

July 14, 2012

PINCHAS

This *parashah* is a little on the dry side unless you want to know how many people were in each tribe and clan, and who the descendants of Ruben, Gad, and Shim'om were. This is a great *parashah* if you are interested in what sacrifices to offer on *Shabbat*, *Rosh Hodesh*, *Pesach*, and *Shavu'ot*. There are lots of numbers, rules, and regulations. But stuck in the middle is the story of the daughters of Tz'lof'chad.

Since the land belonged to HaShem, the Jews could not divide nor dispose of it as they pleased. That was up to God who decided to give an inheritance according to the census. Maintaining the inheritance from generation to generation was important to each family and the tribes to which they belonged. As with the other nations of that day, Israel was a strongly masculine society, and fathers left their property to their sons. If a man did not have a son, he left the estate to the nearest male relative, but never to a daughter.

In the first part of the *parashah*, when all of the counting of all of the tribes and clans has been completed, and Moshe was instructed on how to divide up the land, we find the plight of the daughters of Tz'lof'chad. The five of them went to Moshe and El'azar, the priest, and told them about their problem. "Our father died in the desert," they said, "but he wasn't part of Korach's group who rebelled against HaShem. He died in his own sins but he had no sons. Just because he had no son, why should his name be eliminated from his family?" Notice that this is not a matter of women's rights, but concern for their father's name. Moshe took it to HaShem, and HaShem agreed with the girls. In His great wisdom, HaShem changed the law. From now on, if a man died without having a son, the inheritance did not go to the man's brother, but to his daughter. This was the standard to be used by the people of Israel. This was the decree of justice given by HaShem and another example of His great mercy.

Focus: Justice for All

Hebrew reading: Numbers 27:6-7

English reading: Numbers 27:2-8

Haftarah reading: Jeremiah 2:1-3

B'rit Chadasha: John 2:23-25