



## Numbers - Chapter Thirty Two

### **V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Thirty Two

The conquest of Sihon and Og, the kings of Transjordan, was described in Chapter 21. The high hills of Transjordan, which rise to 2,500 feet or 762m, made for excellent cattle grazing, so it must have seemed a good idea for some of the Israelites to settle there. The tribes of Reuben and Gad put their bid in first. However, since Transjordan south of the Sea of Galilee is outside the Promised Land, Moses is shocked by the request. He accuses the tribes of making the same mistake as the spies by rejecting God's promises. The tribes of Reuben and Gad insist that they fully support the conquest of Canaan: their fighting men will head the invasion force and not return to Transjordan until Canaan is won. Moses accepts this compromise and instructs the high priest and leaders of Israel to honour this agreement. The subsequent settlement of Reuben and Gad is summarised. Half of the tribe of Manasseh would also settle in northern Transjordan.

#### **V.f Numbers 32:1-42 - Conquest and Division of Transjordan**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> Now the Reubenites and the Gadites owned a very great number of cattle. When they saw that the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead was a good place for cattle, <sup>2</sup> the Gadites and the Reubenites came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, <sup>3</sup> 'Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon — <sup>4</sup> the land that the Lord subdued before the congregation of Israel — is a land for cattle; and your

servants have cattle.’<sup>5</sup> They continued, ‘If we have found favour in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us cross the Jordan.’

**Numbers 32:1-5**

The land of Jazer means the land surrounding the village of Jazer. For possible locations of this and other places mentioned, refer to the map.



**Regional Map**

The land of Gilead normally refers to the hilly district south of the Jabbok River, but in vv.39-40 it refers to the area north of the Jabbok.

Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon. These towns were part of Sihon's territory, refer to Numbers 21:2-32, and subsequently were incorporated into the tribal land of Reuben and Gad (vv.34-38).

If we have found favour in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession. Israel had conquered the Moabites and the Midianites, and the ideal grazing lands on the east side of the Jordan River were laid out before them. The tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad were content with these lands, and asked to be given them as their tribal inheritance.

Do not make us cross the Jordan. Although this had been the longing of the children of Israel for some 400 years, ever since Jacob moved the family into Egypt to find relief from famine (Genesis Chapter 46), now these two tribes were content to stay where they are. It seemed good enough for them. They also gave no consideration to the battles that the remaining tribes would have to face without them to secure the land God had promised the whole nation would possess.

<sup>6</sup> But Moses said to the Gadites and to the Reubenites, 'Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? <sup>7</sup> Why will you discourage the hearts of the Israelites from going over into the land that the Lord has given them? <sup>8</sup> Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. <sup>9</sup> When they went up to the Wadi Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the hearts of the Israelites from going into the land that the Lord had given them. <sup>10</sup> The Lord's anger was kindled on that day and he swore, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Surely none of the people who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upwards, shall see the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not unreservedly followed me — <sup>12</sup> none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they have unreservedly followed the Lord." <sup>13</sup> And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord had disappeared. <sup>14</sup> And now you, a brood of sinners, have risen in place of your fathers, to increase the Lord's fierce anger against Israel! <sup>15</sup> If you turn away from following him, he will again abandon them in the wilderness; and you will destroy all this people.'

## Numbers 32:6-15

Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? Moses wanted them to know that there was a battle to fight and that they were all in it together. Just because these tribes were content with where they were did not relieve them of the responsibility to keep the battle going in support of their nation.

Why will you discourage the hearts of the Israelites from going over into the land that the Lord has given them? Moses feared that the attitude of the tribes of Reuben and Gad would keep the other tribes from going into the Promised Land. Their attitude said, “We’ve fought enough and suffered enough already. Let’s just settle down where we’re at.” Moses’ fear had a foundation. If you want to press on with the things of the Lord and go deeper and further with him, there is a sure way to discourage that desire - start hanging around believers who are content with where they are, and who do not want to press on with the Lord. Complacency is contagious.

Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. Moses gives a passionate summary of the spy episode; refer to Numbers Chapters 13-14 for the full account. He sees the reluctance of Reuben and Gad to enter Canaan as worse than that of their parents: And now you, a brood of sinners, have risen in place of your fathers, to increase the Lord’s fierce anger against Israel! It could provoke God to abandon Israel entirely. Perhaps these fears explain the readiness to punish the Transjordanian tribes in Joshua 22:12.

They discouraged the hearts of the Israelites. Moses reminded the leaders of the tribe of Reuben and Gad why Israel failed to enter the Promised Land some 38 years before. It is a terrible thing to be used by the devil or more likely to be driven by personal desire to discourage other believers to walking deeper and further with the Lord. Christians should ask God to guard them from ever discouraging the heart of another child of God: *<<If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea>>* (Mark 9:42).

They have not unreservedly followed me. This is why the discouragement of the ten unfaithful spies worked on the men of their generation. If they had wholly followed the Lord, the discouraging report would not have unduly influenced them. What made Joshua and Caleb different was that they wholly followed the Lord. They did not bend to the discouraging report of the ten unfaithful spies. When Christians do not wholly follow the Lord, they are much more likely to be influenced by their carnal instincts and the discouraging world around them.

You will destroy all this people. It was as if Moses said, “Your discouragement of the nation would mean that you have destroyed them, just as the ten unfaithful

spies destroyed the previous generation.” Moses perhaps felt that the tribes of Reuben or Gad made a bad choice for themselves; that is, they hurt themselves by settling on the lands east of the Jordan River. However, Moses did not confront them with that issue. If a child of God is content to settle for less in their Christian life, there is little or nothing one can do. But when their complacency begins to affect their brothers and sisters, it must be confronted by their church leaders. This was the basis of Moses’ confrontation.

<sup>16</sup> Then they came up to him and said, ‘We will build sheepfolds here for our flocks, and towns for our little ones, <sup>17</sup> but we will take up arms as a vanguard before the Israelites, until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our little ones will stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. <sup>18</sup> We will not return to our homes until all the Israelites have obtained their inheritance. <sup>19</sup> We will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on this side of the Jordan to the east.’

#### Numbers 32:16-19

The tribes of Reuben and Gad modify their proposal. They will leave their **flocks** in **sheepfolds** and their **little ones** in **fortified towns** while their adult fighting men head the army entering into Canaan. They will not return to Transjordan until the campaign is over and they are given the land.

**Will take up arms as a vanguard before the Israelites, until we have brought them to their place.** This effectively answered the issue of discouragement. None of the tribes would envy Reuben or Gad, resting in ease, while the rest of them are battling for their own lands. The men of Reuben and Gad would fight beside them, just as their brothers had fought with them in Transjordan. In fact, they were willing to go before them as the **vanguard** of the army entering Canaan: <<*At that time, I charged you as follows: ‘Although the Lord your God has given you this land to occupy, all your troops shall cross over armed as the vanguard of your Israelite kin. Only your wives, your children, and your livestock—I know that you have much livestock – shall stay behind in the towns that I have given to you’*>> (Deuteronomy 3:18-19).

#### Introduction to Numbers 32:20-32

Moses accepts their offer but warns them that if they fail to live up to their promise, they will be assigned land in Canaan instead (v.30). They assure him that they will keep their promise (vv.31-32).

<sup>20</sup> So Moses said to them, ‘If you do this – if you take up arms to go before the Lord for the war, <sup>21</sup> and all those of you who bear arms cross the Jordan before the Lord, until he has driven out his enemies from before him <sup>22</sup> and the land is subdued before the Lord – then after that you may return and be free of obligation to the Lord and to Israel, and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. <sup>23</sup> But if you do not do this, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out. <sup>24</sup> Build towns for your little ones, and folds for your flocks; but do what you have promised.’

### Numbers 32:20-24

If you do this. If they do as they said, then they would be blameless before the Lord and before Israel. They will then be able to return to Transjordan: <<*And now the Lord your God has given rest to your kindred, as he promised them; therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan*>> (Joshua 22:4). But if they did not, they would surely be guilty. People have a simply choice either to do good or to do evil, which could be said is the outcome of not doing good: <<*Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God*>> (3 John 11).

But if you do not do this, you have sinned against the Lord. If the tribes of Reuben and Gad did nothing, if they stayed at home while their brothers were battling for life and death to take possession of the Promised Land, then their sin of doing nothing would surely find them out. Sometimes, doing nothing is a greater sin, and it is a sin that will certainly become evident, and will be revealed.

Be sure your sin will find you out could be stated as ‘you will suffer for your sin.’ This statement assumes that God, in his providential knowledge and sovereign oversight of all things, always knows whether his people are faithful and will not endure unfaithfulness among them. The people are often warned about the dangers of their sin, for example: <<*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it*>> (Genesis 4:7), and: <<*The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves*>> (Isaiah 3:9).

<sup>25</sup> Then the Gadites and the Reubenites said to Moses, ‘Your servants will do as my lord commands. <sup>26</sup> Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock shall remain there in the towns of Gilead; <sup>27</sup> but

your servants will cross over, everyone armed for war, to do battle for the Lord, just as my lord orders.’

#### Numbers 32:25-27

Your servants will cross over, everyone armed for war, to do battle for the Lord. Although they were willing to cross the Jordan and help their fellow Israelites take the Promised Land, they recognised that it was God’s will that they should go and God’s battle they would be fighting: <<***The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord***>> (Proverbs 21:31).

<sup>28</sup> So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes. <sup>29</sup> And Moses said to them, ‘If the Gadites and the Reubenites, everyone armed for battle before the Lord, will cross over the Jordan with you and the land shall be subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; <sup>30</sup> but if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan.’ <sup>31</sup> The Gadites and the Reubenites answered, ‘As the Lord has spoken to your servants, so we will do. <sup>32</sup> We will cross over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us on this side of the Jordan.’

#### Numbers 32:28-32

So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes. Moses knew that he would not be there to give the instruction later, for God had said he would not enter the Promised Land: <<***But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them’***>> (Numbers 20:12). Therefore, Moses made sure the command was clear from the outset so that the two and a half tribes would inherit Transjordan providing they kept their promise to fight.

<sup>33</sup> Moses gave to them – to the Gadites and to the Reubenites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph – the kingdom of King Sihon of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land and its towns, with the territories of the surrounding towns. <sup>34</sup> And the Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, <sup>35</sup> Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, <sup>36</sup> Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep.

<sup>37</sup> And the Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, <sup>38</sup> Nebo, and Baal-meon (some names being changed), and Sibmah; and they gave names to the towns that they rebuilt. <sup>39</sup> The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there; <sup>40</sup> so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. <sup>41</sup> Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, and renamed them Havvoth-jair. <sup>42</sup> And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its villages, and renamed it Nobah after himself.

### Numbers 32:33-42

Following this final summary about the settlement of Reuben and Gad in Transjordan (vv.33-38), the settlement of part of the half-tribe of Manasseh in northern Gilead is mentioned for the first time in vv.39-42. It is defined more fully in Joshua 13:29-31. It is unclear why this has not been discussed before. Maybe it was not thought to be as controversial as Reuben and Gad's proposal, because northern Gilead fell within the boundaries of Canaan (Numbers Chapter 34).

Dibon and Aroer subsequently belonged to Reuben (Joshua 13:16-17), whereas Heshbon subsequently belonged to Gad (Joshua 21:39).