

Numbers Chapter 36

Verses 1-13: Chapter 27 raised the question of the father's name dying out with his death, since he had no sons. Therefore, his land would pass to other members of his family. The rules of inheritance were altered for the daughters of Zelophehad so that they might inherit, because they had no brothers. But another problem arose concerning the right of daughters to inherit their fathers' land if they were to marry someone from another tribe. Then their land would eventually become the property of that other tribe, and permanently so after the Year of Jubilee (compare Lev. 25:10). To prevent this, Moses commanded that an heiress should marry within her father's tribe (verse 8). This would eliminate land transfers between tribes, and assure that "every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers".

The last chapters of the Book of Numbers deal with the land, its distribution, its extent, and its holiness. Thus Numbers anticipates the entrance into the Promised Land.

Numbers 36:1 "And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:"

The princes, as Aben Ezra. So the Septuagint version, which was the tribe of Manasseh, whose grandson Gilead was, as follows.

"The son of Machir, the son of Manasseh of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near": To the house of judgment, as the Targum of Jonathan. The Sanhedrim or court of judicature, consisting of the following persons.

"And spake before Moses": The Septuagint version adds, "and before Eleazar the priest", as in (Num. 27:2).

"And before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel": The princes of the several tribes. Or it may be rather the seventy elders.

The father in the verse above, could be a father or a grandfather. The father of the family spoke for his family. In this particular instance, the father speaking was from the tribe of Joseph which had come down through Manasseh, Machir, and Gilead.

Numbers 36:2 "And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters."

One in the name of the rest.

"The Lord commanded my lord": That is, Moses, whom they address in a very respectable manner, being the chief governor of the nation under God.

"To give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel": Which command may be seen, in (Num. 26:53).

"And my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother": Or kinsman, being of the same tribe.

"Unto his daughters": Who sued for it, and upon Moses's consulting the Lord about it. It was ordered they should have it (Num. 27:1). And which these princes observed was likely to be attended with the following inconvenience.

We remember, that Zelophehad had no sons. The matter of the inheritance for the daughters had already come up, and the LORD told Moses the daughters were to inherit the same as the men.

Numbers 36:3 "And if they be married to any of the sons of the [other] tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance."

Which was not an unreasonable supposition, and perhaps was judged very probable and likely. If some method was not taken to prevent it. Which they might conclude from the application of some young men of the other tribes unto them.

"Then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received": For the inheritance given unto them would of course, the above being the case, descend to their sons. And whose fathers being of other tribes, it would be fixed there.

"So shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance": Which gave them some concern. For though this was no personal injury to them, nor any detriment to their families and estates, yet, as it was a lessening of their tribe. And they were uneasy about it. And the rather they might be, since half their tribe was to settle on that side Jordan, where they now were. And now all this, the suit of the daughters of Zelophehad for their father's inheritance, which was granted them. The address of young men to them as heiresses. The concern of the heads of the tribe of Manasseh on this account. All this, I say, being before they entered into the land, or it was conquered by them. Or divided to them by inheritance, show their strong faith and assurance that they should possess it.

The daughters of Zelophehad had inherited a parcel of land, the same as the sons of each of the other tribes. The question is, what happens if they marry someone of another tribe? Do they keep their inheritance and take into the marriage with them, or does it go back to the tribe they received it from?

Numbers 36:4 "And when the jubilee of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

At which time inheritances were to be restored to the original proprietors of them. Yet this would be of no service in the present case, but rather the contrary. Since it would fix the inheritances of these daughters in another tribe or in other tribes into which they should marry. And so Aben Ezra and Jarchi interpret it, "though" there shall be a jubilee, that will be of no advantage. It will not remedy this inconvenience. For;

"Then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received": It being one principal part of the business of the jubilee year to settle the inheritances of every tribe. And these daughters being married into another tribe, of consequence their inheritance would be placed there. Or should it be sold by their husbands, or their sons, at the year of jubilee it would be restored to them as of such a tribe.

"So shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers": And thereby be a lessening of it. And every tribe being ambitious of preserving and increasing its grandeur. This affair sensibly affected the heads of this tribe.

The jubilee could not transfer this land to the husband of this daughter. At jubilee, land went back to its original owner. The land of the tribe of Manasseh must stay in the hands of the descendants of Manasseh. This land would be the daughters' ancestors land forever. It appears, that even though jubilee was taught, it was never really practiced, even in Israel.

Numbers 36:5 "And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well."

Even all the tribes of Israel, whom the following law concerned, as well as the tribe of Manasseh.

"According to the word of the Lord": Whom no doubt he consulted on this occasion, as he did when the daughters of Zelophehad applied unto him about the inheritance of their father.

"Saying, the tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well": In showing such a concern for the welfare of their tribe. The consideration of which would be of service to them all, and therefore was worthy of notice. Aben Ezra observes, that the heads of the fathers spoke for the sake of every tribe. What was for the good of them all, and therefore was well spoken.

Now we see the answer that Moses gave them. Moses is saying, that it was best to bring this up before it ever happened.

Numbers 36:6 "This [is] the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry."

Concerning this affair relative to them. The Targum of Jonathan paraphrases the words, "not for the generations that rise up after the division of the land, but for the daughters of Zelophehad." As if this order only respected them, or what might happen before the land was divided, but not after. And this is the general opinion of the Jewish writers. But it seems, that as the following

law not only concerns them, but all heiresses. So all such after as well as before the division of the land, since the reason of it holds good after as before.

"Saying, let them marry to whom they think best": Whom they like best, who are most acceptable to them. As it was reasonable they should, and not have such forced upon them, whose persons were disagreeable to them.

"Only into the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry": They were to marry not only such as were of the tribe of Manasseh, but of their father's family in that tribe. They could only marry into the family of the Hephherites (see Num. 26:32).

This would solve the problem. If they married within their own tribe, the land would remain with the tribe of Manasseh.

Numbers 36:7 "So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers."

Because it was God's gift to each tribe, property could not be sold ("remove"), between tribes. This law stands in the background of the story of Ahab and Naboth. Naboth understood this principle, but Ahab sought to violate it (1 Kings 21:3).

The inheritance of the land was given to that particular tribe for all generations. They must not start changing land from one tribe to the other. The heritage is for generations to come. If they start changing it around, there will be no heritage for future generations.

Numbers 36:8 "And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers."

For the same law which gave the daughters of Zelophehad right to their father's inheritance, gave every other daughter in Israel a right to inherit where there were no sons (Num. 27:8). And every such daughter, according to this law.

"Shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father": Marry into her father's tribe and family": By which it appears that such who were not heiresses might marry persons of another family, and even of another tribe.

"That the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers": Of his father's brethren, or of those that are near akin to him.

This is a general rule to keep the inheritance together for the future generations. The only answer to this problem, is for her to choose a husband of her own tribe.

Numbers 36:9 "Neither shall the inheritance remove from [one] tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance."

Which was one end of the year of jubilee, but that did not sufficiently secure it without this law, as this case shows.

"But every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance": The chief view of which was, that it might clearly appear of what tribe and family the Messiah sprang when he came.

The land ownership must stay within the tribe it began with. Each tribe is like a nation unto themselves. They must stay with the inheritance God gave them from the beginning.

Verses 10-12: The Book of Numbers begins by discussing the obedience of the people (chapters 1-10), but much of the book speaks of Israel's disobedience, which led to the death of an entire generation in the wilderness. The book ends on a positive note, as the "daughters of Zelophehad" obeyed the words of Moses and "married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph".

Numbers 36:10 "Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad:"

They married into, the family of their father's tribe, according to the following account.

The last word on these matters was the LORD. The Lord spoke through Moses to these daughters. The daughters did exactly as Moses had told them.

Numbers 36:11 "For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons:"

The names of the daughters of Zelophehad, and the same as in (Num. 26:33). Only the order a little varied, Tirzah and Noah here changing places. There they are according to their birth, here they are according to their marriage, as Aben Ezra thinks. Though Jarchi is of opinion, that being thus differently placed shows that they were equal to one another, and one was not preferred to the other. These;

"Were married unto their father's brother's sons": So that they were first cousins.

They married their cousins. And the inheritance remained in their tribe. The names above are the names of Zelophehad's daughters.

Numbers 36:12 "[And] they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father."

"Married into the families ... Manasseh": The daughters of Zelophehad exemplified the obedience to God's commandments that should have been practiced by all of Israel. Their

inheritance was a direct result of their obedience to the Lord, a basic lesson stressed throughout the whole book of Numbers.

They obeyed the will of God in this matter, and the inheritance stayed in the tribe of Manasseh of Joseph.

Numbers 36:13 "These [are] the commandments and the judgments, which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan [near] Jericho."

The judicial laws concerning the division of the land of Canaan, the case of inheritances in it, and the cities of refuge.

"Which the Lord commanded by, the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel, in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho": Where the Israelites had been ever since they were first observed by Balak king of Moab. And where the various things had been done recorded in the preceding chapters from that time.

The Lord was giving these people some last minute instructions, before the entering in of the Promised Land, here at Jericho. We must remember that Moses would not go into the land with them. He would die on the eastern side of Jordan.

Numbers Chapter 36 Questions

1. Who came to speak to Moses in verse 1?
2. Who were the fathers?
3. What tribe was the father from?
4. The LORD had commanded to give the land for an inheritance by lot to whom?
5. Who would receive the inheritance of Zelophehad?
6. Why did they receive the inheritance?
7. Who had decided, they would receive the inheritance?
8. What is the question in verse 3?
9. The jubilee could not transfer this inheritance of land to whom?
10. The land of the tribe of Manasseh must stay in whose hands?
11. What is Moses saying in verse 5?

12. Who were the only ones they could marry?
13. The inheritance of land was given to a tribe for all _____.
14. Why was this to be practiced?
15. What did the daughters of Zelophehad do?