

Numbers 32:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones:

Analysis

And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones—Reuben and Gad respond to Moses's rebuke with a proposed compromise. They pledge to secure their possessions first ("sheepfolds for our cattle") and protect their families ("cities for our little ones"), then join the conquest. The Hebrew *gidrot* (גִּידּוֹת, sheepfolds) means walled enclosures, and *arim* (עָרִים, cities) indicates fortified settlements.

Note the order: cattle before children. Some commentators see misplaced priorities here—possessions mentioned before family, both before God's work. However, in verses 24 and 26, the order reverses to children first, suggesting initial thoughtlessness corrected by reflection. Their plan demonstrates practical wisdom in securing dependents before military service, yet Moses requires explicit oath-commitment to prevent the appearance of self-seeking that could demoralize others. This negotiation shows that legitimate provision for family doesn't excuse covenant obligations.

Historical Context

The Transjordan territory (Gilead, Bashan) provided excellent grazing land with adequate rainfall, contrasting with the drier regions west of Jordan that required more intensive agriculture. Reuben and Gad's large herds made this territory attractive. Archaeological evidence shows strong fortified cities in Transjordan during this period, supporting the historical plausibility of their building program.

Later, these tribes did settle this region (Joshua 13:15-28) and built substantial cities.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How can legitimate concerns for family welfare become excuses for avoiding difficult obedience?
2. What does the initial priority of cattle before children reveal about spiritual blind spots?
3. How should believers balance practical provision with covenant responsibilities to God's larger purposes?

Interlinear Text

וְיַעֲשֵׂה	וְיֹאמֶר	וְיַעֲשֵׂה	וְיַעֲשֵׂה	וְיַעֲשֵׂה	וְיַעֲשֵׂה
And they came near	H413	unto him and said		sheepfolds	H6629

לטפּנוּ:	וְעַרְ יָם	פְ ה	לְמַקְבֵּן
here for our cattle	H6311	and cities	for our little ones
H4735		H5892	H2945

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org