

**September 15, 2019 - Num. 36:1-13 - Zelophehad's Daughters Again**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 36:1-13 - Zelophehad's Daughters Again**  
**Psalm 106:34-48**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9 (Last of the Seven of Consolation)**

### **Retaining the Inheritance**

The daughters of Zelophehad had obtained an ordinance (**Numbers 27:1-11**) which permitted the daughters of an Israelite dying without male issue to inherit their father's property. The chiefs of the Machirites of the half-tribe of Manasseh (see **Numbers 32:39-40**), of whom Zelophehad had been one, now obtain a supplemental enactment, directing that heiresses like his daughters should marry within their own tribe.

One interesting aspect of this - This question was brought up before Israel even crossed into the Promised Land. Their serious concern about loss of inheritance for the tribe shows their faith and assurance that God would indeed bring to pass the occupation of Canaan by Israel.

This is similar to God instructing Jeremiah to purchase the field of Hanameel while Jerusalem was under siege by Nebuchadnezzar, to assure them that after the exile, God would return them to the land (**Jeremiah 32**).

(Spiritually, recognizing and retaining our inheritance in Christ is of primary importance, which is why this story is important to us now).

The problem then was that if the daughter who inherits has a son, the son's pedigree follows his father's tribe and his inheritance remains in his father's tribe. But a wife takes her husband's tribe upon marriage. Her birth tribe has no more bearing on inheritance.

**Numbers 36:4** - "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."

But wouldn't the Jubilee Year regulations (**Leviticus 25**) return it? No.

In the Jubilee Year, only those lands that had been "sold" would return to the original owners. Land inherited that had gone to another tribe would remain.

**Numbers 36:5** - "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."

They had "said well" not only because it was a good solution, but because they had show faith in God's promise of possessing the Promised Land.

So if any had no sons, but only daughters, he was to marry them in his own tribe and family, that the inheritance might not be removed.

**Numbers 36:11-12** - "For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, 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."

### **The 15th of Ab**

The Jews say this prohibition lasted only until the tribes were firmly established in their inheritance. Then it was pronounced that the tribes could intermarry. The day later was proclaimed as a joyous holiday by the rabbis.

But this doesn't seem right to me and some scholars. The tribes could already intermarry - it was only the daughters without any male siblings who had inherited who had to marry within their tribe.

I think this was "added in" to a day that already celebrated several events:

- the day that the dying of the generation of the Exodus ceased;
- the day of the first full moon after the Fast of Ab, which pointed to light from out of that disastrous darkness;
- The day of the breaking of the axes used to cut firewood for the sacrifices in the Temple.
- several others

### **What do the Tribes Mean to Us Now?**

In Jesus' day there were only two tribes remaining - Judah and Benjamin. The 10 "lost tribes" had been carried away by the Assyrians centuries before.

Although extensive and detailed genealogies were kept in the Temple, they were presumably lost when the Temple was destroyed.

Wherever they were forced to wander, Jews took with them their own *yuchsin* (family lineage) documents. Unfortunately, most of these were lost in the travels and upheavals, as a result of harsh decrees of the oppressors, and even in fires that destroyed whole neighborhoods — occurrences which were sadly all too common throughout Jewish history.

Historical reports show some of these documents survived, at least for a while.

Tradition claimed Davidic descent for Hillel (born in Babylon c. 110 B.C., died 10 A.D. in Jerusalem). One of Hillel's descendants, Rabbi Judah the Nasi[ii] in the 2nd Century A.D. About three hundred years after Hillel's death, Rabbi Levi claimed that he received a genealogical scroll, which was found in Jerusalem, and in it was written "Hillel was descended from King David."

Similarly, Rabbi Yannai the Great (2d and 3d cent. A.D.) traced his lineage back to

Eli based on a “genealogical chart found at Jerusalem.” (Yerushalmi Ta'anit 4:2; Genesis Rabbah 118:13)

Jewish family in Yemen traced their lineage to Bonai, one of the sons of Peretz, the son of Judah. The genealogical record listed ninety-one successive generations, starting with Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, but ending in the 1500s.

We have no knowledge of discussions about genealogy during the period of the Rishonim (Early Sages, 1000–1500)

Currently, Jewish descent is reckoned through the mother. With the destruction of the Temple and exile, it became increasingly difficult to rely on patrilineal descent. The rabbis may have adopted matrilineal descent as a means of protecting the purity of the Jewish people during trying times – pogroms, oppression, wandering, assimilation – when it was not always clear who fathered a child.

Even after the destruction of the Temple and the official genealogies were lost, Jews knew and passed on their tribal identities. The loss of official genealogies was deeply deplored as a calamity, more especially because of their importance for the understanding of the books of Chronicles (Pes. 62b; B. B. 109). How prolific these Biblical books were in provoking genealogical conceits is shown by the statement that 900 camel-loads of commentary existed on I Chron. viii. 37 to ix. 44 (Pes. 62b).

The emphasis on genealogies and purity of lineage was important until Messiah came, who was expected to be born of the tribe of Judah.

Eusebius, an early church historian, claimed that Herod destroyed all the genealogical records because of the Edomite heritage (Church History, Chapter 7). But Josephus was able to find his own genealogy in the “public records” in the Temple, so they were in the Temple until its destruction (“Life of Flavius Josephus” 1.1). Besides, if the genealogical records were destroyed before Jesus came of age, his Messiahship could not have been proved.

Josephus describes how these Jewish genealogy records are collected, in Against Apion, 1.7:

"For he who is partaker of the priesthood, must propagate of a wife of the same nation; without having any regard to money, or any other dignities: but he is to make a scrutiny, and take his wife's genealogy from the ancient tables; and procure many witnesses to it. And this is our practice, not only in Judea; but wheresoever any body of men of our nation do live: and even there an exact catalogue of our priests marriages is kept: I mean at Egypt and at Babylon; or in any other place of the rest of the habitable earth, whithersoever our priests are scattered. For they send to Jerusalem the ancient names of their parents in writing, as well as those of their remoter ancestors: and signify who are the witnesses also. But if any war falls out, such as have fallen out a great many of

them already, when Antiochus Epiphanes made an invasion upon our country: as also when Pompey the great, and Quintilius Varus did so also: and principally in the wars that have happened in our own times: those priests that survive them compose new tables of genealogy, out of the old records, and examine the circumstances of the women that remain. For still they do not admit of those that have been captives; as suspecting that they have had conversation with some foreigners. But what is the strongest argument of our exact management in this matter is what I am now going to say; that we have the names of our High priests from father to son set down in our records, for the interval of two thousand years."

Strangely, Ephraim and Dan are not mentioned in the New Testament, not even in the listing of tribes in **Revelation 7:4-8**.

But Jesus and the New Testament talk a lot about the 12 tribes. There was an expectation of the restoration of the allotted tribal lands in later Jewish descriptions of the Messianic age.

Tractate Kiddushin of the Babylonian Talmud 4:70:2 - "The Almighty's Presence dwells only among families of pure lineage in the Nation Israel":

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: When the Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His Divine Presence, He rests it only upon families of unflawed lineage among Israel, as it is stated: "At that time, says the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel" (Jeremiah 30:25). Of all Israel, is not stated, but "of all the families," which includes only those of unflawed lineage, the renowned families of Israel.

Maimonides - "in the days of the King Messiah, when his kingdom is restored, and all Israel shall be gathered to him, all will have their genealogies set right by his mouth, through the Holy Spirit that rests upon him, as it is said, 'he shall sit a refiner and purifier'" In other words, purifying the sons of Levi by separating those who are not really descendants of Aaron from the genuine priests.

Jesus appointed 12 disciples who became the apostles of the church. The Twelve had a symbolic role to play showing He was the Messiah who would restore the tribes.

New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham in "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses" comments, "The significance of the group is undoubtedly related to the ideal constitution of Israel as comprising twelve tribes and the Jewish hopes for the restoration of all twelve tribes in the messianic age."

- **Luke 22:29-30** - "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

- **Matthew 19:28** - "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

- **James 1:1** - "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

- **Revelation 21:12** - "And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel"

For us, the 12 tribes simply mean spiritual Israel, in which Gentiles have been grafted into according to Paul, to join believing Jews as the Church.

### **12 is a mystical number**

The different "tribes" in the new Israel are probably very similar to the gifts and callings of the different members of the Body.

Tradition says Jacob originally placed 12 stones under his head on his way to Haran, which fused into one stone. This alludes to the twelve tribes that he will bring into the world as a result of his marriage. More specifically, the fusion of the twelve stones alludes to the fusion of the twelve tribes. This unification of the twelve sons of Jacob occurred just prior to his death. Surrounding Jacob's bed, his twelve sons proclaimed as one: "Hear O Israel (Jacob's name) The Lord is our God, The Lord is One."

Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXVIII:11 AND HE TOOK OF THE STONES OF THE PLACE (XXVIII, 11). R. Judah said: He took twelve stones, saying: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, has decreed that twelve tribes should spring forth. Now neither Abraham nor Isaac has produced them. If these twelve stones cleave to one another, then I know that I will produce the twelve tribes.' When therefore the twelve stones united, he knew that he was to produce the twelve tribes.

The Sages teach that the Red sea split into twelve paths, providing a separate path for each of the twelve tribes.

Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XXIV:1 AND MOSES LED ISRAEL ONWARD (XV, 22). It is written, Do you thus requite the Lord? (Deut. XXXII, 6). R. Shasha, son of R. Abba, used to write the he below, and the lamed above, implying: Alas! 'Do you thus requite the Lord' after all the miracles He hath performed for you, dividing the sea for you into twelve portions and drowning the Egyptians in the sea, drowning them with one hand and saving you with the other, as it says, Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy (Ex. XV, 6)?

The Midrash Haggai explains the sea was split into twelve paths and the water between each path was congealed into a kind of glass, thereby enabling each tribe to march along on its own path while remaining none the less in full view of all the other tribes (See also Pirke d'R. Elieazar 52)

The 12 loaves of showbread are bonded into oneness on the table of showbread.

There are twelve precious stones on the breastplate of the High Priest.

Midrash Rabbah - Numbers XIV:18 R. Phinehas b. Yair observed: The twelve silver dishes, the twelve silver basins, the twelve golden pans, the twelve bullocks, the twelve rams, the twelve he-lambs, and the twelve he-goats corresponded to the twelve constellations, the twelve solar months, the twelve lunar months, the twelve tribes, the twelve princes, the twelve controllers of life, and the twelve loaves of shewbread on the table.

See <http://www.betemunah.org/twelve.html>

Each tribe was given different meaningful names (**Gen. 29-30; 35:18**), and different destinies according to the blessings of both Jacob (**Genesis 49**) and Moses (**Deut. 33:6-25**).

In a sense then, we are following God according to our different gifts and offices and ministries, on individual paths but remaining one by being able to "see" one another. Or as we say in the Afikomen, we "discern the Lord's body" i.e. to discern that we are part of Christ's Body (**1 Corinthians 11:29**).

### Completing the Book of Numbers

The Book of Numbers is called "Bamidbar" in Hebrew: "In the Wilderness." It began with a census or numbering of the tribes. But that whole generation died in that wilderness because of their rebellion, except for Joshua, Caleb and the Levites. Aaron has died, and Moses has been told he will die soon. Now the book or scroll ends with the last few chapters emphasizing the new generation of Israelites leaving the wilderness and approaching their inheritance.

With instructions for driving out the Canaanites, warnings about idolatry, setting out the boundaries of that inheritance and providing for cities for the Levites as well as Cities of Refuge, it now ends with a question that focuses on and magnifies the importance and value of Israel's inheritance, and how to guarantee it not be lost.

For us, it focuses on our spiritual inheritance, of the "Rest" whose fulfillment is in Christ.

- **Matthew 5:5** - "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (*eretz* in Hebrew = land)"

- **John 2:19-21** - Jesus' body is the new temple - "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.... But he spake of the temple of his body."

True worship will no longer be restricted to Jerusalem, but is possible anywhere as long as it is "in spirit and in truth" (**John 4:21-23**).

Numbers ends here with Israel on the cusp of entering the land. The tale will continue in the last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy.