

EXEGETICAL PAPER: **Ephesians 1:11-14** (NIV based)  
by David M. Coddington

Inheritance Of The Kingdom

**Main Idea**

True believers in Jesus Christ were predestined by God the Father to obtain an inheritance through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and who are sealed by the Holy Spirit to receive their inheritance in the kingdom of God.

**Outline**

- I. Inheritance Obtained (vv.1:11-12)
  - a. Through the work of Christ (v.11a)
  - b. Predestined according to the will of God (v.11b)
  - c. Those who first believed (v.12)
- II. Guarantee of the Inheritance (vv.1:13-14)
  - a. Inclusion of Ephesian believers (v.13a)
  - b. They heard and believed the Gospel (v.13b)
    - i. Belief resulted in being sealed with the Holy Spirit
- III. Promise of Redeeming Inheritance (v.1:14)
  - a. Holy Spirit is a guarantee, or down payment, of inheritance (v.14a)
  - b. Future acquisition of the inheritance (v.14b)
    - i. This will be "to the praise of [God's] glory"

**Introduction**

The promise of an inheritance that cannot be taken away is of great importance to the Christian life because it gives hope in very dark times. This great reward is expounded upon in Ephesians 1:11-14. Every member of the Trinity is a part of the inheritance that every believer has. God the Father chooses or predestines those who are to receive the inheritance. Jesus Christ is the means by which the inheritance is received. And the Holy Spirit acts as a seal and guarantees the inheritance for those who believe.

**Context**

**Historical Context**

Paul opens the book of Ephesians in a typical epistolary manner by naming the author and the recipients. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 1:1). The authorship of Paul is not contested among conservative scholars and can be taken at face value. However, some scholars assert that it is unclear whether Paul wrote to a specific church in Ephesus, or to a number of churches in that area and the letter was circulated. Most likely Paul wrote to the main church in Ephesus and it was then copied and circulated to other churches in the area (Lewis).

The church of Ephesus was visited by Paul on two occasions. He first visited there on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19). He came back a second time during his

Third Missionary Journey and stayed there for two years ministering and teaching (Acts 19:10).

Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus in A.D. 62, five years after leaving the church of Ephesus. The city of Ephesus was a port city located in Asia Minor and home to the Temple of Artemis. The followers of Artemis worshiped her as the goddess of fertility by engaging in many immoral acts (Banks). Despite the heavy pagan influence, a Jewish community took root in Ephesus, according to Acts 18:19, "They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews." This is very important because the reconciliation of the Gentile people to God is addressed in this letter.

### Literary Context

In the beginning of this letter to the Ephesians is described the outworking of God's plan through His Son Jesus Christ. This topic begins in verse 1:3 and continues until verse 1:14. The discussion of this topic begins with the concept that God predestined people to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ (v.1:4). Then, four blessings that come from Christ are explained: redemption, riches of his grace, uniting of all things, and an inheritance. This flow of thought concludes in the explaining of the inheritance given through Jesus, in verses 1:11-14.

The next topic that Paul begins upon in verse 15 is his feelings towards the believers in Ephesus. He is thankful for the Ephesians and prays for them constantly. This sets the platform for transitioning into chapter two, in which there is an explanation of the position of believers as new creations who were once dead in sin but are now made alive in Christ (v.2:5).

### Exegesis

#### Inheritance Obtained

The final thought on the benefits of Christ begins by declaring, "In him we were also chosen" "to an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11a with Strong's #2820). The definition of "chosen to inheritance" and what is being inherited must be extrapolated in order to rightly interpret verses 11-14 because it is the basis of the passage. Unfortunately, no definition is supplied in the immediate context of verse 11 as to what is inherited, but subsequently in Ephesians 5:5 is described the inheritance, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a man is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Outside of the Book of Ephesians, Paul writes in a similar manner that sinners will not "inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:21).

The 'kingdom of God' is introduced in the book of Daniel and brought into existence by Jesus. Daniel prophesied that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). John the Baptist declared that "'The time has come,... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15). The 'kingdom of God' is the institution set up by Him that is made up of his sons and daughters. The benefit of being a part of the 'kingdom of God' is eternal life in the presence of Him.

In the Old Testament, the meaning of 'inheritance' refers broadly to the "estate received by a child from its parents" and "the land received by the children of Israel as a

gift from Yahweh" (Hirsch). Believers under the New Covenant are promised, in a similar way, an inheritance as sons or daughters of God in his kingdom. The redemptive work of Jesus is the agent that allows a person to obtain this inheritance. That is why it is written, "In him we were also chosen" "to an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11a with Strong's #2820).

Christ is the benefactor through which believers have an inheritance because of His redemptive work on the cross that allows sinners to be adopted as sons of God. This is expounded on earlier in verses 1:5,7, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" and "in him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood." The blood of Christ covers the sins of those who believe in Him. This reconciles them to the Father so that they can be sons of God. Without the work of Christ, every person is an enemy of God and is entitled to nothing from him (Colossians 1:21). "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Because of Christ, those who believe in Him are able to "share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light" (Colossians 1:12).

The tenses used to describe the believer's possession of the inheritance leads to the conclusion that the inheritance is gained positionally by the believer at conversion; however full possession is given in the future, specifically after death. In Ephesians 1:11 is stated that "we were also chosen" "to an inheritance" (v.11a with Strong's #2820), yet in verse 1:14 refers to the Holy Spirit as guarantee of the "inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession". R.C. Craston describes this dichotomy as: "While enjoyment of it begins in this life, insofar as the kingdom is already present, the full possession must be future" (Craston 608).

A type of this concept is the promise of God to give land to Abraham and his descendants. Abraham and his family died without ever seeing the fulfillment of this promise, yet they believed in life that God would remain faithful, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (Hebrews 11:13). In the same way, believers in Jesus are adopted into the kingdom of God at salvation and possess the inheritance; however believers do not get to be in heaven or fully benefit from this inheritance while living on the Earth. Full fulfillment is yet to come in heaven, the Millennium, and the New Jerusalem, wherein God's kingdom comes fully to pass and all other kingdoms are destroyed.

The discussion moves from the work of the Son to the work of God the Father in the next phrase: "having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11b). This phrase must be taken in consideration of the ten preceding verses, in which is explained that people are predestined to "be holy and blameless" and to "be adopted as his sons" (vv.1:4-5). The discussion expands upon those two concepts and adds that the predestination was also for obtaining the inheritance and for those who "were the first to hope", to be "for the praise of his glory" (v.1:12).

The description of God's predestination of people, "according to the plan..." "of his will", is very important (v.1:11). Heinrich Meyer explained that "predestined" can be translated as "being chosen by lot." Without the addition of "according to... his will", God's selection would be an act of divine chance, and divine partiality would not play a

role. Thankfully, this phrase is included in order to add clarity that God's predestination of His children was by the determination of God's gracious, purposeful will (Meyer 327).

Paul makes a distinction between his audience and himself in verse 1:12, "in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory". This statement is highly debated among scholars because it seems to be highly ambiguous. The tension comes from the phrase: "first to hope". The Greek word "proelpizo", meaning "having previously trusted" or "to hope in advance of other confirmation" (Strong's #4276), is rare in classical literature and never used in the LXX. This is the only place it is used in the New Testament (Hoehner 231). Some scholars believe that a distinction is being made between Jews and Gentiles, in that the Jews were the first to receive the Gospel and brought it to the Gentiles; however this view reads this interpretation into the text. The reconciliation of Gentiles is not brought up until Ephesians 2:11, and in that verse there is no mention of the fact that the Jews received the Gospel first.

It is more likely, then, that the "we" (v.1:12) is referring to "[the] apostle with his fellow workers who write to the church at Ephesus, and they express common interests and experiences, not a reprimand" (Hoenher 233). Paul and his companions were predestined to be the first to hope in Christ so that they could spread the Gospel, which was to the praise of God's glory. This fits in with Paul's next statement that "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth..." (v.1:13). Paul and his companions were the ones who brought the gospel to Ephesus during their missionary journeys.

### Guarantee of Inheritance

Next in verse 13, the focus of this writing returns to the recipients of this letter by an encompassing statement that parallels the salvation of Paul and his audience. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory" (vv.1:13-14).

Belief in the gospel of Jesus alone gives a person the inheritance, and the guarantee of the inheritance, of the kingdom of God. This statement seems to be contradicted in Colossians 3:24 and Ephesians 5:5. In Colossians 3:24, slaves are encouraged to work hard because they know "that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward". Similarly, in Ephesians 5:5 is declared that those who are "immoral, impure or greedy" have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." These two verses seem to indicate that the inheritance can be gained by good works and be lost by sinful actions. A better interpretation is that a part of the inheritance is a reward for the good works that are done on Earth (1 Corinthians 3:14), and those persons who are extremely immoral do not believe in the gospel.

In very definite terms, believers are encouraged that they are sealed and their inheritance is guaranteed (Ephesians 1:13,14). The word "seal" is a term rich in picture (v.13). "The verb "sphragizo" (Strong's #4972) is rooted in the use of marks as a means of identification. Within the context of the passage as a whole, the term clearly refers to God's pledge to complete the process of bestowing the gifts of salvation of which believers already received a first installment" (MacDonald 205). This happens to believers

at the moment of conversion. As a result, the inheritance to be a part of the kingdom of God, and eternal life in extension, is assured for the believer by the Holy Spirit.

### *Promise of Redeeming Inheritance*

Not only is the Holy Spirit the seal of God on the believer but He is also the guarantee or down payment of the inheritance. This idea is from the context of ancient business and commerce. People would pay money as a down payment to ensure that an animal or land would be fully paid for in the future. "The message being communicated here is that God so values His people that He has put down a deposit and will complete the transaction in the future" (Arnold 93).

This thought is closed with a short purpose statement: "to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14). This phrase is only used twice in the whole Bible and both times are in these four verses. It is unique because the glory of God is praised, an attribute that is not often singled out. Just as God's plans work to the praise of His glory, the lives of believers should be to the praise of His glory. "To live 'to the praise of the glory of his grace' is both to worship him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God He is, and to cause others to see and to praise Him too" (Stott 50).

### **Application**

The main point of this passage is that every believer has an inheritance through Jesus Christ, that is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, and waiting for them in heaven when they die. This passage can be used to encourage believers to persevere, trust in God's nature, and not lose faith.

Pastors in the Middle East endure torture and persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. They may become discouraged and think that their persecutors have won. But they can be encouraged that they have an inheritance that cannot be taken away from them in life or in death. This would then spur them on to give all they have for Jesus because they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

A community of recently converted pagans may still hold to the belief that God is prone to mood-swings based on His whim. These people can be shown that "God is not like the heathen deities who are moved by changing circumstances, by whim and caprice, so that one never knows how long their favor is going to last" (Hendriksen 89). Since the beginning of time, God preordained His plan and those whom He is going to save. Believers can trust that God loves them no matter what.

Finally, this section of verses applies to those who doubt their salvation. A young Christian woman who was sexually abused as a child could be plagued with doubts that she is good enough for God and even saved. She may think that the abuser made her unworthy for God. Because of this passage, she can be secure in the knowledge that she has an inheritance that cannot be taken away. Not only that, but she has been also chosen by the all-powerful God to be his daughter and spend eternity with Him.

### **Conclusion**

In Ephesians 1:11-14 is described the function of each member of the Trinity in the salvation and subsequent benefits of those who believe in Jesus. God the Father predestines people to be adopted as sons and receive an inheritance. He makes those appointments according to His gracious will with the purpose of bringing praise to His

glory. Jesus Christ is the agent by which sinners are reconciled with God and allowed to become sons and daughters. This brings the blessing of inheriting a place in the kingdom of God that was foretold by Daniel and fulfilled by Jesus. Even though believers are a part of the kingdom now, they await the day when they acquire the full possession of the inheritance. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the seal on the believer and the down payment for the inheritance that will come in the future.

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