Doctrine of Inheritance

Physical Inheritance

1. In biblical times as well as modern, an inheritance involves the receipt of property as a gift or by legal right, usually upon the death of one's father.

2. The Hebrew institutions relative to inheritance were of a very simple character.

3. In ancient Israel the property of a deceased person was usually distributed according to law or tribal custom.

4. Written wills were rarely used.

5. Under the patriarchal system the property was divided among the sons of the legitimate wives

   - Genesis 21:10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

   - Genesis 24:36 And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath.

   - Genesis 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

6. One reason Rachel and Leah were willing to leave their homeland and go with Jacob is because they felt they would never receive an inheritance for their father had devoured their money.

   - Genesis 31:14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.

7. Rachel and Leah had reason to be concerned about any hope of a personal inheritance.

   - Genesis 31:14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?

8. The birthright of the firstborn son could be denied only because of a serious offense against the father, as in the case of Reuben who committed a sexual transgression.
• Deuteronomy 21:15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: 16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: 17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

• 1 Chronicles 5:1 Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.

9. A larger portion of any inheritance was generally given to the eldest who in turn became responsible for maintaining the females of the family.

10. The sons of concubines were portioned off with presents.

• Genesis 21:14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

• Genesis 25:6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

11. At a later period the exclusion of the sons of concubines was rigidly enforced.

• Judges 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

12. Daughters had no legal share in the patrimony but they did receive a marriage portion and occasionally, some received a generous provision by a loving father like Job.

• Job 42:15 And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

13. The Mosaic law regulated the succession to real property thus: it has to be divided among the sons, the eldest receiving a double portion, the others equal shares;

• Deuteronomy 21:17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.
14. If there were no sons, the inheritance went to the daughters on the condition that they did not marry out of their own tribe, otherwise the patrimony was forfeited.

- Numbers 27:8 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.

- Numbers 36:6 This is the thing which the Lord doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry. 7 So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. 8 And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers. 9 Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance. 10 Even as the Lord commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad:

15. If there were no daughters it went to the brother of the deceased; if no brother, to the paternal uncle; and, failing these to the next of kin.

- Numbers 27:9 And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. 10 And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. 11 And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the Lord commanded Moses.

- Ruth 4:10 Moreover [And Boaz said] Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

16. To the Hebrew mind, the term inheritance had strong spiritual and national associations extending far beyond the family estate.

- Exodus 34:9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

17. The land of Canaan was regarded as an inheritance from the Lord because God had promised the land to Abraham and his descendants.

- Numbers 26:53 Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names.
• **Numbers 33:53** And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.

• **1 Kings 8:35** When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflicteth them: 36 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.

18. Both Moses and Joshua were told by the Lord to divide the land of Canaan among the tribes "as an inheritance".

• **Numbers 26:52** And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 53 Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names.

• **Joshua 13:6** All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee.

19. God directed that the land be distributed to each tribe by lot based on its population.

• **Numbers 26:54** To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him.

• **Numbers 33:54** And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.

20. Each family, in turn, was assigned a parcel that was to remain in the family's possession.

21. This sense of sacred birthright probably accounted for Naboth's refusal to sell his vineyard to King Ahab: "The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" (1 Kings 21:3).

22. Aaron and his immediate descendents were not allowed an inheritance of land in Canaan for they represented the hope of heaven and reminded people to look for a heavenly home.

• **Numbers 18:20** And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.
23. In like manner the tribe of Levi, of which Aaron was a part, was to receive no tribal land "because the Lord the God of Israel himself is their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:2).

- Numbers 18:23 But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.

- Deuteronomy 18:2 Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the Lord is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them.

24. Though the Levites were to receive no tribal land, in matchless grace God appointed a tenth of the nation’s wealth for the inheritance of Levi and his descendents for their service in the Tabernacle of the congregation.

- Numbers 18:21 And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

25. Because they had received a tenth of the nation’s wealth, the Levites were to give God a tenth of their resources through the sacrificial system.

- Numbers 18:26 Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe.

26. It was Joshua who finally partitioned the land for Israel.

- Joshua 11:23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

- Joshua 13:33 But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them.

Spiritual Inheritance

27. Spiritually, Israel was considered the Lord’s inheritance.

- 1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his [Saul’s] head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?
28. The Messiah was promised not only Israel but all the earth for His possession.

- Psalms 2:8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

29. Every believer can consider the Lord a portion of his spiritual inheritance.

- Psalms 16:5 The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

30. The church must pray often for the Lord to remember and save His people and to bless His inheritance.

- Psalms 28:9 Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.
- Psalms 74:2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

31. A nation is blessed when chosen by God to be a covenanted client-nation.

- Psalms 33:12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord: and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.

32. The spiritual blessings of the elect are to be forever.

- Psalms 37:18 The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.

33. It is the Lord who chooses our inheritance for us.

- Psalms 47:4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

34. The spiritual inheritance of a people is confirmed in part by physical blessings.

- Psalms 68:9 Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary.

35. The Lord will dispose the inheritance of the heathen according to His sovereign pleasure.

- Psalms 78:55 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.
36. It is possible for the Lord to become angry with His spiritual inheritance.

- **Psalms 78:62** He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.

37. Spiritual Israel is called the Lord’s inheritance and is blessed with material prosperity.

- **Psalms 78:71** From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.

38. God’s people have appealed to their covenant relationship with God in seeking divine protection.

- **Psalms 79:1** A Psalm of A'-saph. O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

39. The Lord will not forsake His covenanted people.

- **Psalms 94:14** For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.

40. The covenanted promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has been fulfilled historically.

- **Psalms 105:11** Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance:

41. The psalmist encourages the faithful, “to bless ourselves in the favor of God, to place our happiness in it, and to seek it, accordingly, with all seriousness” (Matthew Henry).

- **Psalms 106:5** That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

42. While a good man will leave an inheritance to his children’s children under proper condition, the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

- **Proverbs 19:14** House and riches are the inheritance of fathers and a prudent wife is from the Lord.

- **Proverbs 13:22** A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

**Special Note.**
Sometimes children and grandchildren believe they are entitled to the hard earned resources of their parents. That is not true for “the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.” In other words, God will sometimes take from sinners or ungodly children and grandchildren what they did not earn or deserve and give it to the just.
- Proverbs 17:2 A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

43. Sometimes an inheritance may be gotten “hastily” through legal maneuvering such as not honoring contractual agreements or an abuse of a power of attorney, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

- Proverbs 20:21 An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

44. Wisdom must accompany an inheritance or it will soon be squandered.

- Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

45. An inheritance is not guaranteed in life, nor should one be expected. Individuals have a right to dispose of their resources as they please.

- Lamentations 5:2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.