

**NOTES**  
**ON**  
**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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*"Things new and old."*

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**Numbers 27**

The conduct of the daughters of Zelophehad, as recorded in the opening section of this chapter, presents a striking and beautiful contrast to the unbelief on which we have just been commenting. They, most assuredly, belonged not to the generation of those who are ever ready to abandon divine ground, lower the divine standard, and forego the privileges conferred by divine grace. No; those five noble women had no sympathy with such. They were determined, through grace, to plant the foot of faith on the very highest ground, and, with holy yet bold decision, to make their own of that which GOD had given. Let us read the refreshing record.

**"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters, Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah, and they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the Lord, in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family because he hath no son? Give unto us, therefore, a possession among the brethren of our father" (Verses 1-4).**

This is uncommonly fine. It does the heart good to read such words as these at a time like the present, when so little is made of the proper standing and portion of GOD's people, and when so many are content to go on from day to day, and year to year, without caring even to inquire into

the things which are freely given to them of GOD.

Nothing is more sad than to see the carelessness, the utter indifference, with which many professing Christians treat such great and all important questions as the standing, walk, and hope of the believer and the Church of GOD. It is not, by any means, our purpose to go into these questions here. We have done so repeatedly in the other volumes of the series of "Notes." We merely desire to call the reader's attention to the fact, that it is at once sinning against our own rich mercies, and dishonouring the Lord, when we evince a spirit of indifferentism in reference to any one point of divine revelation as to the position and portion of the Church, or of the individual believer.

If GOD in the aboundings of His grace, has been pleased to bestow upon us precious privileges, as Christians, ought we not to seek earnestly to know what these privileges are? Ought we not to seek to make them our own, in the artless simplicity of faith? Is it treating our GOD and His revelation worthily, to be indifferent as to whether we are servants or sons - as to whether we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us or not - as to whether we are under law or under grace - whether ours is a heavenly or an earthly calling?

Surely not. If there be one thing plainer than another in Scripture, it is this, that GOD delights in those who appreciate and enjoy the provision of His love - those who find their joy is Himself.

The inspired volume teems with evidence on this point. Look at the case now before us in our chapter. Here were those daughters of Joseph - for such we must call them - bereaved of their father - helpless and desolate, as viewed from nature's standpoint. Death had snapped the apparent link which connected them with the proper inheritance of GOD's people. What then? Were they content to give up? - to fold their arms, in cold indifference? Was it nothing to them whether or not they were to have a place and a portion with the Israel of GOD? Ah! no, reader; these illustrious women exhibit something totally different from all this - something which we may well study and seek to imitate - something which, we are bold to say, refreshed the heart of GOD. They were sure there was a portion for them in the land of promise, of which neither death nor anything that happened in the wilderness could ever deprive them. **"Why should the name of our father be done away from among his people because he hath no son?"** Could death - could failure of male issue - could anything - frustrate the goodness of GOD? Impossible. **"Give unto us: therefore, a possession among the brethren of our father."**

Noble words! words that went right up to the throne and to the heart of the GOD of Israel. It was a most powerful testimony delivered in the ears of the whole congregation. Moses was taken aback. Here was something beyond the range of the Lawgiver. Moses was a servant, and a blessed and honoured servant too. But, again and again, in the course of this marvellous Book of Numbers, this wilderness volume, questions arise with which he is unable to deal, as for example, the defiled men in chapter 9, and the daughters of Zelophehad in the section before us.

**"And Moses brought their cause before the Lord. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 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"** (Verses 5-7).

Here was a glorious triumph, in the presence of the whole assembly. A bold and simple faith is always sure to be rewarded. It glorifies GOD, and GOD honours it.

Need we travel from section to section, and from page to page of the holy volume to prove this? Need we turn to the Abrahams, the Hannahs, the Deborahs, the Rahabs, the Ruths of Old Testament times? or to the Marys, the Elizabeths, the centurions, and the Syro-phoenicians of The New Testament times? Wherever we turn, we learn the same great practical truth that GOD delights in a bold and simple faith - a faith that artlessly seizes and tenaciously holds all that He has given - that positively refuses, even in the very face of nature's weakness and death, to surrender a single hair's breadth of the divinely given inheritance. What though Zelophehad's bones lay mouldering in the dust of the wilderness; what though no male issue appeared to sustain his name? faith could rise above all these things, and count on GOD's faithfulness to make good all that His Word had promised.

**"The daughters of Zelophehad speak right."** They always do so. Their words are words of faith, and, as such, are always right in the judgment of GOD, it is a terrible thing to limit **"the Holy One of Israel."** He delights to be trusted and used. It is utterly impossible for faith to overdraw its account in GOD's bank. GOD could no more disappoint faith than He could deny Himself. He can never say to faith, "You have miscalculated; you take too lofty - too bold a stand; so lower down, and lessen your expectations." Ah! no; the only thing in all this world that truly delights and refreshes the heart of GOD is the faith that can simply trust him; and we may rest assured of this, that the faith that can trust Him is also the faith that can love Him, and serve Him, and praise Him.

Hence, then, we are deeply indebted to the daughters of Zelophehad. They teach us a lesson of inestimable value. And more than this, their acting gave occasion to the unfolding of a fresh truth which was to form the basis of a divine rule for all future generations. The Lord commanded Moses, saying, **"If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter."**

Here we have a great principle laid down, in reference to the question of inheritance, of which, humanly speaking, we should have heard nothing had it not been for the faith and faithful conduct of these remarkable women. If they had listened to the voice of timidity and unbelief - if they had refused to come forward, before the whole congregation in the assertion of the claims of faith; then, not only would they have lost their own inheritance and blessing, but all future daughters of Israel, in a like position, would have been deprived of their portion likewise. Whereas, on the contrary, by acting in the precious energy of faith, they preserved their inheritance; they got the blessing; they received testimony from GOD; their names shine on the page of inspiration; and their conduct furnished, by divine authority, a precedent for all future generations.

Thus much as to the marvellous results of faith. But then we must remember that there is moral danger arising out of the very dignity and elevation which faith confers on those who, through grace, are enabled to exercise it; and this danger must be carefully guarded against.

This is strikingly illustrated in the further history of the daughters of Zelophehad, as recorded in the last chapter of our book.

**"And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of The children of Israel: and they said, The Lord commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters. And if they be married to any of the sons, of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they were received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers. And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well" (Numbers 36:1-5).**

The "**fathers**" of the house of Joseph must be heard as well as the "**daughters**." The faith of the latter was most lovely; but there was just a danger lest, in the elevation to which that faith had raised them, they might forget the claims of others, and remove the landmarks which guarded the inheritance of their fathers. This had to be thought of and provided for. It was natural to suppose what that the daughters of Zelophehad would marry; and moreover it was possible they might form an alliance outside the boundaries of their tribe; and thus in the year of jubilee - that grand adjusting institution instead of adjustment, there would be confusion, and a permanent breach in the inheritance of Manasseh. This would never do; and therefore the wisdom of those ancient fathers is very apparent. We need to be guarded on every side, in order that the integrity of faith and the testimony may be duly maintained. We are not to carry things with a high hand and a strong will, though we have ever such strong faith, but be ever ready to yield ourselves to the adjusting power of the whole truth of GOD.

**"This is the thing which the Lord doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best, only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry; so shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe; for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers . . . Even as the Lord commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad; for they [the five daughters] were married unto their father's 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" (Verses 6-12).**

Thus all is settled. The activities of faith are governed by the truth of GOD, and individual claims are adjusted in harmony with the true interests of all; while, at the same time, the glory of GOD is so fully maintained, that at the time of the jubilee, instead of any confusion in the landmarks of Israel, the integrity of the inheritance is secured according to the divine grant.

Nothing can be more instructive than this entire history of the daughters of Zelophehad. May we really profit by it!

The closing paragraph of our chapter is full of deep solemnity.

The governmental dealings of GOD are displayed before our eyes in a manner eminently calculated to impress the heart.

**"The Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin"** (Verses 12-14).

Moses must not go over Jordan. It is not only that he cannot officially bring the people over, but he cannot even go himself. Such was the enactment of the government of GOD. But, on the other hand, we see grace shining out, with uncommon luster, in the fact that Moses is conducted, by GOD's own hand, to the top of Pisgah, and from thence he sees the land of promise, in all its magnificence, not merely as Israel afterwards possessed it, but as GOD had originally given it.

Now, this was the fruit of grace, and it comes out more fully in the close of Deuteronomy, where we are also told that GOD buried His dear servant.

This is wonderful. Indeed there is nothing like it in the history of the saints of GOD. We do not dwell upon this subject here, having done so elsewhere; \* but it is full of the deepest interest. Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips, and for that he was forbidden to cross the Jordan. This was GOD in government. But Moses was taken up to Pisgah, there, in company with the Lord, to get a full view of the inheritance; and then the Lord made a grave for His servant and buried him therein. This was GOD in grace - marvellous, matchless grace! grace that has ever made the eater yield meat and the strong sweetness. How precious to be the subjects of such grace! May our souls rejoice in it more and more, in the eternal fountain whence it emanates, and in the channel through which it flows!

\* See Appendix 2 for an article entitled "*Grace and Government*" from "*Things New and Old*," Vol., 4. p. 111. G, Morrish, 20, Paternoster Square.

We shall close this section by a brief reference to the lovely unselfishness of Moses in the matter of appointing a successor. That blessed man of GOD was ever characterized by a most exquisite spirit of self-surrender - that rare and admirable grace. We never find him seeking his own things; on the contrary, again and again, when opportunity was afforded him of building up his own fame and fortune, he proved, very distinctly, that the glory of GOD and the good of His people so occupied and filled his heart that there was no room for a single selfish consideration.

Thus it is in the closing scene of our chapter. When Moses hears that he is not to go over Jordan, instead of being occupied in regrets as to himself, he only thinks of the interests of the congregation.

**"And Moses spake unto the Lord saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."**

Whet unselfish breathings are here How grateful they must have proved to the heart of that One who so loved and cared for His People! Provided that Israel's need were met Moses was content. If only the work was done he cared not who did it. Self, his interest, and his destinies, he could calmly leave all in the hand of GOD. He would take care of him, but oh! his loving heart yearns over the beloved people of GOD; and the very moment he sees Joshua ordained as their leader, he is ready to depart and be at rest forever. Blessed servant! Happy man! Would there were even a few amongst us characterized, in some small degree, by his excellent spirit of self-abnegation, and jealous care for GOD's glory and His people's good. But alas! alas! we have to repeat, with deepening emphasis, the words of the apostle, "**All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's.**"

O Lord, stir up all our hearts to desire a more earnest consecration of ourselves, in spirit, soul, and body, to thy blessed service! May we, in good truth, learn to live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us - who came from Heaven to earth about our sins; and is gone back from earth to Heaven about our infirmities; and who is coming again for our eternal salvation and glory.

~ end of chapter 25 - 27 ~

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