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## **THE INHERITANCE OF ABRAHAM**

Abraham complained to God that he had no heir. He said that it seemed his servant Eliezer would end up being his heir (Genesis 15:2), but God said to Abraham,

“This man will not be your heir,  
but a son coming from your own body  
will be your heir.”

Genesis 15:4 NIV

In addition to an heir God promised to allow Abraham to inherit the Land of Canaan. God said,

“I am the LORD,  
who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans,  
to give you this land to inherit it.”

Genesis 15:7 NKJV

In response Abraham said,

“Lord GOD,  
how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

Genesis 15:8 NKJV

To give assurance to Abraham, God made a covenant with him, in which He obligated Himself to give the Land of Canaan not only to him but also to his descendants. You can read about the making of the covenant in Genesis 15:9-21.

Abraham did not, during his lifetime, come into possession of the Land of Canaan, and so the promise of the Land of Canaan passed from Abraham to Isaac, Abraham's son. From Isaac it passed to Jacob, Isaac's son. In blessing his son Jacob, Isaac said,

“May he [God] give you and your descendants

the blessing given to Abraham,  
so that you may take possession of [inherit]  
the land where you now live as an alien,  
the land God gave to Abraham.”

Genesis 28:4 NIV

## ACTUAL POSSESSION OF THE LAND

During the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the inheritance remained only a promise. Not until the time of Joshua did the children of Israel begin to possess the Land of Canaan. Under Joshua's leadership, they conquered much of the Land of Canaan. Following the conquest of it, Joshua divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israel by casting lots.

Possession of land was very important in Old Testament times, as the two following stories illustrate.

### THE STORY OF ZELOPHEHAD'S DAUGHTERS

There was a certain man named Zelophehad, who died during the wilderness wandering. He left behind several daughters but no sons. His daughters came to Moses and asked,

“Why should our father's name disappear  
from his clan because he had no son?  
Give us property among our father's relatives.”

Numbers 27:4 NIV

Moses brought the matter before the Lord, and the Lord said that the daughters of Zelophehad should, indeed, receive their father's allotment of land. The daughters of Zelophehad were told, however, that they must marry within their own tribe if they wished to inherit land (Numbers 36:6). This restriction was placed upon all women among the children of Israel who wished to inherit

land. It was placed on them so that ownership of the land would not pass from tribe to tribe (Numbers 36:7-9).

## THE STORY OF BOAS AND RUTH

Boas, of the tribe of Judah, fell in love with Ruth, the widow of one his relatives, and he wanted to marry her; but Boas could marry Ruth only after he had made arrangements concerning a parcel of land to which she had claim. So he went to the tribal leaders and expressed his desire to buy the property. Boas explained to the elders that, although he wanted to buy the property, there was a relative nearer than he to Ruth's family. Boas then urged the nearer relative to buy the property, and the man agreed to buy it. Whereupon, Boas explained to him that if he bought the property, he must also marry Ruth. When the relative heard this, he declined to buy it. Then Boas pledged both to buy the property and to marry Ruth (Ruth 4:9-10).

From such stories as these, we see that inheritance of land was woven into the fabric of society in those days.

## GOD'S INHERITANCE

In addition to emphasizing that the Land of Canaan was an inheritance for the children of Israel, the Old Testament contains several references to the fact that the children of Israel were themselves God's "inheritance." Moses said to the people of his day,

“But as for you,  
the LORD took you and brought you  
out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt,  
to be the people of his inheritance,  
as you now are.”

Deuteronomy 4:20 NIV

## GENTILES CAN INHERIT

There are also suggestions in the Old Testament that God's "inheritance" would not always be restricted to the children of Israel and that at some time in the future God's inheritance would include Gentiles. The Psalmist Asaph prayed,

"Arise, O God, judge the earth:  
for thou shalt inherit all nations."

Psalm 82:8 NIV

King David recorded a conversation that God held with him regarding Gentiles. God told David that He would give him the "nations" (Gentiles) as an inheritance and that the "ends of the earth" would be his possession. God said to David,

"You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.  
Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations (Gentiles)  
your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession."

Psalm 2:7-8 NIV

Of course, David did not inherit in his lifetime all the Gentiles, nor did he ever possess the ends of the earth. This is a prophecy not about David himself but about one of David's descendants, the Messiah. The second Psalm, in which this statement is made, is a messianic psalm. It foretells what the Messiah would do.

In the New Testament we have the story of how God and David both inherit Gentiles.

## WHAT JESUS THOUGHT ABOUT “INHERITANCE”

When one gets to the New Testament one witnesses a change with regards to the topic of “inheritance.” Jesus is the one who made the change. He lifted people’s thinking from earthly to heavenly things.

The value that Jesus placed on an earthly inheritance is shown by what He said to a certain man who called out to Him from a crowd. The man wanted Jesus to force the man’s brother to divide their inheritance. Jesus, instead of helping the man, admonished him, saying,

“Watch out!  
Be on your guard  
against all kinds of greed;  
a man’s life does not consist  
in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 12:15 NIV

It is obvious from this, that inheriting property on earth was not high on Jesus’ list of priorities. To Him it was far more important to inherit eternal life.

According to Jesus, one’s being an heir to what God had promised depended no longer on being a member of one particular race but upon following Jesus and being willing to sacrifice for Him. Jesus said,

“And everyone who has left houses  
or brothers or sisters or father or mother  
or children or fields for my sake  
will receive a hundred times as much  
and will inherit eternal life.”

Matthew 19:29 NIV

Jesus did not place emphasis on inheriting land on earth, as the Old Testament did, but on inheriting eternal life.

To those who inherit eternal life, Jesus promised to give also the kingdom. The privilege of being in the kingdom of which Jesus spoke does not depend on one's parentage. Only those people who live in a certain way will inherit the kingdom that Jesus promised. In His description of the final Judgment Jesus said,

“Then the King will say to those on his right,  
‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father;  
take your inheritance,  
the kingdom prepared for you  
since the creation of the world.’”

Matthew 25:34 NIV

## HOW GOD INHERITS PEOPLE

One of the chief actors in turning Gentiles to God was the apostle Paul. Some years after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared to Paul and commissioned him to tell Gentiles that the (eternal) inheritance is not for Abraham's physical descendants only. Jesus said to Paul,

“I will deliver you from the Jewish people,  
as well as from the Gentiles,  
to whom I now send you,  
to open their eyes,  
in order to turn them from darkness to light,  
and from the power of Satan to God,  
that they may receive forgiveness of sins  
and an inheritance among those  
who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Acts 26:17-18 NKJV

An inheritance is prepared for everyone who is sanctified (made holy) by faith in Jesus. If Gentiles have faith in Jesus, they can inherit along with Abraham and with other saints of old.

The apostle Paul was faithful to carry out the commission that Jesus gave him. He went to many Gentile cities and announced that they too could be heirs along with the children of Israel. Paul said,

“This mystery [secret] is  
that through the gospel  
the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel,  
members together of one body,  
and sharers together in the promise  
in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 3:6 NIV

## PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO LIVE BY THE LAW OF MOSES IN ORDER TO INHERIT

The apostle Paul maintained that people do not have to live by the Law of Moses in order to inherit what God has promised. Paul pointed out that Abraham’s inheritance came to him, not as a result of his having kept the Law of Moses, but as a result of God’s promise to him. Paul said,

“For if the inheritance depends on the law,  
then it no longer depends on a promise;  
but God  
in his grace  
gave it to Abraham through a promise.”

Galatians 3:18 NIV

## ALSO GENTILES CAN BE “SONS OF GOD”

The apostle Paul gave further evidence that Gentiles can inherit. He maintained that Gentiles if they are Abraham’s spiritual children, can also be “sons of God.” On both counts, then, because they are Abraham’s (spiritual) children and because they are God’s children, Gentiles can be heirs of the promises made in the Old Testament. Paul said,

“You are all sons of God  
through faith in Christ Jesus,  
for all of you who were baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Galatians 3:26-27 NIV

Take notice of the evidence that the apostle Paul cited to show that some of the Gentiles in Galatia had become “sons of God.” Did he cite only their faith as evidence? No, he cited their baptism as well as their faith as evidence. Their having been baptized “into Christ” was the deciding factor that led to their being “clothed” with Him. Their faith had led them to want to be baptized, but it was their baptism that put them into Christ and made them one body with Him. See also Romans 6:3.

The fact that the Galatians had been “clothed with Christ” rubbed out all distinctions between them. Since all of them were “in Christ” and “clothed” with Him, they were “one;” and therefore the apostle could say,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek,  
slave nor free, male nor female,  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28 NIV

If believing Gentiles and the believers among Abraham’s physical descendants are all “one in Christ Jesus,” there is no



distinction between them. If there is no distinction between them, one has reason to think that believing Gentiles will inherit along with the physical descendants of Abraham who believe. The apostle Paul continued by saying,

“If you belong to Christ,  
then you are Abraham’s seed,  
and heirs according to the promise.”

Galatians 3:29 NIV

The apostle Paul felt that the people to whom he wrote the above words had become both “sons of God” (Galatians 3:26) and “Abraham’s seed” (Galatians 3:29). This qualified them to inherit both from God and from Abraham. As a result, believing Gentiles are in no way disadvantaged. They are just as entitled to inherit the promises of God as are the physical descendants of Abraham.

## ONE INHERITANCE

As we have made our way through the Bible looking at “inheritance,” it has become obvious that there is but one inheritance that matters. Eternal life is a far better inheritance than land in Canaan.

The apostle Paul, wanting believers in Ephesus to have a full appreciation of their inheritance, wrote to them as follows:

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart  
may be enlightened  
in order that you may know the hope  
to which he has called you,  
the riches of his glorious inheritance  
in the saints.”

Ephesians 1:18 NIV

Inheriting Land in Canaan was, to be sure, important to the descendants of Abraham in Old Testament times. It helped to keep their national identity alive until the Messiah came. If, however, the promise of an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants involves only land, the promise would turn out to be too meager. It would be too meager to satisfy the physical needs of all of Abraham's millions and millions of spiritual descendants. It would also be too meager to satisfy the needs of the heart, for no land on earth can satisfy the needs of the human heart. We humans were created for a higher destiny than merely to inherit land on earth.

## CONCLUSION

God inherits all of Abraham spiritual descendants as His people. He inherits them from all races. He does this through the agency of His Son Jesus.

The physical descendants of Abraham who believe in Abraham's (and God's) Son Jesus (and follow Him) will receive a far greater inheritance than land in Canaan. To be explicit, they will inherit a home in heaven.

Believing Gentiles, who follow Jesus, also inherit. They inherit along with physical descendants of Abraham who believe in Jesus and follow Him. They receive an inheritance that "can never perish, spoil or fade," which is kept in heaven for them (1 Peter 1:4).

What starts out in the Bible as a promise of an inheritance for Abraham's fleshly descendants ends up being a promise of eternal life to all of God's spiritual children of whatever race.

Similarly, what starts out being a promise of an inheritance consisting only of land ends up being a promise of a home in heaven.

**THOUGHT QUESTIONS:**

1. Why did Jesus not help the man get his rightful share of his inheritance? See Luke 12:13-15. What do you think?
2. How do you understand the passage that says that the meek shall inherit the earth? Matthew 5:5. Was Jesus speaking only of this earth?
3. Explain why is it more important to inherit eternal life than it is to inherit land on this earth?
4. What is the “mystery” that was long kept secret but was finally revealed in the gospel? See Ephesians 3:6.
5. How do people get “clothed” with Christ? See Galatians 3:26-29.
6. Are Jesus’ followers required to keep the Law of Moses in order to inherit? See Galatians 3:18,25.
7. What can people do to gain a better appreciation of the splendor of their inheritance in heaven?