

August 25, 2019 - Num. 32:1-42 - Petition of Reuben and Gad
Torah Reading: Numbers 32:1-42 - Petition of Reuben and Gad
Psalm 106:13-18
Haftarah: Joshua 22:8-12, 21-24, 26-29

'Bring Us Not Over Jordan'

- **Matthew 6:24** - "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

In this Torah reading, the tribes of Gad and Reuben want to opt out of their inheritance in the Promised Land and settle on the east side of the Jordan River, on land already conquered by the Israelite victory over the Amorite kings Sihon and Og, but which is not in the land of Canaan.

Their chief concern is evident from their words:

Numbers 32:1 - "Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle..."

Numbers 32:4 - "Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle..."

They sure talk about their cattle a lot. Our words reveal what's in our heart:

- **Matthew 12:34** - "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

- **Matthew 15:18** - "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man."

They even focus on protecting their cattle before their own families:

Numbers 32:16 - "And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones..."

Moses makes a point to reverse the order:

Numbers 32:24 - "Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth."

Rashi - They evinced more concern for their own money than for their own sons and daughters, as they placed their cattle before their little ones. Said Moses to hem: DO not so! Put first things first and secondary things second! "Build you first cities for your little one and affterwards, fold for your sheep."

A midrash comments on this incident:

Three gifts were created in the world (wisdom, strength and wealth)...[but Jeremiah says] "Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither the mighty man glory in his might, let not he rich glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me" (Jeremiah 9:22-23) These gifts when they do not emanate from the Holy One blessed be He, will ultimately fail a man.

For some reason, Reuben and Gad seemed to have more cattle than the other tribes.

The land of Gilead is mentioned later in the scriptures for its well watered and rich pasture land. It was tempting for herders to want to occupy it rather than an unseen and unconquered area in Canaan. All the tribes had also just absorbed the cattle herds of the defeated Amorites and Midianites.

Besides, if they opted out of their inheritance, there would be more room for the other tribes. A win-win situation.

Moses didn't see it like that at all.

Numbers 32:7 - "And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?"

Moses brings out the covetousness and cowardice that their request implies. He compares them to the spies who gave an evil report on the Promised Land, and implies that their actions could trigger "discouragement" in Israel and bring on a disaster like the one that caused the whole generation to perish in the wilderness.

Numbers 32:15 - "For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave them in the wilderness; and ye shall destroy all this people."

This time, the cause would not be fear of giants in the land, but simple self-seeking. Besides, they directly ignored God's command to go up and possess the land at once.

Repentance and an agreement

After Moses expressed his anger, the spokesmen for Gad and Reuben actually listened and heard and repented. And in a remarkable talk with Moses, they offered to send their armed men along with the other Israelites until the war was over and the land was conquered.

Not only that, they would be the vanguard to "go before" the children of Israel in the attacks.

They would leave behind their families and cattle - trusting in the Lord to care for them - with no thought of returning until all Israel had their inheritance. And so it is not until the

22nd chapter of Joshua that they are released to return home.

- **Joshua 22:1-2** - "Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh and told them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and you have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you..."

Numbers 32:21-22 - "And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD."

Why didn't God force them to inherit their lands inside Canaan? Were these tribes worse off on the east side of the Jordan?

God can't force us to receive and enjoy our inheritance. But He also can't allow us to claim to be part of Israel and abandon or ignore our community or forsake the bond we have with one another. If we do, "be sure your sin will find you out" (**Numbers 32:23**).

This is one example of several times a long-suffering God "changed his mind" at the insistence of the people, allowing a change of direction that He eventually worked out for good. (Their later desire for a king is one example).

Numbers 32:33 - "And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about."

Previously no mention is made of the half the tribe of Manasseh being part of the request.

It appears that a portion of that tribe had been engaged in the conquest of certain portions of Gilead and Bashan, and had, therefore, justly acquired a claim to the possession of the districts which they had subjugated.

Numbers 32:39-41 - "And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it, and dispossessed the Amorite which was in it. And Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein. And Jair the son of Manasseh went and took the small towns thereof, and called them Havothjair." (See also **Deuteronomy 3:13-15**)

There may also have already been a division between the "sons of Machir" and other clans within the tribe. Half of Manasseh settled on the west side of the Jordan directly opposite of the other half on the east.

Consequences

Despite the outcome here, the rabbis saw one consequence of the decision of Reuben, Gad and Menasseh:

"... in the case of the children of Reuben and Gad, you find it that they were rich, possessing large numbers of cattle, but they loved their money and settled outside the land of Israel. Consequently they were the first of all the tribes to go into exile, as is borne out by the text, "And He carried them away, even the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh" (**1 Chronicles 5:26**) What brought it upon them? The fact that they separated themselves from their brethren because of their possessions.

Expansive Boundaries of the Promised Land

This episode seems to depict the Land of Israel as "expandable." Now it seems to include the eastern lands settled by Reuben, Gad and Manasseh as well as the lands in Canaan.

But in the several places where borders for the Promised Land are given, there is much discrepancy. The borders seem to be ambiguous and expandable.

In one place, it is described as all the land that Abram can see (**Genesis 13:15**). In another place, it is wherever the Israelites *walk*:

- **Deuteronomy 11:24** - "Every place where the sole of your foot treads will be yours. Your territory will extend from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Western Sea." (See also **Joshua 1:3**)

- **Genesis 15:18** - "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

In fact, the *Amorite land* is where Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh settled.

This "expandable" Promised Land suggests that spiritually, the borders of Israel take in the whole world.

In the prophet Ezekiel's ideal vision (**Ezekiel 48**), the Promised Land will be divided up equally among the tribes (completely different from the historic division). The borders he describes (**Ezekiel 47**) also are different from other descriptions.

According to one rabbinical interpretations, the phrase "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" signified that Israel was to become a nation "declaring God's Name" at the crossroads of the two great centers of civilization in the known world - Egypt and Sumeria.

This in fact is what God's Promise to Abraham said:

- **Genesis 12:1-3** - "...in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

In the New Testament, we see this promise fulfilled by the coming of Christ and the conversion of Gentiles into the church.

- **Galatians 3:16** - "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

For Christian believers, the Promised Land inheritance is a spiritual "Rest."

- **Deuteronomy 12:9** - "For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you."

But in Hebrews, it states that Joshua, although conquering the Canaanites and settling the people, did not fulfill the promise:

- **Hebrews 4:8-11** - "For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

In the same way, the New Jerusalem is a spiritual entity. Zion is no longer the hill of Jerusalem but represents the whole people of God:

- **Hebrews 12:22-23** - "...you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to myriads of angels in joyful assembly, to the congregation of the firstborn, enrolled in heaven. You have come to God the judge of all men, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect..."