

# Women Were Not Ignored Under Patriarchy

Joshua 17:1-13

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, February 25th 2024

## I. Introduction - figuring out the relationships (see chart in outlines)

This will be the second time that I have preached on the daughters of Zelophehad. Back in 2021 I did a topical sermon on them in the Women of Faith series. But today I will be covering a *lot* of other stuff, so there won't be much repetition. But if you want more details on these remarkable women, I would encourage you to go to that sermon in the Women of Faith series.

I do want to begin by bringing to your attention two puzzles in verses 1-2 that have made scholars scratch their heads. The first puzzle relates to which clans got which territory. If you just did a surface read of these verses you might conclude that the sons of Gilead got the land on the east side of the Jordan River. But that land was already distributed to *other* sons of Manasseh. So how do we reconcile this passage with those other passages?

The other puzzle is figuring out the *incredibly* complicated relationships of these descendants of Manasseh to each other. It's confusing even to commentators. Some confuse the children of Gilead with the sons of Manasseh. Others confuse the *region* called Gilead with the son of Machir who had the same name. But conservatives point out that the region of Gilead was named Gilead hundreds of years before Gilead, the son of Machir, was even born.

So in order to make it easier for you to track with what I am preaching, I created a visual chart that represents *the most* conservative scholarship, and that avoids apparent contradictions between this passage and other passages. I am pretty confident that the genealogical chart that I put at the top of your outlines is 100% accurate.

And let me explain the color-coding very briefly. The blue boxes represent the clans who had already inherited the East side of the Jordan River, and the green boxes represent the clans who were about to inherit the West side of the Jordan River in verses 3-13. You will want to keep that chart handy as I preach through the passage. But let's dive in.

## II. This arrangement was ordained by God (v. 1a)

The first thing that I want to emphasize in verse 1 is that this arrangement (that very beautifully includes the rights of women) was ordained by God. Verse 1 says, "there was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh..." We saw in the past that when they threw these lots (like throwing dice) it was trusting God's providence to dictate the boundary lines for

everyone. So this was not simply *people* choosing the land. It was God *Himself* who had ordained which place each person would get.

And what's *cool* about this is that the lots that were cast fell exactly as the book of Numbers had earlier dictated that the inheritance *should* go. In other words, the lots didn't land by accident. I will reference that *much earlier* decision of God when we get to verse 4. But what I am pointing out here is that God's sovereignty lined up with His prophetic Scriptures.

And I think we can apply this in our own lives. We too can have the confidence that when we approach the Lord in faith, His providence will be consistent with His Word. After all, it is the same God who gave us Scripture who also governs providence. We can never blame God's providence as if God gave us more than we could handle. 1 Corinthians 10:13 gives this guarantee: "No trial has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tried beyond what you are able, but with the trial will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." The Bible guarantees that God will never give us more than we can handle in His providence. Instead, His Providence perfectly supports His Biblical will for our lives. That helps to remove hopelessness and to give you faith. We can trust the sovereignty of God.

### III. The Rights of the Male Leaders (vv. 1-2)

#### A. Patriarchy protected women (vv. 1-6 with Numb. 27)

The next thing that I see in this passage is that God spoke to the rights of the male leaders in Manasseh. Ordinarily God gave inheritance via a system of patriarchy. That's not a popular subject in our modern age, and it is certainly a grossly misunderstood subject.

For example, I will be pointing out that women's rights were not lost within God's version of patriarchy. They sometimes were lost in the *pagan* versions of patriarchy (what I call "hyper-patriarch"), but God's system of patriarchy actually *protects* the needs of women and children. The African Bible Commentary points out that this passage and the passages in Numbers would be a perfect solution to the horrible fate that children face when their father dies or that adult women face when their husbands die. In those nations in Africa, a woman cannot stay on the property owned by her father or her husband if her male head dies. Instead, an uncle can come in and take away the land, leaving the women absolutely destitute. It says,

Deprived of any means to support themselves, widows and unmarried daughters would be reduced to poverty and possibly even to slavery or prostitution. This pattern is sometimes seen in Africa when widows are evicted from their husband's land because his male relatives claim it...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), 199.

That's horrible. And the commentary goes on to show how *Biblical* Patriarchy beautifully protects women and children whereas African and Muslim hyper-patriarchy harms women and children. In God's law, *everyone* was provided for - male and female. They were provided for in different ways, but they *were* provided for.

But let's examine the rights and responsibilities of the males first.

### B. Patriarchy placed responsibilities upon males

Society was clearly organized around the male leaders, and patriarchy placed heightened responsibilities upon the males. Verse 1 mentions the tribal leader, Manasseh. Tribal leaders were male. It also mentions the rights and responsibilities of the firstborn son, Machir. And we will get to the unique role of the firstborn in a bit. But the main aspect of patriarchy that is highlighted in the first two verses is male leadership. Even when the women in this chapter inherited land, their husbands were the leaders in the home. And we will see that the word "them" in verse 4 does not refer to the daughters, but to their male descendants. So it passed from these daughters to their male heirs. The males were also the warriors. Verse 1 mentions that Gilead was a man of war. The armies were composed of men, not women. So even though the males had rights that women did not, they also had responsibilities that women did not.

### C. The patriarchal system of inheritance brought great blessing to Israel as a whole (including the women)

But who inherited the land after *this* generation got their *initial* distribution? Answering this question correctly is critical to understanding true Biblical patriarchy. Who inherited the land *after* the initial distribution? Logistically it would eventually only be able to be passed on to one son.<sup>2</sup> Usually that was the firstborn.

And this was because the firstborn had heightened responsibilities. Prior to the Levites taking over the responsibilities of the firstborn, the firstborn son was usually the one who became the priest of the extended family. He had responsibilities to lead, shepherd, protect, and even avenge murders that happened to the family. So he took on civic responsibilities too - at least prior to the state being established. But one of the huge responsibilities he shouldered was to care for his parents in their old age, to make sure they received a proper burial, and to lead the clan after the father died. Because of the *extra* responsibilities that he shouldered, the firstborn usually received double the money inheritance of other sons,

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<sup>2</sup> Someone after the sermon thought I was saying that it would be a sin to subdivide the land among sons. So let me clarify that just as it wasn't a sin for a father to disinherit the firstborn of his rights/responsibilities, it wouldn't be a sin for the father to divide the land among his sons if he had sufficient land to make it feasible. We are only dealing in this sermon with the longterm trajectory of God forcing division of labor by having them inherit a small geographic area in the middle east.

and he normally also got the land - *all* of the land. If he was not spiritually qualified, the duties and rights of the firstborn were passed on to another son.

But let me explain why the land normally passed on to *only one* son *after* this initial distribution. And this is the only part of the sermon in my Women of Faith series that I am going to repeat (in a much more abbreviated fashion). Just imagine Joshua's generation inheriting 500 acres of land per nuclear family in Israel (which would be *way* more than any nuclear family would likely have gotten because of the small size of Israel).<sup>3</sup> But for ease of computation, let's be generous in our calculations just to prove the point). Imagine that each nuclear family got a huge 500 acre parcel. They wouldn't be able to farm that; it would be way too much to plow by hand or by ox. So we are starting with an impossibly large 500 acres. And then imagine that each family had ten sons - which obviously didn't always happen, but which is feasible. Well, that would mean in the second generation that each of your sons would only inherit fifty of those 500 acres. That's a sizeable reduction. If your sons had ten sons, they would each get five acres. If each of their sons had ten sons, they would each get 1/2th of an acre for their farming - that's a third of the size of my small yard. And that's just within three generations of the first generation. You can see that within just four generations the land would be unfarmable and would not sustain a family. *Mathematically* it would very soon become the size of a postage stamp. Nor does having a partnership solve the problem since in several generations there would be thousands of descendants who would be trying to make money from a small plot of land - probably 12 acres.

So take out of your mind forever the idea that *every* son got a portion of the land inheritance. It is impossible mathematically. God wanted division of labor, and this meant that the other sons would be forced to move to villages, towns, and cities, creating further division of labor and further wealth. So this ties in with the sermon on cities that I gave in chapter 15. It is mathematically impossible for every one of the sons to inherit the farm. So don't think it is women alone who didn't inherit the land. *Most* of the men did not inherit land either. The vast majority of Israel lived in cities, towns, and villages.

And just as a side note - if a father didn't trust a son to take care of him and his wife in his elderly years, he wouldn't give the farm to that son. He would pass on the responsibilities

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<sup>3</sup> If every male got land (as opposed to being in cities) then each nuclear family would get slightly less than 12 acres. Of course, there are hints that many families got more than that and there were cities, towns, villages, and common grounds around those that make up some of the total acreage. See the previous week's sermon and the image that Jeff Krutz made that overlaps Israel over the part of Nebraska from Lincoln and south. Exell estimates 42 acres per each of the 600,000 families. He says, "The portion of the land divided by Joshua has been computed at twenty-five million acres. Dividing this by 600,000, the probable number of families at the time of the settlement, we get forty-two acres as the average size of each property." Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Illustrator* (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 228.

of the firstborn to another son and that other son would get the land (or if he didn't have land, a double portion of the financial inheritance.) This by itself shows that there were no absolute rights to the land from each descendant. If a father could remove the firstborn son from his inheritance (for whatever reason) it would not be a sin to not pass on the land to other sons.

Which partially answers the next question: What about if the parent was not a farmer? After all, most of the population did not own farms. They were in cities, towns, and villages. Well, if the parent was not a farmer, the firstborn (or some other worthy son) would get a double portion of the *financial* distribution (you've seen that phrase in the Scripture - a double portion). Why would he get that? Because he would have *monetary costs* in taking care of his parents. In other words, the one who cared for the parents would get twice as much financial inheritance as the other sons. But I pointed out in that previous sermon that *women also* got financial distributions as an inheritance - both with their dowry, and with *other* financial distributions.

And here is the beauty of that system: By only allowing one son to inherit the farm, it kept the farm from being broken up into impossibly small patches of yard. But it also forced Israel to prosper through division of labor and specialization among the sons and daughters. The other sons and daughters would learn trades and other skills that would enable Israel as a whole to prosper exponentially generation after generation. New businesses would fill niches that did not exist before.

The way some people misinterpret the inheritance laws, Israel would have remained a stagnant economy and eventually *the farms themselves would all go under*. The inheritance laws forced industrialization and economic diversity and promoted increasing prosperity for everyone. That's not a curse; that's a blessing.

But let's dig into this deeper. Going back to the ten sons and only one of them receiving the farm. Let's compare and contrast the nine non-firstborn sons and *their* inheritance to that of the daughters. This is a more fair comparison between the men and the women. Wealthy people like Job could easily bless sons and daughters alike with a financial inheritance since no one would need to financially care for Job in his old age. He would have plenty of servants and all of his kids would be wealthy enough to care for him just from the businesses that Job gave them a jump start on. Not everyone would be able to do as Job did and give equal inheritance to daughters and sons because not everyone is hugely wealthy.

What would happen with *poorer* families is that the wife's *main* inheritance would have been the dowry that her fiance gave to her through her parents. Plus, she would have the financial support of her new husband who had presumably received a financial inheritance from *his* parents and was building on that inheritance with his *own* acquired wealth. Since a man is commanded to provide for his family, the woman would be well-taken care of.

It is certainly true that unbiblical relatives could potentially drain her of her dowry (like Laban was trying to drain Jacob's wives), but her husband would likely be equally drained since they would be having each other's backs in those dire circumstances. But through the dowry laws there really was *equal* provision for both the sons and the daughters of even

poor families. And in my other sermon I get into that in much more detail and explain why it would be good to resurrect the dowry system for today. It's a fantastic system.

In any case, we can't use the story of the daughters of Zelophehad to overthrow patriarchy like some people do. They are ignoring the context. God *upholds* patriarchy in this passage while *also* fully protecting the rights of women.

#### **D. Patriarchy protects against communism - there is no state ownership of land here (vv. 1-13).**

And there are many *other* ways that patriarchy protected the freedoms of *everyone*. The next point shows *one* of those ways. Patriarchy undermines statism. It really does. Patriarchy and communism are at odds with each others.

I won't comment a lot on this, but we have already seen in previous sermons that all of the actual ownership of land in these chapters was private ownership. We saw that *the state owned borders, but not land, houses, or businesses*. Here's the problem. If the state owns all property, then the state completely undermines the leadership of fathers. Communism is the ultimate example of what egalitarianism produces, and it ain't pretty. Feminism *always* eventually leads to communism or some other form of statism. And if you have seen some of the recent polls in America, young men are increasingly anti-statist (praise God), while the women are becoming increasingly more statist. That's one of the reasons the Bible does not allow women to vote. God created women to be dependent, and if they don't have a strong home life, they might be tempted to depend upon the state. Egalitarianism and statism go hand-in-hand.

So one application from all of these chapters is that private ownership of property is absolutely essential to true Biblical patriarchy. If the government can legally freeze or seize your bank account (which is one kind of property), do you really own your money? No. That means the government gives you the privilege of using it as long as you are in their graces. If the government can tax your property, do you really own your property? No. It can be seized through onerous taxes. Ezekiel 46:18 says, "the prince shall not take any of the people's inheritance by evicting them from their property; he shall provide an inheritance for his sons from his own property, so that none of My people may be scattered from his property." Family property rights are embedded into these laws. They speak strongly *against* communism. But the main point is that the family is held together by strong male patriarchal leadership. The healthiest families are the ones where the dad takes his patriarchal responsibilities seriously. So this chapter speaks not only to female rights, but also to male rights.

#### **E. A clarification of a controversy - Machir was not Manasseh's only son (Numb. 32:41-42; Deut. 3:14; Josh 13:30; 1 Kings 4:13; 1 Chron. 7:18)**

But before we go further, I do need to deal with the first two controversies that I introduced this sermon with. And this is where the chart will be handy. One of the controversies revolves around how many children Manasseh had. Many commentaries

claim that he only had one son - Gilead. The only evidence they put forth for that view is that Gilead is the only one mentioned here. But to me that is foolish because even *here* it mentions "the rest of the children of Manasseh."

Second, it is foolish because those commentaries are *forced* to claim that other texts of Scripture somehow got corrupted. And the reason they say it got corrupted is that they have an unbiblical view of textual criticism and thus they have no problem with affirming that the wording of the text can sometimes be lost - something that the Bible absolutely denies will ever happen.<sup>4</sup> In any case, they are forced to say that those other passages got corrupted because those other passages clearly say that Manasseh had other children. It always amazes me when evangelical commentaries accept the wrong conclusions of liberals. If you look up every reference that I put in your outlines you will see that Manasseh *clearly* had other children.

For example, Numbers 32:41-42 speak of Jair and Nobah as being the sons of Manasseh. The reason they aren't mentioned here is that this section is going to be focusing *especially* on the inheritance on the West side of the Jordan River, whereas those other passages speak of other descendants of Manasseh inheriting the East side of the Jordan - the territories of Gilead and Bashan. Let me read three passages which show this very clearly. First, Numbers 32:41-42 says this:

Also *Jair the son of Manasseh* [so that's another son, right? "Jair the son of Manasseh"] went and took its small towns, and called them Havoth Jair. 42 Then Nobah [there's another son] went and took Kenath and its villages, and he called it Nobah, after his own name.

So Jair and Nobah are clearly sons of Manasseh, but their *clans* took the *East* side of the River, not the side that *this* passage is talking about. Deuteronomy 3:14 says,

Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and called Bashan after his own name, Havoth Jair, to this day.)

Joshua 13:30 says, "Their territory was from Mahanaim, all Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jair which are in Bashan, sixty cities..."

But I will admit that the Hebrew of verses 1-2 *is* difficult. And that is why you have quite a variety of ways that these verses have been translated. The main disagreement I have with the New King James Version is its punctuation. And punctuation is interpretive; it's not in the Hebrew. So I will be following other versions that interpret each phrase in a way that reconciles this passage with all the other passages. The translation is the same, but the punctuation is different.

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<sup>4</sup> For many of these promises, see Phillip Kayser, *Has God Indeed Said? The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament* (Omaha, NE: Biblical Blueprints, 2009).

Verse 1 begins, “There was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn...” This is going to be explaining why Manasseh got *two* territories whereas Ephraim got one. The explanation is that Manasseh was the firstborn. And you might object, “Now wait a minute! Wasn’t Ephraim the second-born put *ahead* of Manasseh in Genesis 48?” Yes he was. And Ephraim *was* put ahead of Manasseh in four ways: First, Ephraim would receive his inheritance *before* Manasseh did. And last week we saw that he did receive it first. Second the tribe of Ephraim would become more powerful than the tribe of Manasseh. And despite its land-size being smaller, the tribe of Ephraim *did* become more powerful. Third, Ephraim’s inheritance was better in terms of quality. And fourth, Ephraim would *far* outpace Manasseh in fruitfulness or population. Those are the *only* ways that Ephraim was explicitly put ahead of Manasseh. *But Manasseh was still the firstborn* (as this text says), so he got the firstborn’s double portion - a portion on the East side of the River (Bashan) and a portion on the West side of the River.

In the next phrase he is going to point out that Machir (one of *four* children of Manasseh) would get an inheritance on *both sides* of the Jordan because Machir was *also* a firstborn son, and would get the double portion that belonged to the firstborn. Machir was also rewarded because he was a mighty man of war who had proved himself to be worthy. So Machir gets a *double* inheritance.

And if you look at the first green box on the genealogical chart in your outlines, you will see the name, “Machir.” Under Machir you will see blue boxes that inherited the East side of the Jordan and you will see green boxes that inherited the West side. Seeing it visually helps to make sense of the text. So the rest of verse 1 mentions the *first* part of his inheritance and then verse 2b through verse 13 outlines the *second* part of his inheritance - on the West side. Starting to read halfway through verse 1:

namely for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, [now comes the first part of a parentheses] (because he [that is, Machir] was a man of war; therefore he was given Gilead and Bashan.

Gilead and Bashan were the huge territories on the East side of the Jordan that had already been distributed while Moses was alive. Just for clarification, it was *Machir* who was given Gilead and Bashan, not Gilead his grandson and it was Machir who earlier in Scripture is labeled as the mighty warrior. The English grammar of this verse could go either way, but it was Machir.

Then in verse 2 he mentions that Manasseh’s *other children* (so there *are* other children - and those other children have already been mentioned earlier in Scripture) *also got an inheritance*. The first clause of verse 2 is also in that parentheses. And several translations take it this way. It says,

And there was a lot for the rest of the children of Manasseh according to their families. [end of parentheses]]

Instead of a full colon (which is interpretive, since there aren’t punctuation marks in Hebrew) there should be an ending parenthesis finishing off that clause, with the next clause picking up with Gilead again, who had been introduced before the parenthesis.



Otherwise there are contradictions. So that is saying, “By the way, it wasn’t just Gilead who got an inheritance. Manasseh had other children with their clans.” But now he gets back to Gilead and Gilead’s clans and he names the clans that descended from Gilead: “for the children of Abiezer, the children of Helek, the children of Asriel, the children of Shechem, the children of Hopher, and the children of Shemida.”

Then comes a summary of all of verses 1-2 - “these were the children of Manasseh with their clans.”

Almost every commentary admits that it is awkward Hebrew, but the conservative commentaries point out that there really are no contradictions between this text and earlier and later texts. The focus in this chapter is Manasseh, his son Machir, his grandson Gilead, and the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Gilead.

But it is easiest to explain from the chart, which puts several passages together, including from Chronicles. And as I’ve already said, I have cross-checked this with the most conservative commentaries. The blue boxes inherited Gilead and Bashan while the green boxes inherited the land on the West side of the Jordan.

## IV. The Rights of the Women (vv. 3-6)

### A. The problem stated (v. 3)

Well, let’s move from the rights of men to the rights of women. Verses 3-6 explain that when there is no male heir, women aren’t thrown off of the land like happens in unbiblical hyper-patriarchy. If her father dies without male children, the females can inherit it. If the husband dies, the wife can stay on the land. So these verses give a huge corrective to pagan hyper-patriarchy and preserve the rights of women. Most women got their inheritance rights *through their husbands*. Marriage made them *one* with their husbands and they had the enjoyment of the land *through* their husbands. But these verses bring up a unique case where there was no son to inherit the *father’s* property. Verse 3 says,

But Zelophehad the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but only daughters. And these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

So what does a dad do when he only has daughters? He is interested in his descendants inheriting his land and his wealth, but at least the system of *land* distribution was primarily given to males. The land was distributed to a son, with daughters occupying land (or houses, if they were in the city) through their husband’s inheritance. Wives became full-fledged members of their *husband’s* clan, so it’s not like they were left out at all. The only problem here was that the dad who was going to pass on his inheritance didn’t have sons to pass it on to. And obviously Moses gave a solution to this, but before we get to that solution, I want us to learn some lessons related to women.

### B. The daughters are proactive (v. 4a)

The first thing that I see is that the daughters were proactive in solving this problem, not passive. Don't ever think that women have to be passive spectators. They should *honor* their authority structure, but they have the right to see that their needs are fulfilled. So verse 4 says, "And they came near..." They came. They acted. They pursued their rights. This is Biblically appropriate.

In this church we value the input that women have. And husbands should value the input and the wisdom that their wives have as well. You are a team, and even though there is a team *lead* in the family, that does not mean that you women have no voice. Leaders should always value the wisdom of those that they lead.

### C. These women had direct access to the leaders

The next thing to notice is that these women had *direct* access to their leaders. This too is in such stark contrast to Muslim and African hyper-patriarchy. The leaders did not consider it strange that these women came directly to them. Not at all. It says, "And they came near before Eleazar the priest, before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the rulers, saying..." Can women speak to elders? Yes. Can they speak to elders even if they are married? Yes. We will see when we look at Numbers 36 that these daughters were *all* married by this time, yet *they* came directly to the leaders and *they* got an answer. Can women speak to political leaders? Yes.

Obviously it was the men who normally *represented* the needs of their families, but let's say that a dad is passive and completely ignoring the needs of his family. Or worse, let's say that the dad is being abusive to the family. Can women interpose and come directly to the church leaders and ask for help? I believe this chapter is one of many that says that the answer is "Yes." We saw in chapter 15 that Achsah was very respectful in the way she approached her husband and the way that she approached the civil leadership, but women can have access to the leadership of the church *and the state* when the need arises.

And this is true even if the family itself is not the problem. In this case it appears that the father was dead and that these daughters had married godly men. Yet because the *daughters* were the ones who were legally entitled to their father's property (not the husbands), the *daughters* came and presented the case, not the husbands. The husbands may or may not have been there, but it was the *women* who presented their case. These daughters are about to remind these leaders of something that God had said through Moses. They did not want to be neglected. And they don't passively hope that the leaders will remember. They proactively asked for what was legitimately theirs.

### D. These daughters base their request upon the Word of God (v. 4b)

And the next point is related. These daughters based their request upon the Word of God. They say, "The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers." We will look at that command in a bit, but first I want to point out that the Word of God stands above all leaders and so it can be appealed to. And leaders cannot ignore the Word of God. If a daughter sees something unbiblical happening in the home, she can respectfully remind

the parents about what the Word of God says. A wife can do the same. Single women can do the same when it comes to other forms of leadership. Leaders are not immune from being held accountable to the Word of God.

### E. This implies that these daughters knew how to read and had access to the Scriptures (v. 4)

Of course, this means that the women *needed to know* what the Word of God said. They were not ignorant. *They were educated.* And by the way, this is a proof that there *was* a written canon that these daughters could appeal to. Francis Schaeffer used this verse to contradict liberals who claimed that the Pentateuch had not been written yet. But we know that is false. There was an objective body of Scripture that *anyone* could appeal to, and we have already seen that the synagogue leaders ensured that *everyone* was educated in the Scriptures - like I am trying to do this morning.

And Numbers 27 shows that these daughters knew the intricate ins-and-outs of the Scripture from a very young age even before they were married. We need to teach our children how to read Scripture, how to interpret Scripture, and how to apply Scripture to their own situations. But in any case, many Scriptures insist on the education of *all* of our children, not just the males.

### F. The background story (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12)

And to see how they did that, go ahead and turn to Numbers 27. This is what the daughters are referring to as the command of the Lord. I'm going to read and comment as we go through the text, but I am going to keep my comments to a minimum. I just want you to get the key points that these women are appealing to. Numbers 27, beginning to read at verse 1.

Num. 27:1 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2 And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: 3 "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons.

Whichever daughter was the spokeswoman for the other daughters, she wanted to make sure that the leaders knew that their father was not disinherited because of rebellion. He died from other causes. And that shows that they were quite familiar with God's laws of inheritance. They knew that a person *could* be disinherited, but they point out that this was not the case with their dad. So they came up with a question. In verse 4 they ask,

4 Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

Since only males had been counted in the census of Numbers 26, which had just occurred prior to entering Canaan, they saw a problem. Since they had no father or brothers to inherit what belonged to the family, their father's land would go *outside* the family and thus contradict God's purpose in patriarchal inheritance. On the other hand, they knew that their dad *had a Biblical warrant* to inherit land. So they asked to be allowed to inherit their father's portion of the land. It was a logical extrapolation from the Scriptures that they had, but nothing explicit had yet been given in the Bible. So they asked for a judgment in their case. Verse 5:

Num. 27:5 So Moses brought their case before the LORD. 6 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 7 "The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them.

Notice that God *Himself* appreciates the faith of these daughters and their own application of the inheritance laws. He says that they were right. They had apparently figured this out before Moses did, which again speaks to God's high evaluation of women and their capabilities. Don't ever think of true Biblical patriarchy as diminishing women. It does not. It elevates the status of women. And it protects women far more than feminism does. Feminism puts undo burdens upon women and excuses men from their responsibilities. Feminism actually removes protections in the long run. Why? Because it almost always leads to statism.

But the word "them" in the phrase, "you shall surely give *them* an inheritance" is masculine plural. In other words (just like in Numbers), the "them" is not referring to the daughters. It refers to the male descendants of these women. This speaks of covenant succession. But it also reinforces patriarchy. So the fact that these women had rights did not do away with the fact that males would eventually own their land.

God goes on to lay down more Scripture to guide people on these kinds of issues in the future. Verse 8:

8 And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it." And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

The faith of these women resulted in an inscripturated solution that would benefit women *and others* for generations to come. God enshrined the rights of women to not be totally disinherited from property.

Now turn to Numbers 36. This answer presented another conundrum for the elders of Manasseh. There could potentially be a loophole that people might take advantage of in the year of Jubilee and transfer property that belonged to one tribe to another tribe. This could completely undermine state sovereignty. So even tribes (or states) had rights within

patriarchy - rights that have been almost completely evaporated in America because of the centralization in Washington, DC. Numbers 36, beginning at verse 1.

Num. 36:1 Now 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 spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. 2 And they said: "The LORD commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. 3 Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. 4 And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

This is a very logical deduction. They knew that God's will never contradicts itself, and since God wanted the borders of the various states to remain in place, they wanted a Scripture that would resolve the potential conundrum. Verse 5.

Num. 36:5 Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying: "What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. 6 This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, "Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.'

Notice that these women were not forced into marriage. That's another inalienable right that they had - to agree to the one that they are going to marry. This is a right that is absent in the hyper-patriarchy of many nations in Africa. And this was built on the Biblical doctrine of the covenant. The marriage would not be a covenant if they were forced into marriage. Covenants must be freely entered into. Thus God says that the women can marry whom *they* think is best.

But then God says their choices are limited to *some* degree by the Word of God. And women today can marry whom they choose, but within the confines of the Word of God. They cannot marry an unbeliever, or a man who does not meet other Biblical qualifications. But the point is that if arranged marriages do happen (they don't need to, but if they do), they must be approved by the woman. And there are many Scriptures that we looked at under my previous sermon that show that a woman can veto the pick of the dad. So in terms of women's rights, the Bible was revolutionary in its day. Women had a choice. And these passages are very important for correcting hyper-patriarchy in our own day. Verse 7:

7 So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. 8 And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. 9 Thus

no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance.” Num. 36:10 Just as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad; 11 for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to the sons of their father’s brothers. 12 They were married into the families of the children of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father’s family.

Well, this means that when they approached Joshua, they were already married. Yet they legally had a right to inherit their father’s property. Verse 13 emphasizes that this is not simply the opinion of Moses, but is the very Word of God.

Num. 36:13 These are the commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.

### G. Joshua gave them more than one share (vv. 4c-6a)

So back to Joshua 17, verse 4 ends by saying, “Therefore, according to the commandment of the LORD, he gave them an inheritance among their father’s brothers.” If God’s Word said it, Joshua followed it to a t.

And again, the “them” is masculine plural, implying that the eldest male firstborn of each daughter would inherit the land and take care of their parents. And not one of the leaders of Israel questioned it, showing again that women had legal rights in Israel. It’s a beautiful passage on women’s rights.

And what’s super interesting about this is that Hephher (their dad) gets a share for *each* of his daughters, which places *each* of the daughters on an equal footing with Hephher’s other brothers. It’s astounding. It’s almost as if God is going *overboard* in emphasizing that women have property rights. Verses 5-6:

Ten shares fell to Manasseh, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which were on the other side of the Jordan, 6 because the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance among his sons; and the rest of Manasseh’s sons had the land of Gilead.

Commentators point out that there were five living sons of Gilead (Abiezer [sometimes called Jeezer], Helek, Asriel, Shechem, and Shemidah). Each of them got a share, making five shares. And each of the daughters of their brother Hephher got a share, making an additional five shares, or a total of ten shares to the descendants of Gilead who were on the West side of the River. The daughters didn’t have to divide one share between all of them. Thus, as David Howard words it,

Hepher's inheritance was multiplied fivefold. Thus, the grand total of portions in Manasseh's inheritance was twelve, two east of the Jordan and ten to the west.<sup>5</sup>

That is really a stunning gift on God's part. God deliberately elevated these women's rights to those of warriors who had fought for the land. And on what basis? Astoundingly, God's generosity here was not based on service. It was simply based upon the fact that they had persevered in claiming God's promises. I think David Firth is correct when he says,

One does not need to be exemplary in faith to claim God's promises to all his people; one simply needs to know what God has promised and then live in light of that. Mention of these women, therefore, is still intended to point to them as examples of faith, as those who claim the promises; but at the same time they are more typical of ordinary believers than Caleb in that they have no extraordinary basis for claiming their promise, merely the persistence to keep bringing those promises before God. In this case, these women became like the other clan heads in Manasseh, each receiving their portion within the allotment to the whole tribe. They therefore provide an important point of balance, because many believers today continue to make the mistake of thinking that God's promises are only for those who live an exemplary life in some way. The simple reality seen in these women, though, is that it is merely a matter of knowing God's promises and being willing to ask for them in Christ Jesus, in whom they all find their fulfilment.<sup>6</sup>

And I say, "Amen!" And so my challenge to you is, "Do you know God's promises? Do you believe God's promises? And are you actively claiming God's promises?" The case of these women shows that we ought to.

## V. The Territory of Manasseh Further Explained (vv. 7-11)

I won't spend a lot of time on the division of the rest of the territory since the applications are *very* similar to what I made in previous sermons. But I will mention that verses 8-9 remind us that some of Ephraim's cities overlapped into Manasseh's territory. And verses 10-11 shows that some of Issachar and Asher's cities overlapped into Manasseh's territory. And the same applications we made last week could be made to those verses here.

## VI. The Levitical cities (vv. 7,11)

Two of the cities in its boundary description became Levitical cities: Shechem (in verse 7; see 21:21) and Taanach (in verse 11; see 21:25). God scattered the Levites throughout

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<sup>5</sup> David M. Howard Jr., Joshua, vol. 5, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 352.

<sup>6</sup> David G. Firth, *The Message of Joshua*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 168.

Israel to ensure that there would be theological instruction in the Word of God everywhere. No Israelite would be deprived of the preaching of the Word. And I have commented on this in chapters 15 and 16 sufficiently that I don't need to say more.

## VII. The Failure of Manasseh to drive out the Canaanites (vv. 12-13)

But I do want to end with verses 12-13, which say,

12 Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities, but the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. 13 And it happened, when the children of Israel grew strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

Why were they not able? After all, God had promised Joshua that Israel *would* be able to defeat their enemies *if they would look to Him in faith*. In *ourselves* we are never able to fulfill God's Word. By faith we must receive that ability from God Himself. It is only by God's divine power and through the merits of Jesus that anything we do has lasting value and is pleasing to God. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. I like what Precept Ministries says on this verse. Their website says,

Repeatedly God has reassured Joshua and the Israelites that He is able to defeat their enemies. And yet His doing so does not give Israel (in this case the sons of Manasseh) a "pass" so to speak. In other words God's promise of His power and provision was not teaching them to "Let go, let God" a teaching that is NOT in the Bible! The more accurate truth is "Let God, let's go!" The sons of Manasseh for some reason did not engage in the "Let God" part of this "divine dynamic." Whether they were fearful, unbelieving, apathetic, lazy, etc, the point is that they did not engage the Canaanites. In other words, they "WOULD NOT" engage them and as a result they "COULD NOT" disengage them!<sup>7</sup>

The text is quite clear that this is correct. Since the citizens of Manasseh *were* able to put the Canaanites to forced labor, that means that they *could* have driven them out. But lacking faith, they lacked the spirit to do so. And this is a warning to us. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith we do not engage in our labors by His supernatural power. And when our eyes are not fixed on God, it is so easy to be satisfied with lesser goals than what God gives to us.

Like the daughters of Zelophehad, may we be grounded in the promises of God, confident in the grace of God, have faith to make big prayers with audacious expectations, and be motivated only to seek the glory of God. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.preceptaustin.org/joshua-17-commentary>