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The Daughters of Zelophehad Revisited

36: 1-13

The daughters of Zelophehad revisited DIG: How is tribal identity determined, by the mother or the father? How does the mitzvah of tribal identity relate to the Bride of Messiah? Are Gentile believers turned into Jews when they become believers? Why? Why not?

REFLECT: What did you learn about yourself from Isra'el's experience as recorded in the book of Numbers? Give an example of something you have learned about yourself during this study. How has ADONAI challenged you to cross over the Jordan? Have you gone?

Women must only marry into a family from their father's tribe.

Chapters 34, 35, and 36 are appendages to the book of **Numbers**. Its theological climax comes at 33:54 when ADONAI declares: **You will inherit the land by lot according to your tribes. You are to give more land to the larger tribes and less to the smaller ones. Wherever the lot falls to any particular person, that will be his property. You will inherit according to the tribes of your ancestors.** It is there that the will of YHVH for **His people** is stated in definitive form as **they** are about to enter **the land of Promise**. Some may regard this chapter as somewhat anticlimactic, but it is also instructive. It shows a continuing pattern of the development of **Torah** in **Isra'el**. The fact that these three chapters are appendages does not mean that they were not written by **Moses**. In fact, **Moshe** is still the principle human player in these chapters.⁷⁹³



Chapter 36 once again picks up the case of **the five daughters of Zelophehad** that first appeared in Chapter 27 (**to see link click [Eu](#) - The Five Daughters of Zelophehad**). There, **they** appeared before **Moses** to request that **they** should inherit **their dead father's inheritance**, even though the custom had been that only male relatives inherited land. **The women** asked: **Why should our father's name be cut off from his clan**, and **his family penalized because he had no son**? **ADONAI** answered through **Moses**, "**You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and give their father's inheritance to them**" (27:5-7). Now, another question was raised, but this time the judgment sought was not by **the women**, but by **the leaders of the tribe of Manasseh**, the tribe to which **Zelophehad** and **his daughters** belonged. **They** raised another question. May **Zelophehad's daughters** marry a husband who is a member of another **tribe**? Or must **they** marry husbands only from within **their own tribe**? **The leaders of the tribe of Manasseh** argued that if **the women** marry outside **the tribe**, then **their tribe** would permanently lose part of **their inheritance**. Even **the Year of Jubilee** redistribution (see **Leviticus [En](#) - The Freedom of the Year of Jubilee**), would not bring **the land** back to **the inheritance** of **Manasseh** since the mitzvot of **the Yovel Year** apply only to **land** that was purchased, not inherited.⁷⁹⁴

The difficulty arises because of **the Torah's** assumption that when a **woman** marries a **man**, **her** family identity is merged into **her husband's**. Therefore, **her tribal** affiliation was also erased. For example, if a **woman** from **the tribe of Levi** married a **man** from **the tribe of Judah**, **she** would no longer be considered from **the tribe of Levi**. From then on, **she** would be a **woman of Judah** in every respect. **Marriage** created a new family identity for **the woman**. Given the fact that a **woman's tribal** identity was determined by **her husband**, **the land** owned by a **woman** would be absorbed by **the tribe** into which **she** married. As a result, giving **the daughters** a **tribal inheritance** endangered the integrity of **Manasseh's land** holdings.

Incidentally, this explains why it is permissible for **women** of foreign origin to marry into **the house of Isra'el**. Even the prestigious **house of David** includes three Gentile **women: Rahab, Ruth, and Tamar**. Yet those **women**, once **married to their husbands**, were no longer regarded as Gentiles. **They** became Judeans in every respect, and **their** children were counted as being fully Jewish. **In modern Jewish Halachah, the counting of Jewish pedigree has been flipped on its head from this biblical standard. In modern Jewish thought, only children born of a Jewish mother are considered Jewish. This reversal was done some time in the Middle Ages because of the extraordinary amount of children born as a consequence of rape by foreigners.** Nevertheless, the biblical standard remains that tribal identity is reckoned through the father!

This explains how Gentiles come to be counted as **grafted into Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Romans Cz - The Illustration of Isra'el's Future**). Believers in **Messiah** are called **the Bride of Messiah** whether they are Jewish or not. The status of **the Bride** is more than merely symbolic. It is legal. Believers take on the **marital** status of **Messiah's** tribal identity. Therefore, Gentile believers are **grafted into Judah**, and receive an honorary status in **Isra'el**. This is not to say that we become "**Jews.**" For example, even after **her marriage to Mahlon, the son of Elimelch, Ruth** was still referred to as **Ruth the Moabitess**. The "partners" of **the B'rit Chadashah** are, in biblical terms, **God and Isra'el**. Although not a formal partner of **the New Covenant**, the Gentiles in the Church "participate" when they make the Jewish **Messiah** the **Lord of their lives (Eph 1:13-14)**. They also "participate" as a recipient of the promised **Covenant** blessings for Gentiles who have come through the Seed of Abraham, **Yeshua Messiah**. So, Gentiles take on the legal status of **Judah**, just as **Ruth** came to be regarded as a woman of **Judah**. As **the Bride of Messiah**, we are all counted as part of **Isra'el**.⁷⁹⁵

The request (36:1-4): The leaders of the clans of the family of the descendants of Gil'ad, the son of Machir, the son of M'nasheh, of the families of the descendants of Yosef, approached and addressed Moshe and the leaders, the heads of the clans of the people of Isra'el. They said: ADONAI ordered my lord to give by lot the land to be inherited by the people of Isra'el, and my lord was ordered by ADONAI to give the inheritance of our kinsman Zelophehad to his daughters. But, in the case of intertribal marriage, if they get married to anyone belonging to another tribe, then their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of our ancestors and be added to the inheritance of the tribe they will then belong to; thus, it will be taken away from the sum total of our inheritance. And when the Year of Jubilee of the people of Isra'el comes, their inheritance will be added to the land possessed by the tribe they will then belong to and be subtracted from the inheritance belonging to

the tribe of our ancestors. This transfer of property would become permanent in **the Yovel year** because it only applied to property that was sold, and not to **inheritance (36:1-4).**

The response (36:5-9): **Moses** responded with a mitzvah stating that a woman inheriting land can only marry into **their own tribe.** **Moshe gave this mitzvah to the people of Isra'el,** in keeping with the word of ADONAI: **"The tribe of the descendants of Joseph is right in what it says. Here is what ADONAI has ordered concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: 'Let them be married to whomever they think best, but they must marry only into a family from their father's tribe. In this way no inheritance of the people of Isra'el will move from one tribe to another; for each of the people of Isra'el is to hold on to the land for inheritance belonging to his father's tribe. Every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Isra'el is to become the wife of someone from the family of her father's tribe, so that every one of the people of Isra'el will stay in possession of his ancestors' inheritance. Thus, no inheritance will move from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of Isra'el will hold on to its own inheritance' (36:5-9)."**

The result (36:10-13): The daughters of Zelophehad were obedient and **did as ADONAI had ordered Moshe.** **Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah all got married to their cousins.** They were married into the families of the descendants of **Manasseh the son of Joseph,** and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their **father's family.** The accounts of **the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 and 36** form a bracket for the events and organization of **the Wilderness Generation** whose appearance is marked by the Second Census in **Chapter 26** (see [Ec - The Second Census: The New Generation of Hope](#)).⁷⁹⁶

In conclusion, **Moses** wrote: **These are the mitzvot and rulings which ADONAI gave through Moshe to the people of Isra'el in the plains of Mo'ab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.** This refers to **mitzvot and rulings given to Isra'el** since **they arrived in the plains of Mo'ab** in **Chapter 22** (see [Dm - The Story of Balaam](#)). This is a typical closing to a major section, as found elsewhere in **Leviticus 7:37-38, 26:46, and 27:34.**⁷⁹⁷

There is a real lesson for all of us in this. **The Torah** is very practical. It is, after all, the teaching for the redeemed and the teaching for our everyday life. It was not meant to be merely theoretical. It was meant to be lived by the believer, especially as he or she resided in **the Land of Isra'el.** In short, **the Torah,** if applied by means of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** was/is designed to make us strong believers walking in holiness. **With this in mind,**

therefore, we will conclude this book as the Rabbis do, repeating with meaning the words:

Hazak, hazak, v'nit'chazek!

Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!⁷⁹⁸

Haftarah Masa'ei: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4 (A); 2:4-28; 4:1-2 (S)

(see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Af** - Parashah)

ADONAI asks **Isra'el** how **she** could forget the honeymoon days of the wilderness. How could **the fathers** pursue *hevel* (Hebrew: *vapor* or *breath*)? How could **they** all fail to ask **where is the LORD** (Jer 2:6 and 8). Human disloyalty stuns **God** (Jer 2:5). How could the fathers stray so far from the covenant relationship and not even ask the question? **Ha'Shem** appealed to **heaven** (Jeremiah 3:12). **The Israelites** had forsaken **the streams of living water** and had become **prey for lions** (Jeremiah 2:13 and 15). **God's people** had become **an alien vine** (Jeremiah 2:21). The consequences of hardening had changed the very nature of **the people of God**! Yet, all was not lost. **Judah** could still repent, recover the honeymoon experience once again, and say with sincerity: **My Father! You are my friend from my youth** (Jeremiah 3:4)! Then **the nations** would **bless themselves** and **the blessings**, not the cursings, of the covenant would still come to fruition (Jeremiah 4:1-2).

B'rit Chadashah Masa'ei: James 4:1-12

One cannot serve **God** and **the flesh** at the same time. The desires of our **old sin nature** leads to **quarrels and fights** (Jm 4:1). **Frustration** escalates into **warfare** (Jm 4:2). **Prayers go unanswered**, because **prayers to indulge the flesh** are fruitless (James 4:3). Quoting from the Septuagint translation of **Proverbs 3:34**, **James** states: **God opposes the arrogant, but to the humble He gives grace. Indeed, the grace God gives is greater** (Jm 4:6). **God** has put **His Ruach** in us to combat **human jealousy** (Jm 4:5b). Either **the Ruach** roots out our **fleshly desires**, or we will devour one another. Being **fickle** is not an option (Jm 4:8). When convicted of **sin**, we should **repent** with fullness of heart, accompanied by distress, sorrows, and even **the shedding of tears** (Jm 4:9-10). Without complete repentance, pain and suffering is the only choice we leave to a holy **God**.⁷⁹⁹

Dear heavenly Father, praise You that though the daughters of Zelophehad had to marry

within **their tribe of Manasseh** so that **their land** remained in that **tribe** - there are no **tribal** boundaries for us in heaven. All who believe **Messiah** receive their **inheritance** of the Promised Land of heaven through the redemption of **Messiah (Ephesians 1:7-11)** and sealing by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh (Ephesians 1:12-14)**. It is amazing that the entrance criteria is not any special nationality nor any large amount of money. Loving **You** is the only ticket into our Promised Land (**Galatians 3:26-28**). Praise and thank you that **Messiah Yeshua** is preparing an eternal home for all who love **Him! Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you may also be (John 14:1-3)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen