

Park Street Church Christian Formation
God's People in the Wilderness: Preparing to Enter the Land
Numbers 27: Inheritance and Succession

The Usual and Necessary Review

- Pattern of rebellion and discontent
 - not going into the Land after spies' report → 40 years of detour
 - Korah and followers grasping for priesthood → disastrous judgment
 - clamor for water → with Moses's angry response, he forfeited entry into the Promised Land
 - clamor for food → the bronze serpent incident
- Fear on part of Moab and Midian → Balaam's curses turned to blessings
- The downfall of Israel at Baal Peor
- Second census – forthcoming inheritance purposes

Inheritance in the Land [27:1-11; 36:1-13; Josh 17:3-6]

General Inheritance Principles (kinship structure)

- Units: father's house (heads of fathers), family, clan, tribe
- Sons received with firstborn rights a double portion in order to care for extended family – responsibilities (Deut 21:17)
- Daughters generally received dowry (examples: Gen 29:24,29; Judg 1:13-15; 1 Kgs 9:16)
- Land apportioned by lot (Num 26:55-56)

Precedent-setting Event [following on second census the purpose of which was fair land allotment]

- Family line of Machir repeated in each iteration: Machir, Gilead, Hopher, Zelophehad
- Names of the women also repeated: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, Tirzah
- Women made a legal case at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting in the presence of the entire leadership
 - Recognition of God's justice in dealing with the wilderness generation
 - Distinction from Korah (suggesting perhaps those descendants lost their land claims because of participation in serious religious infraction)
 - Appeal for property – to continue *name*
- Moses brought the case before the Lord who responded—directly
- The request of the five daughters was granted; they were given their father's inheritance
- Then the precedent was established for wider legal audience (vss 8-11)
- Further long-range question: what about the land return in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:10)? The family heads of Manasseh had parsed out the implications of the Jubilee requirements (Num 36:3-4)
- The Lord commanded Moses (36:5 – “the mouth” of the Lord): no transfer of tribal lands among tribes; thus daughters had to marry within their own tribes

Additional Considerations

- We have the family of Machir settled in Transjordan in Gilead (Num 32:39-42)
- As the land was apportioned, twelve portions were for Manasseh (Josh 17:3-6) – ten plus two in Transjordan where they settled Bashan and Gilead. These were given to six sons and five daughters.
- And then an interesting archaeological/geographical note: Samaria ostraca [the “post-it note of antiquity”] have the names No'ah and Hoglah, apparently in western Manasseh. We also have a geographical location (Tirzah) west of the Jordan river.

Leadership Transition

The Impending “Crisis” – closure to this generation of leaders

- On the cusp of entering the Land meant the time of Moses’ death was also approaching
- Miriam and Aaron already dead
- An unsettling time for the whole people: multiple accounts to confirm details of succession
 - Moses’ retrospective (Deut 3:21-29)
 - recommissioning of Joshua (31:1-6; 14-23)
 - preparation for Moses’ ascent to Mt Nebo (32:48-52)
 - Death of Moses and transition to Joshua (34:1-12)

The Geographical Context

- The mountain (range) of Abarim (27:12) – Mt. Nebo to the top of Pisgah (Deut 34:1)
- God’s gift: “you will see, and then you will be gathered to your people, even you . . .”
- Because you (plural) “rebelled against my mouth” (27:14)
- Moses would see the whole Land (Deut 34:1-4): Gilead, Dan, all of Naphtali, territory of Ephraim/Manasseh, the land of Judah as far as the Sea, Negev, whole region from Jericho as far as Zoar

Continuity and Discontinuity

- Moses’ prayer to the “God of the spirits of all flesh” (only used in 16:22)
- Sheep (people) need a shepherd
- Joshua well-prepared – the S(s)pirit in him; had served as Moses’ assistant; trained in warfare; separate on mountain with Moses; knew the land as one of spies
- Ordination: public identification as co-leader until Moses’ death
- Distinctive from Moses:
 - Moses was to give Joshua “some” of Moses’ splendor, dignity, authority (*hod*)
 - Joshua would consult the Lord via the Urim and Thummim and the high priest, Eleazar, would obtain decisions
 - Nature of the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:29-30): possibly hendiadys – a dazzling light – accompanying the oracular words of the priest to confirm them – validating the message

Lessons

Next Week: Palm Sunday – singing and Scripture