

Zelophehad, his daughters and Messiah's genealogy.

The promise of God to David that a future Son whose throne would be established forever and who would build God's house was fulfilled in immediately and illustriously in Solomon (1 Chron.22.6-10).

Solomon however fell into serious and multiple transgressions, and his kingdom was ripped in two shortly after his death. With some glorious exceptions, his progeny for the most part continued a path of dismal decline until the throne was permanently removed from Judah in the time of King Jeconiah.

Was Solomon the apogee of God's gracious promise?

The Psalmist Ethan the Ezrahite, a contemporary of Solomon's, looks for a far more glorious future fulfillment, One whom he describes as God's 'firstborn' (Ps.89.27). One to Whom not only the tribe of Judah and the whole nation of Israel, but all created powers will be subject.

Jehoshua the Messiah, the son of Mary, the daughter of Heli, of the lineage of David, is the fulfillment of this promise. He is the divinely appointed firstborn substitute, both the Priest of sinners and the King of meekness, the true Surety of Judah, the One Who by His piercing brings Shiloh, and has laid the foundation stone of the Third Temple, by which alone iniquity may be purged.

Yet how does Jehoshua descend from David? If as the New Testament claims, His birth was the result of a unique and supernatural conception in Mary's womb alone, how can He lawfully inherit David's title?

The Gospel of Matthew, lays out Joseph's lineage from David, through Solomon, through cursed King Jeconiah, and Salathiel and Zerubbabel, right down to Joseph's father Jacob. Here is a formal train of inheritance linking David to an adopting father, Mary's lawful husband, yet with no blood ties to the Prince.

The unconditional promise to David, unlike that to Solomon, explicitly refers to his genetic link to the coming King, 'And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son...' 2 Sam.7.12-14a

The Gospel of Luke, with its focus both on Mary and her family and its distinct emphasis on the humanity of the Messiah, records a chain of genealogy from David, which bypasses Solomon, now via Nathan, also passing through Zerubbabel and Salathiel, right down to Heli. Joseph is recorded as though Heli's son, with the unique insertion, 'as was supposed', (*ὡν ὡς ἐνομιζέτο* Luke 3.23). Was Joseph the son of Jacob, son of Matthan, son of Eleazar, who Matthew records begat him (*ἐγέννησεν* Matt.1.16), or was he the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, son of Levi? Luke, by the Spirit, introduces his account like this, 'Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.' Matthew, or Levi, a senior tax collector before his conversion, records his genealogy of the Messiah with equal awareness of the many scoffers and rejecters of His majesty. Do critics really imagine the two writers to be presenting so awkward and massive a contradiction, that even a small child could easily perceive it, without any qualification or reference to the other 'flawed' position?

So if both Joseph and Mary descended from David, how could the promise to David's house properly apply to Jehoshua?

It appears likely that Mary had no brothers. When the Messiah expired, He passed her care into the hands not of His half brothers or sisters, who were the natural born children of Joseph and Mary, but into the care of the son of Salome, John, His disciple. This must have seemed most peculiar, but John held a strong devotion to his Rabbi, not at that time shared by the natural brethren. Who was better placed to nurture and placate the bitter wound in the now widowed Mary's soul, the 'sword' Simeon had long foreseen? There is also evidence that Salome was Mary's sister, for though it is often claimed that Mary of Cleophas was the sister referred to in John 19.25, it would be most unusual for two sisters to share the same name. Salome was also present (Matt. 27.56). If this was indeed the case, John would have been His Lord's half-cousin, and as one also intimate with the extended family, naturally placed to take up the care of his aunt. Even if it were not, there were no other close relatives the Saviour dared entrust His own widowed mother, in either case it suggests Mary had no nephews or nieces from a brother ready to share her deepest grief.

Even if Mary had no male co-heir, how does this qualify her firstborn Son to a title in David's name?

Zelophehad had only 5 daughters and no sons (Numbers 27.1-9). These daughters, by their appeal to God through Moses, and by a later counter-appeal, from their tribal elders, establish the Divine right of the female inheritance, where no alternative male descendants exist. This counter-appeal clarifies that the right of inheritance must pass through the male name, and is only maintained if the daughters marry within their own tribe to avoid confusion.

This exceptional double Divine lesson in reactive jurisprudence, comports with many other passages in which a woman's right to land and protection is secured by her inheritance through a son. Ruth the Moabitess is graciously elevated into the royal line by boldly seeking the right of marriage at the hand of Boaz, as her Goel (kinsman redeemer). Tamar in an ignoble but equally tenacious manner, when denied the right of marriage to Selah, secures her family line by ensnaring Judah. The shame of a family head who refuses to oversee this duty properly commissioned, is lawfully underscored as the 'one whose shoe is loosed' (Deut.25.10). Indeed the sacrifice entailed by a Levirate husband in forgoing his own rights was significant. It lead Onan to deny Tamar a child 'to his brother', 'knowing the seed would not be his', a grave enough sin to be punished with death (Gen. 38.8-9). It lead Boaz' now anonymous rival for Mahlon's inheritance land to pull out, despite his immediate interest in the land (Ruth 4.5-6).

It is claimed that the grant to Zelophehad's daughters was strictly confined to their inheritance. Gerald Sigal, writes Zelophehad's case 'does not apply here since it concerns the transference of physical property and not privileges of lineage.'¹ Yisroel Blumenthal claims, 'we shall shortly demonstrate that the right of inheritance has no relationship to genealogy'².

However it appears from the passages that address these questions of inheritance, that the name of the father is as important a consideration as the shelter of and provision for the surviving wife and her progeny. In the text the perpetuity of the father's name is the *primary* consideration. Moreover in

¹http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59:whos-genealogy-is-given-by-luke&catid=58:birth-of-jesus&Itemid=488

Mahlon's case the principle of inheritance is explicitly posited on the assumption of this perpetuation of his name.

Boaz says to the elders of Bethlehem, (Ruth 4.9-10), 'Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, **to raise up the name of the dead** upon his inheritance, that **the name of the dead be not cut off** from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.' The name of the deceased Mahlon is not be cut off (תָּרַכְ), but raised up again in his posterity (הִקִּימ), irrespective of the sinful descent into Moab that led to his premature demise. In his opening appeal to Mahlon's closer blood relative, Boaz roots the question of the land inheritance on this perpetuation of Mahlon's name. Before the witnessing elders and experts, he actually enforces the duty to perpetuate Mahlon's name upon the purchase of his inheritance, from Naomi, v.5, 'Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, **thou must buy** it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, **to raise up the name of the dead** upon his inheritance.' If our learned friends had been in Bethlehem's council, would they not have raised their eyebrows at Boaz' forceful interweaving of land transfer and the line of the name of the deceased, and in doing so find themselves in a minority of two against twelve?

It is intriguing that the elders allude to Tamar in their blessing of Boaz, 'And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.' Pharez is recognised and even celebrated as Judah's lawful seed and heir, even though the union that led to his birth was so shameful that it was not to be repeated (Gen.38.26).

This respect shown to the name of the deceased is enshrined in statute, not merely by approved tradition. 'And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that **his name be not put out** (מָחָה) of Israel.' (Deut.25.6)

How weighty then is the scriptural evidence that, 'the right of inheritance has no relationship to genealogy'² or that 'the transference of physical property' is unconnected to privileges of lineage¹?

Yisroel Blumenthal's argument¹ is based on Numbers 36, by which he claims that the revision of the law sought by the elders of Manasseh clarifies that, 'tribal genealogy remains exclusively in the male line'². So upon the assumption that he is correct, the entire purpose of the daughters in suing Moses on their father's behalf was to ensure that his land remained in their possession, and was counted along with their future husbands' lands as the title of their progeny. Largesse something similar to this is displayed in Job's act of bestowing land rights, not only on his sons (who in Zelophehad's case didn't exist) but also on Job's three daughters (Job 42.15). Yet it is not just the inheritance that the daughters plead for, but a primary concern that '**the name of our father be done away** from among his family' (Num 27.4). It is solely upon this premise, that Zelophehad's name should endure that the right of inheritance is then pleaded. This pretended separation between the name of the departed and his inheritance is both forced and artificial, the preservation of the inheritance is presupposed in the perpetuity of the name.

It is not difficult to see why this is the case, when the portion of land allotted to believers is sometimes named with their name – Jair and Havoth-Jair (Nu 32.41), Leshem-Dan (Jos 19.47) or Gilead and his land (Jos 17.1), though in the last example the name was taken from the land not conferred upon it (Gen 31.21). It is of course, also a mark of the godless, though in false expectation (Ps 49.11, Gen 4.17). What indeed is

² <http://yourphariseefriend.wordpress.com/2010/12/30/dr-brown-volume-4/> (response to page 88)

the name of the promised land, and why should the patriarchs and Joseph have taken such trouble to be buried within the land if they did not expect a resurrection there later? Indeed the elders of Manasseh's primary concern that the daughters' 'inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers' may be construed as a concern at the failed perpetuity of promised apportionment of the land given to Manasseh's name.

Yisroel Blumenthal writes, 'The entire thrust of the passage is that female inheritors must marry into their own tribe in order to keep the inheritance within the tribal possession. If the female inheritors would be able to pass their genealogical attributes to their children this would not be an issue.' However the case is only half stated, the danger of confusion between the tribes arose, when a daughter bearing inheritance rights to her father's land married outside of her tribe. Then her husband's name and lineage would take precedence, and her land being taken under his name, the land belonging to Manasseh would fall under the name of another tribe.

There is another consideration which tends to support this consideration. Imagine Hopher, Zelophehad's father, had had brothers, and such a hypothesis is feasible, given the 52,700 inhabitants of the tribe contemporary with the 5 daughters (Num.26.33,34). Exactly the same situation might have arisen within the tribe of Manasseh, as opposed to outside it in Numbers 37. What if Hopher's other descendants expressed their concern about the daughters removing their landrights to another branch of the same tribe? Dynastic concerns can also be weighty. Might that not also have caused some confusion, some loss of prestige for the Hopherite branch of the family? No such concern was entered or considered, does this not suggest that there was some weight to the lineage of Zelophehad that ran through his daughters? Does not indicate that it was only the complete removal of the ownership of land to another tribe, given the supercession of the husband's rights over his wife that needed protection against? A marriage within the tribe not only prevented confusion, but also preserved the wife's right to her father's title, in the peculiar circumstance that Zelophehad's daughters found themselves.

As Michael Brown points out in the case of Jarha³, the Egyptian servant of the sonless Sheshan of the tribe of Judah, upon the marriage of Jarha and Sheshan's daughter, Sheshan's genealogy continues through his grandson Attai, and is then recorded for 13 subsequent generations to Elishama (1 Chron.2.34-41). Yisroel Blumenthal suggests that the statement in v.33 before Jarha's match with Sheshan's daughter demonstrates that his progeny were excluded from the genealogy, 'These were the sons of Jerahmeel'⁴. It is extraordinary that a careful record of 15 generations of a non Israelite lineage is carefully recorded in the midst of Israelite genealogies. The expression 'these were the sons' in the AV is used 12 other times in Chronicles, and 6 times in the Torah⁵. The exact Hebrew expression 'אֵלֶּה הַיְּבָנִי' only three⁶. The phrase may either introduce a genealogy (1 Chr 2:50) or conclude it (Gen 36:13b), and the context of the last reference is rich in both uses. Yisroel Blumenthal however writes on 2 Chr 2.33, 'the concluding statement in verse 33 *it is made clear* that the children of this union were not considered descendants of Jerahmeel'

³ Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: NT Objections, Vol.4, p.88.

⁴ Answering Dr Brown p.14.

⁵ Gen 10:29, 36:12,14,16, Nu 3:17; 1Chr 1:23, 2:50, 3:1, 4:6, 7:17, 8:38, 9:44, 23:10,24, 24:30, 25:5, 2Chr 21:2.

⁶ Gen. 36:13, 1Chr 2:33,50.

(italics added). I suggest he perceives a clarity greater than the text allows, and has allowed his presuppositions to overrule his judgement, a snare we must all guard against.

Michael Brown also argues that Zeruah, David's sister is also given as the sole parent of the famous three warriors Asahel, Abishai and Joab 5 times, and 23 times of at least one of them, suggesting her dominant importance to their genealogy. He also alludes to the curious connection between Judah's Hezron marriage to Machir's the Manassehite's daughter, leading to their grandson Jair conquering property in Gilead, which is of Manasseh not Judah. It is not clear what relevance this is to Zelophehadite inheritance however, and conquest may not be governed by the same principle as inheritance. What is interesting is Jair's link to the portion of land allotted to Manasseh is through his paternal grandmother, not his paternal grandfather's lineage (1 Chr.2.21-22).

Michael Brown also raises the difficult question of the genealogy of Barzillai in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ez.2.62, Neh.7.63) as an indication of a genealogy that passes through female members of a family³. The very next verse in both accounts indicates that their qualification for a priestly genealogy was unsatisfactory and the sons of Barzillai were disqualified along with two other groups of candidates, 'These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood'. At first sight, this would seem to serve the case *against* a Zelophehadite lineage perfectly, if the priesthood couldn't be safely entrusted to a genealogy that passed through a female member, how much less the Monarchy and the Messiahship? However it is most noteworthy that the dismissals were not final or definitive, the decision was merely postponed by Nehemiah until an authoritative determination was made. 'And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.' This suggests there was not so much a problem with the principle of a female link in Barzillai's genealogy, had there been one why the need for only a deferral? It suggests that along with the other two groups of candidates there was sufficient doubt about the records, based on the added complexities of their lineage, to *temporarily* disqualify the sons of Barzillai. In the event, this may well have fatally injured their own candidacy, but it only supports the validity of a female link in a genealogy under strict and defined circumstances, otherwise the very possibility could only have been dismissed out of hand.

The Lord Yehoshua the Messiah was born of a virgin mother and adopted by His earthly patron and Mary's betrothed husband Joseph, son-in-law to Heli, natural son of Jacob. Both lineages are important to the Divine promise to David. We have sought to show how the Messiah's descent from David through His mother is consistent with the inheritance and lineage of Zelophehad. We propose it too as a potential solution for the mysterious chiasm in the Messiah's genealogy at Salathiel, during the painful and murderous time of the first Exile.

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