

CHAPTER 27

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 27

This chapter relates, that, upon a petition of the daughters of Zelophehad, the affair of inheritances was settled; and it is directed that, in case of want of male issue, inheritances should pass to females, and in failure of them to the next of kin, whether father's brethren or any near kinsman, (⁻⁰⁴²⁷⁰⁸Numbers 27:1-11), also an order to Moses to go up to the Mount Abarim, and take a view of the good land, and die; with the reason of it, (⁻⁰⁴²⁷¹²Numbers 27:12-14), upon which Moses desires a successor of him might be appointed, (⁻⁰⁴²⁷¹⁵Numbers 27:15-17), in answer to which Joshua is nominated, and being presented before the high priest and the people, was invested with his office, by imposition of hands, and had his charge given him, (⁻⁰⁴²⁷¹⁸Numbers 27:18-23).

Ver. 1. *Then came the daughters of Zelophehad*, etc.] Who are mentioned among the families of Manasseh, under that of the Hopherites, (⁻⁰⁴²⁵³³Numbers 26:33), their father being dead, and they having no brethren, when they heard the land was to be divided among those that were numbered, and who were only males of twenty years old and upwards, were concerned, lest they should have no share in the division of the land; and therefore came, according to the Targum of Jonathan, to the house of judgment, or court of judicature, where Moses, the princes, etc. were now sitting: the genealogy of Zelophehad is given;

he was the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, the son of Joseph; by which it appears he was of the tribe of Manasseh, and of the fourth generation from him:

and these are the names of his daughters, Mahlah, Noah, ann Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah; in the same order their names are given in (⁻⁰⁴²⁵³³Numbers 26:33 ⁻⁰⁴²⁷¹³Joshua 17:3), but in (⁻⁰⁴²⁸¹¹Numbers 36:11), it is a little altered, Noah and Tirzah change places, which Jarchi says shows they were upon an equality one with another.

Ver. 2. *And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes, and all the congregation*, etc.] Who were now sitting

in court, to hear and try causes brought before them; here were Moses the chief magistrate, Eleazar the high priest, the princes of the several tribes, and the representatives of the whole congregation, or it may be the seventy elders; a very grand and august assembly, before whom these ladies appeared, and from whom they might expect to have justice done them:

by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; near to which this court was held, both for the convenience of the people, to apply to in case of need, when they came thither to worship, and of Moses, to seek the Lord in case of any difficulty that might arise, as now did:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 3. *Our father died in the wilderness*, etc.] As all the generation of the children of Israel did, that came out of Egypt, who were twenty years old and upwards, excepting Joshua and Caleb:

and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah; which is observed, not so much to obtain the favour and good will of Moses as to clear the memory of their father from any reproach upon it, he dying in the wilderness; and chiefly to show that the claim of his posterity to a share in the land was not forfeited, he not being in that rebellion, nor in any other; so that he and his were never under any attainder:

but died in his own sin; which though common to all men, every man has his own peculiar way of sinning, and is himself only answerable for it, (²⁵¹⁶Isaiah 53:6 ²⁶⁸⁰⁴Ezekiel 18:4) he sinned alone, had no partner or confederate, whom he had drawn into any notorious and public sin, as mutiny, etc. to the prejudice of the state, and the rulers in it; so the Targum of Jonathan adds,

“and he did not cause others to sin,”

so Jarchi; some take him to be the sabbath breaker, (⁰⁴¹⁵²Numbers 15:32), others that he was one of those that went up the hill, (⁰⁴¹⁴⁴Numbers 14:44,45), most likely his sin was that of unbelief, disbelieving the spies that brought the good report of the land, and giving credit to those that brought an ill report of it; and so with the rest of the people murmured, for which his carcass, with others, fell in the wilderness, and entered not into the good land, through unbelief: a sin not punished in their children:

and had no sons. which was the reason of this application.

Ver. 4. *Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son* etc.] Or be withdrawn, and his family lose their part and share on that account; this they thought was unreasonable: according to the Targum of Jonathan, to prevent the name of their father being lost, and his part in the land, their motion was, that their mother might marry their father's brother, according to the law in (^{<0285>}Deuteronomy 25:5,6), with which Jarchi agrees; but it does not appear that that law was as yet in being; though how otherwise the name of their father would be preserved, than by raising up seed in that way, is not easy to say; except, as some think, it was done by a son of one of those heiresses, or by the first son of everyone of them, being called after the name of their grandfather Zelophehad, or their mother's grandfather Hephher; though the Jews^{f423} commonly by the "name" understand no other than the "inheritance", which seems to be confirmed by what follows:

give us therefore a possession among the brethren of our fathers; a part with their uncles, or their children; by which they express their faith that the children of Israel would inherit the land, though as yet it was not conquered, nor even entered into; and might signify, as some think, their concern to have a part and portion in the heavenly inheritance the land of Canaan was typical of; and if so, as Ainsworth observes, they may be considered as five wise virgins indeed.

Ver. 5. *And Moses brought their cause before the Lord.*] For it seems it was too difficult for this court to decide; and it devolving upon Moses, as the president of it, and who only could have recourse to God at all times, he carried it to him and consulted with him about it: this, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem say, was one of the four causes that came before Moses the prophet, that he solved according to the mind of the Lord, which he consulted; one was concerning the blasphemer, (^{<0341>}Leviticus 24:11), the other concerning those defiled by the dead, (^{<0408>}Numbers 9:8), the third concerning the sabbath breaker, (^{<0454>}Numbers 15:34) and the fourth was this; (see Gill on "^{<0342>}Leviticus 24:12").

Ver. 6. *And the Lord spake unto Moses,* etc.] From off the mercy seat, where he consulted him, and from whence he promised to commune with him about any difficult matter that came before him, (^{<0252>}Exodus 25:22), *saying;* as follows.

Ver. 7. *The daughters of Zelophehad speak right*, etc.] What is just and reasonable:

thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; their uncles, or rather the children of them; for it is reasonable to suppose their father's brethren, or their uncles, were dead also: or "in giving thou shall give"^{f424}; which, according to Jarchi, denotes two parts or portions they should receive; the part of their father, who was of them that came out of Egypt, and his part with his brethren in the goods of Hephher: in the Misnah^{f425}, from whence he seems to have taken it, it is;

"the daughters of Zelophehad took three parts for inheritance; the part of their father, who was with them that came out of Egypt, and his part with his brethren in the goods of Hephher, and because he was the firstborn he was to take two parts:"

and though this strict command was given to Moses, yet it does not respect him personally, who lived not to enter into the land to see it divided; but him who should be his successor, and chief magistrate at the time of the division of it, which was Joshua, and of whom these ladies claimed their part, and had it, (^{f426}Joshua 17:3,4),

and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them; that is, that part which would have fallen to him by lot, had he been living, these were to take, they standing in his place; and so the portion of the land he would have had was to be divided between these live daughters of his.

Ver. 8. *And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel*, etc.] The above affair occasioned a law to be made, in which all the people would have a concern, among whom such cases should happen, as after related:

saying, if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter; as in the above case of the daughters of Zelophehad; what was determined as to their particular case was made into a general law.

Ver. 9. *And if he have no daughter*, etc.] Dies without any issue:

then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren; and the children descending from them; that is, if his father was dead; otherwise, if he was living, he was to be preferred to them, according to the Jewish writers; though, according to our law, no estate in fee simple ascends lineally, or

goes from a son, who has made a purchase of it, to a father: in the Misnah it is said ^{f426}, the order of inheritances is thus,

“if a man dies and has no son, then they cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter; a son is before a daughter, and all that descend from the son are before the daughter; the daughter is before the brethren (of her father), and those that descend from the daughter are before the brethren; the brethren (of a man) are before his father’s brethren (or his uncles); and they that descend from his brethren are before his father’s brethren: this is the general rule, everyone that is before in the inheritance, those that descend from him are before others, and a father is before all that descend from him.”

Ver. 10. *And if he have no brethren*, etc.] Nor any descendants from them: *then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father’s brethren*; that is, to his uncles, and to their children.

Ver. 11. *And if his father have no brethren*, etc.] Nor any descending from them:

then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family: that is nearest of kin to him, though ever so remote; that is, of his father’s family, not his mother’s, which was no family:

and he shall possess it: here the Jews have a saying, that an Israelite is never without heirs ^{f427}:

and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment; a judicial law, that should ever remain firm, and sure, and unalterable:

as the Lord commanded Moses; and therefore no man could dispose of his estate or inheritance by will, otherwise than is set forth by this command.

Ver. 12. *And the Lord said unto Moses*, etc.] After the covenant made with Israel in the plains of Moab, and the song delivered to them, (^{<630>}Deuteronomy 29:1 ^{<631>}Deuteronomy 32:1-49)

get thee up to this Mount Abarim; which was a range of mountains, so called from the passages by them over Jordan into the land of Canaan; one part of which was Nebo, and the top of that Pisgah, from whence Moses

had the view of the good land here directed to; (see ^{<0637>}Numbers 33:47, ^{<0639>}Deuteronomy 32:49 34:1).

and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel; for though he was now one hundred and twenty years old, his eyes were not dim, he could see at a great distance; and the height of this hill gave him an advantage of taking a prospect of the land, a great way into it; and very probably his sight might be greatly strengthened and increased at this time by the Lord, for the purpose; this may be an emblem of that sight by faith, which believers have at times of the heavenly Canaan, and sometimes are favoured with an enlarged one of it before their death.

Ver. 13. *And when thou hast seen it,* etc.] Which was all he was admitted to; for to go into it and see it was not allowed him, though he importuned it, (^{<0625>}Deuteronomy 3:25,26),

thou shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered; die as he did, in the same sudden, easy, quiet, and cheerful manner; (see ^{<0626>}Numbers 20:26-28).

Ver. 14. *For ye rebelled against my commandment the desert of Zin,* etc.] Both Moses and Aaron, which was the reason why they were not suffered to go into the land of Canaan, but died a little before the children of Israel came into it: what their sin was, called here a rebelling against the commandment of the Lord; (see Gill on "^{<0612>}Numbers 20:12"), and is next suggested:

in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me before their eyes; when the congregation of Israel strove against the Lord for want of water, they did not sanctify the Lord by believing in him; but expressed some degree of diffidence before the congregation about fetching water out of the rock, or questioning whether the Lord would give it to such a rebellious people, though they had his order for it:

that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; so called to distinguish it from another Meribah, or water of strife, at Rephidim, (^{<0617>}Exodus 17:7 ^{<0625>}Deuteronomy 32:51).

Ver. 15. *And Moses spake unto the Lord,* etc.] Having requested to go into the land and see it, which was denied him; and perceiving he must quickly die, and being a man of a public spirit, and concerned for the

welfare of the people of Israel, prays that a successor might be nominated and appointed:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 16. *Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh*, etc.] The Maker of the souls of men, called the spirits of all flesh, or of corporeal beings, to distinguish them from the angels, who, though spirits, are incorporeal; and who knows the different qualities of the souls of men, their powers, and capacities, and fitness for service, what gifts and talents they have for business; and who can bestow such upon them, which will qualify them for it:

set a man over the congregation: meaning in his room and stead.

Ver. 17. *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*, etc.] Which may lead them out, and go before them in war, and command them in battle and bring them in peace, having conquered their enemies; or these phrases only mean the administration of civil government among them, and diligence and assiduity in it, (see ^{<4010>}2 Chronicles 1:10), unless it has any peculiar respect to the leading the people of Israel out of the wilderness, and introducing them into the land of Canaan:

that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd; and so wander about, having none to guide them into proper pastures, or to protect them from beasts of prey; which is to be in a most forlorn and distressed condition; (see ^{<4085>}Matthew 9:36).

Ver. 18. *And the Lord said unto Moses*, etc.] In answer to his request:

take thou Joshua the son of Nun, who had been a servant of his near forty years, and of whose humility, diligence, faithfulness and integrity he had sufficient proof, as well as of his skill and courage in military affairs, particularly at the battle with Amalek, (^{<0173>}Exodus 17:9-13 24:13 33:11):

a man in whom is the Spirit: not only in whom is a spirit or soul, which is in every man; but the Spirit of God, and that not only as a spirit of grace and sanctification, which is in every good man; but as a spirit of prophecy, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; or rather it respects the more than ordinary gifts of the Spirit qualifying him for government, as courage and conduct, wisdom, prudence, and greatness of mind:

and lay thine hand upon him; thereby transferring the government to him, pointing him out to the people as his successor; to show to the children of Israel that he was in his place, as Aben Ezra notes; upon which followed a larger measure of the gifts of the Spirit of God; (see ^{f640}Deuteronomy 34:9).

Ver. 19. *And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation*, etc.] Declaring before them all that he was his successor, and that they might be witnesses of what was said and done unto him, and receive and acknowledge him as such, and as having power and authority over them, which it became them to submit unto:

and give him a charge in their sight: to take care of the people committed to him; to rule them in the fear of God, and according to his laws; and to be of good courage, and go before the people and introduce them into the land of Canaan; assuring him of the divine Presence and help, so that he need not fear any enemy whatever; of this charge, and as confirmed by the Lord himself, (see ^{f630}Deuteronomy 31:7,8,23).

Ver. 20. *And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him*, etc.] Meaning not the Spirit that was on Moses, and the gifts of the Spirit; for to do this was the work of the Lord, and not Moses, (see ^{f4117}Numbers 11:17,25), but of the honour of civil government; suggesting that he should give him a share in it, and use him not as a minister and servant, as he had been, but as his colleague and partner; and let him have some of the ensigns of power and authority, and some exercise of it; not only to inure him to government, but to make him respectable among the people:

that all the congregation of Israel may be obedient; to him as their ruler and governor, hearken to his words, and obey his commands.

Ver. 21. *And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest*, etc.] This was for the honour of God, whose priest Eleazar was, and whose oracle was consulted by him; for it is said ^{f428}, the high priest did not come into the presence of the king but when he pleased; and he did not stand before him, but the king stood before the high priest, as it is said, “and before Eleazar the priest shall he stand”; though it is commanded the high priest to honour the king, and to rise up and stand when he comes unto him; and the king does not stand before him, but when he consults for him by the judgment of Urim; and his posture seems to be different from other persons that consulted; for the same writer ^{f429} observes, in answer to a question,

“how do they consult? the priest stands, and his face is before the ark, and he that consults is behind him, and his face to the back of the priest;”

whereas here Joshua stood before the priest, and so any king or supreme governor:

who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: of the Urim and Thummim which were in the breastplate of judgment, and of consultation by them, (see Gill on “⁴⁻⁰²⁸³Exodus 28:30”) and from this place the Jews ^{f430} infer that consultation was not made by them for a private person, but for a king, or for one the congregation stood in need of:

at his word shall they go out, and at his word shall they come in; go out to war, and return from it, or do any service enjoined them; that is, either at the word of the Lord, or rather at the word of Eleazar the priest, declaring the will of God, which comes to much the same sense; or at the word of Joshua, directed by the high priest, according to the oracle of God; and he being under such direction, the people could never do amiss in obeying him, or be in any fear or danger of being led wrong by him; but he is mentioned in the next clause, as included in those that went out, and came in:

[both] he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation; which Maimonides ^{f431} interprets thus, “he”, this is the king; “and all the children of Israel”, this is the anointed for war, or he whom the congregation hath need of; “and all the congregation”, these are the great sanhedrim, or seventy elders.

Ver. 22. *And Moses did as the Lord commanded him,* etc.] Being faithful and obedient to him in all things, though ever so contrary to his own private interest and to that of his family:

and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; as his successor, whom God had named and appointed as such.

Ver. 23. *And he laid his hands upon him,* etc.] Jarchi observes, that he did this cheerfully, and did more than he was commanded; for the Lord said to him, “lay thine hand”, but he laid both his hands:

and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded Moses; (⁻⁰²⁷⁹Numbers 27:19), this is a clear proof that Moses was no imposter, since he sought not to aggrandize his family, or serve the interest of that; nor did he in the least repine or murmur that the priesthood was given to his brother Aaron and sons, and now the civil government to his servant of the tribe of Ephraim; and as for his own posterity, they were only common Levites that waited upon the priests.