Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Numbers 27:1-11

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we will read Numbers chapter 27 and 28. Today, we will read verses 27:1–11.

Last week, we read about Moses and Eleazar taking the second census of the men of Israel on the plains of Moab. All the men who had been counted in the first census in the Wilderness of Sinai had died in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb. Therefore, the men counted in the second census belonged to a new generation of Israelites. Although the total number of men counted in these two censuses remained almost unchanged, decreasing by less than one percent, a closer examination of the numbers in each tribe reveals a very different picture: some tribes experienced a sharp decline, while others increased dramatically. We can also learn from these numbers how to receive God's blessings. The tribe with the greatest increase was Manasseh. Not only did its population increase by sixty-four percent, but the names of five women from this tribe were also specifically recorded. The Holy Spirit preserved these names as a special foreshadowing of what was to come. Today's passage tells the story of these five women.

Verses 1–2: "Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying:"

These verses first tell us who these five women were. Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and these two sons became two tribes of Israel. Because Jacob had given the birthright to Joseph, Joseph's descendants were entitled to inherit a double portion of the inheritance. This double portion was passed on

through the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. These five women were descendants of Manasseh in the fifth generation: Manasseh fathered Machir, Machir fathered Gilead, Gilead fathered Hepher, and Hepher fathered Zelophehad. Zelophehad had no sons; he had five daughters. Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. As we mentioned earlier, the reason the population of the tribe of Manasseh increased so dramatically during the wilderness wandering was that they raised healthy, strong, and independent children. This was true not only of their sons but also of their daughters.

These five women had a special request, so they came forward personally and presented it directly to Moses and Eleazar the priest. Moses was the leader of the Israelites, and Eleazar was the high priest. In the eyes of the Israelites, they were two highly esteemed leaders. Even the tribal leaders and the elders of the clans would not have dared to approach them casually. These five women did not go through the usual channels of their clan or tribe to obtain an introduction. Instead, they went directly to the highest leaders, bypassing the intermediate levels of authority. This certainly required great courage. On the other hand, it also shows that the power structure among the Israelites was quite flexible, allowing those with special requests to bring their concerns directly before the highest leaders.

In fact, the church today should function in the same way. Christ is the Head of the church, and every saint has the right to bring his or her concerns directly before Christ. Since this is so, every saint should also be able, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to bring concerns before the leaders of the church, just as these five women brought their request before Moses and Eleazar. I have heard that some very large churches, commonly known as megachurches, have highly organized and complicated structures. There may be seven levels of authority between an ordinary believer and the senior pastor: from the believer to the small-group leader, then to the district leader, the area pastor, the assistant pastor, the pastor, and finally the senior pastor. Saints who bypass these levels to bring a matter directly to a higher leader may be accused of refusing to submit to authority. Under such a rigid organizational structure, it may be harder for a newly baptized believer to meet the senior pastor than to come before Christ Himself.

The Israelites had more than six hundred thousand men who had been counted, making their congregation even larger than today's megachurches. Yet these five women were able to come directly to the doorway of the Tabernacle and meet with Moses and Eleazar. The doorway of the Tabernacle was a place where God's presence was manifested. They stood before God, before Moses and Eleazar, and also before all the leaders and the congregation. It seems that Moses convened a large assembly specifically because of their request, allowing these five women to present their case before everyone. Their courage is truly admirable.

According to the customs of that time, women were regarded as being subordinate to men. Unmarried daughters had to follow their fathers' arrangements. When a daughter married, her family would prepare a dowry for her. After marriage, she would leave her father's household and become part of her husband's household. She could no longer have a say in the inheritance of her father's family. Only sons could inherit property; daughters could not. The request made by these five women was intended to break a long-established custom. If they had submitted their request through the administrative structures of their clan and tribe, it might have been rejected long before reaching Moses, perhaps on the grounds that they were refusing to submit to authority or were greedy for an inheritance. Their proposal might never have had a chance to be considered. Let us now look at their request.

Verse 3: “Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons.”

They first described their father's circumstances. Zelophehad had died in the wilderness, but he had not participated in the rebellion of Korah's company. He had not been consumed by fire, nor had he died in the plague. He was a devout Israelite who had died in his own sin. This statement reveals how spiritually perceptive these five women were. Although their father had not committed an evil act that brought God's judgment upon him, he was still a descendant of Adam. He was born with a sinful nature and would also die in sin. Perhaps Zelophehad died of illness, or

perhaps he died in an accident. In any case, because he was born a sinner, he would inevitably die in sin. The important point was that Zelophehad had no sons; he had five daughters.

Verse 4: "Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

These five women presented their question: Why should the name of Zelophehad be removed from his clan simply because he had no sons? If his name remained in the genealogy, he would be remembered by God. These five women deeply honored their father and did not want his name to be forgotten by God. God is eternal, and to be remembered by Him is to receive an eternal blessing. These five women truly had spiritual insight. Their father had died, but they understood that death was not the end. Therefore, they sought a place for him in God's eternal remembrance.

The same principle applies to believers under the New Covenant. The greatest way we can honor our earthly parents is to help them receive God's grace and salvation so that they, too, may be remembered by God forever. Everyone's days on earth will eventually come to an end, but being remembered by God is eternal. Moreover, the life we will enjoy in the new heaven and new earth will be far better than our days on earth.

Their second request was: "Give us a possession among our father's brothers." According to the customs of that time, because Zelophehad had no sons, his family would receive no portion of the inheritance when the Israelites entered the beautiful land and divided the territory. Therefore, these women asked that, when the inheritance was distributed, a portion be set aside for their father from among the inheritance of their uncles.

This request brings out two important points. First, these five women truly had faith. The Israelites were still on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. They had not yet entered the good land of Canaan, nor had they driven out its inhabitants.

Yet these women were certain that the Israelites would receive the inheritance God had promised their forefathers. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). They were full of faith, and therefore they requested in advance that a portion of the inheritance be set aside for their father when the land was distributed.

Second, these five women earnestly desired to receive an inheritance. They argued their case with reason and hoped to break with the traditional customs. They had no parents to plead on their behalf and no brothers to help them. Instead, they stood up for themselves and appealed directly to the highest leaders of Israel, Moses and Eleazar. Their understanding and vision were far more advanced than the traditions and customs of their time. Even in the New Testament era, all sisters should likewise receive the rights that these women so courageously and reasonably sought.

Verse 5: “So Moses brought their case before the LORD.”

Moses' response was very spiritual. He truly lived up to the description of one who was faithful in all God's house. Whenever God had already spoken clearly about a matter, Moses would make a decision immediately. But when God had not spoken about something, Moses did not dare to make a decision on his own. Instead, he brought the case before the LORD.

Moses certainly knew the customs and traditions of that time. I believe that Zelophehad was not the first man whose family had daughters but no sons. The question of whether daughters could inherit property must have arisen before, but tradition and custom had always governed people's decisions, limiting both the courage and the imagination of those involved. It was truly remarkable that these five women dared to raise this issue before Moses and all the leaders. Moses was able to look beyond tradition and recognize that the authority to decide this matter belonged to God. This further demonstrates that Moses was a careful and wise leader.

Verses 6–7: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them.’”

The LORD directly answered the matter Moses had brought before Him: “The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right.” Many traditions and regulations come from human teachings passed down through generations; they do not necessarily reflect God's will. Regarding the matter of authority, 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” Man is the head of woman, Christ is the head of every man, and God is the head of Christ. This is the order established by God.

Men have a position of headship over women and therefore represent God in exercising authority. In the church, this responsibility must be carried out by the brothers. However, when it comes to being remembered by God, receiving His blessings, and inheriting His promises, there is no distinction between men and women; both have equal rights. According to the customs of that time, only men could inherit property. Yet in this matter, God ruled that these five women were right. He established a new regulation: the land was to be given to these five women from among the inheritance of Zelophehad's brothers, and they were to receive their father's inheritance.

Verses 8–9: “You shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers.’”

God did not merely rule that Zelophehad's five daughters could inherit their father's property. This case became a precedent. Based on this principle, God established a general regulation concerning inheritance: when a man dies, if he has sons, they are to inherit his property. If he has no sons, his inheritance is to pass to his daughters. This abolished the traditional custom that daughters could not inherit property. If he has no daughters, his inheritance is to be given to his brothers.

The principle established by God gives priority first to male descendants in the direct line of descent, followed by female descendants in the direct line. If there are no direct descendants, the inheritance passes to collateral relatives, beginning with the closest relatives, namely, his brothers.

Verses 10–11: "If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses."

The same principle applies to collateral relatives: the inheritance goes first to the closest relatives. His own brothers are the first in line. If he has no brothers, the inheritance goes to his father's brothers, that is, his paternal uncles. They are second in line among the collateral relatives. If he has no paternal uncles, the inheritance is to be given to the closest relative in his clan. These relatives are third in line. This was to become a statute and ordinance for the Israelites, as commanded by the LORD to Moses.

When God gives statutes and ordinances, He begins with the fundamental principles. Inheritance is determined by blood relationship, proceeding from the closest relatives to those more distant. When an unusual situation arises, people are not to make their own decisions. Instead, they are to bring the case before God. After God gives His ruling, a new statute or ordinance is established.

In Numbers chapter 36, another problem arises. What if these five women marry men from other tribes? If they take their inheritance with them when they marry into other tribes, the inheritance belonging to the tribe of Manasseh would be reduced. How should this situation be handled? God would provide a new principle for dealing with this new problem.

God's statutes and ordinances were not laid out exhaustively from the beginning to cover every possible situation. Rather, God's people must remain continually

connected to Him. Whenever they encounter a problem, they should bring it before God and seek His guidance. God will then provide the principles and answers they need. In this way, God's people can maintain their fellowship with Him. They will also come to know Him more and more and increasingly understand His ways of dealing with matters. How wonderful this is!

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, You are a generous and abundant God. How willing You are to bless us and allow us to receive a rich heavenly inheritance! You not only watch over our days on earth, but You have also prepared for us a rich spiritual inheritance. How blessed are those who are remembered by You! Grant us the insight and courage of the five daughters of Zelophehad, so that we may bring before You the things we do not understand and seek Your guidance. Then You will give us clear direction according to Your will. May You bless our daily lives, so that we may always be remembered by You and continually experience the fullness of Your lovingkindness and grace. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.