

"Trust in the Lord Our Shepherd"

Numbers 27

As we come to Ch. 27, we just had the census taken in the 40th year of Israel's travels. They are now east of Jordan river from which they will enter the land of Canaan. The census was a reminder that all those men counted who were 20+ in the first census have died and will not enter the land. Only Joshua and Caleb. Not even Moses. Ch. 27 reminds us why but also prepares the readers for the new leader of Israel, Joshua who will continue the ministry Moses began.

The 5 daughters of Zelophehad, were mentioned in the census and the reason for their mention is explained in vv.1-11. While initially we may see them as two separate events, the closer we study it we see the similarity between the two and the purpose of both. Let's first see the similarities between the two sections.

In vv.1-11 we are reminded that a man from the tribe of Manasseh named Zelophehad died (as one of the first census who did not believe Israel could successfully get into Canaan with God's help) and he had no sons, leaving five daughters. Inheritances of land were divided up by the male descendants, whose job (primarily the firstborn son) are to take care of the rest of the family. The 5 daughters approach Moses and Eleazar and the congregation at the Tent of Meeting, making a formal presentation to ask divine favour on how their father's name can continue on and that they should receive his inherited land.

In vv.12-23, after God reminds Moses that he can see the land from a distance but will not go in, Moses asks God about the future of Israel. Who will lead them? In both sections, we see the daughters of Zelophehad and Moses

Go to God concerned about their family (vv.2-4, 16-17)

Zelophehad's individual family and the nation who would need a 'father' to guide them into the land.

Both the daughters and Moses

Go in faith believing God's promises (v.4, vv.13-14, 16-17)

The daughters show in v.4 that they believe God will give Israel the land of Canaan because they believe they will inherit land. Great faith. Moses believes Israel will get into the land too and asks God by faith to provide a shepherd to help them do it.

The daughters of Z and Moses both

Acknowledge and accept the judgment on sin (v.3, 12-17)

The daughters acknowledge their father's death was because of his failure like many others, not to believe they would get in the land. He wasn't involved in Korah's rebellion, but "he died for his own sin". So will Moses. Moses robbed God of glory when the rabble wanted water back in Num. 20. God told Moses to speak to the rock, but instead he struck the rock in anger, telling the people "must we bring you water out of this rock?" Moses does not argue with God, he accepts it and is more concerned about the nation than himself.

Both the daughters of Z and Moses

Receive a clear answer from God (vv.6-7, 18-21)

God provides for the 5 daughters to maintain their father's inheritance. Moses is told by God to lay hands on Joshua as your successor. But we also see that

God's answers affect the whole nation both times (vv.8-11, 20-23)

Surely in the nation of Israel, the daughters of Zelophehad are not alone. There would have been other families who would have had a similar scenario. And God even broadens that and establishes rules dealing with other scenarios if there are no children and where does the inheritance go then? This will become a huge part of the book of Ruth.

And God chooses Joshua to succeed Moses so the nation will be clearly directed as to who will lead. Moses will publicly lay hands-on Joshua to verify the eventual change.

Yet what combines the two episodes is that they both go to God as the shepherd who will meet their needs.

God is the Shepherd We Need

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

He, He, He, He, His Name's sake. When the shepherd leaves the safety of the sheep pen to provide for his flock, he is the only one the sheep can rely on to get them what they need. And who does he rely on? He's all alone in the wilderness, and David says, as I am the sole provider and protector for my flock, I have to rely on God as my sole protector and provider. The cool thing about these two narratives is we see

God cares about our individual needs (vv.1-11)

Zelophehad was one man among 600,000 other men. Well over 2 billion people. Does God care about these 5 fatherless sisters? Absolutely. He cares about our needs too. You and I are a microscopic pinhead in a sea of 8.3 billion people. Yet God says, oh there's And ... and he knows everything about each one of us – saved and unsaved. And according to rough stats, about 500-600 billion are born again. Even if only 100 billion are praying today, it's unfathomable to think that God cares about each one of us individually.

A couple of weeks ago we were sharing at bible study that Michelle and I had prayed about two things that were important to us: 1) for Michelle to figure out how to fix the sewing needle thingamabob on the sewing machine on her own. 2) we temporarily misplaced a set of car keys. We prayed and God answered both prayers in the same day. He cares about the things we care about. We see that in the daughters of Z. We also see from Moses that

God cares about our communal needs (vv. 12-23)

Moses prays for God to approve a shepherd for the people. Moses the shepherd, asks God His shepherd to meet the shepherding needs of the community. And God answers His prayer. Joshua

has been with Moses since the Exodus if not before. In Ex. 17 Moses asks Joshua to pick an army and defeat the Amalekites

⁸ The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

For Moses to ask Joshua that, then we know Joshua has already risen to leadership level within Israel. In Ex. 24:13 we read this about Joshua:

¹³ Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. ¹⁴ He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."

And in Ex. 33 we read this:

⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. ¹¹ The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

Joshua is the right choice. They are going to need a military leader yet one who has learned to trust God over his life. When we put the two narratives together, we see God our Shepherd looking out for our individual needs as well as the needs of our community of like-minded believers and God looks after the needs of a nation. God cares about every person and every nation.

So then it's important for us to ask ...

God to Provide the Shepherds We Need

The daughters of Z needed protection, provision and care. They approached God through Moses and God said your father's family will watch over you and make sure that your needs are met, as well that God establishes a law that also protects the women and therefore it is up to the leaders who are responsible for the community to keep God's laws, and to care for their needs the way God would. And when He does, what should our response be?

Thank Him for supplying (vv.1-11, 12-23)

We need to praise God and give thanks to Him for how He provides godly parents, godly friends and godly ministry leaders. We're not told they did this directly but indirectly we are told that they are sharing the news about this new law for families with no sons to the rest of the community. Sharing God's truths so that they are obeyed is the visible evidence that you are thankful to God for supplying. Obedience is the evidence of a thankful attitude. When Moses obeyed God's Words to choose Joshua as the next shepherd, he obeyed God and symbolically laid hands on Joshua with Eleazer the priest present in front of the entire assembly. The nation would respond quite favourably to Joshua's leadership. Again, obedience is a demonstration of being thankful for how God provides.

Paul instructed Titus in Titus 1:5

appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ An elder must be ... ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.

Rebellious people reject God's messengers and Word because they don't see its value and are thankless. The people who appreciate Godly leaders respond with thankfulness and obedience. When we look at the book of Joshua we see almost complete trust in Joshua's ability and faith to lead Israel. Thank you Lord for giving us Joshua. We will follow him as he follows you. Obedience is not just evidence of thankfulness but is clearly

Encouraging to the shepherds around them (vv.18-23)

When Moses obeys God and chooses Joshua as the next shepherd of Israel, God tells him to have a public ceremony so that everyone knows Joshua is God's man. And he did. Joshua stands before Moses and Eleazer the high priest; Moses places his hands on Joshua, reminding him of God's Words and his responsibilities, and probably praying over him. How encouraging was that for Joshua! And no doubt many others would have come up to him and congratulated him and assured him of their loyalty, support and prayers.

Perhaps we need to thank a past shepherd who was instrumental in our maturing in Christ. A Sunday School teacher, a parent, a small group leader, a friend who has watched over you and been in a shepherding-like role in your life. And I think that is a good way to apply this passage for all of us. It's easy to think that the shepherds are the ministry leaders but we need to open our eyes and realize we all have shepherding roles to play. God is the Shepherd we need, who provides under shepherds we need to help us grow but He also expects us to

Be a Shepherd for Others

All of us have shepherding roles. We look after our families, we may be a leader at work, a captain of a team or giving leadership to a smaller group within a church or ministry. God made us in His image which means we all will be a shepherd – caring, overseeing – to others. How are we to be a godly shepherd to others? A good passage for this is from Jesus in Matt. 9:

Matt. 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

If we're to be God's shepherd to others we must

Show them Jesus' compassion (Matt. 9:35-38)

Notice Jesus used the same phrase Moses did in Num. 27? They are like sheep without a shepherd. Those who don't know the Lord don't know they are being guided by worldly shepherds who only want to use them for their purposes. Or they are leaderless not knowing they are wandering aimlessly in life, without purpose. Jesus offers us true direction. He points us to His father who loves

all of us and sent what we needed: rescuing from our sins. He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and then He rose. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd

I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Jesus wants us all to follow Him and know that He will meet our greatest need: forgiveness of sins. And now He wants us to listen to His voice in His Word and trust Him as He leads us in life. We're to lead in the same way, with a heart of compassion for those in need right around us.

Another good place to help us understand how to shepherd/lead is found in 1 Pet. 5:1-7.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. ⁵ Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

All of us have people under our care: at home, at work, in the community or in ministry. There's an overbearing, selfish way to do it or a Godly humble way to do it. There's all kinds of bad examples in the world of bully-shepherding, which, too many who receive that, retaliate accordingly. When Peter wrote this, many believers were suffering at the hands of bully-shepherds, religious and political people in their communities who used their shepherding responsibilities to force people to submit to their way of living. Peter says that we need to endure that without retaliating like they do and show them the Jesus way of leading, with compassion because they themselves need Him as their shepherd.

The daughters of Z and Moses show us we have the Lord as our shepherd who sees and meets our needs but also desires us to be like Him, showing a harsh world their need for a compassionate, saving Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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