

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 27:1-11
“Zelophehad's Daughters”

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Verses 1-4

The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. They came forward² and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said,³ “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah’s followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons.⁴ Why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives.”

- Zelophehad was a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh. He had died in the wilderness wanderings as part of the generation which had refused to trust God and invade the Promised Land. He had not been part of Korah's rebellion (see Numbers 16). When he died he had no sons, only five daughters.
- Zelophehad's daughters came to Moses at the tent of meeting requesting that the portion of the yet to be taken Promised Land which would have gone to their brothers, if they had only had brothers, be given to them. This was a remarkable request because, in ancient times, women could not inherit.

Verses 5-7

So Moses brought their case before the LORD,⁶ and the LORD said to him,⁷ “What Zelophehad’s daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father’s relatives and give their father’s inheritance to them.

- Moses, being a just man saw the sense in the argument these women presented. However, he realized that this decision would set legal precedence. So he took the matter to YHWH.
- God recognized the right of these women and ordered that they should be given their Father's portion.

Verses 8-11

“Say to the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter.’⁹ If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers.¹⁰ If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers.¹¹ If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to have the force of law for the Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.”

- It is established that a man's inheritance will be passed to his nearest relative, even if they are women. This is to protect the man's family after his death.
- The rule is given the weight of law for all time.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Zelophehad's Daughters*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)