

SESSION 13: INHERITANCE

We profoundly believe that the Bible is a “book” that has one single story.

In our last session, we saw that being in Christ meant we are not only born again into new creation, but that we have also been granted the privilege of firstborn status. Firstborn status is all about inheritance—receiving the inheritance to rule and reign with God over his creation, for all eternity. This is not being saved—this was taken care of by being born again into new creation—this is, instead, fully becoming what we have been saved for. This is what we can fall short of, so we must give this very, very careful attention.

In Acts 26, we find Paul making his defense before King Agrippa. He revisits what happened to him on the way to Damascus, and quotes the words that Jesus spoke to him: “I am sending you, to open their eyes”—that is, the eyes of the Gentiles—“so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” (Ac 26:17-18, NASB)

In Colossians 1:12, Paul says, “...and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.”

In 1 Pe 1:3-4, Peter says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade...”

Salvation's end goal is the inheritance. Deliverance from the dominion of Satan, the forgiveness of sins, etc., are all means to achieving what Paul describes in Colossians as 'the inheritance.'

In Christ, and in this life, there are many victories that will be won, many prayers that will be answered, many joys to be experienced, and in this way we are getting a foretaste of our inheritance. But 'The Inheritance' (Col 1:12) is the adoption to sonship, into the royal family of God, to become an heir with God in order to rule and reign with God over his creation project, that is, extending the garden of Eden over the entire earth in a renewed world where righteousness and righteousness alone, dwells (2 Pe 3:13).

This is the heart and soul of the One Story of the Bible! It is this that was seeded in the first two chapters of the Bible (Gen 1-2) and seen realized in the last two chapters (Rev 21-22)!

In the Old Testament, for the people of God, inheritance was a major theme and was, for them, the reason for their salvation from Egypt. However, it took them a while to understand this, as it does for us! But once understood, for the Children of Israel, their inheritance became their obsession, as it ought to be for us as well!

For Israel, this whole idea of 'inheritance' all began with Abraham. In Genesis 15:7, in confirming the covenant made in Genesis 12, God said to Abraham, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." The land promised was, of course, the land of Canaan!

For the nation of Israel, the land of Canaan was understood to be their promised inheritance, by virtue of being Abraham's family. Canaan was a family inheritance! This is confirmed in Acts 13:19 when Paul said about God, "...and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance."

It should be noted that possessing their inheritance, the Promised Land, as wonderful as this was, was always a means toward a greater end, a more noble purpose than just possessing a piece of real-estate. There was a 'God purpose' to all of this! This 'God purpose' was the blessing God had called them to, and the blessing he had called them to be, to all the nations of the world (Gen 12:2-3). Possessing their inheritance would qualify them for rulership to advance God's Kingdom purpose, together with God, throughout the whole earth.

The full possession of their Promised Land, their inheritance, was achieved—not through Joshua, as is often thought—but 450 years following the Exodus, when King David took possession of the final enemy stronghold of Canaan, Jerusalem, which had up until that time been occupied by the Jebusites (2 Sa 5).

Jerusalem also became known as the City of David, and was chosen to be Israel's capital, the city from where Israel's kings would reign. And with the construction of the Temple, under Solomon's reign, Jerusalem was designated the city of God (Ps 48:8). Jerusalem, therefore, would be the city from where God himself would reign. From God's perspective, Jerusalem was not just the capital of Israel, it was the capital of the entire world!

From this point on, Israel could now begin to govern together with God, to rule and to reign, to become that 'blessing to all the nations of the world' which was the very reason Israel was called to be God's first-born, God's chosen people, God's elect.

This is exactly what began to happen. We read in 1 Kings 4:34, "From all the nations, people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who heard of his wisdom." Solomon's Temple was constructed with an additional court to Moses' Tabernacle. This was the Court of the Gentiles, and was specifically added for Gentiles to come from all over the world and learn about the one true God.

Of special note was the visit of the Queen of Sheba. (You can read about her visit in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9.)

Tragically, just a few chapters later, Solomon's heart, the Bible says, turned away after other gods. His heart, we are told, "was not fully devoted to the Lord his God (1 Ki 11)."

We are left to ponder on what might have happened—in terms of God's mission to all the nations of the world, and with Ethiopia as our example—if Solomon had stayed the course of fidelity towards God throughout his entire life and Israel had done the same into succeeding generations of Israel's Kings?

What Solomon and Israel either forgot or never fully grasped was that Israel was saved for God's sake, not primarily for their sake! They were given an inheritance not primarily for their own benefit, but for God's benefit!

Dt 32:9 "For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his **allotted inheritance.**"

Ps 23:3 "...He leads me in the paths of righteousness for **his name's sake...**"

Obtaining the inheritance—whether it be Israel in the Old Testament or us, as God's people, in the New Testament—is for God's benefit and glory.

We find Paul talking in Ephesians 1:18 about "the riches of **his glorious inheritance in his holy people...**"

John, in 1 John 2:12 (ESV), says, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven (why) for his name's sake."

This is powerfully illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. "Give me my inheritance now," the prodigal son demanded. And he took his inheritance and squandered it on himself in selfish, fleshly ways, with total disregard for the interests of the Father!

He never saw the inheritance as being connected to the ongoing success of the family business. He never thought, for one moment, of reinvesting his inheritance back into the family business for its growth and development, for the family's future well-being!

As Christians we can, sadly, fall into the same selfish mindset if we are not careful! We can think that our inheritance in Christ is all about us, that it's for "my benefit and for my benefit alone." We are king's kids, are we not? Didn't Jesus die so we can enjoy health, wealth and prosperity? If they are not careful we could end up the same way as the prodigal—losing and forfeiting **the inheritance**. The inheritance is for a much greater and more noble purpose than our temporal comfort and enjoyment. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "We are not our own we have been bought at a price, therefore honor God."

By the grace of God, the prodigal was restored but his inheritance had been forfeited! After his restoration, and during the welcome home party, the father said to the elder son, "All that I have is yours (Lk 15:16)."

Salvation is far, far more than sins being forgiven or going to heaven. It's about the inheritance, being a co-heir with God, ruling and reigning with God in God's new world, in his real, better, eternal world of which this current world is a parody!

And this life is all about preparation for rulership as God's firstborn or—if we use the Greek image—sonship adoption. Being saved and sins forgiven is not the end of our journey; it's just the beginning! We haven't finished the race when we are born again; Jesus has qualified us to enter the race!

Jesus, as the Last Adam and the second man, has made this possible. Jesus, as the true Israel, has qualified us for firstborn status, to which we will be turning our attention in future sessions.