

# The Composition of Numbers 32: A New Proposal

Liane Marquis

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- 2 What consequence do these two tribes face if they do not help the Israelites inhabit Canaan?
- 3 What does the Israelite military formation look like?

Moses gave (וַיִּתֶּן) to them — to the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph — the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. (Num 32:33)

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They defeated him and his sons and all his people, until no remnant was left him; and they took possession of his country. (Num 21:35)



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Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29 Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan with you to do battle before Yahweh and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. 30 But if they do not cross over with you as shock-troops, they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.”

(Num 32:28-30)

1a What is the status of the Transjordanian land?

Israel occupied (וישב) the land of the Amorites. (Num 21:31)

And they took possession (ויירשו) of his [Sihon's] country.  
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## 1a What is the status of the Transjordanian land?

Num. 32:16 Then they stepped up to him and said, “We will build here sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children. 17 And we will hasten as shock-troops in the van of the Israelites until we have established them in their home, while our children stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. 18 We will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites is in possession of his portion. 19 But we will not have a share with them in the territory beyond the Jordan, for we have received our share on the east side of the Jordan.” 20 Moses said to them, “If you do this, if you go to battle as shock-troops before Yahweh 21 and every fighter among you crosses the Jordan, before Yahweh until he has dispossessed his enemies before him, 22 and the land has been subdued before Yahweh, and then you return — you shall be clear before Yahweh and before Israel; and this land shall be your holding before Yahweh. 23 But if you do not do so, you will have sinned against Yahweh; and know that your sin will overtake you. 24 Build towns for your children and sheepfolds for your flocks, but do what you have promised.” 25 The Gadites and the Reubenites answered Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our children, our wives, our flocks, and all our other livestock will stay behind in the towns of Gilead; 27 while your servants, all those recruited for war, cross over before Yahweh to engage in battle — as my lord orders.” 28 Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29 Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan with you to do battle before Yahweh and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. 30 But if they do not cross over with you as troops, they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.” 31 The Gadites and the Reubenites said in reply, “Whatever Yahweh has spoken concerning your servants, that we will do. 32 We ourselves will cross over as troops before Yahweh into the land of Canaan; and we shall keep our hereditary holding across the Jordan.” 33 So Moses assigned to them — to the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph — the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. 34 The Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35 Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36 Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran as fortified towns or as enclosures for flocks. 37 The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38 Nebo, Baal-meon — some names being changed — and Sibmah; they gave [their own] names to towns that they rebuilt. 39 The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there; 40 so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. 41 Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, which he renamed Havvoth-jair. 42 And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its dependencies, renaming it Nobah after himself.

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And they destroyed by fire all the towns in which they were settled, and their encampments. (Num 31:10)

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Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan **alongside you** to do battle **before Yahweh (לפני יהוה)**, and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. (Num 32:29)

Moses said to them, “If every shock-fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan **with you** to do battle **before Yahweh (לפני יהוה)**, and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. (Num 32:29)

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## Numbers 2:9-17

Judah

(includes Issachar  
and Zebulun)

9 The total enrolled in the division of Judah: 186,400, for all troops. These shall march first.

10 On the south: the standard of the division of Reuben, troop by troop. Chieftain of the Reubenites: Elizur son of Shedeur. 11 His troop, as enrolled: 46,500.

12 Camping next to it: The tribe of Simeon. Chieftain of the Simeonites: Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

13 His troop, as enrolled: 59,300.

14 And the tribe of Gad. Chieftain of the Gadites: Eliasaph son of Reuel.

15 His troop, as enrolled: 45,650.

16 The total enrolled in the division of Reuben: 151,450, for all troops. These shall march second.

17 Then, midway between the divisions, the Tent of Meeting, the division of the Levites, shall move. As they camp, so they shall march, each in position, by their standards.

Reuben

(includes Simeon  
and Gad)Tent of  
Meeting(carried by  
the Levites)

Ephraim

(includes Manasseh  
and Benjamin)

Dan

(includes Asher  
and Naphtali)

“before Yahweh”

Judah

(includes Issachar  
and Zebulun)

Reuben

(includes Simeon  
and Gad)

Tent of  
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(carried by  
the Levites)

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“at the head of the Israelites”

Reuben and Gad

Israelites

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1 The Reubenites and the Gadites owned cattle in very great numbers. Noting that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were a region suitable for cattle, 2 the Gadites and the Reubenites came and they said to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains of the community, 3 “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon — 4 the land that Yahweh has conquered for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle. 5 They said, “If we find favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a holding; do not move us across the Jordan.”

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## Literary Analysis: Story A

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## Literary Analysis: The Requests

The land that Yahweh has conquered (הכה יהוה) for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle. (Num 32:4)

But Yahweh said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I give him and all his people and his land into your hand. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon.” They defeated him (ויכו אתו) and his sons and all his people, until no remnant was left him; and they took possession of his country. (Num 21:34–35)

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### Reubenite & Gadite Request

5 “Let this land be given to your servants as a holding.”

### Moses’ Response

20 If you go to battle to fight before Yahweh, 21 and every shock-fighter among you crosses the Jordan before Yahweh, until He has dispossessed His enemies before Him, 22 and the land has been subdued before Yahweh, and then you return, then this land shall be your holding before Yahweh.

## Reubenite & Gadite Request

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25 The Gadites and the Reubenites answered Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our children, our wives, our flocks, and all our other livestock will stay behind in the towns of Gilead; 27 while your servants, all those recruited for war, **cross over before Yahweh** to engage in battle — as my lord orders.”

28 Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29 Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites **crosses the Jordan with you to do battle before Yahweh** and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. 30 **But if they do not cross over with you to fight,** then they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.”

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## Literary Analysis: The Conquest of Gilead

The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there; 40 so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. 41 Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, which he renamed Havvoth-jair. 42 And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its dependencies, renaming it Nobah after himself. (Num 32:39-42)



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So Moses assigned to them — to the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph — the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. (Num 32:33)

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1 The Reubenites and the Gadites owned cattle in very great numbers and they saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were good cattle land, 2 and they said to Moses 4 “The land that the LORD has conquered for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle.” 5 They said, “If we find favor in your eyes, do not move us across the Jordan. 17a We will hasten to fight at the head of all the Israelites until we have established them in their home. 18 We will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites is in possession of his portion. 19 But we will not have a share with them in the territory beyond the Jordan, for we have received our share on the east side of the Jordan.” 20 Moses said to them, “If you do this, 22 then you shall be clear before Yahweh and before Israel; 23 But if you do not do so, then you will have sinned against Yahweh; and know that your sin will overtake you. 24 Do what you have promised.” 33 Then Moses gave to them the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. 39 The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there. 40 Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. 41 Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, which he renamed Havvoth-jair. 42 And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its dependencies, renaming it Nobah after himself.

## Literary Analysis: Story B

2 The Gadites and the Reubenites came and they said to Moses and to Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains of the community, 3 “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, let this land be given to your servants as a holding. 6 Moses replied to the Gadites and the Reubenites, “Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here? 16 Then they approached him and said, “We will build here sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children. 17b And our children stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land.” 20 Moses said to them, “If you go to battle to fight before Yahweh, 21 and every fighter among you crosses the Jordan before Yahweh, until he has dispossessed his enemies before him, 22 and the land has been subdued before Yahweh and then you return, then this land shall be your holding before Yahweh. 24 Build towns for your children and sheepfolds for your flocks.” 25 The Gadites and the Reubenites answered Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our children, our wives, our flocks, and all our other livestock will stay behind in the towns of Gilead; 27 while your servants, all those recruited for war, cross over before Yahweh to engage in battle — as my lord orders.” 28 Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29 Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan with you to do battle before Yahweh and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. 30 But if they do not cross over with you to fight, then they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.” 31 The Gadites and the Reubenites said in reply, “Whatever Yahweh has spoken concerning your servants, that we will do. 32 We ourselves will cross over to fight before Yahweh, into the land of Canaan; and we shall keep our hereditary holding across the Jordan.” The Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35 Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36 Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran as fortified towns or as enclosures for flocks. 37 The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38 Nebo, Baal-meon — some names being changed — and Sibmah; they gave names to towns that they rebuilt.





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“...because of the inhabitants of the land.” (Num 32:17b)

Thus they spread calumnies among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, “The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size.” (Num 13:32)

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“Why is Yahweh taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be carried off! It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!” (Num 14:3)

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Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its dependencies and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

(Num 21:32)

וילכדו בנתיה וירשו את האמרי אשר שם

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Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. (Gen 50:23)

## Literary Analysis: vv. 7-15

Why will you turn the minds of the Israelites from crossing into the land that Yahweh has given them? 8 That is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to survey the land. 9 After going up to the wadi Eshcol and surveying the land, they turned the minds of the Israelites from invading the land that Yahweh had given them. 10 Thereupon Yahweh was incensed and He swore, 11 ‘None of the men from twenty years up who came out of Egypt shall see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they did not remain loyal to Me — 12 none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they remained loyal to Yahweh.’ 13 Yahweh was incensed at Israel, and for forty years He made them wander in the wilderness, until the whole generation that had provoked Yahweh’s displeasure was gone. 14 And now you, a breed of sinful men, have replaced your fathers, to add still further to Yahweh’s wrath against Israel. 15 If you turn away from Him and He abandons them once more in the wilderness, you will bring calamity upon all this people.” (Num 32:7-15)

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That place was named the [wadi Eshcol](#) because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down there. (Num 13:24)



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**“Not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.” (Num 14:30)**

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**But My servant Caleb, because he was imbued with a different spirit and remained loyal to Me — him will I bring into the land that he entered, and his offspring shall hold it as a possession (Num 14:24)**

## Literary Analysis: vv. 7-15

Why will you turn the minds of the Israelites from crossing into the land that Yahweh has given them? 8 That is what your fathers did when I sent them from **Kadesh-barnea** to survey the land. 9 After going up to the wadi Eshcol and surveying the land, they turned the minds of the Israelites from invading the land that Yahweh had given them. 10 Thereupon Yahweh was incensed and He swore, 11 ‘None of the men from twenty years up who came out of Egypt shall see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they did not remain loyal to Me — 12 none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they remained loyal to Yahweh.’ 13 Yahweh was incensed at Israel, and for forty years He made them wander in the wilderness, until the whole generation that had provoked Yahweh’s displeasure was gone. 14 And now you, a breed of sinful men, have replaced your fathers, to add still further to Yahweh’s wrath against Israel. 15 If you turn away from Him and He abandons them once more in the wilderness, you will bring calamity upon all this people.” (Num 32:7-15)

“We set out from Horeb and traveled the great and terrible wilderness that you saw, along the road to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. When we reached Kadesh-barnea...” (Deut 1:19)

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**The Judites approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him. . . Thus Hebron became the portion of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, as it still is, because he was loyal to the LORD, the God of Israel. (Josh 14:6, 14)**

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**“None of the men who have seen My Presence and the signs that I have performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and who have tried Me these many times and have disobeyed Me, 23 shall see the land that I promised on oath to their fathers; none of those who spurn Me shall see it.”** (Num 14:22-23)

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**“In this very wilderness shall your carcasses drop. Of all of you who were recorded in your various lists from the age of twenty years up, you who have muttered against Me, 30 not one shall enter the land in which I swore to settle you — save Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.”** (Num 14:29-30)

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# Conclusions

1 The Reubenites and the Gadites owned cattle in very great numbers and they saw that the lands of Jazer were good cattle land, 2 The Gadites and the Reubenites came and they said to Moses and to Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains of the community, 3 “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, 4 the land that Yahweh has conquered for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle.” 5 They said, “If we find favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a holding, do not move us across the Jordan. 6 *Moses replied to the Gadites and the Reubenites, “Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here? Why will you turn the minds of the Israelites from crossing into the land that Yahweh has given them? 8 That is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to survey the land. 9 After going up to the wadi Eshcol and surveying the land, they turned the minds of the Israelites from invading the land that Yahweh had given them. 10 Thereupon Yahweh was incensed and He swore, 11 ‘None of the men from twenty years up who came out of Egypt shall see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they did not remain loyal to Me — 12 none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they remained loyal to Yahweh.’ 13 Yahweh was incensed at Israel, and for forty years He made them wander in the wilderness, until the whole generation that had provoked Yahweh’s displeasure was gone. 14 And now you, a breed of sinful men, have replaced your fathers, to add still further to Yahweh’s wrath against Israel. 15 If you turn away from Him and He abandons them once more in the wilderness, you will bring calamity upon all this people.”* 16 Then they approached him and said, “We will build here sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children. 17 We will hasten to fight at the head of all the Israelites until we have established them in their home, and our children stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land.” 18 We will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites is in possession of his portion. 19 But we will not have a share with them in the territory beyond the Jordan, for we have received our share on the east side of the Jordan.” 20 Moses said to them, “If you do this, if you go to battle to fight before Yahweh, 21 and every fighter among you crosses the Jordan before Yahweh, until he has dispossessed his enemies before him, 22 and the land has been subdued before Yahweh and then you return, you shall be clear before Yahweh and before Israel, and then this land shall be your holding before Yahweh. 23 But if you do not do so, then you will have sinned against Yahweh; and know that your sin will overtake you. 24 Build towns for your children and sheepfolds for your flocks; but do what you have promised.” 25 The Gadites and the Reubenites answered Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our children, our wives, our flocks, and all our other livestock will stay behind in the towns of Gilead; 27 while your servants, all those recruited for war, cross over before Yahweh to engage in battle — as my lord orders.” 28 Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. 29 Moses said to them, “If every fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan with you to do battle before Yahweh and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. 30 But if they do not cross over with you to fight, then they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.” 31 The Gadites and the Reubenites said in reply, “Whatever Yahweh has spoken concerning your servants, that we will do. 32 We ourselves will cross over to fight before Yahweh, into the land of Canaan; and we shall keep our hereditary holding across the Jordan.” 33 Then Moses gave to them the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. 34 The Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35 Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36 Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran as fortified towns or as enclosures for flocks. 37 The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38 Nebo, Baal-meon — some names being changed — and Sibmah; they gave names to towns that they rebuilt. 39 The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there. 40 Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. 41 Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, which he renamed Havvoth-jair. 42 And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its dependencies, renaming it Nobah after himself.



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