

The Daughters of Zelophehad

- A. Zelophehad was of the tribe of Manasseh, and had no sons. **NUM 26:33-34.**
1. The promised inheritance of Canaan was divided by lot among the tribes of Israel.
 - a. The tribal lands were basically provinces of the kingdom to be preserved as such in each tribe.
 - b. The family name was to be perpetuated in estates. **NUM 26:52-56.**
 2. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh chose their inheritance on the early side of Jordan. **NUM 34:13-15.**
 3. Half of the tribe of Manasseh entered Canaan and received their inheritance there.
 4. Because the inheritance of a family was to pass to the son(s) upon the death of the father (sons being the only ones included in the census, **NUM 26**), the question of Zelophehad's family share came up. **NUM 27:1-4.**
 - a. Would his family inheritance be swallowed up by other families or some from another tribe?
 - b. Human nature being what it is, Zelophehad's lands could look like ripe pickings to men who might like to swell their own estates.
 - c. Manasseh being only a half tribe in Canaan, this represented a potentially hurtful loss of allotment.
 - d. Their appeal is rooted in faith that God would surely bring His people into Canaan to inherit it as promised. Difficult circumstances of this world are always best handled by a strong faith in God's promises. **1JO 5:4.**
 - e. They were not pressing self-willed ideas but the claims and promises of God to Israel and the logical implications of a circumstance like theirs.
 - f. These were five wise virgins who took their future seriously, planned accordingly, and pressed the matter upon Joshua/Jesus. **JOS 17:3-4 c/w MAT 25:4-10.**
 5. Solomon later praised as virtuous a godly woman who assessed and purchased land because it would be good for the family. **PRO 31:10-16.**
 6. Spiritual daughters of Abraham may be thankful that their inheritance in Christ is as secure as any man's in Christ and does not depend on earthly ties. **1PE 3:1-5; GAL 3:28-29.**
- B. Moses was not indifferent to their appeal and since it was not something addressed in his previous directives concerning the inheritance in Canaan, he took this difficult matter before the LORD. **NUM 27:5 c/w PSA 82:1-3.**
1. The law of levirate marriage was not given until **DEU 25:5-6** and likely would not have even applied in this case.
 2. There were three other difficult cases which Moses brought before the LORD for judgment:
 - a. the blasphemer. **LEV 24:11-12.**
 - b. someone defiled by the dead. **NUM 9:6-8.**
 - c. the sabbath-breaker. **NUM 15:32-35.**
 3. This would have been done at the mercy-seat. **EXO 25:21-22.**
 - a. Christ is our mercy-seat / propitiation between God's Law which condemns us and God. The same word translated as "mercyseat" in **HEB 9:5** is rendered "propitiation" in **ROM 3:25.**
 - b. The most difficult matters of life are processed best through an understanding of our unworthy salvation by Jesus Christ declared by His Spirit in the word. **HEB 12:22-25; JAM 2:12-13; EPH 4:31-5:2.**
 - c. Our best recourse in matters of solemn judgment is what is written, especially under the dominion of N.T. revelation. **1CO 5:11-13; 7:25; JAM 3:17.**

- d. Judgment, mercy and faith are companions, not enemies. **MAT 23:23.**
 4. Ruth was another case of a woman (a Moabitess) in Israel who was not treated with indifference relative to inheritance. **RUTH 4:5.**
 5. God sided with the ladies because their cause was right. **NUM 27:7.**
 6. This inquiry resulted in an additional law to be made to Israel's civil code which extended to the fifth degree. **NUM 27:7-11.**
 7. Interestingly, nothing was said about the lands being appropriated by the state in such cases.
- C. This law raised another question in **NUM 36:1-4.** What happens if the daughters marry into another tribe and so reduce some of Manasseh's allotment?
1. Based upon the word of God, Moses ordered further judgment. **NUM 36:5-13.**
 2. The daughters could "...marry to whom they think best..." but within certain boundaries. **NUM 36:6.**
 3. Paul later instructed (**1CO 7**) that single men and women were at liberty to remain single and celibate, that it was not wrong to desire marriage, and that a widow "...is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (**1CO 7:39**). She may not abandon faith just so she can marry.
 - a. Marriage must be only to someone of the opposite sex, of age, not a close blood relative and unattached maritally to honor the "one man and one woman" directive of Jesus Christ. **MAT 19:4-6.**
 - b. These are the bare minimum requirements for lawful marriage but there are many other factors for folks to consider before taking the plunge.
 4. Mind, though, that in both testaments, the woman is not expected to have no say in the matter. Rebekah had power to decide for herself. **GEN 24:57-58.**
- D. Note that Israel's law did not all come at Sinai but was delivered progressively until their entrance and securing of Canaan.
1. Similarly, the Holy Spirit led the apostles for about forty years. **ACT 11:17-18; 15:19-20.**
 2. "Here was an instance of progressive legislation (see also Exo 18:27) in Israel, the enactments made being suggested by circumstances. But it is deserving of special notice that those additions to, or modifications of, the law were confined to civil affairs; while the slightest change was inadmissible in the laws relating to worship or the maintenance of religion." (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary on NUM 36:5-12)
- E. This case may encourage us to accept God's providences while exercising our own prudence within the context of His law, applying it by faith to our circumstances.
- F. (**ECC 7:11**) Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.