**Zelophehad’s Daughters**

In 1843, a large group of settlers numbering about 1,000 people led by John Gantt left St. Louis and headed west to Oregon. While smaller groups had previously made the journey, this was by far the largest group assembled and became known as the Great Migration of 1843. The western part of the United States had been explored by fur traders who reported the great potential the land held due to its abundant rivers, forest and fertile land. The prairie land of the Great Plains was seen as an almost uninhabitable desert so it was overlooked as a destination for farming land. It is ironic that some of that land is part of what is now known as the breadbasket of the US due to it prolific grain production. Oregon did offer much of what was reported by the fur traders and became an important agricultural state which currently is the 5th largest fresh vegetable producing state. The trip from St. Louis was an arduous trek of 2100 miles over mountains and would have required a leap of faith since those making the trip had never seen the land they would inhabit. Migration was encouraged by the government as settlement of the west was seen as our manifest destiny and land grants were provided as incentives. In our study of Numbers chapter 27, we see 5 sisters who were determined to claim their share of land they had never seen.

The chapter opens with 5 daughters of a man named Zelophehad going to Moses asking to be granted property in Canaan. Their father had died and they had no brothers who would have normally inherited their father’s estate. They were from the tribe of Manasseh and made certain that Moses knew their father was not a party to the rebellion of Korah but rather had died for his own sins. Their father would have been a man of substance as he is noted in the previous chapter as one of the named descendants of Gilead. Even seasoned leaders often encounter situations they have not seen before and this was the case with Moses. The birthrights of make children were well established and God had instructed that the land be apportioned among the named Israelites who were all male. Moses had never considered how to handle a situation with no precedent so he did exactly what was proper, he consulted God who quickly confirmed the rights of the sisters. He further laid out specific guidelines on how to distribute the inheritance of a man who died. This situation was revisited in the final chapter of Numbers when members of the tribe of Manasseh pointed out that if the sisters married outside their tribe, the land could become property of that tribe. God solved this by requiring that they marry within their clan.

The chapter ends with God telling Moses to climb to the top of the Abarim range so that he could see the land below which was Canaan. After that he would die without actually going into Canaan because he had not honored God as the provider of the water at Meribah Kadesh. Moses asked God to name a successor and God chose Joshua who He said was a man in whom the spirit resided. The chapter ends with Moses laying his hands on Joshua in the presence of Eleazer and the assembly.

These final chapters in Numbers reveal how God was preparing the Israelites to go into Canaan and possess the land. The daughters of Zelophehad showed themselves worthy of the inheritance they sought. It would have taken courage for women of that time to approach Moses with what some would have seen as an unreasonable request since women had few rights. They also showed faith in God who had promised the land as an inheritance. Although they had not seen the land, they believed God would deliver on his promise (see Heb. 11:1, 1st Pet. 1:8 and John 20:29). They would have also known how God described Canaan as good land, flowing with milk and honey. They trusted that the land would be fruitful and saw great potential even though they did not know when it would happen. Finally, they honored their father by seeking an inheritance of his estate to further his name within their clan.