**Grace Group Study Guide**

 **Greater > Week 4**

**Colossians 1:12 – Our Great Inheritance**

Any time I hear the word inheritance I think of a scene from Monty Python’s “The Holy Grail,” where a king is standing with his son inside their castle at a window overlooking the countryside. In a moment of true father/son bonding the father stretches out his hand and says “one day lad, all this will be yours!” To which the ignorant son asks inquisitively, “What? The curtains?” Once again I must remind you that a right view of the Word of God will affect how we go about our daily lives. For this week, I’d like us to look into that word “inheritance” to gain in our own minds a right view of what that looks like in the scriptures as well as what we as believers have to look forward to.

“Legal inheritance refers to actual property or goods received after a family member's death. While Jewish inheritance customs were linked to family blood lines, Greek and Roman laws also provided for the disposition of family possessions through the adoption of an heir. The Scriptures transform the concept of inheritance to include the acquisition of spiritual blessings and promises from God.

**In the Old Testament** - The Old Testament is rich in its usage of the inheritance metaphor. The terms for inheritance occur over two hundred times, most frequently in Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Psalms. While Jewish inheritance laws were specific and complete (Numbers 27:8-11), almost all references to inheritance in the Old Testament are theological, not legal.

In the theological sense, to inherit means to "receive an irrevocable gift" with an emphasis on the special relationship between the benefactor and the recipients. Unlike legal inheritance, the benefactor, God, does not die, yet he provides material and spiritual blessings for his people.

The focus of the inheritance concept in the Old Testament is God's promise to Abraham. The land of Canaan was bequeathed to him and his descendants as an eternal possession (Genesis 12:7). Each family in Israel was apportioned its own inheritance as an inalienable possession (Joshua 13-31) and given the task to occupy the land (Judges 1:3). As the biblical history of Israel unfolds, the promised inheritance specifies a righteous remnant who will inherit the world as an everlasting possession (Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 54:3; Daniel 7:14).

From the promise of Canaan as Israel's inheritance came other aspects of the concept. The nation is described as God's inheritance (1 Kings 8:51, 53; Psalm 78:71; Isaiah 19:25; Zechariah 2:12) whom the Lord will never forsake (Psalm 94:14). The Lord is conversely described as the inheritance of the nation (Psalm 16:5). The privileged position of Israel as God's chosen people placed them at the center of God's plans for blessing.

**Between the Testaments** - In the intertestamental period the actual appropriation of this promise seemed remote due to the domination of Persian, Greek, and Roman powers. The reality of the inheritance of the land was deferred to the future and intertestamental literature emphasized the inheritance of eternal life and the world to come. The focus of the promised inheritance was less on national prominence in the present and more on personal participation in the future life with God. This idea was broadened in the rabbinic literature where having an inheritance or share in the world to come was a primary aspiration of the Jews. A notable dichotomy existed between those who would inherit the future world (the redeemed) and those who would not (the condemned). By the time of the New Testament, it was common for a person to ask a rabbi, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16).

**The New Testament** - The legal-historical milieu of the first century provided an array of inheritance traditions. Jewish, Greco-Hellenistic, and Roman inheritance laws differed greatly in the meaning and implementation of their traditions. However, as in the Old Testament, almost all occurrences of the terms for inheritance in the New Testament are theological (Luke 12:13; is the lone exception).

**Who Are the Heirs?** Three major characters dominate the inheritance usage in the New Testament: Abraham, Christ, and the believer. The New Testament continues the focus on Abraham as a central figure of the inheritance metaphor. The initial promise to Abraham of the land of Canaan (Hebrews 11:8) is broadened to include "the world" (Romans 4:13). While the fact of Abraham's inheritance is significant, the New Testament concentrates on the means by which he received the inheritance: God's promise and Abraham's faith, not by works of the law (Romans 4:14; Galatians 3:18).

The second major character is Jesus Christ. His prominent position as the Son of God uniquely qualifies him as God's heir. He is presented as the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2, 4) and the promises of God's kingdom are focused in him (Matthew 21:38).

Finally, for the believer in Christ, heirship is a natural result of justification: "He saved us, … so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7 ). Since all believers are children of God they are necessarily heirs of God (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7). It follows naturally that Christians are also heirs along with Abraham and Christ (Galatians 3:29). They receive their inheritance by faith as did Abraham (Romans 4:13-14) and share in the inheritance with Christ as sons (Romans 8:17).

**What Is the Inheritance?** Throughout the New Testament, a striking promise for believers is simply "the inheritance" (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Ephesians 1:14, 18; Colossians 3:24). Generally, the promise refers to the possession of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). The believer's inheritance is described more specifically as eternal and joyful existence with God. Believers are promised "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). Inheriting the "world to come" is a guarantee for all those who belong to God's family.

The apostle Paul employs the inheritance metaphor more than any other New Testament writer. For him, the object of the inheritance is the kingdom of God. He never states exactly what constitutes the believer's inheritance of the kingdom, but asserts emphatically that unbelievers will not inherit the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5).

The Bible is clear that inheriting eternal life is synonymous with entering the kingdom. At the judgment, the righteous will inherit the kingdom (Matthew 25:34) but the wicked will be eternally tormented (Matthew 25:46). The finality of the separation of those outside of the family of God is clearly seen in their lack of a share in God's inheritance.

The concept of the believer's inheritance highlights the dignity of the family relationship of the believer in Christ. No higher position or greater wealth can an individual acquire than to become an heir of God through faith in Christ.”

**Taken from: Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology – “Inheritance” by William E. Brown**.