

Day 7 – Feb. 7, 2023

Today we meet the daughters of Zelophehad, and we watch as the world changed. One of the Israelites to leave Egypt was named Zelophehad. This man had no sons, only 5 daughters. Since women had no legal right to inherit or own property, this was a problem for these 5 women. Unmarried and without their father, who died during the Wilderness Wanderings, they either had to get land allotted to them or die destitute since land was wealth. So in the book of Numbers, they approached Moses and asked for a ruling. What Moses decided changed the social structure as well as the legal code for all of Israel. Moses ruled that these women, and from now on women in general, could inherit land. The daughters of Zelophehad were saved, and women gained a huge win. Now when a man died, the inheritance went first to his sons, then his daughters, then his uncle, and so on.

Today's reading is the actual distribution of that land, and once again the women had to remind Joshua and the male leadership of Moses' promise to them. These women had to go to bat for their own rights again and again, and thankfully Joshua honors Moses' ruling and gives them land.

Today we have no laws forbidding women to own land, but women still have to fight for their rights in a male-dominated world. From the glass ceiling (a systemic barrier that keeps women from rising to positions of power and influence) to wage discrimination (women still only earn 82 cents for every dollar their male equals earn for the same work) we are still discriminating against women in 2023. In our denomination, we just called the first ever female President. In our church, we just called the first ever female chair of the church. And while these are celebrated and seen as victories, the fact that they are firsts should shock us. It has been over 6000 years since the daughters of Zelophehad fought for their lives and earned the right to own property. Shouldn't we be farther along that this?