

Numbers Chapter 27

Verses 1-11: "Zelophehad" had no sons, and under the traditional law his inheritance would, on his death, be transferred to his nearest relative, and thus the land would be kept within the family. The order of closeness is given (in verses 9 and 10; compare Lev. 25:48-49). His "daughters" challenged this accepted practice, pleading it would lead to their father's "name" being forgotten (verse 4), and their plea was accepted (verses 7-8). But this would also cause problems, for if they married they would take the family land with them under a new name, thus destroying their father's estate. So, chapter 36 deals with this issue. Their request demonstrated their faith in the divine promises of inheriting the land and occupying it very soon. They were not like their father, who evidently had sided with the skeptical spies, "but died in his own sin" (verse 3; compare 26:64-65).

The coming distribution of the land of Canaan presented a dilemma for the family of Zelophehad since he had no sons. His 5 daughters boldly asked that they inherit their father's name and his inheritance (verses 1-4). The Lord's decision that the daughters should receive his inheritance became the basis of a perpetual statute in Israel governing inheritances (verses 5-11).

Numbers 27:1 "Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these [are] the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah."

Who are mentioned among the families of Manasseh, under that of the Hopherites (Num. 26:33). Their father being dead, and they having no brethren, when they heard the land was to be divided among those that were numbered. And who were only males of twenty years old and upwards, were concerned, lest they should have no share in the division of the land. And therefore came, according to the Targum of Jonathan, to the house of judgment, or court of judicature. Where Moses, the princes, etc. were now sitting. The genealogy of Zelophehad is given.

"He was the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir. The son of Manasseh, the son of Joseph. By which it appears he was of the tribe of Manasseh, and of the fourth generation from him.

"And these are the names of his daughters, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. In the same order their names are given in (Num. 26:33). But in (Num. 36:11), it is a little altered. Noah and Tirzah change places, which Jarchi says shows they were upon an equality one with another.

There was a mention of these daughters in the last lesson. They would have been in the eighth generation from Jacob. It seems that Zelophehad had no sons.

Numbers 27:2 "And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, [by] the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,"

Who were now sitting in court, to hear and try causes brought before them. Here were Moses the chief magistrate, Eleazar the high priest, the princes of the several tribes, and the representatives of the whole congregation. Or it may be the seventy elders. A very grand and august assembly, before whom these ladies appeared. And from whom they might expect to have justice done them.

"By the door of the tabernacle of the congregation": Near to which this court was held, both for the convenience of the people, to apply to in case of need, when they came thither to worship. And of Moses, to seek the Lord in case of any difficulty that might arise, as now it did.

"Saying": As follows.

They have gone to those who speak for God in their nation. They stood by the door of the tabernacle to catch Moses and Eleazar, so they could have an audience.

Numbers 27:3 "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons."

"But died in his own sin": Zelophehad had not been involved in Korah's rebellion. Instead, he had died under God's judgment in the wilderness, like the rest of the faithless Exodus generation.

They explain that their father was not of the 250 leaders who came against Moses out in the wilderness. It seems, he died as all natural men do. He had no sons, so that would have left their family without any land to live on. There seems to be a problem for women to receive land with the others, and these daughters are here to speak of the injustice of that. Notice, they do not come in protest. They come to petition God.

Numbers 27:4 "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us [therefore] a possession among the brethren of our father."

Or be withdrawn, and his family lose their part and share on that account. This they thought was unreasonable. According to the Targum of Jonathan, to prevent the name of their father being lost, and his part in the land. Their motion was, that their mother might marry their father's brother, according to the law in (Deut. 25:5). With which Jarchi agrees; but it does not appear that that law was as yet in being. Though how otherwise the name of their father would be preserved, than by raising up seed in that way, is not easy to say. Except, as some think, it was done by a son of one of those heiresses. Or by the first son of every one of them, being called after the name of their grandfather Zelophehad. Or their mother's grandfather Hopher. Though the Jews commonly by the "name" understand no other than the "inheritance". Which seems to be confirmed by what follows.

"Give us therefore a possession among the brethren of our fathers": A part with their uncles, or their children. By which they express their faith that the children of Israel would inherit the land. Though as yet it was not conquered, nor even entered into. And might signify, as some think,

their concern to have a part and portion in the heavenly inheritance the land of Canaan was typical of. And if so, as Ainsworth observes, they may be considered as five wise virgins indeed.

This is a legitimate request. They are as much a family of Jacob as all the rest. Their father's name should not be left out of the division of land, just because he had no son. They are asking for the land, that would have been allotted to their father, to be allotted to them.

Numbers 27:5 "And Moses brought their cause before the LORD."

For it seems it was too difficult for this court to decide. And it devolving upon Moses, as the president of it. And who only could have recourse to God at all times, he carried it to him and consulted with him about it. This, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem say, was one of the four causes that came before Moses the prophet, that he solved according to the mind of the Lord, which he consulted. One was concerning the blasphemer (Lev. 24:11), the other concerning those defiled by the dead (Num. 9:8). The third concerning the Sabbath breaker (Num. 15:34). And the fourth was this (see notes on Lev. 24:12).

The wonderful thing about Moses is the fact that he goes to the LORD, with things he has never faced before. Moses wants to be fair, but he, also, wants to do it, as God would have him do it. Let God settle this matter, and Moses execute it.

Numbers 27:6 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

From off the mercy seat, where he consulted him, and from whence he promised to commune with him about any difficult matter that came before him (Exodus 25:22).

God never tired of Moses coming to him. We see that the LORD is right there with the answer.

Numbers 27:7 "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them."

What is just and reasonable.

"Thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren": Their uncles, or rather the children of them. For it is reasonable to suppose their father's brethren, or their uncles, were dead also. Or "in giving thou shall give"; which, according to Jarchi, denotes two parts or portions they should receive. The part of their father, who was of them that came out of Egypt, and his part with his brethren in the goods of Hephher. In the Misnah, from whence he seems to have taken it, it is; "the daughters of Zelophehad took three parts for inheritance. The part of their father, who was with them that came out of Egypt, and his part with his brethren in the goods of Hephher. And because he was the firstborn he was to take two parts." And though this strict command was given to Moses, yet it does not respect him personally, who lived not to enter into the land to see it divided. But him who should be his successor, and chief magistrate at the time of the division of it, which was Joshua. And of whom these ladies claimed their part, and had it (Joshua 17:3).

"And thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them": That is, that part which would have fallen to him by lot, had he been living. These they were to take, they standing in his place. And so the portion of the land he would have had was to be divided between these five daughters of his.

This speaks volumes of the fairness of God for them. It also shows that God is no respecter of persons. Males and females have the same opportunity with Him. They are all to receive of the inheritance.

Verses 8-11: The following is the order of inheritance: son, daughter, brother, paternal uncle, and closest relative in the family. This same order (with the exception of the daughter), was followed in Lev. 25:48-49), dealing with the various cases of redemption of the Land in the Jubilee year.

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."

The above affair occasioned a law to be made, in which all the people would have a concern. Among whom such cases should happen, as after related.

"Saying, if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. As in the above case of the daughters of Zelophehad. What was determined as to their particular case was made into a general law.

Each time a problem arises that was not covered in the Mosaic law in Leviticus, God settles the question, and sets a precedent for future decisions on this same matter. This is an additional law to add to the law of Leviticus. These daughters won the inheritance for themselves in this matter, but also won for future generations of women facing this same problem.

Numbers 27:9 "And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren."

Dies without any issue.

"Then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren": And the children descending from them. That is, if his father was dead. Otherwise, if he was living, he was to be preferred to them, according to the Jewish writers. Though, according to our law, no estate in fee simple ascends lineally, or goes from a son, who has made a purchase of it, to a father. In the Misnah it is said, the order of inheritances is thus, "if a man dies and has no son, then they cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. A son is before a daughter, and all that descend from the son are before the daughter. The daughter is before the brethren (of her father). And those that descend from the daughter are before the brethren. The brethren (of a man), are before his father's brethren (or his uncles). And they that descend from his brethren are before his father's brethren. This is the general rule, everyone that is before in the inheritance. Those that descend from him are before others, and a father is before all that descend from him."

Just because the man that dies has no children, does not mean that his inheritance would be overlooked. The next in line to receive his inheritance would be his brother.

Numbers 27:10 "And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren."

Nor any descendants from them.

"Then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren": That is, to his uncles, and to their children.

This is speaking of his uncle. Inheritance laws in our land should use this law in Numbers, when there is no will left.

Numbers 27:11 "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."

Nor any descending from them.

"Then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family": That is nearest of kin to him, though ever so remote. That is, of his father's family, not his mother's, which was no family.

"And he shall possess it": Here the Jews have a saying, that an Israelite is never without heirs.

"And it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment": A judicial law, that should ever remain firm, and sure, and unalterable.

"As the Lord commanded Moses:" And therefore no man could dispose of his estate or inheritance by will, otherwise than is set forth by this command.

Near kinsman would be the next inheritor. God has judged this to be fair. The man's inheritance is not to be overlooked, but dealt with in this manner. This is a commandment, the same as the law of Moses in Leviticus.

Verses 12-14: God reaffirmed that Moses could not enter the land of Canaan, although he was able to see it from Mt. Nebo, across from Jericho (see Deut. 32:49).

Numbers 27:12 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel."

After the covenant made with Israel in the plains of Moab, and the song delivered to them (Deut. 29:1).

"Get thee up to this Mount Abarim": Which was a range of mountains, so called from the passages by them over Jordan into the land of Canaan. One part of which was Nebo, and the top of that Pisgah, from whence Moses had the view of the good land here directed to (see Num. 33:47).

"And see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel": For though he was now one hundred and twenty years old, his eyes were not dim. He could see at a great distance. And the height of this hill gave him an advantage of taking a prospect of the land, a great way into it. And very probably his sight might be greatly strengthened and increased at this time by the Lord, for the purpose. This may be an emblem of that sight by faith, which believers have at times of the heavenly Canaan, and sometimes are favored with an enlarged one of it before their death.

This will be Moses' first actual view of the Promised Land. We must realize this land is a gift from God to His chosen people.

Numbers 27:13 "And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered."

Which was all he was admitted to. For to go into it and see it was not allowed him, though he importuned it (Deut. 3:25).

"Thou shalt be gathered unto thy people": As Aaron thy brother was gathered. Die as he did, in the same sudden, easy, quiet, and cheerful manner (see Num. 20:26).

It is time for Moses to go and be with the LORD. God will allow Moses to see the Promised Land, but not to go into the land. Moses disobeyed God at the Rock, when he struck the Rock, instead of speaking to it.

Deuteronomy 31:2 "And he said unto them, I [am] a hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me: Thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

Numbers 27:14 "For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that [is] the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin."

Both Moses and Aaron, which was the reason why they were not suffered to go into the land of Canaan. But died a little before the children of Israel came into it. What their sin was, called here a rebelling against the commandment of the Lord (see notes on Num. 20:12), and is next suggested.

"In the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me before their eyes": When the congregation of Israel strove against the Lord for want of water, they did not sanctify the Lord by believing in him. But expressed some degree of diffidence before the congregation about fetching water out of the rock. Or questioning whether the Lord would give it to such a rebellious people. Though they had his order for it.

"That is the water of Meribah in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin": So called to distinguish it from another Meribah, or water of strife, at Rephidim (Exodus 17:7).

We remember that Moses was angry with the people. At a previous time, God told Moses to strike the Rock and the water came forth. At this particular time, He told Moses to speak to the Rock. Moses, in his anger at the people, struck the Rock. We discovered that this Rock symbolized Jesus. He was crucified once for our sin. To strike the Rock the second time, was like crucifying the Lord Jesus the second time. When we ask in the name of Jesus, miracles happen. This is the principle Moses was to set here. His anger keeps him out of the Promised Land.

Verses 15-17: Moses' greatest concern was that Israel have a good leader who was like a shepherd. The Lord answered his request in the man Joshua.

Numbers 27:15 "And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying,"

Having requested to go into the land and see it, which was denied him. And perceiving he must quickly die, and being a man of a public spirit, and concerned for the welfare of the people of Israel, prays that a successor might be nominated and appointed.

Notice, Moses does not argue with the LORD's decision.

Numbers 27:16 "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,"

The Maker of the souls of men, called the spirits of all flesh. Or of corporeal beings, to distinguish them from the angels. Who, though spirits, are incorporeal. And who knows the different qualities of the souls of men, their powers, and capacities, and fitness for service. What gifts and talents they have for business. And who can bestow such upon them, which will qualify them for it.

"Set a man over the congregation": Meaning in his place and stead.

Moses is ready to go and be with the LORD. He recognizes the fact that the LORD is the God of the spirits of all flesh. He asks God to put his garment of authority on another.

Numbers 27:17 "Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd."

Which may lead them out, and go before them in war. And command them in battle and bring them in peace, having conquered their enemies. Or these phrases only mean the administration of civil government among them, and diligence and assiduity in it (see 2 Chron. 1:10). Unless it has

any peculiar respect to the leading the people of Israel out of the wilderness, and introducing them into the land of Canaan.

"That the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd": And so wander about, having none to guide them into proper pastures, or to protect them from beasts of prey. Which is to be in a most forlorn and distressed condition (see Matt. 9:36).

Moses had been the deliverer of these people. He had led them as the LORD directed him all these years. They need a leader. In some ways, Moses had been a type and shadow of that great Deliverer (Jesus Christ), who leads us to our Promised Land (heaven). Moses had an extremely hard task bringing such a rebellious people across the wilderness. He had fought the good fight, and was ready to be gathered to God. His thoughts were still of these people. He asked for God to give them a shepherd to lead them.

Numbers 27:18 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom [is] the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;"

"Lay thine hand upon him": Joshua already had the inner endowment for leadership. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit. This inner endowment was to be recognized by an external ceremony. Moses publicly laid his hands upon Joshua. This act signified the transfer of Moses' leadership to Joshua. The laying on of hands can accompany a dedication to an office (see Num. 8:10).

This Joshua you remember, was one of the two who brought the good report back, when they spied the Promised Land. He was full of faith and the Spirit of God. Moses was to lay his hand upon him, and transfer his authority to Joshua.

Numbers 27:19 "And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight."

Declaring before them all that he was his successor. And that they might be witnesses of what was said and done unto him. And receive and acknowledge him as such, and as having power and authority over them. Which it became them to submit unto.

"And give him a charge in their sight": To take care of the people committed to him. To rule them in the fear of God, and according to his laws. And to be of good courage, and go before the people and introduce them into the land of Canaan. Assuring him of the divine Presence and help, so that he need not fear any enemy whatever. Of this charge, and as confirmed by the Lord himself (see Deut. 31:7).

This must be done publicly, so the people and Eleazar will accept him in this position. The charge was instructions on what he was to do, to bring them to their Promised Land.

Numbers 27:20 "And thou shalt put [some] of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient."

“Put some of thine honor upon him”: Moses was to pass on some of the “honor” or “majesty” that he had to Joshua (see Joshua 3:7).

This is very similar to when Aaron removed his garment as high priest, and put it upon Eleazar. The congregation must recognize Joshua as their leader. Moses must shift some of his honor to Joshua. They must recognize Joshua as the replacement for Moses, if they are to follow him.

Numbers 27:21 "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask [counsel] for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, [both] he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation."

God spoke to Moses “face to face” (12:8), but often Moses received divine revelation through Aaron the high priest that would then be confirmed by the “Urim” and Thummim. In a similar manner, “Eleazar the priest” would be a mediator for Joshua (Lev. 8:8).

Moses had been able to communicate directly with God (12:8), but Joshua would receive the Word from the Lord through the High-Priest.

“Urim” (see note on Exodus 28:30), for this part of the High-Priest’s breastplate (Exodus 39:8-21), as a means of determining God’s will (compare Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6). Joshua discovered God’s will through these means, as opposed to Moses who spoke to God “face to face”.

God will speak to Joshua and to Eleazar, as He had spoken to Moses and Aaron. The camp will move under directions of God through Joshua. God will speak to the people through the Urim of the high priest's garment. Just as Moses had been above the high priest, Joshua would be above Eleazar.

Numbers 27:22 "And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation:"

Being faithful and obedient to him in all things, though ever so contrary to his own private interest and to that of his family.

"And he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation": As his successor, whom God had named and appointed as such.

This is just saying, that Moses dedicated Joshua for this calling, just as God had commanded him to do.

Numbers 27:23 "And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses."

Jarchi observes, that he did this cheerfully, and did more than he was commanded. For the Lord said to him, "lay thine hand", but he laid both his hands.

"And gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded Moses" (Num. 27:19). This is a clear proof that Moses was no imposter, since he sought not to aggrandize his family, or serve the interest of that. Nor did he in the least repine or murmur that the priesthood was given to his brother Aaron and sons. And now the civil government to his servant of the tribe of Ephraim. And as for his own posterity, they were only common Levites that waited upon the priests.

In the following Scripture from the New Testament, we see that the empowering to do the work God has called him to do, came from the laying on of the hands.

1 Timothy 4:14 "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

The gift given to Joshua, was the power to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Numbers Chapter 27 Questions

1. Who were these daughters that came to Moses?
2. Where did they appear for an audience?
3. What happened to their father?
4. What injustice are the daughters here to speak of to Moses?
5. What were they asking for?
6. How did Moses settle this?
7. What was God's answer to the daughters?
8. What law is added to the Levitical law, here?
9. When there is a problem not covered by the law, how is it handled?
10. Who does the inheritance belong to, if there is no son?
11. If there is no son or daughter, who inherits?
12. If there is no son, daughter, or brother, who inherits?
13. Where did God tell Moses to go?
14. What was Moses to see?
15. What will soon happen to Moses?

16. Why will Moses not be allowed to go into the Promised Land?
17. How old is Moses?
18. Moses' _____ keeps him out of the Promised Land.
19. Who does Moses call the LORD in verse 16?
20. What does Moses ask Him to do for the people?
21. Moses had been a type and shadow of whom?
22. Who does the LORD choose to replace Moses?
23. How is Moses to dedicate Joshua?
24. Why should Moses bring him before the people to dedicate him?
25. God will speak to the people through the _____ of the high priest.