


From Father to Children: What an Inheritance!

A Meditation on Revelation 21:7

by Jason Van Vliet

The *new* heaven and the *new* earth... with the *new* Jerusalem as its spectacular centre-piece: what will it be like?

We already know some things for sure. There will be no more crying or pain in the new creation. If you have ever been up at 2AM with a baby who is cutting his first molars or if you have ever been in the hospital with someone who is dying of bone cancer, then you will understand, at least to some degree, what a blessing it will be to live in that new pain-free reality.



*The one who conquers will have
this heritage, and I will be his
God and he will be my son.
Revelation 21: 7*

Of course, curious people that we are, we can hardly hold ourselves back from asking more questions about the new heaven and the new earth. What will my resurrected body be like? What kind of task will I have on the new earth? What kind of animals will there be in the new creation? Many of our answers to these questions boil down to this: “We’ll just have to wait and see.”

Yet even if we cannot know everything about the new creation right now, one thing is clearly revealed in Revelation 21:7. It will be an *inheritance*. When that great voice from the throne says, “The one who conquers will have *this heritage*,” then he is referring back to what

he just said in verse 5, “Behold, I am making *all things* new.”

Describe the new creation as you wish. Call it glorious. Describe the New Jerusalem in all her purity and perfection. Sketch out how it glistens and sparkles. But in and through it, do not forget the voice of him who is seated on the throne who says, “All of this is an *inheritance*.”

This, in turn, leads to another intriguing, eschatological question: *why* does our heavenly Father call the new creation an inheritance? There is an unmistakable connection here to the Promised Land of Old Covenant. In Genesis 12, after Abram had passed through the land of Canaan, the LORD said to him, “To your offspring I will give this land” (v. 7). So, the land would be a gift.

Yes, but what *kind* of gift? The answer comes shortly thereafter in Genesis 15. You see, Abram wanted a son—not only to hold a bouncing baby boy in his arms (that, too, of course) but also to have a son who could be his heir. As it stood Eliezer of Damascus, his faithful servant, would be his heir, but Abram really wanted to pass down his inheritance *to a son* rather than to a servant (v. 2). Surely, we can all identify with that kind of longing.

Remarkably, then, the LORD promised him a son who would also be his heir (v. 4), and at the very same time he promised him an inheritance for that heir. The LORD said, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of the Ur of the Chaldeans to give you *this land to possess*” (v. 7). Here’s the remarkable thing: the word that the LORD chooses to say “possess” is exactly the same word that Abram had just finished using to describe Eliezer as *his heir*. In the original language the play on words is too obvious to

miss, and the point is abundantly clear: Abram and his offspring will receive the Promised Land not merely as a gift but as an inheritance. This truth is confirmed repeatedly throughout the Old Testament (Exod 32:13, Lev 20:24, Deut 4:21, Josh 1:6, etc).

So the Promised Land of the OT, which was received as an inheritance, foreshadows the new creation of eternity, which will also be received as an inheritance. But what difference does that make? Much in every way. For one thing, it puts our entire eschatological hope right within the Father-children relationship that God has graciously established with us in Christ. After all, immediately after describing the new creation as an inheritance the voice from the throne continues "... and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev 21:7).

And within that Father-children relationship, the inheritance is not only about the *what* but it's also about the *from whom*. In other words, inheritance has an *heirloom* quality about it. Let's say you receive a valuable painting worth \$5,000 as an inheritance from your earthly father when he dies. What should you think about when you see that painting hanging on your living wall? Do you simply see an object of art that is worth \$5,000? Or do you see a beautiful painting that is symbolic of your father's love for you and your appreciation for him? Hopefully it would be the latter.

Well, if that is true for an inheritance from an earthly father, how much should it not be true for the inheritance from our heavenly Father? Yes, it will be great to live on an earth that is free of death, crying, and pain. But what is even greater than that is that it will be a gift given to us by our Father. The entire angst-free and glory-filled new creation is one enormous inheritance from the eternal Abba to his unworthy adopted children. What an heirloom!

At the same time, viewing eternal glory through the lens of inheritance makes another difference. It makes grace appear even more gracious. Inheritance is never a paycheck. In fact, to even think about an inheritance along the lines of a paycheck is just fundamentally wrong. Why? If for no other reason than the obvious fact that in order to receive an inheritance, you first have to be an heir, and in order to become an heir, you don't clock in the hours. In order to become an heir, you don't rack up a repertoire of good deeds. On the contrary, to become an heir, you simply have to be a son or daughter of the one who is giving the inheritance.

How does that happen? There are just two ways. Either you become someone's child and heir by natural birth or by legal adoption. We know which one applies to us. As the apostle says in Romans 8 we have become God's children through the Spirit of adoption and "if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (v. 17). It also goes without saying that children are not adopted because of what they have accomplished but because of the gracious and free choice of the one who adopts them. In short, since we are God's children by grace, we are his heirs by grace, and the inheritance he gives us is also out of his grace. It's grace from alpha to omega.

Inheritance. It's an inspired and an inspiring word to keep in mind when we ask that all-intriguing question: "What will it really be like on the new heaven and new earth?"



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