

This has to be one of the strangest conclusions to any book of the Bible!

Verse 13 demonstrates that this is, in fact, the end of the book.

“These are the commandments and the rules that the LORD commanded through Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.”

We’ve been on the plains of Moab since chapter 22,
waiting for Israel to enter the Promised Land.

Why does the story of Numbers end with the daughters of Zelophehad.

Numbers consists of three blocks of teaching, focusing on the events and teaching at three places:

- 1) Sinai (chapters 1-10)
- 2) Forty Years at Kadesh (chapters 13-19)
- 3) The Plains of Moab (chapters 22-36)

In between these three blocks of teaching,
there are the travel narratives (from Sinai to Kadesh in chapters 11-12,
and from Kadesh to Moab in chapters 20-21).

The first block of teaching at Sinai is designed to prepare Israel for their wilderness journey.

The second block of teaching at Kadesh is all about Israel’s refusal to enter the land,
and the development of the priestly duties of the Levites and the sons of Aaron.

The third block of teaching at the Plains of Moab is all about the new generation,
and preparations for life in the Promised Land.

But there is another way in which Numbers is oriented around the two censuses –
in chapter 1 and chapter 26.

That’s *why* the book received the name “Numbers.”

But immediately after the *second* census,
was when we were first introduced to the daughters of Zelophehad.

Back in chapter 27, we heard about the case of the daughters of Zelophehad.

Zelophehad died in the wilderness – not in a rebellion –
but he had no sons, only daughters.

So the five daughters of Zelophehad came
and requested a possession among their father’s brothers.

Moses inquired of the LORD,
and the LORD granted their request.

Now, probably just a few weeks later,
as the people are discussing the division of the land (in chapter 34),
they realize that there is another problem.

What if the girls marry outside of the tribe of Manasseh?

If one of the daughters marries a man from Gad,
then a part of the inheritance of Manasseh will be joined to Gad.

And so:

1. How to Complain Well: The Complaint of the Heads of Manasseh (v1-4)

The heads of the fathers' houses of the clan of the people of Gilead the son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans of the people of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the chiefs, the heads of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel.

In other words, they complain.

I have often said that I want you to be good complainers!

We need to distinguish between “grumbling” and complaining.
Grumbling, murmuring, whining – these are all *bad* forms of complaint.

Grumbling and murmuring tend to be directed *to the wrong people*.

This often takes the form of, “you’ll never believe what so-and-so said...”
and winds up as gossip and tearing people down behind their backs.

Whining is usually directed to the right people – *but in the wrong manner*.

“Mommy, you never let us have any fun...”

You all know what grumbling and whining looks like –
so I don’t think that I need to give more examples of that!

But what does a *good complaint* look like?

Our Book of Church Order in the PCA has a whole chapter on *complaints*.

If you don’t like a decision of your session, your presbytery, or your General Assembly,
you may file a complaint.

Nowadays we require that the complaints be in writing –
obviously that wasn’t a requirement in Moses’ day!

But the complaint must be submitted
to the body whose action you are complaining against.

This is precisely what the people of Gilead do.

In chapter 27, Moses had given the daughters of Zelophehad
an inheritance with their father’s brothers.

The principle – the basis for his decision –
was that a father’s house should not be eliminated from Israel.

Therefore, if a man has no sons, then his daughters may inherit.

If he has no daughters, then his nearest male relative inherits.

² They said, “The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the people of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters.

The people of Gilead recognize that this decision was from the LORD,
so they realize that they can’t overturn the decision.
But after several weeks or months, as people are talking about the future,
they realize that there is perhaps an unintended consequence of this verdict.

³ But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance.

If the daughters of Zelophehad marry *outside* the tribe,
if these daughters of Manasseh marry into Zebulun or Reuben –
then their sons will be of the tribe of Zebulun or Reuben.
And so the inheritance will pass out of the tribe of Manasseh.

Verse 4 highlights the problem:

⁴ And when the jubilee of the people of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry, and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.”

The Jubilee was the 50th year.
(7x7 + 1)

Leviticus 25 describes the Jubilee year.

Every seventh year was a “Sabbath year” – the land was given a year of rest.
But then they were to count seven weeks of years – “seven times seven years” –
and they were to consecrate the fiftieth year as a year of jubilee:
“when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.”

The Jubilee year was to be a holy year (like the Sabbath day was a holy day).

On the jubilee year, all land was to be returned to its rightful owner.

You could rent out the land for 49 years –

but in the 50th year it would return to it’s original owner.

As God said in Lev. 25:23

“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine.

For you are strangers and sojourners with me.”

God permitted Israel to alienate houses in walled cities –

but the land was their inheritance from God.

So the people of Gilead point out that if a daughter of Zelophehad marries a Reubenite,
then their son would be a Reubenite –
and so when the Jubilee year came,
this land in Manasseh would be handed over to Reuben *forever*.

I want you to notice the attitude expressed in this complaint.

The complaint is clear, straightforward, and avoids making accusations.

A good complaint is clear: *here's the problem*.

A good complaint avoids making accusations

(there's nothing like the grumbling in the wilderness here!).

And further, a good complaint *trusts* the one in authority to make it right.

The people of Gilead come to Moses trusting that Moses will make it right.

They *could have* proposed a solution.

It is often prudent to propose such a solution when you bring a complaint!

But such is their confidence in Moses – and in Moses' God –

that they are content to bring their concern,

and leave it to the wisdom of the body.

(There is a great line that concludes all petitions

brought to the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly.

After stating the desired goal of the complaint or petition, they say:

“or do otherwise as in their wisdom may seem best”)

Now, I started with church complaints – because that's the context in Numbers –
but this is equally true in any other situation in life.

Children, I want you to be good complainers!

Parents, you need to teach your children how to complain.

They already know how to grumble and whine – they don't need help with that!

But *complaining* requires humility and respect.

That's hard.

You need to teach your children – walk them through, step by step.

Help them practice!

Don't *wait* until they figure out how! (*they won't*)

If they grumble, tell them, “No, don't grumble to your sister –
bring your complaint to me.”

If they whine, tell them, “No, you need to use a respectful voice.”

Teach them the words – teach them the tone.

And for that matter, demonstrate a proper complaint in how you talk to your spouse!

If you speak respectfully to each other –

and demonstrate humility in your attitude and your words –

they will learn much more quickly!

But there's another thing we need to see here.
Gilead comes to Moses with *confidence*.
Some people seem to think that Moses was a harsh or difficult man.
That cannot be true.

Why do I say that?
Because of the way that Gilead approaches him.

Are you approachable?
Approachable does not mean that you put with everything!
Moses did not put up with grumbling and whining.
But just as Zelophehad's daughters approached Moses with confidence,
so now the leaders of Gilead come with the same confidence –
knowing that Moses would hear their complaint.

Do your children *know* that you will hear their complaint.
It doesn't mean that you always agree with them –
it doesn't mean that you always do what they want!
But they know that you will take them seriously and hear them out.

And you should also be good complainers at work!
You can always hear grumbling in the hallways.
Too often you hear whining or intimidation.

If you are in a position of leadership
you want to cultivate and develop a culture where good complaints are taken seriously.
This means that you need to establish a track record
of taking good complaints seriously!
It doesn't mean that you do whatever anyone wants you to do!
Rather, it means that you take them seriously!
And even if you have to deny the complaint,
they should come away with the sense that they have been heard.

And notice Moses' reply:

2. The Inalienable Right of Inheritance (v5-9)

⁵And Moses commanded the people of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, "The tribe of the people of Joseph is right.

Not only was it a good complaint (in the proper form) –
but they are right!

They have correctly identified a problem that needs to be remedied *now*.

Whether you are the session or the deacons in the church –
whether you are parents with your children,
or business leaders in the office –
if someone brings a proper complaint –
and you acknowledge that it's proper – *and that they are right!* –
then you need to do something about it!

There is nothing more discouraging than being told,
“You're right – but we're not going to do anything about it!”
Someone recently pointed out to me
that I had gotten stuck on selecting the same songs in the service
over and over again!
So I've asked the secretary to keep track of what we sing,
so that I can try to find a better balance.

In verses 6-9, Moses gives his response to the complaint of Gilead.

⁶This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: 'Let them marry whom they think best, only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father. ⁷The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. ⁸And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers. ⁹So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance.'”

“Let them marry whom they think best” –
verse 6 reminds us that even in a world of arranged marriages,
both parties still had a say in the matter.
Verses 6-9 makes clear, however, that a woman who possesses an inheritance
may only marry within the clan.

Verse 9 explains the reason:

“no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another,
for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance.”

Land and Seed.

The land belongs to the seed.
Not just generically – but particularly.
Each tribe needs to hold on to its own land – its own inheritance.

We're so used to the whole earth belonging to Jesus that we forget about this.
The earth was given to Adam for him to steward – to exercise dominion.
But Adam failed –
and the earth came under the dominion of the devil.

And so God called Israel to be steward over one part of the earth –
and that one part was divided into 12 –
and each tribe of Israel was to exercise dominion over its own inheritance.
But Israel failed –
and so the Promised Land came under the dominion of the nations.

But the promise to Abraham was that he should inherit the earth.
The Mosaic covenant foreshadows the kingdom of Christ –
the one who entered into the inheritance of his Father
in his ascension to the Father's right hand.

It's when you think of the inheritance in this light
that you start to realize why God says that Israel must not alienate their inheritance.
For an Israelite to alienate his inheritance,
would be the same as for Jesus to say to Satan,
“Okay, sure, I'll worship you, if you'll give me all the kingdoms of the earth!”
Because the kingdoms of the earth belong to Jesus!
He is the rightful heir!
If Jesus surrenders his rights to Satan, by bowing to Satan,
then Jesus would have alienated his rightful inheritance!

This is beautifully illustrated by Naboth in 1 Kings 21.
King Ahab tries to purchase Naboth's vineyard, in order to turn it into a vegetable garden.
But Naboth says, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.”

So instead, Queen Jezebel has Naboth slandered and executed,
so that Ahab can take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

What is particularly interesting is that God declares that *this sin* is the final straw.
It is only at this point that God says that he will cut off every male from Ahab's line.

When you start killing the Seed and taking possession of their Land,
then God cuts you off from the Land by obliterating your Seed.

So verses 5-9 highlight how the inheritance is inalienable!

But also notice in verses 10-12 the obedience of the daughters of Zelophehad:

3. The Obedience of the Daughters of Zelophehad (v10-12)

¹⁰ *The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD commanded Moses,* ¹¹ *for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to sons of their father's brothers.* ¹² *They were married into the clans of the people of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan.*

Think about this.

These girls (perhaps teenagers – since they may not have been married yet)
had come to Moses with their complaint a few weeks earlier –
and Moses had granted them their petition.
They will receive an inheritance with their father's brothers.

But now they learn that with this privilege comes a responsibility to the clan.
Most Israelite women could marry anyone they wish
(with the approval of their family).
But Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah – the daughters of Zelophehad –
must only marry within their father's clan.

With privileges come responsibilities.

In Israel, if you are the seed, then you inherit the land.
And so if you are a woman, then you need to make sure that the land stays with the seed.

Incidentally, there would have been no confusion in Hebrew between the man, Noah –
and the woman, No'ah (they are spelled differently).

These five women – the daughters of Zelophehad –
have already exhibited boldness and courage.
Now they demonstrate humility and obedience.

Forty years ago, when Israel was called to enter their inheritance,
the sons of Israel proved to be cowards.
They refused to go up and take their inheritance.
They were cowards and they were disobedient.

Now, the daughters of Zelophehad (together with all the tribe of Manasseh)
demonstrate the fidelity, boldness, and obedience
that Israel had been missing.

David Stubbs rightly says that these women
“mix boldness to confront systems that do not serve their proper ends
with the obedience that is willing to curtail certain freedoms
for the good of the community.
They are an icon of character we desperately need to contemplate.” (p249)

In short, they know when to complain –
when to say, “No, this is not right” –
and when to humbly submit and say,
“My personal preferences aren’t the issue here.”

How do you know which to do when?
Consider Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:22 –
“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth
for a sincere brotherly love,
love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
since you have been born again,
not of perishable seed but of imperishable,
through the living and abiding word of God.”

Love for God and others will impel you, at times, to complain.
And love for God and others will impel you, at times, not to insist on your “rights.”

But when the people of God start to act like the daughters of Zelophehad –
believing God’s promises – boldly pursuing justice –
and humbly submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,
then let all the earth tremble!

This is why I have titled the conclusion of the book of Numbers, in verse 13:
“Jericho has no chance.”

Conclusion: Jericho Has No Chance... (v13)

¹³ These are the commandments and the rules that the LORD commanded through Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

The book of Numbers ends with the word “Jericho.”

Think about it:

The daughters of Zelophehad accepted Moses’ restriction of their marriage rights
so that they might maintain the inheritance rights of all future generations,
and thus the faithful obedience of the daughters of Zelophehad
is the reason why the city of Jericho should be afraid – be very afraid!

Because when the people of God believe God’s promises,
and do what God commands,
then let all the earth give glory to God!

Jesus Christ has now entered into his inheritance.

Therefore all who are united to him by faith become fellow heirs with him.
This is why Paul will say in Galatians 4:6-7,
“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
crying, ‘Abba! Father!’
So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

But with this great privilege comes great responsibilities:

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3-4

that God has caused us to be born again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
so therefore, Peter says,

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,
but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1:14-16)

And Peter goes on to say in chapter 2, verses 15-17,

“For this is the will of God,
that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil,
but living as servants of God.
Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

In other words, if you are heirs of God in Jesus Christ,

then you need to live like the daughters of Zelophehad –

you need to be a good complainer,
you must not alienate or abandon your inheritance,
but, as Peter says in 2:12,

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable,
so that when they speak against you as evildoers,
they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”