
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 13: INHERITANCE

Lecture Presenter: Robert D. McCurley M.Div.



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev. Robert McCurley is the minister of the Gospel at Greenville Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). www.freechurchcontinuing.org

Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

ROBERT D. McCURLEY M.Div.

21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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2. Creation
3. Fall
4. Noah
5. Abraham
6. Patriarchs I
7. Patriarchs II
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Lecture 13

INHERITANCE

Lecture Theme:

God redeems his people in order to bring them to the promised land of his heavenly inheritance, where he will dwell with them for all of eternity.

Text:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:3–4).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 13

At this point in our course, you will have begun to see that when we come to a text, we must not only understand and interpret and apply the text itself, but in order to appreciate the full wonder of truth, we must read it against the backdrop of God’s overarching big story. For that, we need the whole Bible. So, we’ve been illustrating throughout our study both the need and the method for connecting the dots so that we can better discern God’s message in any given text or story. This will be important for understanding the place of the promised land within God’s history of redemption. Why does the land of Israel feature so prominently throughout the Old Testament? How is it tied to the idea of inheritance? What was the theological significance of all of this for the Old Testament church? How do these themes carry over into the New Testament? How does the New Testament build upon them? Where do we find the ultimate fulfillment of the promised land?

First of all, let’s consider the land of promise, this basic theme. Eden was the original territory given to Adam, a place where God dwelt with him. God commanded Adam in Genesis 1:28, and He said that Adam was to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: . . . and have dominion over every living thing that moved upon the earth.” Well, that paradise was lost through man’s fall into sin, but notice that the new land of promise comes with a similar, a renewed if you will, call to take dominion over the land of Canaan. God called them to purge the land of the heathen and their idolatry and to establish a holy dwelling place with their holy God.

Moses had given them clear instructions. In order to accomplish this, they were to smite and utterly destroy, specifically, seven wicked nations inhabiting the land and to make no covenant with them or to show mercy to them. They were to save nothing alive that breathed. That meant all animals and all people. They were not to save anyone alive, anything alive, among the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites,

the Jebusites, and the Girgashites. You see this in Deuteronomy 7. For any others in the land outside these seven nations, they were to kill the males and save the women, children, cattle, and the spoil. The purpose in all of this was to establish a holy land for God's dwelling.

Now, you will remember that God's call to Abraham included a land of promise. In Genesis 12:1, we read, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show [thee]." He repeats this in His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:8, "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." This expectation was increased with Isaac, Jacob, and [Jacob's] sons. Remember Joseph's bones? It was further intensified when Moses led them out of Egypt. They were en route to possess the land promised to them over 400 years earlier, but the land was not an end in itself. It served the promise to the seed. The seed is the first priority. The land serves as an inheritance to them, embodying God's covenant commitment to dwell with them and among His people. The promise was personally applied through the division of the land into allotments given to each tribe, with each tribe assigning portions of their allotment to various families within the tribe as a perpetual inheritance to be preserved.

There is also an exception to this principle. Aaron, the high priest, and his descendants, Levites, were given no inheritance in the land. Their inheritance was to be the Lord Himself. You see this in a few places: Deuteronomy 18:1–2, for example. So, the family of the priests served as a constant reminder that the promise of inheritance was never ultimately found in the geographical real estate, if you will, of the land, but rather in the spiritual inheritance of Christ and His presence with His people, as we will see more in a moment. You must also note the relationship of God's promise of both blessings and curses, and consequently God's demands, within the context of the Covenant of Grace as applied here to the land. The promise had to be received by faith with a believing, responsive obedience. You see, this explains the 10 spies and the two spies. Right? You had 10 [who] were unbelieving, and you had two, namely Caleb and Joshua, [who] were believing. And it explains the cause for God's judgment in stripping Israel of the possession of what was promised to them. They followed the 10 spies in unbelief. They made a breach of covenant. They were covenant-breakers, thus reaping the covenant curses that God had promised. They suffered 40 years in the wilderness, and all of those age 20 years and above perished without ever enjoying the land.

Joshua and Caleb, however, entered the land by faith. Notice the beautiful description of Caleb in Numbers 14:24, "But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it." You'll note the emphasis on the fruit of obedience at the beginning and end of the book of Joshua chapter 1 and then chapter 23. As we have seen previously, there is this distinction within the covenant people of God, a distinction between the visible church, those who are outwardly seen, and the invisible church, where those who are true believers. This is referred to in places like Romans 2 and 9 in the New Testament. This important theological principal continues to bear significance in the remainder of the Old Testament and into the New Testament. We also note that those who were originally outside the covenant could be brought in through faith. So, the Gentile Rahab is a notable example during this period. Hebrews 11:31 says, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

Throughout their sojourning in the wilderness, God still continued mercifully to set the gospel before them. Reference is made to Israel in the wilderness in Hebrews 4:2 which says, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them." One example is the brass serpent in the wilderness. We read about this in Numbers 21. This is fulfilled in Christ. Jesus says so in John 3:14–15. It says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." So, the gospel continues to be proclaimed in the wilderness. Well, Israel, having broken the covenant through unbelief and disobedience, had to renew the covenant with God before entering the promised land under Joshua. This was a confirmation of the covenant God had already made with them, and this is recorded in Joshua 5, where Joshua also circumcises all the males—it's the sign and seal of the covenant—and keeps the Passover at Gilgal, a covenant meal.

This marks the transition from wilderness to conquest. The manna, we are told, ceases, and the eating of corn begins. At the end of the chapter, Joshua encounters a theophany, and he is told, like Moses in Exodus 3, to

take off his shoe for he was standing on holy ground. Well, much more could be said. You should also notice, for example, the connection between evil and Gerizim in the book of Deuteronomy and what we find in Joshua 8. The book of Joshua outlines the conquest of the land in the first 12 chapters, the division of the land in chapters 13 to 21, and then rest in the land in chapters 22 through 24. We'll return to the significance of this last point, the point about rest, in a moment. We're only providing a brief sketch, but this period is full of rich gospel truth. For example, we can explore the theological significance of the cities of refuge and how they provide background for the revelation of God as our Refuge, and a gospel theme that is woven throughout the New Testament. But we discover throughout the whole Old Testament, God's people possessing the land points to the future reality of living as God's people in His kingdom.

And that brings us to our next point: secondly, a land of fulfillment. Abraham was described as a stranger and sojourner, a tent dweller. This concept was reinforced in the experience of his role as a whole during the period in the wilderness. They too were aliens, foreigners, and pilgrims, but what did this convey? Well it meant they did not belong, but it also meant that they were homeless. They were homeless. They did not have a place that belonged to them where they could dwell and put down roots. They had not arrived in God's land of promise. The tabernacle, as we saw earlier, was a microcosm of heaven, but it reflected the design of the whole land, the whole promised land. The land was a place where God would dwell among His people. So, Abraham, Moses, and Israel as a whole looked beyond the symbol of the land to what it signified, where the promise was to be ultimately fulfilled in permanently dwelling with God in His eternal abode.

We see this taught in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:10 and then verse 16 says that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He goes on a little later, "But now they desire a better country, that, is a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." That city is the new Jerusalem, and it's described in Revelation 21 and 22. Likewise, Moses had respect unto the recompense of the reward. In the same chapter, Hebrews 11, we read of those in the Old Testament who were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. You see, they all set their sights beyond the land. They looked to what the land symbolized, the eternal inheritance that is found in heaven. You need to understand the Old Testament vocabulary and concepts because they carry over into the New Testament where they are applied to all believers, Jewish and Gentile believers alike. Christians remain strangers, sojourners, and pilgrims. We are homeless in this world. Our mind is set on things above. Our conversation is in the heavens. We seek a land greater than this world. We are en route to our final destination and home in heaven, dwelling with Christ forever.

The symbolism of the land and the promise of an inheritance as a whole carry over as a dominant theme in the New Testament. True believers are the children of God, and therefore they receive an inheritance from Him. They are destined to enter into the full enjoyment of that promise. I Peter 1:4 affirms that God gives to His people "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Christ promised this. For example, John 14:2-3, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The focal point is being with Christ, being with Jesus, dwelling with His people in the eternal land of promise. As with the Old Testament priests, our inheritance is found in the Lord Himself, seeing and sharing in His glory. Jesus in His high priestly prayer said in John 17:24, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Once again, all of this is connected to the development and fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace. We read, "And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament," new covenant, "that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15). Notice the language describing heaven in Revelation 21:7, "he that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." There's the language of the covenant. Just as Canaan was divided into allotments among the people, so the Lord has prepared designated allotments for each believer in heaven. Do you remember the emphasis in Joshua on God giving His people rest in the land? Hebrews makes clear that this too is fulfilled in the ultimate promised land of heaven, our place of rest. Hebrews 4:9 says, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

You should also know that the name *Joshua* is the New Testament equivalent of the name *Jesus*, and both mean the same thing: “Jehovah saves.” So, we read in Matthew 1:21, “and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Joshua pointed forward to Christ, and think of the parallels, for example, of God’s commission to Joshua, in Joshua 1, where He calls him to take the land for the Lord, and on the other hand, Christ’s commission to His Church at the end of Matthew 28, where He tells them to disciple, to take if you will, all nations for Christ. And notice that in both places, God emphasizes the same promise, “I will be with you.”

Some Christians today have confused their theological categories through a misplaced emphasis on the significance of the current geographical land of Israel and its importance for the Jews and the church. They stop at the Old Testament land promise without tracing its original symbolism to its fulfillment in the New Testament. As we have seen, neither the Old Testament saints nor the New Testament writers made this mistake.

Thirdly, let’s consider briefly how the books of Judges and Ruth fit within the theme of this lecture. They both record events that followed the period of conquest under Joshua. We will consider, first of all, the book of Judges. After Joshua and the elders die, Israel enters this period of the judges, which forms a link between Moses and Joshua and the rise of the monarchy in I Samuel. Just as Israel entered into the land by faith in the fruit of obedience, they can only continue to enjoy the land with the same faith and obedience. The covenant promises both blessings and curses, and it brings demands.

So, Judges begins with an account of Israel’s failure to fully obey God’s command to drive out and destroy the wicked nations within the portion God had given them to possess. One of the dominant responses of Israel was their slothfulness, seen in their unwillingness to expel these nations, and in their greed, desiring to use the nations for their own profit. As John Calvin notes, “The dominion of the land which had been divinely offered, they with flagrant ingratitude rejected by taking possession of only a part.” This resulted in idolatry. It resulted in the corruption of the tabernacle, immorality and pride, and God punished them with those who spoiled and plundered the land and forced them into the service of other nations. God warns them that their failure would result in the heathen being “as thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare.” We see that in Judges 2:3, again recounted in I Samuel 12.

The whole book follows the same cyclical pattern. You see sin in Israel bubbling up to the surface, and then we see that provoking God’s wrath. He brings affliction, chastening them, and then they cry out in repentance. God responds by sending them deliverers, saviors, the judges; and then the people reform themselves and begin routing the nations; and they enjoy a period of rest, but this cycle continues over and over and over, from sin to God’s wrath to a chastening to their cry to deliverers to reform to routing the nations and to rest. And each time, they quickly returned to their stubborn ways and “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” That language is used over and over: “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” As God had warned the remaining heathen proved a powerful snare by the influence of their wicked ways and their false worship. Please read II Corinthians 6:14–18 because we find in the New Testament God issuing the same warning. In fact, He’s using the same covenant language to the New Testament church. II Corinthians 6:14–18 is built on what we discover in the Old Testament.

Now ultimately, later in the Old Testament, Israel’s idolatry and rebellion will result in their expulsion from the land altogether when they will be taken into exile. We see throughout the book Israel’s inability to enjoy the land because of their sin, and we see God’s gracious provision of these judges, these deliverers, to call them to repentance and to deliver them. But the deliverance only lasted for one generation at a time. Something more was needed. They needed a king after God’s own heart who would do that only which was right in God’s eyes, as we read in I Kings 14:8, and who would uphold the rule and reign of God’s redemptive kingdom. The last verse of the book of Judges says this, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Well, we also need to consider Ruth. The story of Ruth took place during the period of the judges, and it focuses on the experience of one family, that of Elimelech and Naomi. Israel had experienced the famine, a sign of the curse of the covenant, as seen in Deuteronomy 28 verses 5 and following. Elimelech left Bethlehem his home. *Bethlehem* means “house of bread.” And he left the promised land, the place of God’s presence and promise and provision, all in rebellion against God’s commandment and went to live among the pagan people of Moab. There he dies. His sons marry two Moabite women, and the sons die, so Naomi returns to her homeland. We have a beautiful description of Ruth’s faith, her daughter-in-law’s faith, and her conversion, in cleaving to Jehovah.

The whole book is full of beautiful portrayals of gospel truth, but we can only touch the main theme of Ruth as it relates to this lecture.

The themes are tied back to the law and tied forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. So first of all, you need to understand the law in order to understand Ruth. And there are two important institutions in the law that we need to explain. The first is called the Levirate marriages. You can read about this in Deuteronomy 25 verses five and following. If an Israelite died without a seed, his brother or a near relative was responsible to marry his widow and to raise up a progeny for his brother and to thereby preserve the inheritance and land of his family. Well, from what we have learned, you know why this was so important. This institution, the Levirate marriages, was a ceremonial exception to the general rule regarding marriage. But secondly, we need to consider what we call the Goel Institution. You'll read about this in Leviticus 25 as well.

The Hebrew word *Goel* means Kinsman or Redeemer or near of kin or next of kin. This person was responsible to buy back or redeem the land of a family member who had lost it for various reasons, thus protecting and defending the family. While this has great prominence in Ruth—the word *goel*, word for kinsman redeemer, is used 20 times in this brief book, so it's obviously a dominant theme—behind this institution, you need to understand, was the fact that God Himself was the Kinsman Redeemer of Israel. Many passages could be cited to prove that God was the One Who had redeemed Israel from Egypt and brought them to the promised land. The land was ultimately God's land, the place of His dwelling, and so [it] was not to be sold but redeemed. The kinsman redeemer had the right, although [he] didn't have the obligation in every case, he had the right to redeem a family member. He could redeem a family member from slavery. He could redeem their land from being sold to another. He could fulfill the Levirate marriage that we spoke of earlier, and he could serve as the avenger of blood in the cases of murder. This is part of the background to the cities of refuge. So, he served as God's agent to redeem persons, property, blood, and the name and posterity of a family member.

Well, you can easily see how Ruth fits within the theme of this lecture. It is not just a nice story. It provides revelation of God and His gospel grace. Best of all, the main character is not Naomi or Ruth or Boaz; it is Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. Like Boaz, Christ secures the names and eternal inheritance of His people in heaven. Christ purchases our inheritance and makes us joint heirs with Him. You come to the end of chapter 4 at the end of the book of Ruth, and you find a genealogy. Now the recorded genealogies in the Bible tend to be portions that many people want to skip over, and this is a grave mistake. God never includes an unnecessary word in Scripture. You'll notice that the book of Ruth ends with a genealogy, and you may have wondered, "why?" Well, we're going to answer that question in the next lecture on David.

Now that you understand the redemptive historical significance of the concept of the land and of inheritance, you can see how the New Testament builds on this theme. You'll find copious references to the inheritance that Christians obtain in Christ Jesus and through His gospel. In the words of Colossians 1:12, it will lead you to give "thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Well, in conclusion, we have learned in this lecture that God redeems His people in order to provide in order to bring them to the promised land of His heavenly inheritance where He will dwell with them for all of eternity. The end of both Judges and Ruth set the stage in preparing us for the provision of a king. In the next lecture, we will consider the place of David, Israel's greatest king, within the unfolding revelation of God's redemption.