

East of Jordan

8th May 25



The tribes of Reuben and Gad seemed to have a lot more cattle than the other tribes. So as the whole nation waited as a congregation pitched in the Jordan valley, east of the river, the scouts of these tribes reported back on the fertile grazing plains stretching northwards, and so appealed to the leadership – Moses, Eleazar the high priest, (for Aaron had died) –

if they could settle in that region, as it seemed so well suited to their requirements. In Numbers 26 we are informed that the tribe of Reuben had 43,730 men aged 20 years and upward, Gad had 40,500. Why they had significantly more cattle is not stated. This is a suggestion. The tribes of Reuben Simeon and Gad always encamped on the south side of the Tabernacle. In the case of the great plague which befell the nation when the Midianite women went into the congregation under the training of Balaam, it was the tribe of Simeon

which was plagued. See how their numbers fell from 59300 from the first census, to 22000 at the second census in Numbers 26. That means that they went from the second largest tribe to the smallest. The suggestion is that their neighbouring tribes – Reuben and Gad took care of the surplus cattle which was left from the 37000 men who had died.

Anyway, this is an aside, but may explain why these two tribes had so much additional livestock.

They did not demand the land east of Jordan, but presented their request in a humble way: - *if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.*

However Moses responded very harshly. He immediately questioned their motives and assumed more than they were suggesting.

He assumed they were planning to take the easy way, and snatch the nearest available land, and abandon the work of driving out the inhabitants of Canaan from the Promised Land as God had commanded, leaving the burden of the work to their fellow tribes. He assumed they had selfish motivations.

He also saw this as a form of discouragement for the rest of the tribes who yet to receive their inheritance, and that they would hasten the breakup of the nation. He likened them to the spies who brought back an evil report in the previous generation.

Moses warmed to his theme, as he recounted what happened back then, and he reminded them how that disastrous and cowardly report, brought out fear among the tribes, and they refused to go up to the land, and so wandered the wilderness for 38 years.

Now, Moses continued, you are standing in the place of your fathers all those years ago, a brood of sinful men, and you will be the cause of the increase of the anger of God even more against the nation, and the cause of the destruction of the whole nation.

The elders of the two tribes would have been startled by this powerful rebuke from Moses, and maybe they would have found his comments quite hurtful.

It is not nice when people credit us with false motives, and judge our intentions before we have explained ourselves.

This is a relevant verse: Proverbs 18:13: *He that answers a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.* The wise Nicodemus had this to say: John 7:51 *Does our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he does?*

One can hardly blame Moses, who was no doubt still feeling sore that he was not allowed to enter the land, because he allowed himself to be provoked, and did not give credit to God when it was due, as he had become so angry with those who continually moaned and groaned. Now before him, were another bunch of complainers, or so it seemed.

This is a clear lesson, on how we can judge a situation based on what we have been conditioned to think before. But instead the correct procedure is to judge each situation on a case by case basis which is a much better way.

The two tribes responded. They were not angry back, nor did they take offense at the tone of Moses' reply. They could have gone off in a huff, or been insolent to Moses, but they did not. They knew he was the spokesman for God, and they respected that.

They had a proposition they had clearly already thought about. They would build towns and stockades for the wives, children and cattle, but they themselves of fighting age, would prepare for war, and go in with the other tribes, even as the advance guard, and remain on duty fighting and conquering the land until such time as all the other tribes have their possession, and only then would they return to their inheritance on the east of Jordan.

This would have softened Moses as he considered their words. They were not abandoning the tribes at all. If anything they were prepared

to leave their nearest and dearest their wives and children unprotected, whilst fighting for another's inheritance. This showed enormous faith and courage. They obviously believed what they were doing was correct in God's eyes, and that God would be their Protector.

Moses saw this immediately, and on this basis, he agreed with them and said that if they kept to their word, they would not be guilty, and indeed this land east of Jordan would be theirs as an inheritance. But he added the proviso: If they did not keep to their word, and it was an elaborate deception... verse 23: *behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.*

Be sure your sin will find you out! This is a lesson again for us all. God and God alone can judge the motivation of the heart. Therefore: 1 John 3:20: *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.*

At this point, when Moses agreed for this plan to be put in place, representatives of the tribe of Manasseh came forward, and did not seem to be part of the earlier discussion. It was not all the tribe, but just the families of Machir and Jair. Even so it still constituted half of the tribe.

The map above shows the regions which Moses apportioned them. It worth noting that these tribes did not squabble over Moses decision of where they were to be based – even though the decision was not by lot or drawing of straws– they seemed to show a very good spirit in these things. Again another lesson, with matters relating to plans in the future – we may propose, but the disposing of it is in God's hand. Proverbs 16:33: *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.* Yes, like these examples, it is best for us to place our trust in the protection of the Almighty God.

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