

CCO Inductive Bible Study Series

THE 5 DAUGHTERS

NUMBERS 27:1-11

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CCO Inductive Bible Study Series

Our heart is for all CCO students, staff, and partner churches to grow in their love and understanding of the Bible as the grand unfolding story of all human history. More than a book of religion, the Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments faithfully and reliably communicate to us the goodness of creation by the God the Father, redemption in the Son, and gives a call to all God's people to live with humble confidence in the power of the Spirit to make all things new.

We hope these studies are a guide to go deeper into this story. The only way for these resources to come to life is through your active engagement with communities of faith who will consider the claims that Scripture is making and then to take up the call in their context to live lives of radical hope and love.

We must not only study together, but we must allow this narrative to reshape our lives together in mission. In order to get to higher vistas, musicians take up learning theory, scales, and music history until their instrument can truly sing, and even play well with others. The inductive method of Bible study has its own rhythm that unfolds and leads the reader to places of deep discovery and, eventually, faithful action.

The Flow of Information

Background: Knowing the history and context of any writing is crucial to understanding its full import. Research background on the author, where the passage falls within redemptive history, and genre. Leaders should be able to articulate these things in one or two paragraphs, plus any key terms that may be unfamiliar to someone new to the text.

Observations: Sitting with the text without rushing into interpretive judgments allows the text to break down our own presuppositions and even surprise us. Make note of patterns, repetition, contrasts, cause/effect, progression, key verbs, verb tenses, pronouns, geography, and quotations.

Questions: List all the questions the text prompts in and for you.

Interpretation: What does this text tell us about God's character? How is a Christian worldview distinctive here? What does this text tell us about the nature of our sin? What does this tell us about human nature and our telos? How are faith, hope, and love displayed here? In dealing with an Old Testament passage, how do you understand Jesus' relationship to the particular text?

Application: While the text may have a particular interpretive focus, the applications may be quite broad. Think about three spheres of possible application:

Character: Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? Do I need to pray about something from the text? What should I give thanks for? Does the passage tell me about something to resist, recognize, or repent of?

Community: How does the text shed light on our experience in relationship to God and others? How does the text reorient what we love and the people we are called to? How can we live it out before a watching world? Is there a call to hospitality or deeper engagement with the 'other'?

Calling: How does this inform our engagement with different spheres: medicine, government, the arts, family, higher education, sports, business, and media? Can you identify common objections a non-Christian might raise and develop reasonable answers?

Numbers 27:1-11



The Daughters of Zelophehad

1 Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. **2** They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, **3** "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. **4** Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."

5 Moses brought their case before the Lord. **6** And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: **7** The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them. **8** You shall also say to the Israelites, "If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter. **9** If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. **10** If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. **11** And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the Israelites a statute and ordinance, as the Lord commanded Moses."

Background

The book of Numbers is about in-between times. The experience of waiting and the refining process of wandering is central to the book of transitions. Anthropologists talk about liminality as a way to describe living at a threshold, beyond the beginning of one's journey, but searching for answers on where to go. The experience of wilderness and liminality can be a creative struggle if we allow God's spirit to move us to greater depths of insight and trust. Two sins of the "Wilderness generation" were idolatry & unbelief. Yet God is committed to preparing his people to enter the Promised Land. Sandwiched between the counting of a new generation and appointing Joshua as successor to Moses, the story of five daughters helps us re-imagine God's heart for justice and flourishing for the most vulnerable in the community of God's people. Generally, only men are named in Scripture, yet this group of women who are unattached and facing dire poverty band together in a daring act of faith.

Key Terms

leprosy — various skin diseases associated with uncleanness and separation from others. In the ancient world, lepers were the living dead. They wore ragged clothing and symbolized the tragic element of life and human vulnerability.

Mannaseh — One of the 12 tribes of Israel, together with the tribe of Ephraim, form the house of Joseph.

Daughters' names — Mahlah (sickness), Hoglah (dancing), Noah (movement), Milcah (queen), Tirzah (pleasing).

inheritance — In the Old Testament, legal inheritance refers to actual property or goods received after a family member's death. The Scriptures transform the concept of inheritance to include the acquisition of spiritual blessings and promises from God. References to inheritance in the Old Testament are theological, and not merely legal. The very idea of inheritance spoke to the deeper themes of identity and calling. The concept of the believer's inheritance in the New Testament highlights the dignity of the family relationship of the believer in Christ. No higher position or greater wealth can an individual acquire than to become an heir of God through faith in Christ.

Observations

- Generally only men are named in biblical accounts, but each daughter is named
- There is power and dignity in the daughters standing before the assembly
- The daughters had no advocates and risked ultimate shame
- The daughters were learned and very shrewd, knowing military history and the law.
- They appealed to the mercy and grace of God (He gave Zelophehad no sons)
- They appealed to the righteousness of their family head
- Their ask was clear and to the point
- Moses presents the case before the LORD, without complaint or before any human
- God's answer is flexible, dynamic, and responsive to the needs

Questions



ASK: *What is the purpose of the system? What do you notice about the system?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Based on patriarchy, traditional systems of wealth distribution likely mirrored other ancient cultures. But now that God is preparing his people to live in the land he gives, God is reframing notions of power, privilege, and calling. For the God of Israel wants to be distinctive, and wealth as a reflection of his blessing means that least of these can gladly participate in the joy of his abundance. There is no need to fear losing wealth & power, because there is more than enough for everyone.



ASK: *Do we set up additional laws that keep the least of these from joyfully participating in God's expansive Kingdom mission?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Without sensitivity and awareness of our cultural biases we are likely excluding others from receiving God's blessing and then ministering to others in the name of this generous and responsive God. We in the U.S. too easily conflate the American Dream with the Kingdom of God and confuse our priorities with the primacy of God's mission.



ASK: *What is the promised land? For them? For us?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: The blessing of God encompasses two great themes: land & people. The reality of God's faithfulness to his promises could be seen and touched in God setting up a land filled with his image bearers living and loving as

he does. The promised land was part of the covenantal life God give them so that he might dwell with his people. It's not merely a spiritual blessing, but something embodied in creation. And in the New Testament, Paul expands this inheritance, cosmically, to all of creation where he will reign and rule not just over a sliver of land but in all things with the people he has called in and through Christ. We are co-heirs with him now of this great inheritance.

Interpretation

- In his answer, God clarifies the law and his heart and intention for the widow and the orphan and their importance in his mission
- There was a cultural shift in how women were viewed, painting a larger more expansive picture of God's call for his people
- Each and every person has an equal share in God's call toward the Promised land, the realization of this is found in Galatians where Paul states that there is no distinction now between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female but all are now called and given the grace of God's full inheritance.
- God desires leadership that will submit to his good and gracious will
- Jesus is our righteous head that opens the way to God's inheritance

Application

Character: We are called to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn. Do we make space for the widow and orphan in our lives? Do we allow their stories to shape our lives?

Community: Have we identified the most vulnerable among us, living in our communities? Our community life together is meant to reveal the glory of God, and the mission of God. Seeing the image of God in the least of these very near to us ought to reshape how we spend our time and resources. Giving voice to and empowering the marginalized must be a community effort.

Calling: Our culture sends many conflicting messages on who is worthy to lead, give shape to our common life together. The story of the 5 daughters of Zelophehad is reminder of all of us to pause and reflect on the cultural and political processes in which we all participate. Our call as Christians in very sphere is to bring a God entranced vision of all things redeemed where the image of God does not get trampled by cultural values or political expediency. He has come to make all things new in an expansive Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Throughout scripture God has a habit of using the least of these to shame the wise and to bring change. The five daughters of Zelophehad challenged the status quo through their faith to speak the truth to power winsomely and with great clarity. In that they pointed the way to a new reality in which each and every person created in the image of God is called to participate in his covenantal life. This story finds its surprising telos in Jesus, the true and greater Zelophehad, who died a righteous death to bring the most vulnerable into security, empowering them to live new life by his Spirit.

Prayer

O gracious God,

How quickly we put up barriers to those called to follow you. We are blind to our culture and the systems we create when we are called to live by your Name. Teach us to mind the orphan and widow and allow their stories to shape ours. Break our hearts for the things that break yours, and give us courage to take risks to address injustice in our day. In Jesus' name, Amen.