

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Reuben and Gad Request Land

32: 1-15

Reuben and Gad request land DIG: What were the tribes of Reuben and Gad asking for? What was the basis of their decision? What were the dangers? What was Moses afraid of? What does “the fringe of the Promised Land mean?” Why did the two-and-a-half tribes decide to settle outside of the Promised Land? What do you think about their reasons?

REFLECT: Today, what natural and spiritual barriers to unity exist between isolated believers? What dangers are there for lone-wolf believers? What would you do to break this isolation and bring people together? In what ways are the congregations of God isolated from one another? What dangers are there in such prolonged isolation?

Moses feared a repetition of the sin of the Exodus Generation, and punishment of Kadesh-barnea.

This chapter begins, as several chapters do, with people making a request of **Moses**. **They** came to **him** not because **he** was king, but because **he** was the appointed divine mediator between **YHVH** and **His** people. As in the case of **the daughters of Zelophehad** ([to see link click Eu - The Daughters of Zelophehad](#)), and as in the instance of the relatives of those women (see [Gn - The Daughters of Zelophehad Revisited](#)), so the leaders of **the tribes of Reuben and Gad** approached **Moshe**. The abundance of fertile grazing land in the Transjordan prompted the leaders of those two tribes to request **Moses and Eleazar** that **they** might settle there, not across (west of) **the Jordan River**.

This was nothing more than a pragmatic decision that led to remarkable negotiation between **God** and **His** servant **Moses**. **Their** request was not sinful, although the Transjordan was outside the Promised Land. But it was also a gift of **God**, won by conquest. When we think of Canaan, we are prone to think of the Cisjordan. Canaan proper is described in **Chapter 34** (see [Gi - Israe’el’s Land](#)). Yet, the full inheritance of **the Israelites** extended to the regions of the Transjordan as well.

But it was, in a sense, **the tzit-tzit** of the garment (see [Cl - Tzit-tzit and Blue Thread](#)). It was not the heart and soul of **the Land**, and to settle on the fringe was a mixed blessing. It was **their** choice to live there.

However, because **they** were somewhat removed from the center of life in the Land, **they** were the most prone to be influenced by outsiders. And clearly they were the most open for territorial expansion by their pagan neighbors. Territorial living had both its advantages and its disadvantages. Ultimately, their request and **the LORD's** decision through Moses expanded the territory of **Isra'el**. If you take a positive outlook, we can see this chapter as a rash adventure of faith rather than a record of rebellion.⁷³²



The request of the tribes (32:1-5): The Reubenites and Gadites, who had very large herds and flocks, saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were suitable for livestock. So they came to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the community, and said: the cities of **Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah** (in verse 38 he is referred to as **Beth-Nimrah**), **Heshbon, Eleaheh, Sebam** (in verse 38 he is referred to as **Sibmah**), **Nebo and Beon** (in verse 38 he is referred to as **Ba'al-Meon**) - **the Land that ADONAI subdued before the people of Isra'el - are suitable for grazing livestock, and your servants have livestock.** The repetition of the word **livestock** is for emphasis; **their herds** must have been exceptionally large. The conquest of **the Midianite livestock** would have further expanded the holdings of **their two tribes** as well as the other ten (**to**

see link click [Fq - Report of the Battle](#)). But **their** language suggests that the number of **livestock** that **they** had was out of proportion to the other **tribes**. **They** needed the room that the Transjordan seemed to provide.⁷³³ Therefore, **they** requested: **If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as our possession** and settle in the Transjordan (see [Fy - Reuben and Gad in the Transjordan](#)). **Do not make us cross the Jordan River** and settle in the Cisjordan, or what would be called the West Bank today. True, those **tribes** would be separated from the rest of the nation by **the Jordan**, but **they** saw this as a minor concern.

The negative response of Moses (32:6-15): **Moses** may have reacted too quickly, because **his** first thought was that these tribes were deserting the cause. **He** probably thought **they** were ready to settle down. **Moshe** always had the entire nation at heart as well as the great challenge of conquering and claiming the Promised Land. To **him**, it was a terrible **sin** for any of the tribes to retreat from the conflict and fail to do their part in conquering the Land. Just as the ten spies had discouraged the whole nation at **Kadesh-barnea** and led **the people** into thirty-eight wasted years, so those two tribes could discourage **Isra'el** by quitting at the very borders of **their** inheritance. More than that, **their** selfish attitude could arouse the anger of **Ha'Shem**, and **He** might send judgment as **He** had done before when **the people** sinned. Even worse, **God** might just abandon **the nation** and let **them** die in the wilderness.⁷³⁴ Therefore, **Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites**. There is a subtle shift in the wording from **verse 2**, where **Reuben** proceeds **Gad**. Here the order is reversed. Perhaps this is a subtle way of suggesting that both **tribes** had an equal stake in the decision. Only later do we find that some of the clans of **Manasseh** were also involved (**Numbers 32:33; Joshua 13:8ff**).⁷³⁵

Moses said: **Should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the Land the LORD has given them?** Then **Moshe** raged: **This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to look over the Land. After they went up to the Valley of Eshkol and viewed the land, the ten spies discouraged the Israelites from entering the land ADONAI had given them** (see [By - The Report of the Spies](#)). **Moses** believed that **the tribes of Gad and Reuben** would be guilty of the same sin that **the ten spies** had been guilty of. **Ha'Shem's anger was aroused that day and He swore this oath, "Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of those who were**

twenty years old or more when they came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - not one except Caleb from the tribe of Judah (Numbers 13:6 and 34:19) and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed ADONAI wholeheartedly.” God’s anger burned against Isra’el and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the whole Exodus generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone” (see [Cb](#) - [God’s Response](#)).

The application to the Wilderness Generation: Moses feared a repetition of the sin of the Exodus Generation, and punishment of Kadesh-barnea. And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Isra’el. If you turn away from following Him, He will again leave all these people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction.

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** very gracious love that accepts as family, all who trust **You** as **their Lord and Savior (John 1:12)**. Important decisions need to be carefully prayed over and considered in light of how it will affect their relationship with **You**. Though **the Reubenites** and **Gadites** saw that the lands of **Jazer** and **Gilead** were suitable for **their** very large **herds and flocks**, more importantly was how would this decision would affect **their** worship of **God**? Though the land is very suitable for **their flocks** on **the east side of the Jordan**, that would separate **them** from most of the rest of **the Israelites**. What may look good in the short run may be very unwise for future generations to follow.*

*Worshiping with others is very important. A single light/match can be easily extinguished, but a handful of matches burn longer. So also, a single worshiper may get discouraged, but a family that praises **God** together, stays together! It is helpful to live close to others who can influence in worshiping **You** with all our hearts. **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds. And do not neglect our own meetings, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another - and all the more so as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25)**. May you guide **Your** children to make decisions that draw them closer to **You** and keep their eyes focused on living for **You** in all they say, do and think. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*