

# Numbers 27:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.

## Analysis

**Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.**

The daughters of Zelophehad ask a revolutionary question that challenges patriarchal inheritance laws. Their concern about their father's name (shem) being "done away" reflects ancient Near Eastern values where a man's legacy depended on descendants inheriting his land. The rhetorical question "Why should...?" doesn't accept injustice as inevitable but appeals to reason and fairness.

Their request "Give unto us...a possession" (achuzzah, inherited property) demonstrates courage to advocate for justice within established systems. They don't reject the inheritance system but expand it to include daughters when no sons exist. The phrase "among the brethren of our father" shows they seek equality with male relatives, not privilege over them. This appeal leads to landmark legal reform (Numbers 27:7-11) where **God himself validates their claim**, establishing that justice sometimes requires updating human traditions to align with divine fairness. Women's voices, even in patriarchal contexts, can catalyze righteous change.

## Historical Context

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This event occurred during Israel's wilderness period (around 1406 BC) as they prepared to distribute Canaan's land. Ancient Near Eastern inheritance laws universally favored sons, with daughters typically receiving dowries at marriage but not land inheritance. Property passed through male lines to preserve tribal and family holdings. Zelophehad's daughters—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—belonged to Manasseh's tribe and faced real economic vulnerability without inheritance rights. Their bold approach to Moses at the tabernacle entrance (Numbers 27:2) showed remarkable courage in a male-dominated legal setting. God's response established precedent-setting law that protected women's economic security while maintaining tribal land distribution. This case appears twice more (Numbers 36, Joshua 17:3-6), demonstrating its importance. It previews the Bible's recurring theme that God's justice transcends cultural limitations.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. How did these women's courage to question unjust tradition lead to legal reform that blessed future generations?
2. What does God's affirmation of their claim reveal about His concern for economic justice, especially for the vulnerable?
3. How can believers today discern between cultural traditions worth preserving and those that need challenging?
4. What does this passage teach about the proper way to advocate for change within faith communities?
5. How does this story challenge assumptions about women's roles and voices in biblical times?

## Interlinear Text

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מִשְׁפְּחַת וּבָת וּבָת אֲבִינוּן

H4100 be done away H1639 Why should the name H8034 of our father H1 among H8432 his family H4940

לֹא יְמִלְאָה כִּי

H3588 H369 H0 because he hath no son H1121 Give H0 H5414

אֲתֶלֶת הַבָּת וּבָת אֲתֶלֶת אֲבִינוּן

unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father H272 H8432 H251 H1

## Additional Cross-References

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**Joshua 17:4** (Parallel theme): And they came near before Eleazar the priest, and before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the princes, saying, The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren. Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father.

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