

548. What differences does the Scripture make between the circumstances under which a man or a woman might make binding vows.
549. Give the circumstances under which a woman's vow was not binding.
550. How does the law of vows relate to a betrothed woman?
551. At what time might it be assumed that an unmarried woman might make a vow without the consent of her father?
552. When was a married woman's vow valid, even if her husband did not speak his word of approval?
553. What two kinds of women might make binding vows without consulting any men?
554. Discuss fully the principle which underlies the law of vows. How does it establish a firm foundation for truth?
555. What four conditions should every vow meet to be proper?
556. What would cause a forced vow to lose its validity?
557. Discuss why it would be superfluous to ask an honest man to take a vow.

#### IV. THE LAST EVENTS IN TRANS-JORDAN (31:1—33:42)

##### A. ATTACK UPON THE MIDIANITES vv. 1-12

###### TEXT

Chapter 31:1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. 3. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian. 4. Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. 5. So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand

armed for war. 6. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand. 7. And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses: and they slew all the males. 8. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain: namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword. 9. And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. 10. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire. 11. And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. 12. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses and Eleazar the priest, and unto the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by Jordan near Jericho.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 31:1. Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Execute the full vengeance of the Children of Israel upon the Midianites; afterward, you shall be gathered unto your people." 3. And Moses spoke unto the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the conflict, and let them go forth against Midian and avenge the Lord on Midian. 4. You shall send to the war one thousand men from each tribe, throughout all the tribes of Israel." 5. So twelve thousand armed men were brought out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, for the battle. 6. And Moses sent them to the battle, a thousand from each tribe, they and Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, to the battle, with the holy instruments and the trumpets and his hand to blow. 7. And they fought against Midian as the Lord had commanded Moses: and they killed all the males. 8. And they killed the kings of Midian, besides the others who were slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam, the son of Peor, with

the sword. 9. And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captive, along with their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods. 10. Then they burned all the cities where they lived, as well as their camps, with fire. 11. And they took all the loot, and all the prey, both of man and beast. 12. And they brought the captives and the prey and the loot to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho.

## COMMENTARY

God had earlier commanded the attack upon the Midianites (25:17), citing their prostitution of Israel at Peor (25:18). We have no way of determining exactly how long this interval had been, but in the meanwhile the census had been taken to establish the basis for Israel's army. When the attack was finally made, it seems to have been quite unexpected, and the victory was total. One thousand men from each of the tribes constituted the attacking army, and they were accompanied by Phinehas, the son of the high priest, who took with him certain "holy instruments", whose identity is not known, along with the trumpets.

In the battle, all males—apparently the adults—were killed, along with the five "kings" or chiefs of Midian. Along with these five prominent men is mentioned the fact that Balaam, son of Beor, was a victim of the same attack. It would seem that Balaam had remained in the area, had attached himself unto the Midianites, and counseled the Midianites to tempt Israel into idolatry (v. 16). His death may have been the result of judicial execution rather than from the battle itself (see *PC* p. 400).

Following the overwhelming victory comes the matter of dividing the spoils of conquest. The women are taken prisoners, along with all children. The "cattle", here meaning beasts of burden, and their domesticated flocks are confiscated, along with all of their goods. The cities were burned next. Since the Midianites were a nomadic people, it is very possible that these cities had originally belonged either to the Moabites or the

Amorites, and that they had been captured by Sihon. The *KJ* word "castle" is not justified in the text; the term means simply "camps". The booty now was brought before Moses and Eleazar, as well as the congregation, in their camp in Moab for disposition. Since the battle had been ordered by the Lord, the warriors were not to look upon the occasion as one of personal exploitation of the victims. God Himself must guide this next important step.

Why was the annihilation of so great a number of the Midianites ordered? Not because they were the only idolatrous people with whom Israel came into contact; nor were the Israelites to become international moral policemen to enforce Divine laws of conduct. The reason, simply put, is that Midian "had made an unprovoked, crafty, and successful attack upon God's people, and had brought thousands of them to a shameful death. The motive which prompted the attack upon them was not horror of their sins, nor fear of their contamination, but vengeance; Midian was smitten avowedly 'to avenge the children of Israel' (v. 2) who had fallen through Baal-Peor, and at the same time 'to avenge the Lord' (v. 3), who had been obliged to slay his own people," (*PC*, p. 403.) A final word is appropriate. We would be logically in error to apply twentieth-century, or even Christian, moral standards to the actions commanded at Moses' time. The treatment of the Midianite women and children was, by the standards of his day, most merciful, and is a step toward that ethic God would have all men reach through His Son—to stir a national conscience against atrocities and, ultimately and ideally, to eliminate war altogether. If men fail to reach this goal, it is due not to a failure in God's plan or a lowering of His goals, but to the continuing rebellious and inhumane attitudes and acts of His rebellious creature.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

558. What was the basic reason for God's ordering the attack upon the Midianites?
559. Why had He not done similarly to the Moabites or the Amorites?

560. Who accompanied the army, and with what implements?  
 561. Tell who was killed in the ensuing battle.  
 562. Who were spared initially?  
 563. Why had the cities probably not been built originally by the Midianites?  
 564. Discuss the ethical question of the annihilation of the Midianites. Why is it a fallacy to apply contemporary standards of the actions here?

## B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THEIR DISPOSAL vv. 13-20

### TEXT

Chapter 31:13. And Moses and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp. 14. And Moses was wroth with the officers of the host, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle. 15. And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? 16. Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the Counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. 17. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. 18. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves. 19. And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day. 20. And purify all your raiment, and all that is made of skins, and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 31:13. And Moses and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. 14. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds,

who had come from the battle. 15. And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women alive? 16. "Behold, these caused the childrn of Israel to revolt against the Lord through the counsel of Balaam, in the matter of Peor; and there was a plague of the Lord among the congregation. 17. "Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by lying with him. 18. "But all the girls who have not lain with a man you are to keep alive unto yourselves. 19. "Stay outside of the camp seven days, anyone who has killed another person, and anyone who has touched a corpse; purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day. 20. "And you shall purify every garment and every item of leather and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood."

#### COMMENTARY

The anger of Moses, Eleazar and other leaders of the people is not difficult to understand. When they learned that the very most involved members of the Midianite tribe who had earlier corrupted Israel had been spared, their reaction was spontaneously to disapprove. These were the very women who induced the people of God to sin flagrantly, both in committing whoredom and in subscribing to orgaistic religious rituals before the pagan gods. To spare them would be an affront to the very God who had ordered the extermination of the offending tribe. Moses' decision is immediate, and his orders are to the point. He first rebukes those who were responsible for the situation, then he gives the reason for his displeasure. Then they are told what they must do: kill every male child and every woman who has had intercourse with a man. Only virgins, of whatever age, are to be spared. The male children are to be exterminated in order to bring Midian to extinction. The women who have had sexual experience are to be killed to prevent further seduction of the Israelites; and, as we may now conclude from present knowledge of the ravages of sexually-oriented diseases, to prevent a further infestation of God's people in a manner all too familiar from the past.

Why, then, were the virgins spared? Unlike many of their contemporary nations, the Hebrews were not slave traders. They were permitted servants, with numerous laws in the Mosaic code to govern the practice. But in this instance it seems correct to assume that many of the Midianites married into the nation of Israel, since any children born to such a union would have been considered Israelites; and they are not yet living under the circumstances which would have prohibited the marriages. Nevertheless, both soldiers and captives were required to remain outside the camp for one week. During the time, they are to follow exactly the strictures of 19:11ff., in order that they might be ceremonially clean when they reentered the camp. Even their clothing and anything made of skin, goats' hair or wool, must likewise be made clean. The directions specify that only those who have actually killed another, or have touched a corpse, are involved. Even the captives themselves are to undergo the ritual cleansing before they may be admitted into the assembly of Israel.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

565. Give the causes for the anger of Moses and Eleazar when Israel's warriors returned from their battle with the Midianites.
566. Relate Moses' instructions as to how the captives were to be treated. What was to happen to the different kinds of prisoners?
567. Why was it reasonable to spare only the virgins among the Midianites?
568. What eventually became of those Midianite women?
569. For what reason and for what length of time were some of the soldiers not permitted to return to camp?
570. Compare the treatment given these captives by Israel with that normally given to prisoners of war in other contemporary societies.
571. Suggest any reasons you can for requiring the Israelites to purify even the garments and other such items before bringing them into camp.

C. PURIFICATION OF THE SOLDIERS  
AND THE BOOTY vv. 21-24

TEXT

Chapter 31:21. And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord commanded Moses; 22. Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead, 23. Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water. 24. And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 31:21. Then Eleazar the priest said to the warriors who had gone to the battle, "This is the statute of the Law which the Lord commanded Moses: 22. only the gold and silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead, 23. everything which can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. But whatever does not pass through the fire you shall pass through the water. 24. "And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean; afterwards you may enter the camp."

COMMENTARY

In recognizing that "this is the earliest instance of the high priest declaring to the people what the law of God as delivered to Moses was, and then applying and enlarging that law to meet the present circumstances," (*PC*, p. 400), we should also recognize the circumstances under which such a declaration was made. As the account moves inexorably toward the time of the death of Moses, more responsibility has already been shared with Joshua, and it is only reasonable that such a sharing should occur in another area in which Moses has carried a singular responsibility—a responsibility which will be an inherent part of



the duties of the succeeding high priests. This fact alone is hardly sufficient to prove that the passage is a later interpolation.

All those metals which can be purified by fire are to undergo this method of treatment; materials which would not survive this process are to be washed thoroughly with water. The metals named here: gold, silver, bronze, tin, iron and lead were well known to ancient people; all of them were refined, and all could be purified by the fires; so it was ordered. The process of washing would have included all skins, clothing, and woven fabrics of any kind. Even aside from the fact that the order is given for ceremonial purposes, no better precautionary measures could have been taken to insure curtailment of any transmissible diseases. In a day when men did not know anything of this fact, and of the part which either clothing or materials of any other kind could play in spreading unwanted germs and infestations, it was a part of God's divine protection of His people to order such a cleansing. Their own clothing must be washed on the final day of the quarantine, as the final act of compliance; following this, life might be resumed in its normal course.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

572. Why were the metal items and all other articles of booty to be subjected to the ritual of cleansing?
573. Explain the part of Eleazar in presenting the instructions to Israel.
574. Why did Moses himself not deliver the instructions?
575. Find other instances where the Israelites were required to make similar compliances with God's orders.

#### D. DIVISION OF THE BOOTY vv. 25-54

##### TEXT

Chapter 31:25. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 26. Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the

congregation: 27. And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation. 28. And levy a tribute unto the Lord of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, both of the persons, and of the beeves, and of the asses, and of the sheep: 29. Take it of their half, and give it unto Eleazar the priest, for a heave offering of the Lord. 30. And of the children of Israel's half, thou shalt take one portion of fifty, of the persons, of the beeves, of the asses, and of the flocks, of all manner of beasts, and given them unto the Levites, which keep the charge of the tabernacle of the Lord. 31. And Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord commanded Moses. 32. And the booty, being the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep, 33. And threescore and twelve thousand beeves, 34. And threescore and one thousand asses, 35. And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him. 36. And the half, which was the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and thirty thousand and five hundred sheep: 37. And the Lord's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen. 38. And the beeves were thirty and six thousand; of which the Lord's tribute was threescore and twelve. 39. And the asses were thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the Lord's tribute was threescore and one. 40. And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the Lord's tribute was thirty and two persons. 41. And Moses gave the tribute, which was the Lord's heave offering, unto Eleazar the priest, as the Lord commanded Moses. 42. And of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided from the men that warred, 43. (now the half that pertained unto the congregation was three thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred sheep, 44. And thirty and six thousand beeves, 45. And thirty thousand asses and five hundred, 46. And sixteen thousand persons,) 47. Even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of men and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which

kept the charge of the tabernacle of the Lord: as the Lord commanded Moses.

48. And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses: 49. And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us. 50. We have therefore brought an oblation for the Lord, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the Lord. 51. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of them, even all wrought jewels. 52. And all the gold of the offering that they offered up to the Lord, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels. 53. (For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.) 54. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 31:25. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "You and Eleazar the priest, and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation shall take a count of the loot which was taken, of both man and animal; 27. and divide the loot between the warriors who went out into battle and all the congregation. 28. "And you shall levy a tax for the Lord from the warriors who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the people and of the cattle, and of the donkeys and of the sheep; 29. take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the Lord. 30. "And from the half belonging to the children of Israel you shall take one of each fifty of the people, of the cattle, of the donkeys and of the sheep, from all the animals, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the Tabernacle of the Lord." 31. So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord commanded Moses. 32. And the booty which

remained from the loot which the warriors had taken was 675,000 sheep, 33. and 72,000 cattle, 34. and 61,000 donkeys; 35. and of people, of the women who had not lain with a man, the total number of women was 32,000. 36. And the half which was the allotment of those who went to war was the following: the number of sheep was 337,500, 37. and the Lord's tax of the sheep was 675, 38. and the number of cattle was 36,000, from which the Lord's tax was 72. 39. And there were 30,500 donkeys, from which the Lord's tax was 61. 40. And there were 16,000 people, from whom the Lord's levy was 32 people. 41. And Moses gave the tax which was the Lord's offering to Eleazar the priest, as the Lord had commanded Moses. 42. And from the half belonging to the children of Israel, which Moses received from the men who had gone to war 43. (now the congregation's half was 337,500 sheep, 44. and 36,000 cattle, 45. and 30,500 donkeys; 46. and there were 16,000 people), 47. and from the half belonging to the children of Israel, Moses took one chosen from every fifty, of both man and animals, and gave them to the Levites who kept charge of the Tabernacle of the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

48. Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, came to Moses. 49. And they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a census of the warriors who are under our command, and not one man is missing. 50. "So we have brought as an offering to the Lord what each man found, items of gold, jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and belts, to make atonement for our souls before the Lord." 51. Then Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought jewelry. 52. And all the gold of the offering which they offered up to the Lord from the captains of the hundreds was 16,750 shekels. 53. (Now the warriors had taken loot, every man for himself.) 54. Now Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it to the Tent of Meeting as a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord.

## COMMENTARY

Everything taken in war against the Midianites was first divided into two equal portions. These were shared alike by those who had gone to battle and those who had not. David would later base his distribution of loot from war upon this principle (see I Sam. 30:24ff.): it is implicit in Joshua's words to the people when the two and one-half tribes settled east of the Jordan (Josh. 22:8).

When the equal division was completed, the booty was assessed for a tribute unto the Lord. One-fifth of one percent of that which was designated for the warriors was to be given Eleazar for a heave offering unto the Lord. The same portion was taken from those given the congregation, and these portions were taken for the Levites. Although the total portions taken were identical, the proportions differed greatly: .2% of the soldiers' booty, but 2% of the booty of the people. This would recognize the active service of the warriors. If the number of animals taken seems large, let the later reference of Judges 6:3-5 be considered, where the Midianites' herds and flocks are compared to grasshoppers in multitude, and their camels are said to have been "without number."

The soldiers were obviously pleased with their rewards (v. 49); and an even more intriguing item is the note that not one man was missing from their ranks. This latter fact has been attributed to the protection of God, to the lack of resistance from the Midianites, and to the full obedience and sound faith of the participants. The passage does not assign a cause.

A number of items of jewelry appear in the detailing of the booty. We should not wonder that a nomadic people possessed such items, since this was a custom of antiquity among the Bedouins, whose jewelry represented the total of their wealth, apart from their flocks. The Israelites themselves had produced a sufficient quantity to more than provide for the necessities of construction of the Tabernacle. All of the gold so taken was given to the Lord, and was doubtless used to support the tabernacle services.

## QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

576. Compare the amount of booty allocated to the soldiers with that shared by the people.
577. On what basis were the soldiers allowed the greater shares?
578. What explanations have been offered for the fact that not one of the Israelite soldiers was lost in this battle? Defend the one you accept.
579. Is it reasonable to believe that a nomadic people could have as much gold as Israel took from the Midianites? Explain your answer.

## E. REQUEST OF GAD AND REUBEN (32:1-5)

## TEXT

Chapter 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. 2. The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying, 3. Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon, 4. Even the country which the Lord smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: 5. Wherefore, said they, 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.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 32:1. Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had an exceedingly large number of livestock. So when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that it was a suitable place for livestock, 2. the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, 3. Ataroth, Dobon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam,

Nebo and Beon, 4. the land which the Lord conquered before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock; and your servants have livestock. 5. And they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not take us across the Jordan."

### COMMENTARY

We may infer that the herds of Gad and Reuben had, by some means, grown more rapidly than had those of the other tribes, and their request must be based upon this situation. The land of Jazer, or Jaazer, is situated just east of the Jordan in the vicinity of Heshbon. Gilead is the common name for the greater portion of the territory beyond the Jordan, sometimes even including the land of Bashan which is east of the Sea of Galilee. In its most restrictive sense the term Gilead refers to the area from the northern tip of the Dead Sea to the Yarmuk River and the Sea of Galilee. The area is mountainous, but there are also occasional plateaus and plains, with large areas offering pasture land and tillable fields. It must certainly have looked most desirable to these shepherding people, after considering the relatively barren land through which they had come.

The nine settlements mentioned in v. 3 are all in the southern section of the eastern land; they were later divided with four going to Gad and five to Reuben. It is possible that the flocks and herds of the entire nation were grazing well within the area the cities described. At this time the tribes had not received their allocations. When Gad and Reuben asked for portions on the east of Jordan, the request would seem out of order. Whether they coveted the finest pasture land, or wanted to escape having to assist in driving the pagan tribes out of the land across the Jordan, or whether they had some other motive altogether is not told; Moses understood their reason to be the second of these. History would later show their choice, if not their faith, to have been faulty.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

580. What reasons could the two tribes have had for wanting

to settle east of the Jordan?

581. Give the areas specified, and describe them, as Gad and Reuben made their requests.
582. Follow the decay and downfall of the eastern tribes in later time, especially after the division of the Kingdom of Israel. Can this be traced in any way to their choice of territory?

#### F. REBUKE BY MOSES vv. 6-15

##### TEXT

Chapter 32:6. And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? 7. And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them? 8. Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. 9. For when they went up into the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the Lord had given them. 10. And the Lord's anger was kindled the same time, and he sware, saying, 11. Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: 12. Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun; for they have wholly followed the Lord. 13. And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the Lord, was consumed. 14. And behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the Lord toward Israel. 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.

##### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 32:6. But Moses said to the sons of Gad and the



sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here? 7. And why do you now discourage the children of Israel from crossing into the land which the Lord has given them? 8. This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. 9. For when they went up to the wady of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the children of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. 10. So the Lord's anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying, 11. 'Indeed, none of the men who came up from Egypt, twenty years old and up, shall see the land which I pledged to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob because they have not fully followed me. 12. excepting Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have fully followed the Lord.' 13. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he made them wander forty years in the wilderness, until the entire generation of those who had sinned in the sight of the Lord were destroyed. 14. And behold, you are risen up in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the fierce anger of the Lord toward Israel. 15. For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more abandon them in the wilderness; and you will destroy all these people."

#### COMMENTARY

The anxieties and fears shown by Moses are readily understandable. Above all other things, he most wanted to prevent another fiasco like that at Kadesh-Barnea. There the disobedient people incurred the righteous wrath of God, and their stubbornness had cost the lives of virtually the entire group, besides the forty years of time lost in the wilderness. The suggestion from Gad and Reuben at this juncture conceivably could produce a rift among God's people again, and who could predict the possible consequences? Moses' conclusion that the two tribes hoped to avoid having to participate in the military campaign in the west is logical. He further concluded that such action would disturb the essential unity of the tribes. Almost exactly the same charge would later be leveled against the two

tribes by Deborah (Judges 5:16, 17), and with sound reason. For one-sixth of the group to stand back now and disengage themselves arbitrarily from Israel's advance into the Promised Land would have dulled the glory of the moment of triumph to say the least; at most, it could have served as a disquieting and discouraging element of such magnitude as to cause the remainder of the people to refuse to advance any farther. Thus the situation of Kadesh-Barnea could easily have been repeated.

Are the words of Moses unnecessarily harsh? His response to the circumstantial request is immediate; he has not asked for an explanation: and he does not consult the Lord first before voicing his own objections: this hardly seemed necessary. But he was not omniscient, and regardless of the manner in which the issue came to its settlement, his forthright zeal to protect God's people had been evidenced. Moses was not being stubborn or inconsiderate or illogical; he was taking a positive stand for right as he understood it. That he later qualified his stand is irrelevant, excepting to show the great stature of the man who, when all the facts are introduced into the picture, was willing to modify his position when he was satisfied that the principle for which he contended would not fall. Beyond doubt those who made the suggestion among the two tribes were young men whose minds had little or no recollection of the analogous circumstance to which Moses compared this one. He speaks from wisdom and experience. Nothing in the incident can be understood as a reflection upon his integrity, his character, or his intelligence. He simply does not want disastrous history to repeat itself if he can prevent it.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

583. What did Moses fear as possible results if Gad and Reuben were permitted to settle east of the Jordan?
584. What possible motives might they have had?
585. To what historical situation and incident did he compare the choice before them?
586. Defend the propriety of Moses' words.

587. What is there in the incident which makes you think more highly of Moses?
588. What later historical events seem to suggest that Moses' fears were not entirely ungrounded?

## G. THE TRIBES' PLEDGE vv. 16-19

## TEXT

Chapter 32:16. And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones: 17. But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities, because of the inhabitants of the land. 18. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance: 19. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 32:16. Then they came near him and said, "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, 17. but we ourselves will go armed and ready before the children of Israel until we have brought them unto their place, while our little ones live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. 18. We will not return to our houses until the each of the Children of Israel had taken his inheritance. 19. For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east."

## COMMENTARY

The answer given Moses by Gad and Reuben made it apparent that their intentions in settling east of the Jordan are not those he had feared. They were more than willing to assist their brothers to whatever degree it was necessary in clearing out the western lands; they desired only to be allowed this

productive portion for themselves, and that they first be allowed to make shelters for their animals and "cities", or camps, for their families. These camps would have been fortified villages in which the women, children and the aged could enjoy a degree of protection.

To make their willingness completely clear, the two tribes offer not only to go with the other ten, but to arm themselves and precede the others until the conquest is complete. Only then will they return to their homes and families. We encounter some difficulty in understanding just what the two spokesmen meant in affirming "our inheritance is fallen to us on this side of Jordan eastward," v. 19. The allotment has not yet been made, (see 33:16ff.), and we have been given no decree from any source that any of the tribes would be permitted to settle here. The statement is best understood to designate the tribal preference, rather than an official allocation, as if to say, "With your permission and the Lord's, we should like this area to be considered our allotment." Apparently none of the other tribes had any objections, to say nothing of any resentment, of the plan and request, which must have been an important factor in resolving the question.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

589. Show how the Gadites and Reubenites demonstrated their desire to maintain their strong ties with the other tribes.
590. What conditions did they lay down as preliminary to moving forward to clear out the land?
591. Looking ahead, how long was it to be before these men would return to their families, and who gave them permission to do so?
592. Explain how the territory they sought could be called their "inheritance".

H. LAND GIVEN TO GAD, REUBEN, AND  
ONE-HALF OF MANASSEH vv. 20-33

## TEXT

Chapter 32:20. And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war, 21. And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the Lord, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, 22. 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. 23. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out. 24. Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth. 25. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth. 26. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead: 27. But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, as my lord saith. 28. So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel. 29. And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the Lord, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession: 30. But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. 31. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, As the Lord hath said unto thy servants, so will we do. 32. We will pass over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours. 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.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 32:20. So Moses said to them, "If you will do this, if you will go armed before the Lord 21. and all of your armed men cross over the Jordan before the Lord until he has driven his enemies out from before him, 22. then later you shall return and be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. 23. But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out. 24. Build cities for yourselves, and for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; then do what you have promised." 25. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben said to Moses, "Your servants will do just as my lord commands. 26. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks and all our cattle shall be there in the cities of Gilead; 27. but your servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, just as my lord says."

28. So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' households of the tribes of the children of Israel. 29. And Moses said unto them, "If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you across the Jordan, each man armed for battle, before the Lord, and the land shall be overcome before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; 30. but if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. 31. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, "As the Lord has said unto your servants, that is just what we will do. 32. We will pass over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, in order that the possession of our inheritance may be ours on this side of the Jordan. 33. And Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben and to one-half of 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 its cities and their environs, the cities in the surrounding country.

## COMMENTARY

The offer of service is quite acceptable to Moses. If the

tribes will keep their word to go "before the Lord" and fight until the land of Canaan is cleared, they may have their request, and their inheritance east of Jordan will be granted. Should they renege in any manner, however, and fail to do exactly as they have promised, their sins would be brought graphically to their attention, and they shall regret their folly. If a pledge made by an individual Israelite was considered inviolate, we may well attach supreme importance to such a promise made by this large segment of the nation. Failure under these circumstances could bring disaster upon the total nation.

We are told now (v. 33) of the inheritance of the one-half tribe of Manasseh, without having been told of the division of the tribe; they were not named at all in the negotiations. Whether there had been division within the tribe; whether Gad and Reuben were more prominent as spokesmen in the discussions; or, whether it was advisable to split the number because this tribe had multiplied so rapidly, we are not told. The answer may well be found later (vv. 39-42).

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

593. Suggest what punishment the Lord might have brought upon the men of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh if they failed to honor their pledge.
594. Why does the half-tribe of Manasseh now join with the others in the pledge?
595. What reasons may be given for the division of Manasseh's tribe?

### I. CITIES BUILT OR TAKEN IN THE LAND

vv. 34-42

#### TEXT

Chapter 32:34. And the children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer, 35. And Atroth, Shopan, and Jaazer, and Jogbehah, 36. And Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran, fenced cities; and folds for sheep. 37. And the children of Reuben built

Hesbon, and Elealeh, and Kirjathaim, 38. And Nebo, and Baal-meon, (their names being changed,) and Shibmah: and gave other names unto the cities which they builded. 39. And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it, and dispossessed the Amorite which was in it. 40. And Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein. 41. And Jair the son of Manasseh went and took the small towns thereof, and called them Havorth-jair. 42. And Nobah went and took Kenath, and the villages thereof, and called it Nobah, after his own name.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 32:34. And the children of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, and Atroth-shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, 36. and Beth-nimrah and Beth-haran as fortified cities, and sheepfolds for sheep. 37. And the children of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kiriathaim, 38. and Nebo and Baal-meon (their names were changed) and Sibmah, and they gave other names to the cities they built. 39. And the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, went to Gilead and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there in it. 40. So Moses gave Gilead to Machir, the son of Manasseh, and he lived in it. 41. And Jair, the son of Manasseh, went in and took their villages, and called them Havvoth-jair. 42. And Nobah went in and took Kenath and its villages, and called it Nobah, after his own name.

#### COMMENTARY

The text must not be made to mean that the named cities were first constructed by the Israelites; rather, they were rebuilt or restored, in order to provide the necessary security for the families who would remain there. All of the cities are located between the Arnon and the Jabbok rivers. The general territory was very unstable in later days, with much of the area fluctuating between the Gadites, Reubenites, Ammonites, and Moabites. The boundaries are often very difficult to ascertain.

The incident related in verse 39 is followed by Manasseh's



settlement of Gilead. The descendants of Machir, son of Manasseh, were especially prominent in taking this territory, and apparently this was the reason Moses awarded them the land. "Gilead" here is used to apply to the land north of the Yarmuk—the area more often known as Bashan—indicating a broad use of the term.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

596. In what sense are the Israelites said to have built the cities in Gilead?
597. Using a good Bible encyclopedia, determine the widest and most narrow sense in which "Gilead" is used.
598. How does this passage of the text help show the probable reason for awarding of a portion of the eastern territory to half of the tribe of Manasseh?

## V. REVIEW OF THE ROUTE FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN (33:1-49)

### A. EGYPT TO SINAI (33:1-15)

#### TEXT

Chapter 33:1. These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2. And Moses wrote their going out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord: and these are their journeys according to their goings out. 3. And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians. 4. For the Egyptians buried all their first born, which the Lord had smitten among them: upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments. 5. And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth. 6. And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness. 7. And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pi-hahiroth, which is before Baal-zephon: