

Message #34**Numbers 32:1-42**

When is the last time you have heard someone complain that “I have way too many blessings.” When is the last time that you have said, “I have so much I don’t know what to do with all God has given me?”

That was a problem here for Israel. God has so blessed the nation that the people were overflowing with blessings to the point that they didn’t know what to do. It is not wrong to be blessed by God. It is not wrong to have a lot, as long as the will of God and the Word of God are kept in proper perspective. That point is clear from this text:

WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE ARE BEING BLESSED, THEY MUST ALWAYS FOCUS ON OBEYING THE WORD OF GOD SO THOSE BLESSINGS WILL CONTINUE.

God’s people were not even in the Promised Land yet and they were experiencing tremendous blessings. When God’s people purpose to obey God, God blesses them. They were finally obeying God and they were prospering even before getting into the Promised Land.

This passage breaks down nicely into five parts:

PART #1 – Two tribes of Israel ask Moses and Eleazar if they can live east of the Jordan.
32:1-5

Based on all the spoils of chapter 31, two tribes, Reuben and Gad, ended up with a huge numbers of livestock. To maintain livestock you need good pasture land.

So the sons of Reuben and Gad went to Moses and to Eleazar the priest to ask them if they could have the land east of the Jordan as their land. It was great land for the livestock so that was their request.

Most of the cities named in **verse 3** are able to be located today. For example, Ataroth is Attarus, located today about 7.5 miles north of Dibon and 8 miles west of the Dead Sea. Dibon is modern day Dhiban, located about 4 miles north of Arnon and 12 miles west of the Dead Sea. Jazer is modern day Jazzir. Nimrah is Tell el-Bleibil about 11 miles east of the Jordan and 27 miles west of ancient Rabbah. Heshbon is Hesban about 13 miles east and north of the Dead Sea. Elealeh is El-Al northeast of Hesbon. Sebam is modern day Sibma about 5 miles south west of Hesbon. Nebo is a couple miles south of Qurn el-Kibs and Beon is about 10 miles southwest of Hesbon.

Now if Moses would agree to this, it would mean a somewhat divided Israel. You would have most of the nation living west of the Jordan and these tribes east of the Jordan.

Now these were all cities that had been destroyed by the Israelites when they took the Midianite land.

In **verse 5** they said to Moses if we have found favor in your sight, let us have this land.

PART #2 – Moses initially responds to the request of the two tribes. 32:6-15

At first, Moses was not thrilled with the idea. This could be a major threat to unity. In fact, he even questioned their motives. Moses' concern was that it would not be right for the other ten tribes to go to war to take the Promised Land while they were sitting on the other side of the Jordan, not going to war.

All of the tribes of Israel had been involved in taking the land they were presently living and it would not be right for them not to help their brothers.

In **verse 6**, Moses said this won't look right. Here your brothers are going to war and you are just sitting in your cities and homes watching them go.

In **verse 7**, Moses saw this as a potential discouragement. It would be discouraging to have to go to war for your inheritance, while you see others who aren't having to go to war.

Moses viewed this as something that would thwart God's plan for the nation. Moses was nearing his own death and he did not want anything to happen that could hinder the success of the nation.

He said this was the kind of thing that happened when I sent the spies into the land. They saw it and came back with a negative report and it discouraged the entire nation (32:8-9). So the Lord became angry and made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all were dead, except for those who were under the age of 20 and Joshua and Caleb (32:10-13).

Moses says this could discourage the whole nation to the point they do the same thing and the whole nation ends up being destroyed (32:14-15). In fact, in **verse 14**, he calls those making this request a "brood of sinful men" who will cause the anger of the Lord to burn against Israel.

Moses sensed the weight of this. The others didn't, but he did. He knew the potential disaster that could happen if the people got discouraged. God's leader must look out for the welfare of the whole group. Sometimes individuals think it is just about them and their little world. They think they are running their own little separate operation; Moses saw it as connected to the whole.

Moses is the key leader here. Even though initially he did not agree with the request, these tribes did not try to go behind his back or usurp his authority. God will ultimately lead Moses to agree to this; it will be done through proper channels of authority.

Clandestine activity without proper leadership knowledge and involvement are not of God.

PART #3 – Two tribes respond to Moses and offer a solution to the problem. **32:16-27**

What we see here is that Moses was a man who was open to reasonable discussion and reasonable negotiation.

The sons of Israel came to Moses with a fourfold proposal:

Proposal #1 - We will build sheepfolds for our livestock and cities for our families. **32:16**

Since they were willing to leave the area to go with the rest of Israel, it would be important for them to have secured areas for the livestock and their families. They wanted to build corrals for their animals and cities for their families to live.

Now the building of the cities would be for fortification purposes. There would not be enough time to build from the ground up, but there would be time to rebuild and refortify.

This was a legitimate need in view of the other proposals.

Proposal #2 - We ourselves will lead the way in the fight with our brothers as armed soldiers
32:17

The two tribes said not only will we be willing to go with our brothers, we will lead the way.

Proposal #3 - We will not return to our homes until all Israel has their inheritance. **32:18**

They are promising that they will not return home until the total and complete conquest of the land is done.

Proposal #4 - Their inheritance will be on the west side of the Jordan and ours on the east side.
32:19

They are promising to fight for their brother's inheritance, even though they will not inherit any land on the west side of the Jordan.

PART #4 – Moses responds to their proposal. **32:20-24**

Moses listened to the proposal and came to the conclusion that these guys were not motivated by cowardice or self-centeredness nor were they out to discourage the rest of the nation. He made the following four “if” conditional statements and conclusions. We may observe that four times in these verses Moses stresses this is being promised “before the LORD” (**32:20, 21, 22, 22**):

Conditional Statement #1 - If you will arm yourselves before the Lord for war. **32:20**

Conditional Statement #2 - If you cross over the Jordan to go to war and stay there until all enemies are gone. **32:21**

Conditional Statement #3 - If you make sure all of the land has been subdued. **32:22a**

Then you may return to this land and it is yours for your possession. **32:22b**

Conditional Statement #4 - If you do not follow through with this, you have sinned and your sin will find you out. **32:23**

Verse 23 is one of the most famous verses in the book of Numbers. In fact, this verse is used often in evangelistic appeals. However, that is not the context of the verse. The context of the verse is in admonishing God's people to follow through with what they promise God because if they don't do it, their sin will find them out.

So Moses challenged them to do what they said they would do—build the cities and sheepfolds (**32:24**).

PART #5 – Two tribes promise to do what they said they would do. **32:25-27**

The sons of Gad and Reuben said to Moses, we will do exactly what you have said.

PART #6 – Moses gives a command to Eleazar to officially declare this before the Lord.
32:28-32

Apparently when Reuben and Gad first made their proposal, only Moses and Eleazar heard it. So Moses decided to gather all the tribes and restate the matter.

This was an “oral contract” that was now made publicly known. This is like a congregational meeting.

PART #7 – Moses officially assigns the land to Gad, Reuben, and one half-tribe of Manasseh.
32:33-42

Moses legally gave the land east of the Jordan to these tribes. The sons of Gad built eight fortified cities plus the sheepfolds (**32:33-36**). The sons of Reuben built more than five cities (**32:37-38**). The sons of Manasseh also built cities (**32:39-42**).