



He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Heb. 1:4). Jesus—God in the flesh—already possessed a “more excellent name” than the angels, but in His death and exaltation to the throne “by inheritance” He “obtained” it in the sense of taking possession of that which was His by right.

So how may this help us to understand Ephesians 1:18? Clearly, God already possesses all human beings just

as a possession. God *inherits* in that sense. This is seen in Scriptures pertaining to Christ. The Messiah was told, “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Psa. 2:8). Didn’t the Messiah—God in the flesh—already *possess* all things? Yes. But in His exaltation to the throne He is told He would be given, “the nations for Your inheritance.” The Hebrew writer says of Jesus, “having become so much better than the angels, as

as He does all things (Psa. 24:1), yet sin separates us from Him. Like Israel, in sin God releases His “inheritance” (cf. Isa. 47:6a; 59:1-2) to Satan (2 Tim. 2:26). In obedience to the gospel, God renews His claim to us. In Christ, God “has visited and redeemed His people” (Luke 1:68), but now we await the “the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:14). It is at that point that God will take possession of us as “His inheritance” (Eph. 1:18). It is in this sense that, yes, He will *inherit* us just as He “shall inherit all nations” (Psa. 82:8). This seems to be the sense in which Ephesians 1:18 speaks of “His inheritance in the saints”—God will claim us as His possession in the riches of His glory.



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806-352-2809
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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
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Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

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Kyle Pope

“His Inheritance”

By Kyle Pope

In Ephesians 1:18, as Paul prays for the well-being of the Christians in Ephesus, he prays that they might come to know “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” The context makes it clear that the possessive pronoun “His” refers to God, but how can anything be said to be God’s “inheritance”? The Lord declared in Psalm 50:

For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness (10-12, NKJV).

So clearly, everything already belongs to God. He cannot *inherit* anything in the sense we normally think of the concept of inheritance. How then are we to understand Paul’s wording in Ephesians?

The Biblical Concept of Inheritance

The words translated “inheritance” in both the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament refer to a *possession, property, or portion* belonging to the one to whom the word is applied, but there are four ways it is used:

1. In reference to the possession inherited by an heir from a progenitor or benefactor. The Holy Spirit declares, “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous” (Prov. 13:22). He says further, “Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent

wife is from the LORD” (Prov. 19:14). In these cases, a possession that did not previously belong to someone is given to an heir. The land of Canaan was given to the Israelites as their **“inheritance”**—it was to be divided to them by lot (Num. 33:54; 34:17, 29; Josh. 1:6). In this case, God was considered the progenitor or benefactor. Jeremiah wrote, **“Thus says the LORD: ‘Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit—behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them’**” (Jer. 12:14). Eternal life is described as an inheritance God will give to the saved. Paul speaks of **“giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light”** (Col. 1:12). But inheritance is also used . . .

2. In reference to the possession belonging to a progenitor or benefactor. Under Mosaic Law, provisions were made for the distribution of the assets of one who died. If he had no sons, it was to go to his daughters—if no daughters, to his brothers—if no brothers, to his father’s brothers—if no father’s brothers, to the closest relative (Num. 27:8-11). In each case, four times in this text the assets are called **“his inheritance”** because it belongs to him, irrespective of the heir or beneficiary. This sense is often used of God’s people and their relationship to Him. For example, **“For the LORD’S portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance”** (Deut. 32:9). In this use, it is not describing **“Jacob”** or **“His people”** in regard to what they will inherit, but as a possession belonging to God as the benefactor or progenitor. We see this also when Saul was anointed king. Scripture records, **“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said: ‘Is it not because the LORD has anointed you commander over His inheritance?’”** (1 Sam. 10:1). This idea is repeated frequently—**“He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance”** (Psa. 78:62)—**“From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance”** (Psa. 78:71)—**“For the LORD will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance”** (Psa. 94:14)—**“The Portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the Maker of all things; and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance. The LORD of hosts is His name.”** (Jer. 51:19). This becomes a standard way of identifying Israel. God spoke through Isaiah of **“Israel My inheritance”** (Isa. 19:25). In this sense Israel belongs to God, but is also counted as His **“portion”** (Deut. 32:9), His **“special treasure”** (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:5; 14:2; Psa. 135:4), or His **“special people”** (Deut. 26:18)—a distinction now applied to the saved in Christ. Jesus **“gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good**

works” (Titus 2:14; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). When God punished Israel, He declared to Babylon, **“I was angry with My people; I have profaned My inheritance, and given them into your hand”** (Isa. 47:6a). In this text, because of sin God is said to release His **“inheritance”** into the **“hand”** of another. They still belonged to Him by right, but He released His possession to another because of sin. The concept of inheritance can also be used . . .

3. In reference to an heir actually taking possession of the thing inherited from a progenitor or benefactor. An heir may have the right to a possession, but not actually have it until he takes possession of it. For example, the tribes on the east side of the Jordan promised, **“We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance”** (Num. 32:18). In this case the land belonged to them by right, but they had not yet taken possession of it. Jeremiah wrote:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will cause to be heard an alarm of war in Rabbah of the Ammonites; it shall be a desolate mound, and her villages shall be burned with fire. Then Israel shall take possession of his inheritance,” says the LORD (Jer. 49:2).

Israel had the right to **“his inheritance”** but the Ammonites actually possessed it, until the time when Israel **“shall take possession”** of it. When Jerusalem fell to Babylon, Jeremiah lamented, **“Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners”** (Lam. 5:2). It was their inheritance, but during the Babylonian exile they did not actually possess the land. In a similar way, land that belonged to a tribe that had been sold was still one’s inheritance, but had to be redeemed in order for one to take possession of it—and in the year of Jubilee, one returned to **“his possession”** or **“his inheritance”** (Lev. 25:8-30; Num. 36:1-13). Eternal life is described in similar terms. Daniel was told, **“you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days”** (Dan. 12:13). Christians await, **“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”** (1 Pet. 1:4). It is our **“inheritance”**—it is **“reserved”** for us, but we will not *inherit* it until we take possession of it upon the **“redemption of our body”** (Rom. 8:23) at the judgment. Finally, inheritance can be used . . .

4. In reference to a progenitor or benefactor actually taking possession of the possession belonging to him. Similar to the second usage above, in this use the possession in fact belongs to a progenitor or benefactor, but (for some reason or another) he has not claimed it as his own. Zechariah declared, **“the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem”** (Zech. 2:12). This describes a restoration of God’s relationship to His people. Israel was released due to sin and restored by God’s mercy. The psalmist prays, **“Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed—this Mount Zion where You have dwelt”** (Psa. 74:2). In this sense, God is actually spoken of as *inheriting* His people. The psalmist prayed, **“Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations”** (Psa. 82:8). As we noted above, doesn’t God already possess **“all nations”**? Yes. Clearly, **“The earth is the LORD’S, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein”** (Psa. 24:1), but the Holy Spirit says of God, **“you shall inherit all nations.”** This is not the same sense in which an heir *inherits* something—this is the progenitor or benefactor claiming something