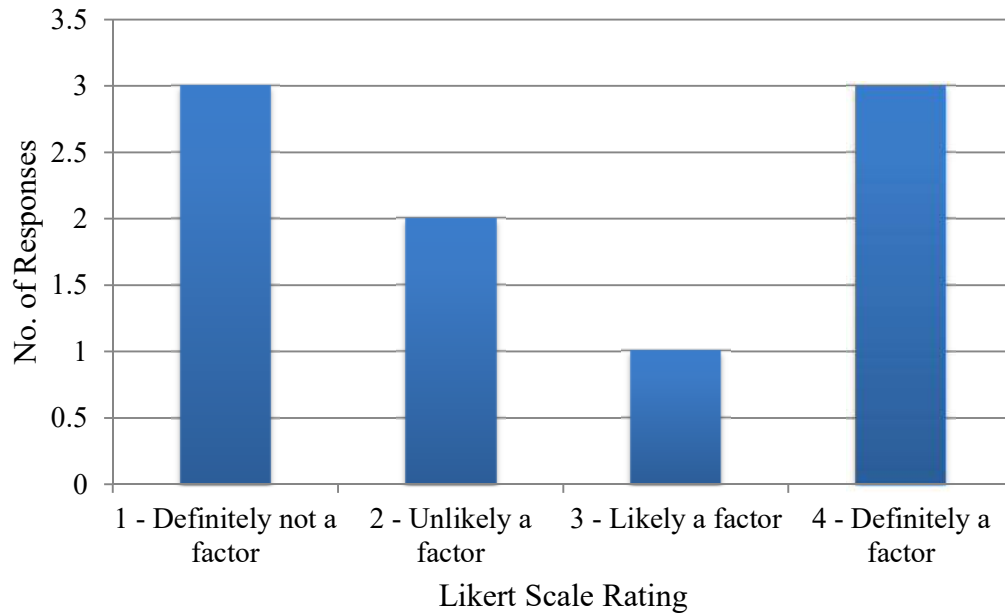


Figure 9. Adoptee’s country of origin

The concluding question from the survey provided the participants the opportunity to openly respond as to their perceptions of other potential contributing factors. Only 4 participants responded to the question. From their responses, 5 potential factors emerged:

1. Anti-adoption groups are gaining power and influence.
2. Non-governmental organizations (NGO) benefit from adoptees remaining in the country of origin.
3. There have been changes in regulations from the countries of origin, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as well as the Hague accreditation.
4. Couples are sensing a calling to adopt.
5. There is a rise in infertility issues.

Of the 5 factors, only 1 factor was common between more than 1 participant. Two participants indicated that they perceived the anti-adoption groups as being a contributing factor to the current rates of adoptions. The second and third factors, concerning non-governmental organizations and regulation changes, could be considered

to fall under the survey “Government restrictions/influence.” The fourth and fifth factors could also be included under the survey category of “Motivations of adoptive families.” This particular category was purposefully broad in order to include all possible motivations for adoption. If I were to include factors 2 through 5 in light of the established survey categories, the anti-adoption groups seemed to be the only new potential factor that emerged.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The purpose of the study was to determine the rate of adoptions among evangelical Christians along with potential contributing factors for the measured rate. The study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative components. Legacy data from participating adoption agencies, which was the quantitative portion of the study, were the basis for the study. One survey instrument, which was the qualitative portion, was used to determine possible factors that affected the adoption rates. As the study progressed, certain strengths and weaknesses of the research design emerged.

Strengths of the Research Design

The first strength of the research design was that the combination of legacy data from the adoption agencies and the survey questions provided empirical data to demonstrate the trend of evangelical adoptions. The second strength of the combined data was that the survey questions provided insight from knowledgeable personnel, along with the expert panel members, on possible factors that contribute to the number of adoptions. Between the two types of data, I was able to compare the two pieces to determine if there is consistency in the perception of the personnel with the stated empirical facts. The third strength of the research design was that electronic communication allowed for more efficient, available participation. The survey questions allowed the participant to contribute to the research with little or no effort. The collection of the data was more readily available to progress in the analysis of the findings. A final strength of the research design

was that the number of adoptions was collected independently of the survey data. This feature allowed for follow-up questions to the participating agencies, in case clarification was needed. I encountered a couple of occasions where the data was delivered as an aggregate rather than separated by year. Through dialogue with the agencies, I resolved the problem.

Weaknesses of the Research Design

In particular, there was one major weakness in the research design. As a part of the research criteria, I prohibited the use of data from an adoption agency where an expert panel member was employed. This posed a problem when trying to obtain data from a particular adoption agency. As described in chapter 3, multiple attempts were made to correct this issue with no success. This issue resulted in the loss of data. In retrospect, there was no need to exclude agencies that employed the expert panel members, as the legacy data would have been untainted by the expert panel member's involvement. In regard to the survey, a stipulation could have been placed that someone other than the expert panel member had to complete the survey.

Another weakness of the research design was that the survey was still somewhat subjective, so the findings were subjective in nature, as well, which could potentially limit the generalizability of the research. An additional weakness of the instrument was the fact that dated elements of the survey became outdated due to the need for a second ethics committee review. For example, one survey question referred to projections for 2014, which was completed by the time the survey was disseminated to the agencies. This discrepancy caused some confusion for the personnel members who responded to the survey.

A final weakness of the research design was that the potential contributing factor of motivations of adoptive families was very broad in definition. While the category of motivations was inclusive, more clarity is needed in order to determine if

some motivations are more influential than others. Additionally, adoptive families could be motivated by several factors simultaneously. In summary, the issue of uncovering motivations of adoptive families was a weakness of this study, however it will prove useful for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research study sought to measure the rates of adoptions among evangelical Christians between the years 2008 to 2013. This chapter describes the numerical trend of adoption rates among evangelical Christians and possible contributing factors to the number of adoptions. Additionally, this chapter discusses research implications, applications, limitations, and future research considerations. Based on the analysis of the research data, some significant findings were discovered and provided the following conclusions.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to quantify the rates of adoptions among evangelical Christians and examine what factors, if any, have had an effect on the adoption rates over the last five years.

Research Questions

1. What is the correlation of the number of adoptions, foster placements, and home studies to past benchmarks from select evangelical adoption agencies in the US within the last five years?
2. What factors, if any, contribute to the rate of adoptions among Evangelicals?

Research Implications

The following section discusses the implications of the research study based on the data and the findings from chapter 4. The analysis of the data presents a clear picture of the state of adoptions among evangelical Christians. One implication is that despite tumultuous patterns, the number of adoptions has increased. This fact is a positive

indicator that the discussion in Christendom concerning adoption is having some type of impact on the orphan crisis.

Another implication from the research is that though there was an overall increase, the path to the increase was laced with decreases and plateaus in the number of adoptions. Evangelical adoptions did not make as much progress in terms of adoptions as they probably should have. One concern for evangelical adoptions is that there appears to be a limited window for adoptions as regulations are becoming stricter and more countries are becoming closed off to international adoptions.¹ Adoptions will continue to face problems because, in addition to strict regulations and closed countries, there is an increasing number of anti-adoption groups gaining substantial political and media power.

The most important implication from the study is that numerous factors affect the number of adoptions. I speculate that the number of factors will increase over time. For now, the major factors affecting adoptions fall into six main categories: personal (motivations), religious, visibility/availability, support, agencies, and political/regulatory. The top two major factors are motivations of adoptive families and religious communication. At the core of adoption is that families want to adopt for one reason or another. Depending on the motivation of the family, obstacles could possibly deter them from pursuing adoption. The second major factor is religious communication. There is significant importance placed on the need for discussion of adoption in sermons, religious literature, and church culture. The church's constant presence or absence in educating evangelical families about adoption greatly impacts the number of adoptions among their families.

The visibility of adoptions, such as personal relationships with others who have adopted, high profile Christian adoptions, marketing, media, etc., can affect adoptions,

¹The increase in regulations is not necessarily a negative step, because it is important for qualified families to adopt the children. However, some regulations, such as residency and financial, pose more obstacles to potential adoptive families.

because each factor, or the lack thereof, may reinforce or contradict religious education about adoption. The concept of “same begets same” applies here because the more evangelical families see adopting taking place, the more they may consider it because it is practical and theological. Conversely, if there is a large amount of teaching of the subject, but there is no visible work of adoption taking place, families may not see its place in their lives.

The next category of factors involves support. Support is not limited to just financial support, but would include support from the church, as well as ongoing training to resource a family considering adoption. The lack of financial support obviously would affect the numbers of adoption as money is needed to participate in the process of adoption, sometimes with no guarantee of adoption. Many families are unable to assume this risk on their own, if at all.

Agencies play an enormous role in the number of adoptions. Many factors determine whether or not the agencies can be effective in their mission. Such factors include, but are not limited to, the leadership of the agency, the number of agencies/offices, agency funding, marketing, agency personnel. Factors involving the agencies ranked below the top four positions in various percentages, however two-thirds of the participants felt that the agencies themselves contributed to the number of adoptions in a significant way.

Finally, political and regulatory changes emerged in both the Likert scale and the open-ended question components of the survey. As mentioned, countries and organizations are implementing and enforcing stricter regulations, and in some cases are even closing down international adoptions. Though the adoptee’s country of origin was not viewed as particularly instrumental in the number of adoptions, governmental restrictions and influence of these countries were viewed as impacting the number of adoptions in a very important way.

The summary of the implications is that while adoptions appear to be increasing, there is no consistent progress being made in terms of the number of adoptions. The inconsistency of adoptions is due to the presence of numerous and various factors, which include positive and negative factors. These factors not only affect the agencies, adoption-related organizations, and the adoptive families but they tend to affect other factors, compounding the effects.

Research Applications

This section presents applications based on the findings of the research study. The applications derived from the research should be useful for the general Christian population and other adoption-focused ministries, which includes, but are not limited to, pastors, Christian adoptive families, adoption agencies, and adoption ministries.

The top two factors that contribute to the number of adoption are motivations of adoptive families and religious communication. The fact that these two factors emerged as the top factors is significant. One way evangelicals can address the orphan crisis is through educating Christians about the theological and practical implications and applications of adoption. The desired effect is that by discipling believers, their theology would influence motivations for adoptions. One of the most practical needs in improving the orphan crisis is to provide continual education through sermons, scriptural study, and Christian literature.

More than just teaching the church about adoption, churches must take tangible steps to model a passion for orphans. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, providing financial assistance to families wishing to adopt, providing ongoing training for the church, adoptive families, and others interested in adoption, supporting and working with local evangelical Christian adoption agencies and ministries, and continuing to pray for orphans, adoptive families, and others involved in adoptions, such as the agencies, their leadership, and governments and their officials.

Another way the church can promote adoption is through fostering an environment of adoption. This can occur through personal relationships with someone who has adopted. Education takes place both formally and informally. One example is that people around adoptive families learn more about adoption through interaction with them. The goal of such interactions would be to influence the motivations of adoptive families through personal connection to others who have adopted or are considering adoption. The church must celebrate the act of adoption corporately and rejoice with families who adopt. Making adoption within the church a public event reinforces the theological and practical importance of adoption and the importance of the church in the life of the believers as in Acts 2.

Churches, adoption agencies, and adoption ministries need to continue to improve local and national partnerships to equip and support the cause of adoption. It often seems that believers are not involved because they do not know how they can be involved without adopting. This application is another component of continuing to educate the church of the state of the orphan crisis and how believers can be involved in adoption, even if they cannot adopt.

One of the factors continually affecting the number of adoptions is governmental restrictions and influences. Another way these partnerships are necessary is that the culture surrounding adoption is changing, even becoming more antagonistic, so it is important that there is a unified Christian voice before governments and other organizations. Orphans need churches praying for them before God and lobbying for them before human officials.

Overall, the orphan crisis is perceived as intensifying, and the number of adoptions is declining in relation to the number of orphans. Along with this trend, the antagonism toward adoption is growing, causing the window of opportunity to rapidly close. There needs to be an urgency with which evangelical Christians become more aware, educated, and involved in caring for orphans. All of the mentioned applications

require intentionality and urgency in order to abate the orphan crisis. Foundationally, these applications and the urgency with which they must be pursued must be informed by Scripture and bathed in prayer. Along with this comes the need to recognize it is God who is sovereign and glorifying Himself through caring for the orphans, as an example of the adoption that believers have through Jesus Christ, as testified to by the Holy Spirit.

Research Limitations

The data in this research study were limited to evangelical adoption agencies; the research was limited to a particular group. The data should not be interpreted as conclusive or exhaustive as a number of evangelical adoption agencies did not participate in the study. The information in this study should be interpreted within the context of evangelical Christian adoption agencies, which means the applications and implications of the research apply to agencies with similar characteristics. The local church may benefit from the research findings in this study.

Future Research

As a part of the research study, this section discusses potential future research suggestions. Further research is another application of the study, because more research is needed to address the orphan crisis after the conclusion of this study. The first research suggestion is to address the drastic decrease in the number of adoptions from 2012 to 2013. In most cases, the decline was preceded by an increase in the number of adoptions; however, all of the participating agencies experienced a similar decline. The research did not reveal the cause of the sharp drop in the number of adoptions, therefore more research is required to see if there might be a common factor that contributed to the negative trend.

A second possibility for future research is to complete a longitudinal study that is a continuation of this study. The range used in the study included data from 2008 to 2014. Future studies could include data in increments of five years, ten years, continuing indefinitely. The longitudinal study would measure the rates over a longer period of time

to accurately reflect the long-term trend among evangelical Christian adoption agencies. One potential problem with this time of study would be the existence of evangelical adoption agencies in the future. If there are not enough agencies in existence, the study would be difficult to complete. As a part of the study, future research could determine what factors, if any, contribute to adoption rates within a longer timeframe. Studying the potential factors would allow for observation of the changes in these factors.

In addition to extending the study beyond 2014, future research could include observing the number of adoptions among evangelicals from years prior to 2008. For the purpose of this study, 2008 was the benchmark year; however, gathering data from previous years would change the benchmark. The inclusion of years on both sides of 2008 and 2014 would allow for a more comprehensive picture of evangelical adoption agencies and the trend of adoption numbers.

Another possibility for future research would be to compare and contrast the adoption rates of evangelical Christian adoption agencies to non-evangelical adoption agencies. This type of study would possibly provide entirely different data and findings from which could come insightful implications for the evangelical agencies and for the local church. Comparatively speaking, this would allow for a more comprehensive observation of response within evangelicalism to the orphan crisis. In regard to measuring contributing factors of adoption rates, a study could interview adoptive families. This research project focused primarily on the perceptions of the adoption agency personnel in regard to contributing factors. Within this new study, the researcher could inquire about the motivations behind adopting. As stated in the section of weaknesses of the study, more research is needed in order to clarify the most influential motivations of adoptive families. This information would also aid in adoption education and the ability to support families who are considering adoption, have adopted, or are in the process of adopting. A research study focused on adoptive families would provide a perspective different from that of the adoption agency personnel. The findings from the

study could confirm the potential factors from this study or provide additional factors not discovered in this study.

Alongside research on adoptive families, there could be research regarding the types of adoptions. The types of adoptions could include, but are not limited to, domestic versus international, infant versus non-infant, single versus sibling adoption, etc. The study could be considered as a possible factor that might affect the number of adoptions or it could be a separate study.

As this research study was conducted, the open response data provided other possible contributing factors not listed on the survey. These factors included non-governmental organization (NGO) financial interests and benefits in keeping children from being adopted outside of the country, anti-adoption groups gaining political power, changes in regulations (country of origin, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and Hague accreditation), couples sensing a calling to adopt, and infertility issues. Several of the factors could be included in the established survey categories; however, there may be benefit in subdividing the categories to determine if specific subsets of factors are more influential than others. Further research could be conducted to include these factors in a modified survey in order to measure them as potential factors. Along with the inclusion of the factors recorded from the open response questions, three of the potential contributing factors possessed inconclusive data. The three factors in question, the adoptee's country of origin, methods of locating orphans, and economic concerns, require further investigation to identify whether or not any one of these factors is a potential factor.

A final possibility for future research would be to research the number of adoptions based on the adoptive families' denominations and religions. The study of denominational affiliations of the adoptive families would benefit each denomination in assessing their efforts to combat the orphan crisis. Also, Christians could benefit from the observation of their efforts compared to that of other religions. In summary, numerous

possibilities for future research could provide contributions to the larger cause of addressing the orphan crisis.

APPENDIX 1

SBC RESOLUTION ON ADOPTION AND ORPHAN CARE

RESOLUTION NO. 2 ON ADOPTION AND ORPHAN CARE

WHEREAS, In the gospel we have received the "Spirit of adoption" whereby we are no longer spiritual orphans but are now beloved children of God and joint heirs with Christ (John 14:18; Romans 8:12-25; Galatians 3:27-4:9; Ephesians 1:5); and

WHEREAS, The God we now know as our Father reveals himself as a "father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5) who grants mercy to orphans (Deuteronomy 10:18; Hosea 14:3); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus welcomes the little ones (Luke 18:15-17), pleads for the lives of the innocent (Psalm 72:12-14), and shows us that we will be held accountable for our response to "the least of these brothers of mine" (Matthew 25:40); and

WHEREAS, The Scripture defines "pure and undefiled religion" as "to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27); and

WHEREAS, The satanic powers and the ravages of sin have warred against infants and children from Pharaoh to Molech to Herod and, now, through the horrors of a divorce culture, an abortion industry, and the global plagues of disease, starvation, and warfare; and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have articulated an unequivocal commitment to the sanctity of all human life, born and unborn; and

WHEREAS, Churches defined by the Great Commission must be concerned for the evangelism of children—including those who have no parents; and

WHEREAS, Upward of 150 million orphans now languish without families in orphanages, group homes, and placement systems in North America and around the world; and

WHEREAS, Our Father loves all of these children, and a great multitude of them will never otherwise hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in

Louisville, Kentucky, June 23-24, 2009, express our commitment to join our Father in seeking mercy for orphans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on each Southern Baptist family to pray for guidance as to whether God is calling them to adopt or foster a child or children; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage our pastors and church leaders to preach and teach on God's concern for orphans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we commend churches and ministries that are equipping families to provide financial and other resources to those called to adopt, through grants, matching funds, or loans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage local churches to champion the evangelism of and ministry to orphans around the world, and to seek out ways to energize Southern Baptists behind this mission; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage Southern Baptist churches to join with other evangelical Christians in setting aside a special Sunday each year to focus upon our adoption in Christ and our common burden for the orphans of the world; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we pray what God is doing in creating an adoption culture in so many churches and families can point us to a gospel oneness that is determined not by "the flesh," or race, or economics, or cultural sameness, but by the Spirit, unity, and peace in Christ Jesus; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit on Southern Baptist congregations so that our churches will proclaim and picture, in word and in deed, that "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world."

APPENDIX 2

INITIAL COMMUNICATION TO THE ADOPTION AGENCIES

[Date]

[Recipient Name]

[Title]

[Company Name]

[Street Address]

[City, ST ZIP Code]

[Email Address]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

My name is Matthew Thompson, and I am a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am in the process of researching and writing my thesis. The goal of the project is to determine if adoption rates among evangelical Christians are on the rise. This particular study is part of a larger body of research among other doctoral students.

The reason you are receiving this email is because your adoption agency meets the requirements for the study. In order to participate in the study the selected adoption agency must (1) self-identify as evangelical, (2) participate in adoptions, foster care, and/or home studies, and (3) have been in existence at least five years. As a part of the research design, I am requesting to obtain legacy records for adoptions, foster care placements, and home studies for the years ranging 2008 to 2013. I understand that due to federal regulations you are not permitted to provide private information. I am simply asking for permission to primarily collect numerical data. For example, I am concerned with the number of adoptions and other related placements from 2008 to 2013. As a courtesy, I will share what information I can at the completion of the study, if so requested. Should you wish for the name of your agency to be withheld, please indicate

along with your response.

I am also requesting that a member from the adoption agency complete a survey consisting of approximately eighteen questions. The survey can be found at <http://questionpro.com/t/ALCB0ZRWQJ> and should take no more fifteen minutes. This is another crucial part of the research, as it seeks to identify factors that are affecting the number of adoptions.

I want to thank you for your time and support for this worthy endeavor. Through this research, it is my goal to glorify God by increasing the awareness of orphans and to “give justice to the weak and the fatherless.” (Psalm 82:3)

Sincerely,

Matthew Thompson

APPENDIX 3

EXPERT PANEL

Criteria

The expert panel is comprised of three members who meet the following criteria:

1. They self-identify as evangelical.
2. They are a member of an adoption-focused organization.
3. They are not an employee of an adoption agency being used in this study.

Function

Members of the expert panel will review the survey questions and make suggestions to improve and validate the research instrument.

Members

1. Kimber Graves
2. Nemili Johnson
3. Nicole Wilke

APPENDIX 4

ADOPTION RATE FACTORS SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify potential factors that contribute to the number of adoptions among evangelical Christians. This research is being conducted by Matthew Thompson for purposes of completion of the Doctorate of Education program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, you will be asked to answer a series of questions. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Would you identify yourself as an evangelical Christian?

1. Yes
2. No

Do you perceive that the orphan crisis, in terms of the number of adoptions, has improved, declined, or plateaued?

1. Improved
2. Declined
3. Plateaued

Do you perceive that the orphan crisis, in terms of the number of orphans, has improved, intensified, or plateaued?

1. Improved
2. Intensified
3. Plateaued

What are your projections for the number of adoptions for your agency in 2014?

Using a four-point scale (1 - Definitely not a factor, 2 - Unlikely a factor, 3 - Likely a factor, and 4 - Definitely a factor), how likely have the following factors contributed to the number of adoptions in the last five years?

	1 Definitely not a factor	2 Unlikely a factor	3 Likely a factor	4 Definitely a factor
Marketing	★	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media (e.g. publicity, perception, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agency personnel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoptees country of origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of adoption agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agency funding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of adoption-related organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership of the adoption agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methods of locating orphans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious communication, such as literature, sermons, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivations of adoptive families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal relationships with someone who has adopted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruitment of eligible adoptive families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governmental restrictions/influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sources of funding for adoptive families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visibility of high profile adoptions (i.e. well-known Christians who adopt)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoption conferences/workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Are there any other factors, not listed, that you would attribute to affecting the number of adoptions over the last five years?

APPENDIX 5

THE WESLEYAN CHURCH PROPOSED ORPHAN CARE INITIATIVE

Proposal

James 1:27 tells us, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” This clear mandate from Scripture compels us to respond in a more concerted effort as a denomination to the estimated 153 million orphans who now languish without families in orphanages, group homes, and placement systems in North America and around the world. Throughout human history, the church has been a primary responder to the plight of the orphan. But no time in human history has the total number of orphans been this staggering. In the past 8 - 10 years, there has been a resurgence in the evangelical world towards caring for orphans. Churches and denominations are collaborating and strategizing together on ways to eliminate the number of orphans worldwide. This proposal is being submitted to mobilize The Wesleyan Church to join the heart of God in caring for orphans through Global Orphan Care, Foster Care & Adoption.

Scriptural Support & Action Steps

In the gospel we have received the “Spirit of adoption” whereby we are no longer spiritual orphans but are now beloved children of God and joint heirs with Christ. (John 14:18; Rom. 8:12-25; Gal. 3:27-4:9; Eph. 1:5)

The God we now know as our Father reveals himself as a “father of the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5) who grants mercy to orphans (Deut. 10:18; Hos. 14:3)

Our Lord Jesus welcomes the little ones (Luke 18:15-17), pleads for the lives of the innocent (Ps. 72:12-14), and shows us that we will be held accountable for our response to “the least of these my brothers” (Matt. 25:40)

The satanic powers have warred against infants and children from Pharaoh to Moloch to Herod and, now, through the horrors of a divorce culture, an abortion industry, and the global plagues of disease, starvation, and warfare; and

The Wesleyan Church has articulated an unequivocal commitment to the sanctity of all human life, born and unborn.

A denomination defined by the Great Commission must be concerned for the evangelism of children—including those who have no parents.

Our Father loves all of these children, and a great multitude of them will never otherwise hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Therefore we express our commitment as a denomination to join our Father in seeking mercy for orphans.

We are calling on every Wesleyan family to pray for guidance as to whether God is calling them to adopt or foster a child or children.

We encourage our pastors and church leaders to preach and teach on God's concern for orphans.

We commend churches and ministries that are equipping families to provide financial and other resources to those called to adopt, through grants, matching funds, or loans.

We ask Global Partners and The Department of Church Multiplication & Discipleship to prioritize the evangelism of and ministry to orphans around the world, and to seek out ways to energize Wesleyans behind this mission.

We encourage Wesleyan Churches to annually join with other evangelical Christians the first weekend in November in recognizing "Orphan Sunday," focusing that day on our adoption in Christ and our common burden for the orphans of the world.

We hope what God is doing in creating an adoption culture in so many churches and families can point us to a gospel oneness that is defined not by "the flesh" racial, economic, or cultural sameness but by the Spirit unity and peace in Christ Jesus.

We pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit on Wesleyan congregations so that our churches increasingly will announce and picture, in word and in deed, that "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world."

The Scriptural Calling & Action Steps have been modified and used with the expressed permission of Dr. Russell Moore

Point Person

Eric Mills, Outreach Pastor at Heritage Wesleyan Church in Rock Island, Illinois will serve as the point person for The Wesleyan Church for the Orphan Care Initiative. The Orphan Care Initiative will be placed under a yet to be determined office of The Wesleyan Church. An employee from the determined office will serve as the point person at The Wesleyan Church Headquarters and assist Eric Mills and any future volunteers in The Orphan Care Initiative. The time commitment approved for Eric Mills by Heritage Wesleyan Church for The Orphan Care Initiative will be 5 – 10 hours per month.

Proposed Budget - 2013

<u>Item</u> <u>Price</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Total</u>
Graphic Design \$500.00 - \$750.00			
Printing Postcard/Brochure \$1750.00 - \$3000.00	.35 - .60 each	5000	
Postage for Postcard Mailer \$660.00 - \$1560.00	.20 - .47 each	3300	
Wesleyan Life Magazine Ad \$525.00 - \$1,400.00	\$525.00 - \$1,400.00 (Depending on Size)		
Table Top Displays \$1000.00	\$500.00	2	
Large Display – 8 ft x 10 ft \$1500.00	\$1500.00	1	
Promotional Video \$6700.00 - \$7200.00			
HdB Media – Dan Madison \$10,135.00 - \$16,410.00			

Additional Budget Considerations

Special Events:
The Gathering – Special Speaker
Divisional Events & Training
District Conferences
District Camps
Booth Space Costs
Promotional Materials
Travel Expenses

Proposed Timeline

December 1, 2012	Begin Work on Graphic Design for Wesleyan Orphan Care Initiative
January 7, 2013	Begin Work on Promotional Video Begin Work on Orphan Care Site Page for the Wesleyan Webpage
January 14, 2013	Soft Launch of Wesleyan Orphan Care Initiative through Social Media Outlets, Wesleyan Webpage & WesLife Newsletter
January 14, 2013	Send Out an Electronic Survey to All Wesleyan Pastors / Churches to Establish a Baseline of what Churches are Doing with Orphan Care and How Many Pastor's / Lay People have Adopted or are Doing Foster Care
January 21, 2013	Begin Promotion for Summit 9 Conference Presented by Christian Alliance for Orphans (May 2-3, 2013 – Nashville, TN)
February 11, 2013	Artwork Ad Deadline for Spring Printing of Wesleyan Life Magazine
February 11, 2013	Promotional Video Completed Orphan Care Site Page Completed for the Wesleyan Webpage
February 18, 2013	Main Orphan Care Initiative Launch <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mail Out Orphan Care Postcard to all Wesleyan Church Leaders• Promotional Video Placed on Wesleyan Webpage and Sent Out through All Social Media Sources
March – December	Monthly Blogs Featuring Orphan Care Stories & Initiatives Ongoing Social Media Updates with Orphan Care Resources & Highlights
March 4, 2013	Begin Promotion for “Orphan Sunday”
May 2-3, 2013	Summit 9 Conference - Presented by Christian Alliance for Orphans
November 3, 2013	“Orphan Sunday”

APPENDIX 6

RS-210—CRISIS OF THE ORPHANS OF THE WORLD

(Submitted by David Arruda)

(Adopted on Friday Morning, June 13, 2008)

WHEREAS, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” - Psalm 68:5 (NIV), and

WHEREAS, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” - James 1:27 (NIV), and

WHEREAS, “the heart of Christian ministry is Christ’s ministry of outreaching love. (2004 Discipline, Paragraph 125), and

WHEREAS, the Mission and Ministry of the United Methodist church states that “the Ministry of the Community stretches out to human needs wherever love and service may convey God’s love and ours. The outreach of such ministries knows no limits.

(Paragraph 126), and

WHEREAS, United Methodists Social principals state “we believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity (Paragraph 161.A), and

WHEREAS, United Methodist Social Principals state “children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received.” And, “we support and encourage greater awareness and education to promote adoption of a wide variety of children through foster care, international adoption, and domestic adoption. And, “we commend the birth parent(s), the receiving parent(s), and the child to the care of the Church, that grief might be shared, joy might be celebrated, and the child might be nurtured in a community of Christian love.” (Paragraph 161.L), and

WHEREAS, there are estimated to be over 150 Million orphans in the world today, and

WHEREAS, every 16 seconds, a child becomes orphaned by the AID/HIV crisis and less than half will live more than five years after being orphaned, and

WHEREAS, of the 800,000 children in the foster care system in this country, nearly 180,000 of these children are ready to be adopted, and less than 10% will be adopted, and

WHEREAS, adoption of the 180,000 children ready to be adopted would affect nearly all of the Social Principles (homelessness reduced 10%), teen pregnancy reduced 1%, teenage suicide reduced 2%, crime reduced 10%, prison population reduced 5%, and AIDS/HIV reduced 2%), and

WHEREAS, in one year if each local church partnered with one other local church to help one family in our local church to adopt one child, the New England Annual Conference would see growth to equal to the equivalent of five new churches.

THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED:

That the New England Annual Conference considers the World Wide Adoption/Orphan Crisis to be unacceptable.

That the New England Annual Conference, as a body of Christ, make every possible effort to aid in the elimination of the Adoption/Orphan Crisis by prayer, awareness, education, mission, ministry, and funding.

That the New England Annual Conference recognize one week each year as Adoption/Orphan Care awareness week. That the Resident Bishop of the New England Annual Conference, District Superintendents, Pastors, and Laity shall communicate and support any and all programs, missions, and ministries for or about Adoption/Orphan Care in the local church within our Annual Conference.

That the New England Annual Conference establish a taskforce to create awareness, education, mission and ministry for and about the World Wide Adoption/Orphan Crisis in each local church within the New England Annual Conference.

APPENDIX 7

REPORT FOR THE AGENCIES

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate what information will be communicated to the agencies following the completion of the research. The information provided back to the agencies will include

1. The numerical data for all participating agencies. The researcher will withhold the agencies' identifying information for professional standards.
2. The statistical analysis of the numerical data, which will provide the interpretation for the numbers.
3. A summary of the interview responses along with the statistical analysis for interpretation.

APPENDIX 8

ECFA STATEMENT OF FAITH

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe in the deity and humanity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, in His present rule as Head of the Church and in His personal return in power and glory.
4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful men regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost, they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the barrenness of damnation.
7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, with equality across racial, gender, and class differences.

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ABSTRACT

ADOPTION RATES AMONG EVANGELICALS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
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The purpose of this study was to examine the adoption rates of evangelical Christian adoption agencies and to determine what factors, if any, contribute to the current adoption rates. A mixed methods approach, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative elements was used for completion of this study. The quantitative section of the research utilizes historical, numerical data from select adoption agencies to determine the pattern of adoption rates. The qualitative portion of the research utilizes an electronic survey, which contains simple answer questions, Likert scale questions, and open-ended questions to determine potential factors that have an effect on the adoption rates. The data was reviewed and analyzed to determine the conclusions of the research study.

KEYWORDS: Adoption, Adoption Agency, Adoption Rates, Evangelical, Foster Care, Orphan Care

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