



This last chapter of the book of Numbers relates how the leaders of the family of Gilead from the tribe of Manasseh came to visit Moses, and the other leaders of the tribes and presented a difficulty which had presented itself. The difficulty was in a law which Moses had under Divine Inspiration legislated in favour of women inheriting land in certain circumstances. In solving a problem, it had in some respects created another. This reveals the complexities of ensuring there is equity and justice in the fallen state of man, and how care must always be taken to ensure all parties are treated justly.

The original problem

The matter relates to an episode described in Numbers 27 where 5 women, who were all the daughters of a man named Zelophehad, realised that they would have no inheritance under the existing laws, and that the name of their father would be erased from the camp, as he had no male heirs. They took action to show the injustice of the current situation.

They were not particularly concerned about themselves, but instead their father's house, and the subsequent division of their father's inheritance – which would have implications on the inheritance of all families, which could be lost through marriage. They could see that the integrity and cohesion of the tribes could be broken down over time. Yet had not Jacob their father made great prophecies regarding the tribes, which related to events a great way off into the future?

But how would these be fulfilled if the family and tribal inheritance could be diminished under the current system?

They laid out their case. Their father had already died, a natural death. He was not among any of the rebels, who had died as a result of their rebellion, but died in his own sin. He did not have any sons. This meant that when all the daughters were married to other families and even into other tribes, the inheritance and the name of the family of Zelophehad would be extinguished, as the inheritance passed through the sons.

Moses took the cause and presented it to God in prayer. The Almighty responded: *27:7 The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.*

The Lord God then instructed Moses whereby there would be a system in place to ensure a continuity of inheritance, to ensure it remained within the family.

If there were no sons, then the inheritance would pass to daughters, if no daughters then would pass to brothers, if no brothers, then to cousins, if no cousins, then the nearest available kinsmen.

This all seemed straightforward enough.

But the elders of the family spotted a difficulty and an injustice that occur in the future. It is amazing how astute and switched on men and women are when it comes to injustice when it affects them, or their family! But not so quick to spot the difficulties of injustice caused by people to each other, and especially when it doesn't affect them! But such is the nature of man!

The new problem

The elders realised that if the inheritance passed the daughters – in this case the 5 daughters of Zelophehad, then when they got married to a man from another tribe, the subsequent male offspring would

then inherit the land, thus taking it away from the original tribe. As the land had been divided by lot, and was to be kept within tribes, this special dispensation for daughters inheriting, would very quickly, and obviously counter that, and then defeat the original point, that the sisters had raised, that is of maintaining their fathers house, and inheritance. In short, daughters who inherited land and then married out of their tribe, that land, would eventually pass to the tribe she had married into. Thus undoing the very solution which God had provided earlier as we can read in Numbers 27.

Moses as was his habit, presented the problem to God in prayer.

The solution

Though simple was necessary. Daughters who inherited land from their fathers, through lack of a male heir, were only allowed to marry within their tribes, and were not permitted to marry outside of their tribes, thus protecting the land, and ensuring it remained within the tribal allotment. In fact this 36th chapter of Numbers records, that is exactly what the daughters of Zelophehad did: 11,12: *For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their fathers brothers' sons: And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.*

Theirs was not the only case. Another case is recorded in 1 Chronicles 23:22: *And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters: and their brethren the sons of Kish took them.*

Although this shows the enthusiasm of the elders in maintaining the integrity of the natural inheritance, and their love for the land, and the willingness to protect future generations, it also reveals the love that they had for the Divine inheritance, in ensuring that the law was maintained, and that things were done circumspectly, decently and in order. See Ephesians 5:15, and 1 Corinthians 14:40.

Question

The law was given by God, who knows all things from the beginning. The ultimate fount of all wisdom, so how was it that there was a lack in this law, which was spotted by these faithful women, and now remedied by this Divine ordinance? But then the law had to be further tweaked, so why did God not legislate this in the first place?

No doubt, it was designed to show that the law given to Moses was impossible to cater for all eventualities, and that even complete obedience to the law of Moses would not save anyone from death.

Hebrews 7:19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did;

Romans 8:3: For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,

The law was given just as a guide and a pointer to a true understanding and life within the will and purpose of God – and as such was not fool proof, it was a schoolmaster [Gr. *pedagog*] to bring us to Christ. In the Lord Jesus Christ, the law of love, the Royal Law showed where the law of Moses was deficient. Under the law of Moses, there was no mercy, no grace. A perfect society cannot be formed by endless legislation. Human nature always finds loopholes and ways around it. But the law of love in Jesus Christ, is perfect, where any failure, weakness or loss is made up, through compassion and kindness, and where the weak are not taken advantage of. We look forward to the day when the Royal Law overtakes all the laws and commandments of men.

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