

Ownership

Taking hold or letting go?

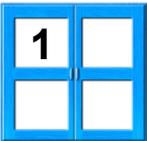
“Mine!” is one of the first one-word sentences a toddler learns. Ownership is a fundamental aspect of the human use of resources. What does the Scripture reveal about how ownership can be understood and practiced?



Pray for clarity to see whatever God wants to reveal to you during this study



“If I ruled the world...”
If you could change the world in an instant so that the assets of the world were distributed as you would like them to be, what would that distribution of ownership look like?



1

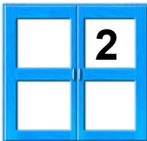
God’s Ownership

Read: Genesis 1: 1 – 25
Psalm 24: 1
Psalm 50: 12
Matthew 22: 15 – 22

What do these passages tell us about where ownership of the world rests?



What are the implications of this perspective on ownership?

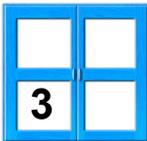


2

Human Responsibility

Read: Genesis 1: 26 – 30
Genesis 2: 15
Genesis 9: 1 – 7

What is the nature of human responsibility for, and human possession of, the earth?



3

Private Ownership

Numbers 26: 52 – 56 Details the allocation of land in the promised land.

What does this suggest about God’s economy?

N.B. In a later study we will look at the laws of Jubilee which were established to maintain an even distribution of the ownership of the land.

Exodus 20: 1 – 17 The 10 Commandments.
Possession is not quite 9 tenths of this law, but how many of the 10 Commandments relate to private ownership, and what do they tell us?

What can we conclude about private ownership in Old Testament Israel?



The Acts Church Community

Read: Acts 2: 42 – 47 and Acts 4: 32 – 37 about the life of the early church.

What do these passages tell us about the approach of the first Christians to ownership?

What was it that motivated this approach?

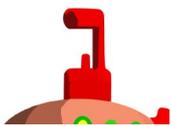
Was this approach to ownership a voluntary or compulsory one for individual Christians?

What does the approach of the early Christians to material possessions suggest to Christians today?

What are the difficulties and benefits of the lightness with which the early Christians held on-to possessions?



What has this study revealed about the nature of God?



What new thought or understanding has come to you during this study?



What issues, questions or practical implications for your local church, your church denomination, or the wider Christian church, are raised by this study?



(This section may be used for personal reflection alone or may be shared within the group)

In the space below list the major assets that you own.

In light of what the Bible reveals about ownership, how can you use these assets in a way that most reflects your faith in Christ?



Spend some time as a group praying over what you have discussed, asking God to bring into focus how you may respond to his Word in an ongoing way.



More Bible passages and discussion questions for further study:

Luke 4: 5 – 7 The 2nd temptation of Christ was, at least partly, to do with the question of who has ownership.

Luke 12: 48 A passage ostensibly about the responsibility of possessing the Gospel, but does it say something more general about human responsibility?

1 Kings 21: 1 – 16 The account of Naboth's Vineyard.
What does this passage say about the rights of private ownership?

Acts 14: 16 – 17 What does this passage say about the ongoing provision of God?

On the basis of your understanding of Scripture evaluate the following models of ownership:
feudalism – ownership in the hands of a ruling class
tribalism – ownership in large family units
capitalism – ownership in the hands of non-personal entities, private individuals and governments
socialism and communism – forms of public ownership or ownership by the state
communal living – shared ownership

What does the trend towards globalization (global companies, investment across national boundaries) mean for future patterns of ownership?

In New Zealand there is a decreasing rate of personal home ownership. In some parts of the world rental housing is lived in by the majority of people. What are the pros and cons of this trend?



Notes on some of the passages referred to in this study:

Matthew 22: 15 – 22 The Pharisees were a religious group in Israel who took very seriously the strict application of the religious laws of the Old Testament and added many other regulations to those laws; many of the Pharisees were opposed to Jesus. The Herodians were supporters of the ruling Herod family which gave allegiance to Rome.

Numbers 26: 52 – 56 Prior to these verses there are details of the census of the tribes of Israel among whom the land was to be divided. The latter part of this chapter goes on to refer to the Levites, the tribe who had responsibility for all things pertaining to worship, and later also for teaching and aspects of the administration of justice. The Levites did not receive an allocation of land but were supported through the tithes and offerings of the other tribes.

Exodus 20: 1 – 17 The 10 Commandments are also found in Deuteronomy 5; that version has some slight variations of wording along with more full explanations. These 10 commandments are principal among all of the laws and regulations that God gave his people to follow.

Luke 12: 48 comes in a passage (v.35 – 48) in which Jesus uses two parables to speak of the responsibility of those who know the Gospel to respond and use that knowledge wisely. In v.48 there is the statement that much is demanded from those to whom much is entrusted. While there is a strong reference in this passage to how we use the knowledge of the Gospel that has been entrusted to us, nevertheless it is not inappropriate to also consider the practical application of this verse to how we approach the use of the material blessings that we have.

1 Kings 21: 1 – 16 Jezreel was a city where King Ahab made his chief residence. Ahab was King of Israel (with its capital being in Samaria) at a time when there was a separation of Israel into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was a daughter of the King of Tyre; Ahab allowed Jezebel to establish Jezreel as a significant centre of worship of the god Baal and goddess Astarte.