

NUMBERS

Chapter 32

The Transjordan Tribes

The Reubenites and Gadites, who had very large herds and flocks, saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were suitable for livestock. ² So they came to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the community, and said, ³ “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon— ⁴ the land the LORD subdued before the people of Israel—are suitable for livestock, and your servants have livestock. ⁵ If we have found favor in your eyes,” they said, “let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan.” ⁶ Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, “Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here? ⁷ Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the LORD has given them? ⁸ This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to look over the land. ⁹ After they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and viewed the land, they discouraged the Israelites from entering the land the LORD had given them. ¹⁰ The LORD’s anger was aroused that day and he swore this oath: ¹¹ ‘Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob— ¹² not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the LORD wholeheartedly.’ ¹³ The LORD’s anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone. ¹⁴ “And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Israel. ¹⁵ If you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the desert, and you will be the cause of their destruction.” ¹⁶ Then they came up to him and said, “We would like to build pens here for our livestock and cities for our women and children. ¹⁷ But we are ready to arm ourselves and go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our women and children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁸ We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. ¹⁹ We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan.” ²⁰ Then Moses said to them, “If you will do this—if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for battle, ²¹ and if all of you will go armed over the Jordan before the LORD until he has driven his enemies out before him— ²² then when the land is subdued before the LORD, you may return and be free from your obligation to the LORD and to Israel. And this land will be your possession before the LORD. ²³ “But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. ²⁴ Build cities for your women and children, and pens for your flocks, but do what you have promised.” ²⁵ The Gadites and Reubenites said to Moses, “We your servants will do as our lord commands. ²⁶ Our children and wives, our flocks and herds will remain here in the cities of Gilead. ²⁷ But your servants, every man armed for battle, will cross over to fight before the LORD, just

as our lord says.”²⁸ Then Moses gave orders about them to Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun and to the family heads of the Israelite tribes.²⁹ He said to them, “If the Gadites and Reubenites, every man armed for battle, cross over the Jordan with you before the LORD, then when the land is subdued before you, give them the land of Gilead as their possession.³⁰ But if they do not cross over with you armed, they must accept their possession with you in Canaan.”³¹ The Gadites and Reubenites answered, “Your servants will do what the LORD has said.³² We will cross over before the LORD into Canaan armed, but the property we inherit will be on this side of the Jordan.”³³ Then Moses gave to the Gadites, the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan—the whole land with its cities and the territory around them.³⁴ The Gadites built up Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer,³⁵ Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah,³⁶ Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran as fortified cities, and built pens for their flocks.³⁷ And the Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh and Kiriathaim,³⁸ as well as Nebo and Baal Meon (these names were changed) and Sibmah. They gave names to the cities they rebuilt.³⁹ The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it and drove out the Amorites who were there.⁴⁰ So Moses gave Gilead to the Makirites, the descendants of Manasseh, and they settled there.⁴¹ Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, captured their settlements and called them Havvoth Jair.⁴² And Nobah captured Kenath and its surrounding settlements and called it Nobah after himself.

32:1 *Reubenites and Gadites.* The abundance of fertile grazing land in Transjordan prompted the leaders of these two tribes to request that they be allowed to settle there and not cross the Jordan. This area too was a gift of God won by conquest. (CSB)

a place for livestock. Plains for grazing. (TLSB)

32:5 The prospect of material gain motivated the request by Reuben and Gad. Selfish interests prevailed over their sense of unity as the covenant people. They were inclined to shirk obligation to other tribes to complete the conquest of the Promised Land. (TLSB)

32:6–9 Moses reminds the people of Reuben and Gad what happened when Israel last hesitated (ch 14). Also, the Reubenites were important instigators in Korah’s rebellion (16:1). (TLSB)

32:7 *discourage the heart.* Moses feared that the desertion of the common cause by the two tribes would have the same disheartening effect on the people that the report of the spies had produced and would precipitate a similar judgment by the Lord (chs 13–14). (TLSB)

32:8 *This is what your fathers did.* Moses’ fear was that the failure of these two tribes to stay with the whole community in conquering Canaan would be the beginning of a general revolt against entering the land. It would be the failure of Kadesh (chs. 13–14) all over again. Moreover, the conquest of Canaan was a commission to all Israel. (CSB)

32:14 Moses snaps at their suggestion (v 5), assuming that rebellion is again about to follow. (TLSB)

32:16 *came near.* Perhaps for a private conference. (TLSB)

sheepfolds. Rock walls formed a large pen, where sheep and shepherds were safe from nighttime predators. Caves were also used for this purpose. (TLSB)

cities for our little ones. Permanent settlements. (TLSB)

32:17 *we are ready to arm ourselves*. The leaders of Reuben and Gad sought to assure Moses that they did not wish to shirk their duty in helping to conquer the land. They would join their brothers in battle but wished to leave their families and livestock behind in the territory of their choosing. (CSB)

32:18 Gad and Reuben commit themselves to full and lasting military service to address Moses' concern (v 6). (TLSB)

32:20–22 Whereas the men of Reuben and Gad pledged themselves in service to their brethren (v 17), Moses emphasized they were vowing to serve the Lord. (TLSB)

32:21 *pass over the Jordan*. Upon the promise of Gad and Reuben to help protect the other tribes, they were permitted to claim the land between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers, most of which had already been taken from the Amorites (21:21–35). It appears to have been a joint occupation of the entire territory without clearly defined borders between the two tribes. Manasseh was able to get its Transjordan portion by dispossessing the Amorites north of the Jabbok (vv 39–42). (TLSB)

32:23 *your sin will find you out*. The bargain was struck, but not without strong warnings if they failed to live up to their word. (CSB)

God would judge them for an unfulfilled vow. (TLSB)

32:28–29 The settlement discussed privately (vv 16–27) is now made public. (TLSB)

32:33 *and the half-tribe of Manasseh*. It appears that after the requirements for Transjordan settlement were established with the tribes of Reuben and Gad, half the tribe of Manasseh joined with them. (CSB)

Half of the tribe of Manasseh received its land on the east side of the Jordan River, together with the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The other half of Manasseh will receive its land in Jsh 17. (TLSB)

32:34–36 *built ... fortified cities, and folds for sheep*. They likely adapted captured cities and sheepfolds, so the settlement would not have taken too long. Cf vv 41–42. (TLSB)

32:40 Moses had led the earlier attacks, which captured the territory, giving him authority to make the grants. (TLSB)

32:42 *Nobah*. Perhaps from Gad. (TLSB)

Ch 32 The Reubenites and Gadites desire the good land east of the Jordan to raise livestock. They vow to fight beside their brothers in the conquest of Canaan (fulfilled in Jsh 22:1–6). When you make promises, keep your word, for the Lord will hold you responsible. Rejoice that He

keeps His Word responsibly, promising and delivering His blessings and care. • “O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life.” Amen. (*LSB* 655:3) (TLSB)