



Numbers - Chapter Thirty Six

V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab **(continues/concludes)**

Summary of Chapter Thirty Six

In Numbers 27:1-11 Zelophehad's daughters had requested a change in the inheritance laws, where a man had daughters but no sons. In this situation they had asked that daughters be allowed to inherit. This was granted. Now the heads of Zelophehad's clan foresee a problem. If these daughters marry husbands from another tribe, their land will become the property of that tribe. Then the tribe of Manasseh, to which Zelophehad belonged, will lose that land, because it will not revert to the original tribe in the Year of Jubilee. The Jubilee Year occurred every fifty years, and in it, land which had been sold returned to its original owner (Leviticus 25:10-28). However, this did not apply to land that was transferred through marriage. Normally when men married, there was no transfer of land; it stayed within the man's own tribe. But if a land-owning daughter married, the land would be transferred to her husband's family and tribe. To prevent tribal land being lost through intermarriage, Moses rules that Zelophehad's daughters must marry men from their own tribe. In this way tribal lands will be preserved: every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of their ancestors.

The insistence that every one shall hold on to his own inheritance is more than a legal obligation, it is a promise that the tribes will always live in their God-given land. In the words of Genesis 17:8 <<*And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God*>>. This makes a fitting conclusion to a book whose principal interest is to show how Israel was brought to the verge of the Promised Land.

However, in another way the book leaves the reader in suspense. The last time the situation of the daughters of Zelophehad was discussed, there immediately followed the command to Moses to go up the mountain to die (Numbers 27:12). This command has still not been fulfilled, so Numbers requires a sequel. And that is provided by the Book of Deuteronomy.

V.m Numbers 36:1-13 - Marriage of Female Heirs

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ The heads of the ancestral houses of the clans of the descendants of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh, of the Josephite clans, came forward and spoke in the presence of Moses and the leaders, the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelites; ² they said, ‘The Lord commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the Israelites; and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters.

Numbers 36:1-2

My lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. This passage is a reference back to Numbers 27:1-11, where the daughters of Zelophehad were concerned that their father’s inheritance would vanish, because there were no sons in their family. God, through Moses, declared that if a father has no sons, the inheritance can then go to the daughters. By calling Moses my lord, the heads of the ancestral houses are showing appropriate deference to this great man of God.

³ But if they are married into another Israelite tribe, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. ⁴ And when the jubilee of the Israelites comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe.’

Numbers 36:3-4

But if they are married into another Israelite tribe, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. If the land was given to the daughters, then when the daughters married, the land went to their husband’s tribe, and eventually, the original tribe’s lands would become depleted. Solving the problem

of Zelophehad's daughters had created another problem - how to keep the property in a tribe through the generations. This illustrates an important principle, that there are rarely perfect solutions to problems; there are usually answers that are trade-offs in other areas. Maturity is able to make and accept the right decisions even when they are not perfect, 'cost-free' solutions.

⁵ Then Moses commanded the Israelites according to the word of the Lord, saying, 'The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. ⁶ This is what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, "Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married, ⁷ so that no inheritance of the Israelites shall be transferred from one tribe to another; for all Israelites shall retain the inheritance of their ancestral tribes. ⁸ Every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the Israelites shall marry one from the clan of her father's tribe, so that all Israelites may continue to possess their ancestral inheritance. ⁹ No inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another; for each of the tribes of the Israelites shall retain its own inheritance.'"

Numbers 36:5-9

Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married. The solution is fairly simple, if a daughter in a family receives an inheritance of land, she must marry within her own tribe. Since the tribes were large enough, this really was no burden.

Each of the tribes of the Israelites shall retain its own inheritance. Seemingly, if a daughter married outside the tribe, she had to forfeit her inheritance because, not only did she have inheritance rights, but the tribe did also. Her individual right of inheritance was neither the only nor the greatest consideration.

¹⁰ The daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹¹ Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, married sons of their father's brothers. ¹² They were married into the clans of the descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan.

Numbers 36:10-12

Their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan. In their case, not only did they marry within their own tribe, but they were married to the sons of

their father's brothers, their cousins. This obviously kept the land inheritance within the tribe, and even within the larger family unit.

¹³ These are the commandments and the ordinances that the Lord commanded through Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

Numbers 36:13

The book closes by reminding the reader that the Lord commanded its content through Moses, i.e. through the preeminent prophet: <<*And he said, 'Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face – clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'*>> (Numbers 12:6-8). Israel's good lies in heeding these instructions. The very last word, in both Hebrew and English, is Jericho, looking forward to the first stage in the conquest: <<*Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'* So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there>> (Joshua 2:1).

In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. The Book of Numbers began in the wilderness. It now finished as close to the Promised Land as the Israelites could get without actually entering the land. As the Children of Israel stood across from the city of Jericho, it is worth considering just what it took and cost to get them from Egypt to this place across the Jericho.

From their encampment at Mount Sinai, God gave Israel the opportunity to grow from being slaves to being a people fit for the Promised Land. He taught them how to be ordered, organised, cleansed, separated, blessed, how to give, to remember that their deliverance was by the power of God alone, given God's presence, and received the tools to advance into the Promised Land.