

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 27:1-11, 36:1-13

by Don Falkos

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One day, five women from the half-tribe of Manasseh stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the other leaders of Israel saying, "Our father, Zelophehad, died in the wilderness. And to be clear, he was not involved in Korah's rebellion against the Lord; he just died. So why should the name of our father disappear from his tribe just because he didn't have any sons? Give us property along with the rest of our relatives."

Moses brought their case before the Lord, who said, "Assign the daughters of Zelophehad the property that would have been given to their father. And instruct the people of Israel that if a man dies and has no son, his inheritance should be given to his daughters. If he has no daughter, it should be given to his brothers; if he has no brother, to his uncles; if he has no uncle, to his nearest relative within his own tribe."

Others from the half-tribe of Manasseh were concerned. "Suppose the daughters of Zelophehad marry men from another tribe? Their land will go with them to that other tribe and be lost to Manasseh forever. Would that be fair to the rest of us?"

The Lord commanded, "Any women throughout the tribes of Israel who are in line to inherit property may marry anyone they like as long as it is within their own ancestral tribe. Land must not pass from one tribe to another; each tribe of Israel must keep its allotted portion of land."

The daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded. They married men of the tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph. And so, their inheritance of land remained within their ancestral tribe.