

INHERITANCE IN HEBREWS REQUIRES OBEDIENCE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Each year at the same time, the Texas State Fair comes to Dallas. To many this is like a temporary heaven on earth. Good food, clean fun, and a great family time are available to those who have a ticket to get in. Often individuals and organizations will purchase a block of tickets to give away to others for free. Those who receive a free ticket are aware that even though the ticket cost them nothing, the giver has paid the cost.

There are many things to do once a person enters the fair: games, animal shows, rides, food, etc. All these activities are available to any ticket holder, though some of them are not covered by the entry ticket and must be purchased. Let's say a man named Joe has received a free ticket to the fair. He is assured entry to the fair and to participation in many of the activities in the fair. But whether or not Joe is able to participate in activities not covered by his free ticket is up to him. If he wants food, beverage, souvenirs, etc., he must purchase those things himself. Therefore, Joe must have earned his own money in order to participate in extra activities not covered by the free ticket.¹

Eternal life is like a free ticket to enter the fair that is available to those who believe in Jesus for eternal life. Although the ticket to receive eternal life is free, it cost Jesus His life. One is guaranteed free entrance into the Kingdom by simple faith in Christ. However, the amount

¹This illustration is drawn from *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 256-57.

that a Christian is able to enjoy once in the Kingdom will depend on the amount of work done while on earth prior to entrance. In other words, although Kingdom entrance comes as a free gift to all who simply believe in Jesus for eternal life, *inheritance* in the Kingdom to rule with Christ and receive other blessings depends on perseverance in obedience now. This seems to be how the writer of Hebrews uses the concept of inheritance.

The terms *kl̄eronomos*, *kl̄eronomeō*, or *kl̄eronomia* appear nine times in the Book of Hebrews.² Unlike other passages (e.g., Mark 10:17; Acts 20:32 and 26:18), Hebrews predicates obedience as a condition to qualify as an “heir” or to “inherit.”³ This paper will examine five areas related to this use of inheritance: Jesus’ obedience as the pattern for inheriting, imitate the faithful in order to inherit, eternal inheritance based on obedience, examples of inheriting blessings, and losing one’s inheritance does not mean losing eternal life.

² Hebrews 1:2, 4; 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:7-8; 12:17.

³ The majority of commentators do not agree with this writer’s view of inheritance in Hebrews as a future reward to rule in the Kingdom based on present obedience. Most of them believe inheritance in Hebrews refers to the final phase of “salvation.” Only those who prove the genuineness of their faith by persevering in obedience will attain “final salvation.” See, for example, Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 46; Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983), 79-80; Marcus Dods, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 4 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897–1910; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 258; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC, ed. A. Plummer, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 16-18; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 65, 220-21, 290-94. This, however, does not mean the majority of commentators are correct. Sound exegesis and careful analysis must be the final arbiter.

II. JESUS’ OBEDIENCE AS THE PATTERN FOR INHERITING

In Hebrews 1:2, 4, and 14, Jesus, as God’s Son, was “appointed heir of all things, . . . having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” One would think that Christ by simple ontological status (as God) would be the heir of all things. However these verses do not convey this sense. In Heb 1:2, the writer uses the verb *ethēke*, which means to “put or place in a particular location.”⁴ This echoes a Davidic enthronement Psalm (2:6-9) where God the Father “appointed [the Messiah] heir of all things” (*kl̄eronomon pantōn*) by granting Him the right to rule over the nations of the earth.⁵ In v 4 the verb *kl̄eronomeō* signifies an active taking of a possession and the granting of a new status (of exaltation)⁶ indicated by Christ’s new name (*onoma*).⁷ To *inherit* the *name* of *son* refers to an enthronement ceremony that occurred at Jesus’ resurrection by which He would be heir of all (see Matt 28:18 [cf. John 20:28-31]; Acts 2:24, 32, 36; 13:33; cf. Ps 2:7-8).⁸

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1003.

⁵ Kent, *Hebrews*, 36. See also 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps 89:26-27; and Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews—Part 1: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5–2:5,” *BibSac* 148 (January–March 1988): 83-84.

⁶ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 106.

⁷ Robert Govett concurs with this (*Christ Superior to Angels, Moses, Aaron: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: James Nisbet, 1884; repr., Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1981], 10).

⁸ Oberholtzer says, “Hebrews 1:4 alludes to this point of adoption by using the perfect tense for the Son’s inheritance (*kekleronomeken*) of a more excellent name, the title ‘Son.’ The official title of ‘Son’ was bestowed after Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and positioning at the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3). This is surely the occasion to which the writer referred in 5:5-6, which, by quoting both Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4, associates the high priesthood with this event. It should be clarified that though Christ received His royal dignity through the title ‘Son’ on the day

Hence Erich Gräßer suggests that the Son's inheritance of all was based on earning at His resurrection a better name that was attained in the ceremonial enthronement act (vv 5-14).⁹

It is important to note the pattern which runs through the rest of the book that the Son *inherited* the right to rule (1:6-9) because He "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (1:9a). That is why the author of Hebrews states that Christ inherited a better name, the Son (vv 4-5) and earned the right to rule the earth (vv 6-9; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:6-9; 8:4-6).¹⁰ Homer A. Kent, Jr., correctly captured the meaning of the participle *genomenos* in v 4:

Having become (*genomenos*) so much better indicates that it is the incarnate Christ in view, for in His preexistent deity there was no development involved. Our author is about to explain, however, that by incarnation Christ became for a time lower than the angels (2:9). Nevertheless, His subsequent exaltation elevated Him to the highest place, far above the angelic beings. The word *inherited* also confirms the view that the exaltation following His earthly task is what the author means (cf. Phil 2:9).¹¹

of His enthronement, He has not yet received His millennial kingdom over which He will rule (Heb 2:8). The final fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant will be in the person of Jesus Christ as King" ("Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews," 85).

⁹Erich Gräßer said, "Die Inklusion *keklēronomēken onoma er hat einen Namem geerbt* V4 und die Ausgestaltung dieser Belehnung in Form eines feierlichen Inthronisationsaktes V5–14 entscheiden die Datumsfrage: Durch die *Erhöhung* wurde der Sohn zum Erben des Alls eingesetzt" (*An Die Hebräer*, EKKNT, ed. Nobert Brox et al. [Zürich: Bezinger, 1990], 58).

¹⁰In Ps 8:4–8 the words "all things under his feet" refers to all things on earth. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith That Endures: The Book of Hebrews Applied to the Real Issues of Life* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), 39-40, 47-48.

¹¹Kent, *Hebrews*, 39. Westcott views the "heirship of 'the Son'" as being realized by the *incarnate Son* (v 4) in His humanity (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Macmillan Publishers, 1889; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980], 8).

In other words, Jesus earned the right to rule because He obeyed, loving righteousness and hating iniquity. Dillow also notes that Jesus inherited (by His earthly work) the superior name "Son" by persevering in obedience:

He achieved this inheritance by perseverance in suffering (Heb. 2:10; Phil. 2:9-11). Similarly, His companions (Heb.1:9; Gk. *metochoi*) will "inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14) in the same way.¹²

Believers can share in that future glory (i.e., inheritance salvation) only by remaining faithful to the end.¹³ If they do, they will obtain an amazing privilege, ruling with the Son of God in His Kingdom.¹⁴

¹²Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 82. See other passages denoting obedience required to inherit a position as a "companion" or "partaker" (*metochos*) to rule: Heb 3:1, 14; 12:8; cf. 6:12; 10:35-36; 12:17). G. H. Lang also understands inheriting salvation in Hebrews as a future possession for the faithful (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers* [London: The Paternoster Press, 1951], 43-44). See also Govett, *Hebrews*, 28.

¹³Oberholtzer also observes that OT "salvation" commonly refers to the "Lord's deliverance of His people from their enemies or trouble. Because of the extensive use of references from the Psalms in Hebrews, the meaning of *soteria* in v 14 requires this OT concept" ("Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews," 92). The Psalms usually refer to salvation as God's delivering Israel from their enemies to enjoy His blessings (e.g., Ps 3:2, 8; 17:13; 34:19; 37:39; 44:4-8; 69:29-33; 118:14-25; 140:6-8; 144:9-11). Hence Oberholtzer concludes, "Therefore the meaning of salvation in Hebrews 1:14 must be related to deliverance from the enemies of God in His kingdom rule as defined by the six Psalms quoted in Hebrews 1:5-13...As 'companions' (v. 9), the readers will have a role in this deliverance or *sōteria* [salvation] over the Lord's enemies and will participate in the millennial kingdom" ("Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews," 92). The seven places where the term *salvation* appears in Hebrews (Heb 1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7) show it is not used as a synonym for eternal life, or for what a person receives upon faith in Christ for justification (cf. John 3:16-18; 5:24; 6:40-47; Rom 3:21-4:25). That is, since the writer of Hebrews predicates receiving "eternal salvation" based on obedience (5:8-9) and inheriting salvation by seeking after righteousness and hating iniquity (1:4-14), the term *salvation* means more than merely being justified (i.e., receiving "eternal life").

¹⁴Oberholtzer says, "The term *metochous* is best understood as referring to those who will be partners of Christ the King in His earthly millennial rule...*Metochoi* is used in Hebrews as a direct reference to Christians (3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8)" ("Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews," 89-90). Zane C. Hodges also interprets Jesus' joy conditioned on practicing righteousness that is also available to those who desire to become His *metochoi* ("Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord

Interestingly, all the concepts present in Heb 1:4–2:5 regarding “rule,” “salvation,” “obedience,” “rewards,” “angels,” “future glory,” and “future resurrection” also appear in other NT passages that refer to future rewards dispensed at Jesus’ return with His angels. Hence, those who will inherit *salvation* (or *deliverance*) are those who will inherit the right to rule (based on present suffering now), which will mean they have finally been delivered from their enemies (cf. 1:13–2:5; cf. Matt 16:25-27; Mark 8:35-38; Luke 9:23-26; cf. Rev 2:25-27).

Only after Christ’s resurrection was He *given* (*edothē*) “all authority . . . in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). Only after Jesus’ resurrection did God the Father place Him at His right hand, and made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:31-36). Jesus (as the second Adam, *not* as God) was “given” authority and “was made” Lord and Christ. He received all this because of His obedience and sacrifice. Thus, just as Christ’s authority to rule came after persevering in obedience until death and was received upon His resurrection, those believers who likewise persevere in obedience will, after their resurrections, receive power to rule with Him (see 2 Cor 5:9-10; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25-27).

The writer’s illustration of Jesus’ inheritance clearly sets the pattern for how the readers should interpret the term *inheritance* in the rest of the book of Hebrews. As Jesus earned the right to receive a name and the right to rule because of His faithfulness, believers who follow Him will have to persevere likewise in faithfulness if they desire to partake in this inheritance with Him as His partners (*metochoi*), according to Heb 1:9; 3:1, 14.

III. IMITATE THE FAITHFUL IN ORDER TO INHERIT

In Heb 6:12, the author calls all believers to “not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” This concept is fully developed in Hebrews 11. This inheritance based on obedience has many promises associated with it, including rest, ruling with Christ, special blessings, a special measure of joy, and special fellowship (cf. 7:6; 8:6; 11:13, 17, 33).

Yet these promises derive from the singular “promise” (vv 13-14, 17)—God’s promise to bless Abraham in Gen 22:17 (cf. 12:2) by multiplying his seed, which ultimately envisaged future dominion over all nations (see Heb 11:13, 17, 33). Until Abraham obeyed God by offering Isaac (Gen 22:1-16), in whom the promise of receiving a progeny depended, God did not guarantee Abraham that the Messiah would come through Isaac (Gen 12:3; 22:18; cf. Gal 3:16; Heb 6:18–7:28).¹⁵ Abraham inherited the promises through faith and obedience as indicated in Gen 22:1-16 and Heb 11:17, 33.¹⁶ This inheritance is not soteriological but is a reward, based on perseverance, which includes, among other things, ruling with Christ in His Kingdom.

¹⁵ Akin to this author’s view is that of F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 153, 155. Although Abraham was justified in Gen 15:6, this did not guarantee that God would bless him with a progeny if he did not obey. Theoretically, if Abraham did not obey God, the Lord could have found someone else by whom He would bring about a nation by which Messiah would come. Obviously, since God is sovereign and knows all things, past, present, and future, He is able to promise confidently that Abraham would be that man by whom He would bless all the nations as early as Genesis 12 (cf. 15:7-21; 17:1-27). The tension of the unconditional and conditional promise is resolved by viewing it from the divine angle without discarding the exegetical and grammatical fact that a condition was indeed involved in further blessings, as Gen 22:1-18 illustrates.

¹⁶ Guthrie said, “Abraham, *having patiently endured* clearly refers to the Isaac trial, as a result of which he *obtained the promise*. There is an echo back to verse 12. Abraham is an example *par excellence* of one who gained his inheritance by faith and patience. Even if the readers could think of no other example, Abraham would admirably illustrate the writer’s meaning” (*Hebrews*, 150, italics original).

and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 782). See Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 108.

Thus Abraham becomes (Heb 6:13-15) another example of what the writer desires the Hebrew readers to follow.¹⁷ Immediately before he mentions Abraham Hebrews 6, the writer emphasizes the need for faithful obedience until the end in order to inherit the promises:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb 6:11-12).

Works of obedience were clearly the condition, not the evidence, necessary to inherit these promises for which the readers should strive. These Hebrews were in danger of forfeiting their inheritance by returning to Judaism's "dead works" of the law (see 3:1-14; 6:1; 9:14; Heb 10:25; 11). To inherit the promises they had to continue to the end of their lives in faithful obedience to God.

IV. ETERNAL INHERITANCE BASED ON OBEDIENCE

Hebrews 9:15 states that believers who participate in the "new covenant" are the recipients "who are called" to "receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Although this verse does not state immediately how the recipients will obtain the eternal inheritance, it is verified in the previous verse and elsewhere in Hebrews.

J. Paul Tanner notes how the previous verse (v 14) clarifies contextually that the believer's faithful service defines this inheritance:

The author has just mentioned 'serving the living God' in v 14 (which looks at our priestly service now enhanced by a cleansed conscience). The idea of the tabernacle-house (suggesting priestly service) was expressed in 3:6 as a conditional

¹⁷This is seen through the explanatory conjunction *gar* ("for") in v 13 that illustrates vividly how this looks through Abraham's epic act of obedience.

matter. Proper 'priestly service' is a prerequisite for this inheritance.¹⁸

Furthermore, Tanner also notes correctly that the entire book of Hebrews uses inheritance as a "conditional matter":

A study of the word group related to *inheritance* (*klēronomias*, used eight times: 1:2, 14; 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:7, 8; 12:17) suggests that the *inheritance* is a conditional matter related to faithfulness. This is highlighted in 6:12 where the author tells his audience that they could not be sluggish if they hoped to *inherit the promises* but must have faith and patience. Thus faith and patience (i.e., patient endurance) are prerequisites for inheritance (cf. 10:36).

The appropriation by faith of Christ's sacrifice grants us eternal redemption. In addition to this, believers can also have eternal inheritance, provided they exercise faith, endure the trials and difficulties of their earthly pilgrimage, and faithfully render their priestly service. Obtaining this eternal inheritance is at the heart of what it means to "enter His rest" (cf. 4:1-11).¹⁹

Dillow also suggests, "It is by 'faith and patience' (Heb. 6:12) and 'holding firm to the end' (Heb. 3:14) that we 'inherit what has been promised.'"²⁰ He believes that though in Hebrews the promise appears to refer to justification by faith, the author's warning (9:14) seems to point one back to 4:1 where the promise of rest remains in view.²¹ These Hebrew readers had to remain obedient to the end of their lives in order to enter this rest, the rest of being Christ's partners in His Kingdom. Zane C. Hodges also concludes:

¹⁸J. Paul Tanner, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, vol. 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1067.

¹⁹Ibid. Also see Hodges, "Hebrews," 788.

²⁰Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 83. (See also Lang, *Hebrews*, 148.)

²¹Ibid.

The author was here perhaps countering the appeal of the sectarians, or others, to the “guilt feelings” of those Jewish Christians who must often have been charged with deserting their ancestral faith. But the blood of Christ ought to quiet their consciences permanently and lead them to pursue the “eternal inheritance” which the New-Covenant relationship brought them. Of course the writer meant here as elsewhere that it is only “through faith and patience” that his readers could “inherit what has been promised” (6:12); but if they would rest their consciences at the Cross, they could pursue this heirship undistractedly.²²

Evidence in the immediate and overall context of the book argues for interpreting “eternal inheritance” as something believers attain by obedience. Those who are called “to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” are the ones called “to rule in the future eternal land promise” specified throughout the entire epistle (cf. 1:2–2:8; 3:1–4:12; 9:12–16; 11; 12–13).²³

V. EXAMPLES OF INHERITING BLESSINGS

In Heb 11:7–8, the writer illustrates how faith and obedience worked together to move two OT saints, Noah and Abraham, to act faithfully and thereby receive an inheritance. This inheritance is defined as the land of promise and “the city...whose builder and maker is God” in vv 9–10 (cf. Heb 11:15). Hence Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., stresses that the inheritance of Heb 11:15 refers to a “firm possession of the land as Heb. 11:9 most assuredly asserts.”²⁴

²²Hodges, “Hebrews,” 802.

²³Referring also to this eternal promise as the land promise is Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 169.

²⁴Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 169. Noting the land promise as well, Dillow sees the meaning of Heb 11:7–9, 13 as the inheritance indicated in Heb 9:15: “It appears to have a similar meaning in Heb. 11:9, 13 when it is used of the land promises to the patriarchs. They

Noah acted in obedience by preparing “an ark for salvation” that physically saved his family from drowning in the flood. Thus he inherited a new world after the flood subsided. He is an example of how such obedience will allow faithful believers to receive an inheritance in the new world to come. The idea of inheritance as a reward to rule in the new world is what the Hebrew writer illustrated already through Christ at the beginning of the book (cf. 1:2–14). It appears that Noah was already a believer. Hence the phrase “heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” does not refer to his becoming a believer. Tanner also acknowledges this point and more:

This does not mean that his obedience gained him a righteous standing with God. Like Abraham, God’s righteousness could be secured only by faith (Gen 15:6). Genesis 6:9 bears witness that Noah was already a righteous man before he ever built the ark, and (like Enoch) he walked with God. So Noah already had the “righteousness according to faith.” But his faithful obedience in building the ark enabled him to also become an “heir,” that is, an inheritor. This same Greek word (*klēronomos*) was used in Heb 1:2 of Christ, the heir of all things. Furthermore use of this term (and related verbal form) in 6:12, 17 reminds us that Christians become heirs with Christ as a result of a life of enduring faith (cf. Titus 3:7). The idea of becoming an “heir” complements what the author had said about rewards in v 6 [i.e., Heb 11:6].²⁵

Lang also concludes,

This was not the imputed righteousness, but his own personal right practice. God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (Gen.

too were to remain faithful to the end of life, and in so doing, they entered into the rest and will one day possess the land. The inheritance should take the meaning it takes elsewhere in Hebrews—ownership of the millennial land of Canaan, the future reign of the servant kings, joint rulership with Messiah in the heavenly country, the millennial land of Palestine” (*Reign of the Servant Kings*, 83).

²⁵Tanner, “Hebrews,” 1080.

18:25). But so to act, so to walk with God, against the universal opposition, was proof of FAITH, faith further displayed by building the ark.²⁶

As Noah's faith manifested itself in obedience, so Abraham's faith did likewise, and he was rewarded with the "promise of the inheritance," not as an incentive to obey, but because he did obey.²⁷

Hodges captures the intent of the writer of Hebrews in using Abraham's faithfulness as an illustration to motivate his readers to obedience:

That the readers should look forward to "the world to come" and treat their present experience as a pilgrimage is a lesson enforced by the life of **Abraham**. This great patriarch lived **like a stranger** in a land **he would later receive as his inheritance**. So also would the readers inherit if they, like this forefather, kept **looking forward to the city with foundations**, a reference to the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21:2, 9-27).²⁸

To receive this inheritance (*klēronomia*) requires more than simply believing in Jesus Christ. Faithfulness is also necessary. By illustrating the obedience of Noah and Abraham, the writer, no doubt, wanted to emphasize a point to encourage the readers to act faithfully and not abandon their faith. Life deals everyone hard blows. It is at these times that we must look upon these faithful examples recorded for us and not lose heart, but persevere in order to inherit the promises in the world to come.

²⁶Lang, *Hebrews*, 213.

²⁷Bruce, *Hebrews*, 290, 292. Noah actually inherited the new world after the wicked were removed. Abraham, because of his faithful expectation of what lay ahead, will one day receive a world to come whose city is not made with human hands (Heb 11:10). Likewise, the readers of Hebrews would, if they remained faithful, receive the inheritance of "the world to come" (*ten oikoumenēn ten mellousan*, ebHI Heb 2:5). See Hodges, "Hebrews," 808.

²⁸Hodges, "Hebrews," 808.

VI. LOSING INHERITANCE DOES NOT MEAN LOSING ETERNAL LIFE

Hebrews 12:16-17 presents the account in Gen 27:34-41 where Esau lost his "blessing" of firstborn inheritance rights to his brother Jacob:

...lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

To attain this inheritance Esau had to remain faithful and not be persuaded by any temptation. Just because Esau lost his inheritance does not mean he lost eternal life (i.e., justification). The idea that one could lose eternal life goes against the whole tenor of Scripture (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40-47; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Rom 3:21-4:25; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rev 22:17), and against the message of the epistle. Nor does it fit the analogy of father and son used by the writer.

Abraham knew of the coming Seed, as his Savior, which is what he believed in order to be justified (see Gen 12:3; 15:6; 22:18; cf. John 8:56; Gal 3:16). So, it would be absurd to think that Esau, his grandson, did not know of this message. Whether Esau believed or rejected this message is not directly stated in Scripture. Yet it is highly probable that he believed this message, since throughout the epistle the writer consistently illustrates believers, not unbelievers, as those who could lose their inheritance by persistent disobedience.

Perhaps the writer wanted to illustrate that Esau's organic relationship as a son was analogous to his justification status. If this was the case, Esau did not lose his relationship as Isaac's son but only his father's blessing. This seems to be what the writer wanted to illustrate through this passage. That is, that he did not receive his blessings because of disobedience. As Erich Sauer concludes,

“Hebrews does not speak about the birthright of Esau in order to show the glories of the church but in order to give a warning...Doubtless, birthright is not identical with sonship. Esau remained Isaac’s son even after he had rejected his birthright. In fact, he received, in spite of his failure, a kind of secondary blessing (Gen. 27:38, 40b)... But nevertheless he suffered an immense loss.”²⁹ This inheritance is conditioned on faithful perseverance to the end as evidenced in the entire book of Hebrews.

We should all heed the writer’s advice in being careful *not to forfeit our future inheritance* called “rest” elsewhere (cf. Heb 4:1, 8-10; cf. Deut 3:18-20; 12:9-11)³⁰ and *not* follow Esau.

VII. CONCLUSION

After looking at each occurrence of the terms *kl̄eronomos*, *kl̄eronomeō*, and *kl̄eronomia* in the Book of Hebrews, it appears that they refer to believers who may or may not obtain future blessings associated with being Christ’s partners in the life to come. The warning passages do not warn of the forfeiture of justification, which is impossible, but rather of the loss of the inheritance of ruling with Christ. J. Dwight Pentecost says it this way:

These exhortations are coupled with warnings about what they would forfeit if they did not

²⁹ Erich Sauer, *In the Arena of Faith: A Call to a Consecrated Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 152-53. Concurring with Sauer, Dillow notes, “Esau forfeited his inheritance, but he was still Isaac’s son. He did not forfeit his relationship to his father. Furthermore, at the end of his life Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau regarding their future (Heb. 11:20)...A Christian can deny his inheritance rights. This should not come as a surprise because the inheritance in the OT could be forfeited through disobedience. This fact surely informed the New Testament writers! While this is not the same as losing one’s justification, the consequences for eternity are serious” (*Reign of the Servant Kings*, 69). Esau’s one-time example of forfeiting his birthright should not be pressed to imply the Hebrews could lose their future rewards by ceasing to follow Christ once, since the entire letter lays emphasis on remaining faithful to the end of one’s life by not abandoning the church.

³⁰ See Hodges, “Hebrews,” 788; Tanner, “Hebrews,” 1090.

continue to walk by faith in patient endurance—not the loss of salvation, but the loss of blessings [termed “inheritance”] that flow from that salvation.³¹

In Hebrews, to inherit Kingdom promises requires obedience. Therefore let us persevere in faithful obedience so that we may be privileged to rule with Christ in His Kingdom and to be partakers with Him of blessings unimaginable!

³¹ Pentecost, *Faith That Endures*, viii.