

A Question of Inheritance; Joshua Appointed as Israel's New Leader

Numbers 27

Numbers 27 - “Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.² And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: ³ “Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. ⁴ Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father’s brothers. ⁵ So Moses brought their case before the LORD.

⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁷ “The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father’s brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. ⁸ And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. ⁹ If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ¹⁰ If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. ¹¹ And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.’” And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

¹² Now the LORD said to Moses: “Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. ¹³ And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. ¹⁴ For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

¹⁵ Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: ¹⁶ “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, ¹⁷ who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”

¹⁸ And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; ¹⁹ set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. ²⁰ And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. ²¹ He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.”

²² So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. ²³ And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.”

Background Notes

The second census of Israel in Numbers 26 was taken after 38 years of wandering in the wilderness, and after the former generation had died. In this second numbering, the new generation of men twenty years and older totaled 601,730

(Numbers 26:51). When the land of Canaan was conquered, each tribal area was to be subdivided based on the adult **males** in the tribe: “*To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names*” (26:53).

A logical question came up in the family of Zelophehad, who was of the tribe of Manasseh. Zelophehad had no sons, but he had five daughters. The five daughters came to Moses and Eleazar, the priest, and all the elders of Israel at the Tabernacle, and said, “*Our father died in the wilderness.... and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers*” (27:3-4)

Notice that Moses didn’t respond, “Well, girls, I’m so sorry, but property is only for men. God favors men over women. Too bad. You lose!” A lot of people today label God as a “male chauvinist”! – but Moses didn’t! Moses did the right thing. He brought the case to the Lord - and I hope that’s what we would have done as well. The Lord told Moses, “*The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them*”(v7).

So this decision became law in Israel from that point on. If a man had no sons, the inheritance went to his daughters. If a man had no children, the inheritance went to the man’s brothers. If a man had no brothers, the inheritance went to the man’s uncles, and if a man had no uncles, the inheritance went to his next of kin.

Doctrinal Points

1. God listens to the logic of His people.

When Zelophehad’s daughters came to Moses, they used a very logical argument. “Look, the Law and Jewish tradition say that sons inherit their father’s property, but our father didn’t have any sons. The Law doesn’t say that daughters can’t inherit property, and we know that God is good and fair. Our father should not be disqualified from having his family share in the inheritance in the Promised Land just because he had no sons!” They went on to say that their father had not participated in Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16), but he had died in the wilderness, just like everyone else who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness. So it seemed logical that his daughters should be allotted the property that would have been the family inheritance if their father had had sons. So Moses told them he would take their case before the Lord.

That’s always a good policy in decision-making: take the situation to the Lord! The Lord listened to the logic of Zelophehad’s daughters: “*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them."*

Here’s an illustration from my life about how the Lord listens to the logic of His people. About thirty years ago, I left my job as a research engineer to work with the Young Life ministry. The Lord definitely opened the doors for me to serve Him in that ministry, even though I had no theological training. Up to this point my educational background had been entirely in science and engineering. Now, however, students were asking me philosophical and theological questions that I couldn’t answer properly, so it seemed logical to me that I should get some theological training. If I were to get into deeper Bible

study and teaching, I knew that I needed to study the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. I could have studied on my own, without going to seminary, but it seemed logical that seminary would be the best way to proceed. So I talked to the Lord about it. He listened to my logic and He answered in a most amazing and dramatic way. A Christian man with whom I had a part-time job came to me one day and told me that he thought that I should go to seminary - and if I did, he would pay my whole way! And he did just that! The Lord listened to the logic of my situation, and He answered my prayer. And He can do that for you, too!

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*” (*Matthew 7:7*). Notice, in the context of this statement, the Lord says that God listens to the **logic** of the prayer requests. Verses 8-11: “*For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*” The Lord listens to the logic of His people.

2. The Lord provides and prepares new leaders for His people.

The Lord told Moses that he was not going to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land because of his irreverence and disobedience at the Waters of Meribah (v18-23). But God would not leave His people without a leader, and He had selected Joshua as Israel’s new leader. Notice that Joshua was **not** chosen by a popularity contest. He was **not** chosen by running a political campaign and getting himself elected as leader! No, **God designated Joshua** as the next leader.

Before Moses died, God instructed Moses to delegate some of his authority to Joshua (v20). Joshua was to lead of God’s chosen people with counsel from Aaron’s son, Eleazar, the new high priest, and the use of the Urim (v21). The Urim, along with Thummim, were probably precious stones that were used by the high priest to help determine decisions before the Lord (see Exodus 28).

Joshua was **provided** by God – and he was **prepared** by God. Joshua had defeated the Amalekites back in Exodus 17. He was with Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24. Joshua was one of the two faithful spies in Numbers 13. Joshua had assisted Moses as his “servant.” So Joshua didn’t just appear out of the nowhere! He was provided by God, and he was prepared by God for the job.

God provides and prepares new leaders today as well. Every local church and ministry is only one generation from extinction, so this doctrinal point is important. When one of God’s leaders moves on, God already has a new leader prepared. Now it’s up to God’s people to recognize the new leader whom God has provided, and those who are spiritual will recognize and support God’s new, chosen leaders. God provides and prepares new leaders.

Practical Application

Like Moses, let's have a good "transition attitude."

When God told Moses that he wouldn't be allowed to enter the Promised Land, Moses didn't pout, or complain, or become bitter. He didn't complain about God's plan, even though, over many years, he had fulfilled the difficult job of leading God's people out of Egypt and through the wilderness. On many occasions, the people of Israel had misunderstood him, and wrongly criticized him, and insulted him, and bad-mouthed him.

Moses had a good attitude. He wanted God, who knows everyone, to appoint the new leader - and God designated Joshua. Notice that Moses was not jealous of Joshua, and he didn't resent having to relinquish the leadership position. He was willing to train Joshua by delegating some of his authority ahead of time, so Joshua would be prepared to take up the entire responsibility as leader. Moses did all that the Lord asked him to do for the transition.

Moses obeyed God with a good attitude. Unfortunately, when leadership transitions take place in churches or in ministries today, the transition is not always smooth. Often older leaders don't want to relinquish their positions, and they're reluctant to step aside for the younger leaders whom **God** is raising up! They haven't trained younger leaders to take up the responsibility of leading the church. Sadly, older leaders may become resentful and bitter, and even hold grudges.

Although there are many factors to be considered when transitions take place, let's at least learn this lesson. Like Moses, **let's have a good "transition attitude"!**