

Numbers 27:1-23

The Daughters of Zelophehad: A Case for Justice (Numbers 27:1-11)

In this chapter, we are introduced to the five courageous daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Their father had died in the wilderness, and he had no sons. According to the customs of the time, land inheritance was passed down through male descendants. This meant that their father's name and legacy would vanish, as his land would not be passed on within his family line.

Refusing to accept this injustice, these daughters boldly approached Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and the entire assembly at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. They said, “Why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives” (v. 4).

Moses, recognizing the significance of their request, took the matter directly to the Lord. God's response was clear: “The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father’s relatives and give their father’s inheritance to them” (v. 7).

This moment is pivotal. It shows God’s heart for justice and fairness, even within the structures of ancient customs. The Lord not only affirmed the daughters' plea but also established a new law: if a man dies without a son, his inheritance should go to his daughter. If there are no daughters, it should pass to his brothers, then to his uncles, and finally to the nearest relative.

Personal Application: The daughters of Zelophehad teach us the power of courage, faith, and advocacy. They didn’t settle for cultural norms that were unjust. Instead, they respectfully presented their case, trusting that God is a righteous judge. Their story encourages us to speak up for what is right, even when it’s counter-cultural. When faced with injustice, whether in our personal lives, workplaces, or society, we should bring our concerns before God, trusting in His wisdom and justice.

Moses Prepares for Leadership Transition (Numbers 27:12-23)

After addressing the matter of inheritance, the scene shifts dramatically. God instructs Moses to ascend Mount Abarim to view the Promised Land. Although Moses had faithfully led Israel for decades, he would not enter the land because of his earlier disobedience at the waters of Meribah, where he misrepresented God’s holiness by striking the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded (v. 14).

Imagine the bittersweet emotions Moses must have felt—seeing the land he had longed for, yet knowing he wouldn't step into it. However, Moses' response is remarkable. Instead of focusing on his personal loss, he intercedes for the people once again:

“May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 16-17).

God answers Moses’ prayer by appointing Joshua, the son of Nun, as his successor. Joshua had proven himself as a man of faith, courage, and leadership, having served closely with Moses for years. God instructs Moses to lay hands on Joshua, commissioning him publicly in the presence of Eleazar the priest and the entire congregation. This act symbolizes the transfer of authority and God’s chosen leadership.

Joshua would seek guidance from God through Eleazar and the Urim (sacred lots used to discern God’s will), highlighting a shift from Moses’ direct communication with God to a more mediated leadership style.

Personal Application: Moses’ humility and concern for the people over his personal ambitions are inspiring. He teaches us the importance of servant leadership—leading not for personal gain but for the well-being of others. His willingness to prepare Joshua shows the value of mentorship and succession planning. Whether in our families, workplaces, or communities, we should be intentional about raising up others, investing in future leaders, and ensuring continuity.

Joshua’s appointment also reminds us that God equips those He calls. Even if we feel inadequate, like Joshua might have, God’s Spirit empowers us to fulfill our purpose. When stepping into new roles or responsibilities, we can find confidence not in our abilities but in God’s calling and provision.

Final Thoughts: Numbers 27 highlights God’s justice, the courage to advocate for what is right, the humility of leadership, and the importance of preparing the next generation. It challenges us to trust God’s wisdom, stand up for justice, and invest in the lives of others with faith and humility.