

Generations of Faith

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[0 : 00] Today we'll be reading from Numbers 27, verse 1 to 11, and Numbers 36, verse 1 to 13. So if you need the church Bible, you can find them on either side of the stage or at the back.

So in the church Bible, our reading can be found on page 126 for Numbers 27, verse 1 to 11, and page 134 to 135 for Numbers 36, verse 1 to 13. So we'll start with Numbers 27.

Let's listen and open our hearts to God's word for today. Then drew near the daughters of Solophehad, the son of Hephaer, son of Gilead, son of Macher, son of Manasseh, from the clans of Manasseh, the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were Malah, Noah, Hogla, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the chiefs and all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting, saying, 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.

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. Moses brought their case before the Lord, and the Lord said to Moses, The daughters of Solophehad are right. You should give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers, and transfer the inheritance of their father to them. And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his father's brothers. 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. And it shall be for the people of Israel a statute and rule, as the Lord commanded Moses. Let's continue to Numbers 36.

The heads of the father's houses of the clan of the people of Gilead, the son of Macher, son of Manasseh, from the clans of the people of Joseph came near and spoke before Moses and before the chiefs, the heads of the father's houses of the people of Israel. They said, The Lord commanded my Lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the people of Israel. And my Lord commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad, our brother, to his daughters. But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the people of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry.

[3 : 37] And their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers. And Moses commanded the people of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying, The tribe of the people of Joseph is right. This is what the Lord commands concerning the daughter of Zelophehad.

Let them marry who they think is best. Only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another. For every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers. So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another.

For each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance. The daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded Moses.

For Mala, Tirzah, Hogla, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to sons of their father's brothers. They were married into the clans of the people of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan.

[5 : 05] These are the commandments and the rules that the Lord commanded through Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word. On button. Oh, yes. Hello. Good morning, Watermark. If you don't know me, my name is Oscar. And if you do know me, my name is still Oscar. That was an old Chris Thornton joke, if you know Chris. I serve as one of the elders here at Watermark, and I feel very privileged and honored to be sharing God's word with Watermark today. Come join me. Let's pray as we dive into God's word. Father God, Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, please come now and illuminate our hearts. We don't want to hear my opinion or some ideas that I have. We want to look at your word, the word of the sovereign God of the universe.

[6 : 24] Come speak to us, Lord. I pray that as we receive your word and listen, help us to understand, help us to conceptualize, help us to respond as you desire us to, Lord.

May we come away here, Lord, not just full of ideas and interesting thoughts, not just with a pep talk or an encouraging word, but changed by the power of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. May we adore Jesus and love him more today.

We give this time to you in your name. Amen. If you spend even a little bit of time in church, you would probably hear this word faith quite a bit.

Christians are people of faith is a common phrase. We must live by faith is another. If you're not a Christian here this morning, maybe you're friends with Christians and you've heard Christians say that we must believe in Jesus.

But what does believing actually look like? Is it just believing that Jesus existed as a historical person? And what does faith actually look like?

[7 : 35] Today, we are in the seventh out of an eight-part sermon series on the book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Bible. Numbers is all about God rescuing his people out of slavery in Egypt and bringing them into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of Canaan.

But before entering the promised land, Israel goes through a long journey in the wilderness. It's a striking illustration of the Christian life.

Once, we too were slaves to sin. But now God has rescued us, given us a new life, a new worldview, a new hope, a new future.

But before we get to glory, before we see Jesus face to face on that special day, we too are wandering and going through our own little wilderness. And that wilderness, this journey, has its ups and downs, temptations and uncertainties, brokenness and suffering.

And life often does feel like being in the wilderness. For some more background on numbers, numbers can be broken down into three sections. The first section, chapters 1 to 10, is this epic buildup.

[8 : 55] It's the bottom of the map there. At Mount Sinai, God speaks and provides clear instructions for Israel as to how to live well with God and with each other on the way to the journey, on the way to Canaan, the promised land.

The second section, chapters 11 to 25, Israel leaves Sinai and is on the move. And here, we've seen story after story of God's people rebelling against Him, complaining, grumbling, wanting to go back to Egypt, outright rejecting God, shaking their fist at God.

At the heart of it, what drove this rebellion was unbelief in here, in their heart. Israel did not believe in the promises of God.

And the third and final section of Numbers is from chapters 27 to 36. And connecting the second and the third sections is a sort of bridge, which is Numbers 26, the second census.

We didn't read it today. Right before today's reading. And if you recall, back in chapter 1, the very beginning of Numbers, God instructs Moses to count every male above the age of 20, and that number came to about 600,000, including women and children.

[10 : 12] Israel was about 2 million at the beginning of the journey in the wilderness. But by chapter 26, about 38 years later, most of the old generation had died out in the wilderness because of their unbelief.

And so this second census in Numbers 26 counts the new generation of God's people. And so as we look now at this third and final section of Numbers, today and next week, Israel has clocked in close to 40 years of desert wandering, and now they stand on the plains of Moab, right on the border of the promised land.

And now the big question is, what will the new generation be like? Will they be a copy of the old generation, those with unbelieving and hardened hearts, whose bodies were buried in the

wilderness because of unbelief?

It's kind of like at the company you work at. The old management were not very good, created a bad culture, and they basically ran the company into the ground.

But fortunately, they've retired, and the new generation has stepped up, and now they're leading the organization. And the question is, what will the new generation be like? So as we open this third section of Numbers, we'll look at these two passages today that center around these five daughters of Zelophehad.

[11 : 36] These two related stories serve as bookends of the third and final section of Numbers, chapters 27 and 36. This is a deliberate move by the author of Numbers to put a spotlight on these women as great examples of the new generation.

In many ways, these two passages are mirror images of one another, with the first leading to the second. Both passages have three components. First, family members from the tribe of Joseph approach Moses with a petition related to land inheritance.

Second, God, through Moses, responds and agrees with both petitions. And then third, after granting each petition, God codifies these rulings into permanent statutes and rules.

Kind of like God uses these examples as case law. Let's look at these passages now. In the first one, number 27, the five daughters of Zelophehad, Machla, Noah, Hogla, Milcah, and Terza, approach Moses with their petition.

Let's look at our Bibles in chapter 27, verses 3 and 4. They say, 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.

[13 : 04] And he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us possession among our father's brothers.

Our father has died. He wasn't part of that particular group led by Korah that shook their fist against God, rose up against God, and as a consequence, the ground swallowed them up and they were buried right away.

But we admit, our father was of the old generation who did not believe in the promises of God. He did not believe that God would bring us into the promised land, and because of father's unbelief, he died in the wilderness.

But we're not like our father's generation. We believe in the promises of God, that God will carry us into the promised land. The daughters believed, but something was in their way, and this was the catalyst that drove their petition.

Again, part of the reason for the second census in the previous chapter was so that land could be allocated according to the size of each tribe. Larger tribes were allocated a bigger amount of land, and smaller tribes were allocated a smaller amount of land.

[14 : 18] But because Israel was not yet in the promised land, land inheritance laws were still being worked through. More clarity was still needed as to how the laws would be implemented as they were still theoretical and not yet put into a real-life scenario.

It's like when we first considered moving here to, moving Watermark here to Viva. We began some preliminary discussions with our landlord on preliminary terms by which we may move here, but nothing was finalized nor legalized until we signed a tenancy agreement.

And so when the five daughters approached Moses and Israel's leaders in the current draft understanding of land inheritance laws, only sons would share in land inheritance.

The expectation was that daughters would marry into land ownership if they got married on their husband's side. Now the five daughters did not have a problem with this.

What their petition was about related specifically to their own family. Our father has died because he has no sons.

[15 : 26] Our father's allocated land, the land allocated to him as his inheritance will now go to his brothers and our father's descendants. us, and if we get married, possibly our children and our children's children and so on and so forth, our descendants, we will lose our inheritance forever.

Imagine your parents, they have a treasured heirloom, maybe a piece of jewelry or a watch, you know, that Patac Philippe commercial where you've got to hand that thing down.

Your parents give that to you and they say, pass it down to your children, which you want to do, you want to pass it down for many generations to come but somehow you lose it.

Moses brings the petition to God and amazingly, God responds. Can you imagine, you think about that, God responds to the petition directly. The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them an inheritance. Transfer the inheritance of their father to them. And then in the next three verses, 8 to 11, God takes this case study and commands it into permanent law for all Israel going forward.

[16:38] The man dies, has no sons, inheritance goes to daughters. Has no daughters, goes to his brothers. No brothers, goes to his uncle and so on and so forth. Now we get to chapter 36 and this is where it gets a bit spicy.

The statute and rule that God had just put in place where daughters would inherit land if the father had no sons has caused a stir among other members of the family, other members of the tribe. In chapter 36, the members of the clan of Gilead who are likely the second cousins of the five daughters, they approach Moses.

They're also part of the new generation and they approach Moses with their own petition. Look at chapters 36 verses 2 and 4.

Essentially, they come and they say, if our second cousins, these five daughters, if they marry men in another tribe, the tribe of Judah, a different tribe, then that land which was supposed to be ours for our tribe to inherit, the tribe of Joseph, that would be transferred to a different tribe and our tribe's land ownership over a long period of time will shrink.

[17:56] What happens? Again, God responds, verse 5, the tribe of the people of Joseph is right. The five daughters can marry whom they think best. Only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father.

And then God goes on and commands this into a rule and statute. Okay, everyone with me? That was a lot of narrative. No? So does like confused? Sorry. Chat later.

So what does this, what does all this narrative tell us about the new generation? What does this tell us about the new generation? They had faith.

They believed God would honor his promise and deliver them into the land. That is why in faith they asked for an inheritance. Let's compare them to the old generation.

Back in chapter 11, what happened back then? They grumbled and complained for they hated the manna that God provided.

[18:57] They preferred the combination of slavery plus cucumbers versus freedom plus manna. Chapter 14, when they heard about giants in Canaan, they cried out, God, why would God take us out of Egypt just to kill us in the desert?

Chapter 16, the men, led by Korah, they rose up, they shook their fist against God. They wanted to overthrow Moses. In spite of all God had done for them, rescuing them from slavery, sustaining them in the wilderness, they did not believe that God would honor his promise.

You see, the old generation, they had no faith. And this is in spite of the fact that they were Israelites, covenant members of God's chosen people, descendants of Abraham, God's friend, circumcised.

On the surface, they looked pretty good. If you asked, they would have said, yeah, we're people of faith. But numbers shows us the old generation had no faith.

It's a mirror into our own lives. We can attend church, join a CG, even read the Bible and pray. And when the sun is shining high, when we're making money, getting married, having children, when our health is good, yeah, we believe God is good.

[20:19] But in the wilderness, when life gets uncomfortable, and it always does at some point, when storms come and the future is a bit cloudy, we too may be full of unbelief.

We too may realize we actually have no faith. But here we have these five young women of the new generation, women of great faith as they held on to the promises of God and looked to their inheritance.

But faith is not just some passive idea. They didn't just sit back and observe and wait. Faith is active.

They took steps forward. So what were some marks or signs of their faith? Remember, at this very point in Numbers, Israel is camped on the plains of Moab, still in the wilderness, and as she looks into Canaan, those giant enemies are still there.

And these are not like the giants from the movie Shrek. The Bible describes in detail the weakness and the violence of the people of Canaan. They would burn their own children as sacrifices to their

false gods.

[21 : 35] Only by the hand of the sovereign God could Israel defeat her enemies. And yet, she couldn't just stand still. The new generation would have to go in and take the land.

The men of Israel had to physically move in and face their enemies. And to do all this, all those in the new generation, including the five daughters of Zelophehad, had to have great courage.

But the daughters also needed courage not just to enter Canaan, but to face Moses and their own people as well. Remember the challenge at home?

Their father's inheritance would go to their uncles. The daughters and their descendants would lose their inheritance forever. Can you imagine being in their situation?

They were not like the older generation who died for their unbelief. The daughters, they were faithful young ladies. They believed God would carry them into the land. They wanted to safeguard their inheritance for generations to come.

[22 : 38] That's why they asked for a possession. But life is complicated and this obstacle is now standing in their way. And so they took a bold and courageous step in front of all God's people and directly to God's chosen representative, Moses.

Not just any leader. Remember in Numbers 12, God said, to prophets, I make myself known to them in a vision or in a dream, but not with Moses.

With Moses, I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. In my very first job when I was 23 years old, I met the CEO of the bank that I worked at and I met him and shook his hand.

I didn't ask him for any land or anything. I was so nervous meeting him. The daughters were meeting God's appointed CEO and yet they approached Moses. Give to us a possession among our father's brothers.

What is your reaction to the petition by the daughters? Do they seem greedy? Self-centered? Should they read the room better? How dare they question God's prophet Moses?

[23 : 56] Or, are they taking a bold and courageous step to grab hold of what God had promised them? To grab hold of what God had promised their family, their clan, their tribe?

Are they stepping out at great risk of being rebuked by Moses and Israel's leaders to take hold of the promise that God made to Israel's forefathers?

As a brief aside, isn't this a wonderful illustration that in the Bible women and young women at that could petition God directly bypassing social norms where in ancient times and perhaps even today, women would have to keep quiet or perhaps go through a clan member or a tribe member and not go directly to God through Moses?

I think it's a very encouraging word today for the ladies at Watermark. Your voice is important. The five daughters took that step. They didn't grumble. They didn't complain.

They didn't feel sorry for themselves. They didn't try to overthrow the leadership of Moses. They did not shake their fist at God. They believed in the promises of God and they took an active and risky step and that took some serious courage because one mark of faith is courage.

[25 : 16] Throughout the Bible, every individual who labored for God exhibited faith-led courage. Moses leading God's people out of Egypt.

Ruth caring for her mother-in-law Naomi in a foreign land. How about all the disciples of Jesus following him amidst great persecution? How about for you?

How about for you today? Where is God calling you to act with faith-driven courage? At work? Standing up against unethical business practices?

Speaking up to protect those who are oppressed that can't speak up for themselves? Sharing the gospel even though we don't know how our friend or loved one will respond?

See, one mark of faith is courage. What is another mark of faith? Well, in the second passage in chapter 36, it's now the second cousin's turn to make their petition.

[26 : 23] They petition. God agrees with it. And in verse 6, God commands the daughters of Zelophehad. You can marry whom you think best, but your husband must be of the same clan as your father.

No more marrying outside your tribe. I wonder if the daughters struggled with this command, given the pool of potential husbands would have been diminished quite a bit.

The math looked a lot worse. 11 out of 12 tribes were no longer in the pool. Well, how do they respond? In verse 10, the daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded Moses.

They lived out their faith by obeying God's command so that the land that they would inherit would remain not just within their own family but within their own tribe.

and through their faith-led obedience, their tribe would be blessed with inheritance from God for many, many, many generations to come because a mark of faith is obedience.

[27 : 32] Well, let's be honest. It's tough to obey God, isn't it? It's just me. It's just me, I think. I used to think that obeying God was like getting handcuffed versus experiencing freedom.

Following the world's gospel, you know, in the short term at least, it's a lot easier. It's much more attractive. But what I've been learning through many mistakes and lessons over the years is that what may seem like a limitation is actually the path to blessing.

And I don't just mean material, physical blessing. The numbers, everything God commanded Israel to do, wasn't because God wanted to put handcuffs on her. God wanted Israel to stay on course in the wilderness so that they would get to their destination, their inheritance, the land where they would live with God and be blessed.

And today, God urges us to obey him, not to remove our fun. By the way, if you recall, quite a while ago, Kevin reminded us that when Jesus turned water into hand sanitizer, no wine, right?

That joke didn't land very well. God urges us to obey him, to help us safeguard our inheritance, our home in heaven.

[28 : 58] You see, in the wilderness of life, we'll have good days and bad days and ups and downs. There will be complications, disappointments, and temptations. Through faith-driven obedience, God carries us through to receive our inheritance.

Living a life, honoring God, finishing well, meeting Jesus face to face, that is what it means to be blessed. The writer of Hebrews reminds us in 4 verse 8, for Joshua, Moses' successor, had given them rest.

God would not have spoken of another day later on. See, Joshua would ultimately guide the new generation into the promised land. But the promised land was never the final destination.

There will be another day where Christians will inherit our eternal home and finally find rest. And like a will which is only enforced upon death, our inheritance in heaven is only possible because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

It's through him. Christ alone that we can receive our inheritance. Let's not be like the old generation who recalled the people of God, but in fact they had no faith and did not finish well.

[30 : 21] Let's keep our eyes on the certainty of God's promises. Remind yourselves about God's promises daily by reading your Bible. Pray for more understanding. Teach these promises to your children so they too may inherit promises.

Share God's promises to your friends who may not know him yet. And today if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, this inheritance that we're speaking about, the eternal inheritance to Jesus is open to you as well.

It's really open to you. Come talk to me or Colin or another elder or leader. We'd love to talk to you about receiving your inheritance. Okay, so what does all of this mean for us here today?

Well, maybe some of us think that living by faith means that it's all on our own shoulders. It's all up to us. We just have to persevere and grit our teeth.

It's true that the Bible never says, the Bible never says the wilderness of life will be easy. But consider this. This is sort of what living by faith is like.

[31 : 34] You're standing at Central Pier and you need to swim across Hong Kong Harbor. It looks impossible, it's so far. But you take the step to ease into the water.

You start swimming. It takes courage, what you do. It's tough. But as you focus on the destination, which is TST, we're going to have a delicious dinner with your friends, before you know it, you're there.

You've made it. Or, living by faith is like you have a 10,000 word paper that you must finish to graduate this course.

It's so much work. You don't know how you're going to do it. You must sit down in front of that laptop and put pen to paper. And when you do, you start writing with an eye on graduation and your summer holiday to come on the beach, you write a few lines, you write a few paragraphs, and before you know it, you finish that paper.

It's like in the wilderness in Numbers. It was tough. The Israelites didn't have a stable home. They lived in tents. They weren't in control of the basic necessities like food or water.

[32 : 46] They had to rely on God. But the new generation, they kept their eyes on the promises of God. And time and again, God carried her through.

We too, today, must take steps by faith, with courage, and obedience, remembering that Jesus has already done everything. And as we trust God, by the power of his spirit, he will carry us through. As Paul reminds us in Romans, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

So church, where is God calling you today to take that step of faith, to live by faith, with courage, and obedience?

We're all unique and different, facing different challenges and obstacles in the wilderness of life. Here are just four application questions for us to consider.

[33 : 51] First, if you take stock of your daily routine, would you admit that you've been cramming everybody and everything into your schedule, but Jesus, he's actually very much secondary in your life.

What does it look like if by faith and obedience you reprioritize your life to put God first? Or for singles, like with the daughters of Zelophehad, within God's people, the church, the possible marriage partner seems limited, and you see more possibilities outside church.

In light of this, what does it mean to protect your inheritance through faith and obedience in relationships? Or maybe you have tension with a friend, a CG member, or a family member. You're tempted to walk away and not deal with that conflict. You want to distance yourself from them and not properly care for them. What does living by faith with courage and obedience look like?

And finally, perhaps you have a friend who's going through a tough time who doesn't know Jesus. You feel led to share the gospel with them, but you're worried that your friend may think less of you.

[35 : 14] How is God calling you to have faith-led courage to share your inheritance with your friend? In closing, two books later, in the book of Joshua, the new generation of Israel, those that had faith, finally enter the promised land.

And in Joshua 17, the five daughters of Zelophehad, they are mentioned one last time in the Bible. Now in the promised land, they approach Joshua and Israel's leaders and remind them of the promise that God made them in number 27.

And in Joshua 17, verse 4, the Bible says, according to the mouth of the Lord, God gave them, the daughters, an inheritance among the brothers of their father.

God made good. God made good on the promise he made to the five daughters of Zelophehad. They would receive their inheritance and pass it on for many generations to come.

God always honors his promises. And so, Watermark, as we journey through the wilderness of life, with all the ups and downs, let's do this as a community.

[36 : 35] Let's fix our eyes on our inheritance, heaven with Jesus. And like the new generation of God's people, may the promise of our inheritance embolden us to live with courageous and obedient faith.

Let's pray together. Father, let's pray. Thank you, Father, for speaking to us today through your word.

Thank you for the entire book of Numbers and all the examples that you have shared with us to guide us and lead us, to warn us and to encourage us. I do pray, God, that as we continue on in the service, may your spirit be working in us, illuminate our hearts, help us to digest, understand what you want to say to us today.

May we, Watermark, be a people with faith-led courage and obedience, God. Not like the old generation who suffered from unbelief.

May we be people who believe in the promises of God. and thank you for your son. You can only believe in the promises, we only have a promise of God because of you, Jesus.

[37 : 55] So thank you for your son as we continue the service. Help us to fix our eyes on him, to love and trust him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen.