

Numbers 27 (1-11) – *The Faith of the Forgotten*

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad may seem like an insignificant piece of Old Testament history. But what they mean in the history of Israel, and in the history of redemption, and the history of you, is something to praise God for. God used them to show you how you are included.

This is a message for everyone who will believe. But it might have a special place in the hearts of the orphans, the widows, those in prison, the forsaken and the forgotten. Others might forget you, or forsake you, call you a loser, or wish you weren't part of their lives. But not God. He is faithful to you.

The book of Numbers is all about numbers; it concerns the numbering of the people. And reading all this detailed numbering may seem quite boring and tedious to you. That is, until you start to understand the meaning of all this. Then these numbers take on a whole new meaning for you.

There are two numberings, two censuses, in the book of Numbers. Chapter 1 gives us the first census, and the story of those people is from chapter 1 through to chapter 25. This census was counting everybody who was 20 years old and older. It was the first generation that had come out of the land of Egypt, having been delivered from the bondage of slavery. And God promised the people that they were going to be brought into a new land of abundance. So, this became known as the Promised Land.

The Promised Land was the inheritance of God's people. All they had to do was go in and possess it, by faith. They needed faith, because there were great obstacles to overcome. But this was their chance to show faith in God's promise as God showed his faithfulness in keeping his promise. But as we read the story of this first generation, we discover that the people didn't have faith in God's promise; they were afraid to enter the Promised Land. So, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and God told them that none would enter, except for Joshua and Caleb, who did have faith in God's promise. They would lead the next generation into the Promised Land.

Then, in chapter 26, we see a new census being taken. This was the next generation, who had been under 20 years old or not born yet in the first census. These were the people who were going to possess the Promised Land. And their story is told in chapters 27-36. The tribes, and the clans of each tribe, each family, were numbered. They were being numbered because God was going to give each family a piece of the Promised Land. That meant each family was a part of this inheritance. And God apportioned to each tribe and to each clan the specific boundaries that they were to inherit.

Now, reading the genealogies and the land allotment passages are not very exciting to us. And you might wonder why they are included. But back then, these things were very important. They meant a lot. And even today, they have importance. Think about how the children of a wealthy person are very interested to know who is going to inherit what when the will is read. Now think of how important this was to these people.

Remember that this land allotment concerned the Promised Land, which the people had not yet possessed, but by faith were going to possess. God's people are God's treasured possession. They all matter. God possessed the people, and the people possessed the land. And it was vitally important that all of the people possessed some of the land. Because it couldn't be a Promised Land for you if you didn't have some part of that land promised to you. But the custom was that when a man died, his possessions would be inherited by his sons. And as of this time, there was no such rule or provision for a man who had no sons, but only a daughter or daughters.

So, here were the daughters of Zelophehad. What was going to happen to them? Their father had died, and it wasn't in the rebellion we read about in Numbers 16. But even though Zelophehad had not been part of Korah's rebellion, he still had no sons. What would happen to his land? To THEIR part of the land? So, they approached Moses and the leaders. And they staked their claim. Vs.4 – *Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers.* And God told Moses to *transfer the inheritance of their father to them.* And then

this becomes the rule for every case where the father has no son. People were not left out of the promise. Furthermore, as you see in vs.8-11, rules were established for other out of the ordinary cases.

However, another situation arose with these daughters of Zelophehad. We read about this in Numbers 36. The inheritance was supposed to be perpetual, which is to say, permanent. And even if you fell on hard times, and you had to sell some of your land, every 50th year was a year of jubilee, and you would get your land back. That way, you could not ultimately lose your inheritance once you came into possession of it. But if the daughters of Zelophehad married outside their tribe, then, according to the law, their inheritance would pass on to their husbands' tribe. As Numbers 36:3 says – *if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance. And this would not be remedied by the year of jubilee. As Numbers 36:4 says – And when the jubilee of the people of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry, and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.*"

So, what was to be done? The answer is given in Numbers 36:6-7 – *This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: 'Let them marry whom they think best, only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And Numbers 36:10 says – The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD commanded Moses. So, the laws of inheritance were given. If there are no sons, it goes to the daughters, who must marry within their tribe.*

Now, here we need to ask and answer a question. Why is the second part of the story of the daughters of Zelophehad given in Numbers 36, at the end of the book, instead of right after the first part of their story in Numbers 27:1-11? Well, it is because the daughters of Zelophehad were an example of what it would take to enter and enjoy the Promised Land. Their story was used

like bookends to demonstrate why this second generation would enter the Promised Land when the first generation didn't. It was because of faith.

In the first part of their story, we see that these women went right to where Moses and Eleazar the priest and the chiefs of the congregation were, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. It took courage, and determination. It took faith. And they pleaded their case in public. They pleaded for their family name, and their right to a piece of the Promised Land. They weren't being selfish. They weren't just thinking of themselves. They were thinking of their family's future and God's promise. They interceded for the name and legacy of their dead father. They weren't going to let their family name get blotted out just because their father had no sons. They knew what was right. They asked what was right. They got what was right.

Then in the second part of their story, you see that they obey God's commands to marry within the tribe. They believe in the promise of God, not just to obtain their inheritance while they lived, but also to secure their inheritance for the future. They believed God's promise, they claimed their possession, they stayed obedient, and they secured their families future. And they accomplished far more than that. Because of their faith, they changed the course of history for countless others. They gave a voice to those who might otherwise have been forgotten. This is why their story is used as bookends for the faithful generation who entered the Promised Land.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad points to another who secured the eternal inheritance of those who had no godly inheritance. Jesus Christ, who on the cross, in his humanity, for our sake, cried out the words of Psalm 22:1 – *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Jesus identified with the groanings of you and me in our sin, as he took the penalty of our sin. But by crying out the first verse of Psalm 22, Jesus was also identifying with all of Psalm 22, which goes from tragedy to triumph. Listen to Psalm 22:27 – *All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.* Jesus secured the eternal future of all his people everywhere. Listen to what is said of Jesus in Psalm 2:7-8 – *You are*

my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

You are not forsaken, and you are not forgotten. Christ has paid the price for your sin, and Christ has secured your eternal inheritance. And it doesn't matter who you are, if you believe, then you belong! Galatians 3:28 says – *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

Hear the prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:16-18 – *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. You are God's possession, his inheritance!*

You might have thought that you aren't good enough to be a child of God, but all it takes is faith in God's promise of redemption through Jesus Christ! Believe what it says in 1 Peter 2:9-10 – *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* What some call refuse God calls royal.

Your inheritance isn't lost. It was given by God. And it is guarded by God. 1 Peter 1:3-5 says – *God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith.* Let your future hope give you a present faith.

Finally, as Acts 20:32 says – *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Amen.*