

Torah Study: Parashat Pinchas (2019/5779)

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Source Sheet by Student Cantor Danielle Rodnizki

Numbers 27:1-11

(1) The daughters of Zelophehad, of Manassite family—son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph—came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. (2) They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, (3) “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korach’s faction, which banded together against the ETERNAL, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. (4) Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father’s kinsmen!” (5) Moses brought their case before the ETERNAL. (6) And the ETERNAL said to Moses, (7) “The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father’s kinsmen; transfer their father’s share to them. (8) “Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: ‘If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. (9) If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property to his brothers. (10) If he has no brothers, you shall assign his property to his father’s brothers. (11) If his father had no brothers, you shall assign his property to his nearest relative in his own clan, and he shall inherit it.’ This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with the ETERNAL’S command to Moses.”

במדבר כ"ז:א'-י"א

(א) וַתִּקְרַבְנָה בָּנוֹת צֶלְפַחַד בְּרוּחָפֶר
בֶּן-גִּלְעָד בֶּן-מְכִיר בֶּן-מְנַשֶּׁה
לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶּׁה בֶּן-יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה
שְׁמוֹת בָּנֹתָיו מַחֲלָה נֹחַ וְחֹגְלָה
וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְזָה: (ב) וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לִפְנֵי
מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנָי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי
הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל-הָעֵדָה פְּתַח
אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: (ג) אָבִינוּ מָתָּה
בְּמִדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא-הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה
הַנוֹעֲדִים עַל-יְהוָה בְּעֵדַת-קָרַח
כִּי-בַחֲטָאוֹ מָתָּה וּבָנִים לֹא-הָיוּ לוֹ: (ד)
לָמָּה יִגְרַע שֵׁם-אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ
כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֶּן וְתָנָה-לָנוּ אַחְזָה בְּתוֹךְ
אָחֵי אָבִינוּ: (ה) וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה
אֶת-מִשְׁפָּטוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ז) כֹּן בָּנוֹת
צֶלְפַחַד דִּבְרַתְךָ נָתַן תַּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחְזָה
נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אָחֵי אֲבִיהֶם וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ
אֶת-נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן: (ח) וְאֶל-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ כִּי-יָמוּת וְבֶן
אֵין לוֹ וְהִעֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבֵתוֹ:
(ט) וְאִם-אֵין לוֹ בֵּת וְנִתְּתֶם
אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאָחִיו: (י) וְאִם-אֵין לוֹ
אָחִים וְנִתְּתֶם אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאָחֵי
אָבִיו: (יא) וְאִם-אֵין אָחִים לְאָבִיו
וְנִתְּתֶם אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ לְשֹׂאֲרוֹ הַקָּרֵב
אֵלָיו מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וַיִּרַשׁ אֹתָהּ וְהָיְתָה
לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט כַּאֲשֶׁר
צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה: (ס)

B. Talmud, Bava Batra 119b:9-10

The Sages taught: **The daughters of Zelophehad are wise, they are interpreters of verses, and they are righteous.** The Gemara proves these assertions. That they are wise can be seen from the fact that they spoke in accordance with the moment, i.e., they presented their case at an auspicious time. As Rabbi Shmuel bar Rav Yitzhak says: Tradition teaches that Moses our teacher was sitting and interpreting in the Torah portion about men whose married brothers had died childless, as it is stated: "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies, and has no child, the wife of the dead shall not be married abroad to one not of his kin; her husband's brother shall come to her, and take her for him as a wife" (Deuteronomy 25:5). The daughters of Zelophehad said to Moses: If we are each considered like a son, give us each an inheritance like a son; and if not, our mother should enter into levirate marriage. Immediately upon hearing their claim, the verse records: "And Moses brought their cause before the Lord" (Numbers 27:5).

Rashi on Numbers 27:4

(1) **למה יגרע שם אבינו** (1) **WHY SHOULD THE NAME OF OUR FATHER BE DONE AWAY** — We stand in the place of male children, and if you say that females are not regarded as issue in respect to inheritance, then our mother should marry her deceased husband's brother (cf. Deuteronomy 25:5, 6) (Bava Batra 119b).

(2) **כי אין לו בן** [WHY SHOULD OUR FATHER'S NAME BE DONE AWAY WITH] **BECAUSE HE HATH NO SON** — Thus it follows that if he had had a son they would have made no claim of any kind: this tells us that they were women of intelligence (Sifrei Bamidbar 133:4; cf. Bava Batra 119b).

Rashi on Numbers 27:7:1

(1) **THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD SPEAK RIGHT** — Understand the word כן as the Targum does: יאות rightly, properly. God said: Exactly so is this chapter written before me on High (The Law has long since been fixed) (Sifrei Bamidbar 134:1). **This tells us that their eye saw what Moses' eye did not see. (They had a finer perception of what was just in the law of inheritance than Moses had.)** (cf. Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas 8).

Sifrei Bamidbar 133:1

"Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad," (Numbers 27:1). When the daughters of Zelophehad heard that the Land was about to be divided among the tribes—but only for males, not for females—they gathered to take counsel. They decided that the mercies of flesh and blood are not like the mercies of God who is everywhere. Flesh and blood is apt to be more merciful to males than to females. But God who spoke and the world came into being is different—God's mercies are for males as well as females, God's mercies being for all: "The ETERNAL is good of all, and God's tender mercies are over all of God's works" (Psalms 145:9)...

Midrashim of the Daughters of Zelophehad by Rivka Lovitz

"The daughters of Zelophehad, of Manassite family—son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, son of Joseph—came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah."

Why, in the beginning, are they called the daughters of Zelophehad (**צלפחד**) and only later are they each mentioned by name? This is due to the shadow (**צל**) and the fear (**פחד**) that they had in the beginning. For at the start, they were in the shadow of their father, and they were afraid to go in front of the assembly. As they drew closer together, this one to the other, they became confident and were thus called by their names, as it is written, "The daughters of Zelophehad ... and these are the names of his daughters..."

...The cynics in that generation would say: The daughters of Zelophehad don't have their words and their hearts aligned. They said: They are doing it for power, they are doing it for wealth, in order to become the equals of men in matters of inheritance; they are not doing it for the sake of heaven. This is why the Torah says: "Zelophad's daughters speak rightly (**כון**)" Where here the language of **כון** is that of honesty or sincerity (**כנות**) - but also **כון** in the sense that it was accurate what they (the cynics) said: They are doing it for power, they are doing it for wealth, they are doing it in order to become the equals of men in matters of inheritance, for the sake of heaven they are doing it.

The Daughters of Zelophehad: Power and Uniqueness by Rabbi Silvina Chemen

The achievement of Zelophehad's daughters was a landmark in women's rights regarding the inheritance of land, from those days up to now. In addition, however, the story of these five women offers a compelling lesson for all those who believe that their destiny is fixed or that divine justice has abandoned them. It encourages us to think differently— and provides a message of hope for all those faced with obstacles. Perhaps the most important legacy of Zelophehad's daughters is their call to us to take hold of life with our own hands, to move from the place that the others have given us—or that we have decided to keep because we feel immobile—and to walk, even to the most holy center, to where nobody seems to be able to go.

After all, nothing is more sacred than life itself and the fight for what we believe is worthy. Thus, this parashah inspires us to discover that we too have the ability to know what is right for ourselves and what our rights ought to be. When we believe in our capacity to shape our history, to the point of being able to change even a law that came from the Revelation at Sinai, then we pay a tribute to Zelophehad's daughters.

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