

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Five Sisters Refute Missionaries



This week's Torah portion, *Pinchas* (Numbers 25:10-30:1), provides a fascinating insight into women's rights and a powerful rebuttal to missionaries.

Before entering into the Land of Israel, God instructed Moses, "*Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel... by their fathers' households*" (Numbers 26:2). After the

census, the Land of Israel was allotted to "*the males as an inheritance*" (Numbers 27:53).

Upon hearing that inheritance would be passed to male descendants, the five daughters of Tzelafchad, of the tribe of Menashe, approached Moses with a concern. With a passionate love for the Land of Israel, and a respectful display of their intellectual prowess, they asked Moses, "*Our father died without sons... why should his inheritance be lost because he has no son?*" (Numbers 27:3).

Moses presented their petition to God and received an immediate response. In a triumph for women's rights, God said, "*What Tzelafchad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance*" (Numbers 27:6).

Missionaries mistakenly use this story in an attempt to counter one of the best proofs that Jesus is not the Jewish messiah.

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According to Genesis 49:10, the Messianic king can only be a descendant of the tribe of Judah. Additionally, tribal membership is passed on through male descendants, as it says, "*Then they registered their ancestry in their families by their fathers' household*" (Numbers 1:18). Since the New Testament claims Jesus did not have a physical father, he cannot, at the same time, make a legitimate claim to be from the tribe of Judah or to be the messiah.

This argument is devastating to missionaries and they attempt to disprove it in several ways.

Some missionaries cite the story of Tzelafchad's daughters as proof that tribal membership is not passed exclusively from father to son. This ruling would apparently allow Jesus to trace his lineage through his mother, Mary.

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However, their argument is wrong for several reasons. First, as stated in I Chronicles 22:9-10, the messiah must be a descendant of Judah through King David and his son King Solomon.

The New Testament provides two genealogical records for Jesus. First, Matthew 1:6 claims he was a descendant of David through Solomon; however, Luke 3:31 contradicts this when it says Jesus was a descendant of David through his son Nathan.

When confronted by this glaring contradiction, missionaries claim Matthew lists Jesus's genealogy through his father, Joseph, and Luke's genealogy is listed through his mother, Mary. However, the text does not say this in the English translation or the Greek original. Furthermore, even if this were Mary's genealogy, Jesus would not fulfill the requirement of being a descendant of David through Solomon since this genealogy is traced from Nathan.

Second, the incident of the daughters of Tzelafchad does not substantiate the missionary claim that tribal membership is transmitted through daughters.

Before entering the Land of Israel, the heads of the tribe of Menashe approached Moses. They were concerned that if Tzelafchad's daughters [prior to the land being apportioned to each tribe] married men from a different tribe, their land would be transferred to their husband's tribe and lost to Menashe.

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God tells Moses that the tribal leaders are also correct, and therefore, Tzelafchad's daughters "*may marry anyone they wish, but only someone from their father's tribe*" (Numbers 36:6). This ruling refutes the missionary argument and demonstrates that tribal membership is transmitted only through male descendants.

Although fathers determine to which tribe one belongs, more importantly, women determine Jewish identity, as demonstrated in Ezra 10:2-3.

Jewish women, including Miriam, Esther, Chana, Ruth, Huldah the prophetess, and the daughters of Tzelafchad, have always been at the forefront of guiding Jews on a path of justice, spirituality, and Jewish survival.

Shabbat Shalom,

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