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A Weekly Publication of Relational Concepts Inc.

Lessons from Jacob's Blessing of Gad

By Jerry Collins

“As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid at their heel...” (Genesis 49:19).

Verse 19—As for Gad, raiders shall raid him—Even though Gad will be raided by marauding bands, he will fight valiantly. That border raids would be the lot of Gad is emphasized by the word plays in the verse—four of the six words play on the name Gad. The rendering would be “Gad, a troop shall troop upon him, but he shall troop on their heels.”

—**but he will raid at their heels**—Gad will be harassed by bands of hostile enemies, but will eventually repel their advances.

PT—A map of Israel in biblical times vividly displays the precarious position of Gad in relation to some of Israel's ancient enemies. Gad, along with Reuben and half of Manasseh, was allotted a portion of the land on the east side of the Jordan River (Joshua 13:24-28). This made the tribe susceptible to the Moabites and Ammonites to the east and north and the Edomites to the south. Hostile bands from these enemies bordered the entire territory, keeping Gad on their toes, ready to defend themselves whenever necessary.

A Review of the History of the Tribe of Gad

- The geographical name for the territory of Gad is Gilead—a name in the Old Testament that often stood for the tribe of Gad. Judges 5:17 referred to the tribe this way: *Gilead remained across the Jordan*. Apparently, the people of Gilead remained on the other side of the river and did not participate in the battle. Gilead, an area of ancient Palestine east of the Jordan River, corresponds to modern northwestern Jordan. The region is bounded in the north by the Yarmuk River and in the southwest by what were known in ancient times as the “plains of Moab.” To the east there is no definite boundary. Sometimes *Gilead* is used in a more general sense for all the region east of the Jordan River.
- The book of Judges portrays the tribe of Gad's perilous existence. *They [Philistines] afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites* (Judges 10:8). The Philistines were shattering and crushing the tribes east of the Jordan. They sustained their oppression until it eventually included tribes on the west side as well.
- It was this constant exposure to hostile enemies that resulted in Gad's developing a reputation as fierce warriors, constantly ready to defend their land. In David's days, as a fugitive from Saul, the Gadite warriors who joined him at Ziklag were described in the following way—*from the Gadites there came over to David in the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains* (1 Chronicles 12:8).
- Moses' blessing on Gad also described their ferocity. *Of Gad he said, “blessed is the one who enlarges Gad; He lies down as a lion, and tears the arm, also the crown of the head.”* Gad was a warring tribe that was very aggressive in conquering and subduing the land. They even rebuilt and fortified cities as well as provisioning for their people. *The sons of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer... as fortified cities, and sheepfolds for sheep* (Numbers 32:34-35).
- Scripture mentions nothing about prominent individuals in this small but strategically located tribe. The most famous Gadite mentioned in the Old Testament was Jair, *who judged Israel twenty-two years* (Judges 10:3-5).

Discipleship Lessons from Gad

- Sometimes we have to play defense in our spiritual lives. Rather than conquering new territory, we will need to solidify and protect the territory we already possess. *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). We will need to *put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11). Just like Gad, we are surrounded by an enemy bent upon destroying the work of God through the people of God. So in your prayer life, determine to stay on course with whatever strategy you use. It will be attacked.
- The New Testament describes our responsibility as an ordinary soldier who must be single-minded in his purpose, rigorous in his self-discipline, and unquestioning in his obedience. *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier* (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

