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## “SHALL YOUR BROTHERS GO INTO BATTLE WHILE YOU REMAIN HERE?” AN ANALYSIS OF *NUMBERS* 32

### I

*Numbers* 21-31 relates the history of the second generation of Israelites on their march to the Promised Land. The chronicle of the journey is unexpectedly interrupted in chapter 32 by the request of two and one half tribes to settle in Transjordan, in the territory captured from *Sihon* and *Og*. This essay will examine the significance of this story and its players in light of the fundamental biblical message of covenant, land, and peoplehood.

### II

In their initial approach to Moses, the tribes of Reuben and Gad propose to remain in Transjordan and take possession of that vast territory as their *abuza* (land-holding):

Now the children of Reuben and Gad had a great multitude of cattle (*mikne rav*); and they saw that the land of Yazer, and the land of Gilead, behold, the place was a place of cattle (*mikne*). The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke unto Moses and unto Elazar the priest, and unto the princes of the tribes, saying, “Atarot and Dibon and Yazer . . . , the land which the Lord smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle (*mikne*), and thy servants have cattle (*mikne*)” (v. 1-4).

Moses responds sternly:

Shall your brothers go into battle while you remain here? And wherefore will you turn away the heart of the children of Israel from going into the land which the Lord has given them? (v. 6-7).

He goes on to compare their requests to those of the *meraglim*, who demoralized the people, turned them away from entering the Land, and brought God's wrath upon the entire nation. Moses concludes his blistering attack by referring to them as "*tarbut anashim hata'im*," "a brood of sinners" (verse 14), continuing down the evil path of their fathers. They respond with a proposal to spearhead the military effort to conquer the Land of Israel, leading their brethren into battle, "*halutsim lifnei Benei Yisrael*." Meanwhile, their cattle and their families will settle in Transjordan in cities and farms they will establish before crossing into the Land of Canaan (v. 16-19).

Moses then offers a counter-proposal: Reuben and Gad shall cross the Jordan and join their brothers in battle, remaining with them until the Land is conquered "before Hashem." This phrase—"lifnei Hashem," is a key phrase, repeated four times in two verses to contrast with the Gadites' and Reubenites' statement, "*lifnei Benei Yisrael*." The tribes acquiesce, and the section ends with their solemn promise to fulfill the terms and conditions set by Moses (v. 20-33).

### III

The first section (v. 1-15) raises a number of points that require careful analysis. To begin with, the text emphasizes the word *mikne*, cattle, repeating it no less than four times in the opening verses. Moreover, the word opens the first verse and closes the fourth verse, enveloping the opening passage. Why does the Torah highlight this element? Moreover, it is remarkable that the request is made only by the tribes of Reuben and Gad (joined later by half of the tribe of Menashe); why doesn't the area attract other tribes desirous of bountiful grazing land for their flocks? The focus on two particular tribes is especially puzzling in light of the war against Midyan, which immediately precedes our chapter. In ch. 31, the Torah describes in meticulous detail the diverse booty captured by the Benei Yisrael, much of it cattle and sheep. Were the hundreds of thousands of cattle and sheep enumerated as booty acquired exclusively by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Menashe?<sup>2</sup> Lastly, while Moses' rejection of the tribes' original request is understandable, his vehemence takes the reader aback. His harsh epithet ("*tarbut anashim hata'im*") and his equation of their action with the heinous sin of the spies seem, at first blush, out of proportion. What was at stake that so raised the ire of Moses, our teacher?

## IV

The resolutions to these problems are, I believe, interrelated. Let us first discuss the background of the participants in the episode.

The tribe of Reuben is made up of the descendants of Reuben, the first-born of Leah, first wife of the patriarch Jacob. As first-born, Reuben is originally slated for leadership of the twelve tribes. Likewise, the tribe of Gad is made up of the descendants of Gad, first-born son of Zilpa, maidservant of Leah. Reuben and Gad, in effect, represent the “first-born” line of Jacob from the side of Leah.

The parallel between Reuben and Gad is already foreshadowed in a subtle shift in the biblical text at the beginning of the book of *Numbers*. The opening census of the tribes describes their organization into four groups of three for purposes of battle and locomotion. Chapter 1 lists the tribes and their princes in the following precise order: children of Leah, children of Rachel, children of Rachel’s maidservant, children of Leah’s maidservant. This creates a chiastic structure, Leah-Rachel-Rachel-Leah, as the organizing literary principle.<sup>3</sup> Thus chapter 1 lists the princes of Reuben, Simeon, Judah, etc., placing Gad eleventh on the list. But later in the chapter, in the actual census of the men of fighting age, Reuben, Gad and Simeon are all grouped in one unit under the banner of Reuben. Gad is the only tribe of the maidservants so included; the other offspring of the maidservants are all grouped separately as a fourth camp, made up of Dan, Naftali, and Asher.<sup>4</sup> This anomaly highlights the Reuben-Gad axis as a single entity reflecting the first-borns of the Leah line, the *bekhorei Yisrael*.

The third tribe in our story, Menashe, fits into this pattern as well. Menashe is the first-born of Joseph, and along with his brother, Efrayyim, is elevated by his grandfather Jacob into becoming a tribe of his own. Tellingly, Jacob equates Efrayyim and Menashe with his own two eldest sons, the offspring of Leah: “*Efrayyim uMenashe kiRuvein veShimon yikhyu li.*”<sup>5</sup> As *Hazal* (*Bava Batra* 123b) and many medieval commentaries note, this move is not merely rhetorical; Jacob’s statement grants Efrayyim and Menashe property rights in the covenantal land as full-fledged tribes. In short, then, all three tribes involved in our story—Reuben, Gad and Menashe—are first-borns initially slated for leadership roles in the Jewish people.

The connection goes deeper, however. These tribes are not only first-borns, they are first-borns who *lose* that unique status. Younger siblings supplant them in the grand hierarchy of the Jewish people and its

covenantal history. With respect to Reuben, the shifting of roles is clearly stated in *Chronicles I*:

Now the sons of Reuben, first-born of Israel, for he was the first-born, but since he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel; but not so as to have the birthright attributed to him by genealogy. For Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came the chief ruler, though the birthright was Joseph's (5:1-2).

Highlighted here is one of the tragic themes of the Joseph narrative and the chapters immediately preceding it: the replacement of Reuben as leader of the tribes and the subsequent rivalry between Judah and Joseph for the vacated leadership role. This familial intrigue in *Genesis* sets the stage for and prefigures the tensions played out in later biblical history. A full analysis is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to note that with Reuben shunted aside and Simeon and Levi excluded for other reasons, the mantle of leadership of the Leah line logically falls on Judah, the fourth son. At the same time, the Rachel line is led by Joseph (and, to a lesser extent, Benjamin) throughout the rest of the Bible. Indeed, the conflicts between Leah and Rachel over the covenantal role of wife and matriarch continue to manifest themselves in the sibling rivalry between the children of Leah (*i.e.*, most of the brothers) and those of Rachel (*i.e.*, Joseph and Benjamin).

Menashe, too, is a first-born who is supplanted by a younger sibling. The *bekhor* of Joseph, he is passed over by Jacob in favor of the younger son:

And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it upon the head of Efrayyim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Menashe's head, changing his hands; for Menashe was first-born . . . . And Joseph said unto his father, "Not so, my father, for this is the first-born; put your right hand upon his head!" But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know, for he shall also become a people, and he shall also be great; but his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" (*Gen.* 48:14, 18-9).

## V

One of the primary themes of *Genesis* is the tension between inclusion and exclusion in the covenantal line and destiny. The drama of sibling

and familial rivalry, with the younger often surpassing the older, permeates much of the narrative.

We may distinguish between two models of *behira* and *dehiyya*, selection and rejection, in *Genesis*: the Cain-Abel, Ishmael-Isaac stories on the one hand, and the Abraham-Lot, Jacob-Esau stories on the other hand. Both models are driven by human action, but in the former set of stories, God explicitly steps into the fray and authorizes the rejection of the older sibling. God's intervention leads to a process of exile, a movement away from the place of divine presence or from the covenantal land. For example, in the aftermath of Cain's fratricide, God exiles him from Eden, the place where God is manifest. "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord (*mi-li-fnei Hashem*)<sup>6</sup> and dwelt in the Land of Nod on the east of Eden" (4:17). "Nod" is a play on the words "*na va-nad*"—wandering, the punishment God had meted out to Cain. In a sense, Cain settles nowhere; and in the biblical scheme, he becomes the father of the wicked line of humanity that is ultimately blotted out in the great flood.<sup>7</sup> It is Seth, the Bible tells us, who represents Abel reborn,<sup>8</sup> becomes the father of the righteous line that ultimately survives the flood and gives rise to the patriarchs of the Jewish people.

Similarly, Ishmael is exiled from the house of Abraham and the covenantal destiny only after God steps in and directs Abraham to obey Sarah's demand to expel him (*Genesis* 21). Indeed, Ishmael eventually takes up residence in Midbar Paran, outside of the covenantal land, and takes a wife from Egypt, thus returning to his mother's roots and destiny (*Genesis* 21:21). Moreover, in the final act of Abraham recorded by the Bible, he gives all that he has to Isaac, affirming Isaac's role as the chosen son (*Genesis* 25:5). In contrast, Abraham offers "gifts" to the children of his concubine Ketura (identified in the *Midrash* as none other than Hagar herself) and sends them away, "*keidma, el erets kedem*"—"eastward, to the land of the east" (*Genesis* 25:6). This verse clearly evokes the original Cain story, when God exiled Cain to the "east," away from Eden. Finally, in an interesting literary twist, the last child of Ishmael listed in the genealogy in that very chapter is named "*keidma*." Nowhere else in the Bible does this word appear as the name of a tribe; it usually means "eastward." As Devora Steinmetz has pointed out,

Ishmael cannot actually go east, because he must dwell in the south, near Egypt, his mother's birthplace. But the inclusion of the word Keidmah in his genealogy makes the point that figuratively, Ishmael has gone east, to the place of exiled brothers.<sup>9</sup>

The second model of *behira* and *dehiyya* does not involve God's direct intervention, but the withdrawal by a brother or kinsman from the covenantal land and destiny. Lot, nephew of Abraham, sets out on the journey to the promised land with his uncle, and indeed, appears to join in the covenantal destiny.<sup>10</sup> Lot is even termed "brother" by Abraham—"Anashim ahim anahnu" (13:8), subtly implying that Lot could have been a partner in the Land and its destiny. Yet Lot returns from Egypt a changed man, heavily laden with wealth, and, as we soon find out, enamored of his experience there. Lot, the Bible tells us, returns with "flocks and sheep and tents" (13:5). But "*lo nasa otam ha-arets la-shevet yahdav, ki haya rekhusham rav, ve-lo yakhlu la-shevet yahdav*"—"The land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together, for their property was great, so they could not dwell together" (v. 6-7). Abraham proposes a compromise in which both parties can remain in the covenantal land, with he or Lot going respectively north or south.<sup>11</sup> Lot, however, opts for neither direction, choosing instead to go south-east, to Sedom, outside of the land of Canaan. Lot chooses Sedom because he sees it as "the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." This is a striking statement, for we well know that in biblical terms, Egypt is the exact antithesis of the place of divine presence. Egypt is the land of immorality and sexual licentiousness, the place of exile and suffering, not the site of covenantal destiny.<sup>12</sup> Yet Lot chooses Sedom: "And Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain" (*Gen.* 13:11-12). Dispelling any doubt about Lot's choice, the very next verse informs us that the people of Sedom were "exceedingly wicked and sinful against God" (v. 13). The great numbers of Lot's flock, his "*mikne,*" lead to his abandonment of the covenantal land and of his stake in the covenantal destiny. It is after this incident that God expands the promise to Abraham regarding the land and the seed. Control of the land and the future of Abraham's seed tie together the end of ch. 13 and ch. 14, culminating in the Covenant of the Pieces in ch. 15.

Two generations later, we come to the rivalry between the sons of Isaac. The intricate story of the relationship between Jacob and Esau requires careful analysis and has been treated in detail by a number of authors.<sup>13</sup> Here we will focus on Esau's ultimate break with the destiny of the Jewish people and the promised land as presented in ch. 36 of *Genesis*. In a thematic and literary parallel to the Lot episode, the Bible tells us that Esau leaves the land, going away from his brother Jacob, "*Ki haya rebusham rav*"—"For their property was too great" for them

to dwell together; and the land of their sojournings could not bear them because of their cattle”—“*mikneihem*”(verses 5-6). Esau heads east, to the territory of Se’ir, becoming the father of the nation of Edom. The covenantal stage is now occupied exclusively by Jacob and his children, whose story commences in the very next chapter of *Genesis*. Following the lead of Rashbam, Ramban and others,<sup>14</sup> we now grasp that the opening verse of ch. 37, “But Jacob dwelt in the land of his fathers, the land of Canaan,” contrasts with the verse in ch. 36, “And Esau dwelt in the land of Se’ir” (verse 7). This juxtaposition mirrors the technique used in the Lot story to highlight the break between Abraham and Lot. Let us note the parallels:

Lot’s Departure:

*And the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together, for their substance was great . . . and they separated themselves one from another. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the plains (13:6, 11, 12).*

Esau’s Departure:

*And Esau went into a land away from his brother, for their substance was too great for them to dwell together, and the land of their sojourning could not bear them because of their cattle. And Esau settled in the mountain-land of Se’ir . . . But Jacob settled in the land of Canaan, in the land of his forefathers (36:6-7; 37:1).*

In these two episodes, then, the Bible presents us with the theme of “brothers” who opt out of covenantal history. In both cases, their choices are driven by an abundance of cattle and sheep (*mikne*) together with the conviction that there is no room in the covenantal land for both brothers to remain with their respective bounties. One brother leaves the covenantal land, heading “eastward,” never to return.<sup>15</sup>

## VI

The patterns of inclusion and exclusion outlined above are the background that color and shape the rest of the book of *Genesis*. The tension between Leah and Rachel reemerges with greater force among the children. Jacob’s favoring of the children of Rachel, coupled with

Joseph's dreams of rule, agitate and anger the other children of Israel. Were the brothers not wondering whether they would share Ishmael and Esau's fate? Were they to be shunted aside, following the pattern of the younger sibling supplanting the older? Who would be "in" and who would be "out" of the covenantal destiny? From the brothers' perspective, the pattern of *behira* and *dehiyya* so evident in the family's history is beginning to emerge anew.

The brothers' fears are, of course, unrealistic. The divine plan had ordained for Jacob's children a different fate. Unlike previous generations, the children of Israel would all remain within the family as progenitors of a large and varied nation of tribes. Yes, there would be a hierarchy, and yes, on some level, the older would be supplanted by the younger. But everyone would remain in the fold. After years of conflict and strife, the brothers would reconcile and Jacob would once again be head of twelve tribes, all of whom would share in his patriarchal blessing: "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this what their father spoke to them and blessed them" (49:29). *Genesis* does not end with one brother in the land and one out. Even in exile, all twelve brothers share in the fervent hope of the deliverance which will restore the entire nation to its land and destiny.

## VII

In light of our analysis, the story in *Numbers* 32 takes on a rich and resonant character. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Menashe, the "first-born" sons who have been supplanted as leaders, approach Moses and ask to remain on the *east bank* of the Jordan, *east* of the promised land, in the territory of the Refa'im. Their request is motivated by the abundance of cattle, *mikne rav*; their circumstances thus parallel the circumstances that led to the breaks between Abraham and Lot and between Jacob and Esau. In fact, the terms are almost identical in all three stories. In *Genesis*, however, Reuben and Gad had not been forcibly exiled from the covenantal land and destiny, as Cain and Ishmael were. Were these tribes now seceding from the covenantal destiny in the manner of Lot and Esau? The abundance of *mikne* and the request to inherit in the east (*kedma-mizraba*) raises the specter of the exiled brothers who opt out, never to return again.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the Bible clearly presents the reader with a typescene intended to echo the narrative of the spies. In *Numbers* 13, ten of the tribal agents return with a negative report of the land, arguing against



crossing into the promised land. But two tribal spokesmen, Joshua and Caleb, of the tribes of Judah and Efrayim, heads of the Leah and Rachel lines, argue for entry into the land. In a literary play and thematic reversal on that narrative, we have here two tribes, Reuben and Gad, *deposed* heads of the Leah line, arguing to remain outside the land, while the other ten want to continue.<sup>17</sup> It is of course no less significant that later in the narrative, these two tribes will be joined by part of Menashe, counterpart to Efrayim of the original spies episode.<sup>18</sup>

This disturbing possibility provokes Moses' angry response. He perceives the tribes' request as the beginning of a split with the rest of the Jewish people and a break with the covenantal land and history. Appropriately, Moses invokes the incident of the spies. The episode of the spies is about rejection of the covenantal destiny and refusal to take possession of the promised land. Indeed, the cry of the people, "Let us return to Egypt!" encapsulates the significance of this episode in biblical history. To return to Egypt is to undermine the entire divine plan, which leads away from Egypt and all it represents, toward the land of Canaan and a bright new world.

Moses sees the actions of the two and one half tribes as flawed in two ways. First, the break that he believes the tribes are attempting to forge is inherently wrong. The unique message of the Jacob narrative is that ultimately, despite their differences and varying roles, his progeny all remain within the fold. All of the brothers can share one land and the fruits of the patriarchal blessing. This is Moses' intention in his impassioned plea, "Shall your brothers go into battle while you remain here?" "We are one nation and one people, not brothers who will separate, never to share again in the same destiny." Second, Moses fears that their actions will undermine the resolve of the rest of the people to complete the mission and take possession of the land. Reuben, Gad, and Menashe, Moses fears, will not only cut themselves off from the destiny of *Kenesset Yisrael*, but will precipitate the demise of the entire endeavor.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad respond to Moses' fears declaring that they will cross the Jordan and fight alongside the rest of Israel until the entire land is conquered. It is unclear whether Reuben and Gad are implying that Moses' concern was misplaced, or that they are retreating from their original goal. Did Moses misunderstand their proposal? Could it be that they never intended to break with their brothers and leave the covenantal destiny? Or did Moses win them over with his passionate address? Whatever the case may have been, their desire to participate in the battle for the land of Canaan highlights their connection

to the nation which will inherit one land “before the Lord.” Reuben and Gad are shunted aside from leadership of the Jewish people, yet, in contrast to Ishmael and Esau, they remain part of the children of Jacob. Similarly, Reuben and Gad will take up residence east of the Jordan because of the cattle (*mikne*), yet, in contrast to Lot and Esau, will remain part of the Jewish people. One can remain on the other side of the Jordan and yet be part of the covenantal people and destiny.

This new reality is rooted in the fact that the territory east of the Jordan was already predestined to be inhabited by the descendants of Abraham. In *Genesis* 14, the Bible recounts the story of the war of five kings of city-states in Canaan/Sedom against four kings of eastern Mesopotamian nations. On their journey to the battle with Sedom, the “superpowers” capture all the territory in their path. The kings move from north to south along the east bank of the Jordan, conquering “the Refa’im in Ashterot-Karnayyim, and the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shave Kiryatayyim, and the Horim in Har Se’ir, reaching unto El-Paran, which is in the wilderness; and they turned back” (vv. 5-7). Thus, when Abraham defeats these kings in battle and chases them out of Canaan, he has earned the right to rule over all the areas captured by these nations.

This point is highlighted at the end of the next chapter in *Genesis* in the Covenant of the Pieces. In his communication with Abraham, God sets out specific boundaries for the promised land for the first time and tells him: “Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates; the (land of the) Kenite, the Kennizzite, and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite and the Perizite, and *the Refa’im*, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite” (vv. 18-21). Abraham is promised the land of all ten nations, not just that of the familiar seven nations of Canaan proper. Abraham is entitled to this entire territory, and indeed, his descendants and relatives take possession of it. The children of Lot and Esau eventually are given the southern areas as an inheritance. This inheritance, we are told in *Deuteronomy* 2, is not to be disturbed by their relatives, the Israelites. But the northern area, the land of the *Refa’im*, does eventually fall under the control of the Jewish people. The relationship between this area of Transjordan and the land of Israel proper is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>19</sup> However, the short background we have just outlined does put our section in clearer focus.

The eastern territories originally promised to Abraham are inherited by his progeny and family. The southern parts of Transjordan are inherited by the branches that fell away from the covenantal destiny of

Isaac and Jacob—the descendants of Lot and Esau. Those areas are now off-limits to the Jewish people and do not form part of their patrimony. In contrast, the territory of the Refa'im, to their north, is never allotted to the “other” branches. It remains open for the children of Jacob to capture, as they in fact do in *Numbers* 21. The conquest and settlement of this territory, while superficially similar to the settlement of the other eastern territories by the children of Lot and Esau, is thus radically different. This, too, is part of the divine promise; though the area is east of Canaan, those who settle there remain within the fold. This is highlighted by Moses’ directive to the two and one half tribes, as recorded in *Deuteronomy* Chapter 3. After recounting the territories that have been captured and apportioned for them in Transjordan, he says:

*The Lord your God has given you this land to possess it; pass before your brothers, the children of Israel, bearing arms . . . until the Lord give rest to your brothers, and they also possess the land which the Lord has given them beyond the Jordan; then shall you return to the land which I have given you* (vv. 18-20).

Both areas are lands which God has given the Jewish people. The Jordan river does not divide between those who are “in” and those who are “out.” It simply runs through two parts of one nation.

## VIII

Our reading of *Numbers* 32 seems to be confirmed by *Joshua* 22, which recounts the actual settlement of this area by the two and one half tribes. After fourteen years of conquest and settlement of Canaan, the time comes for Reuben, Gad and half of Menashe to return to their families on the east bank of the Jordan. Joshua affirms that they have indeed kept their part of the bargain: “*You have not forsaken your brothers* these many years” (v. 3). He then instructs them to cross the Jordan and take up residence in their *akuzā*, and concludes with a plea for vigilance in performing the commandments and living up to the dictates of the Torah. Joshua ends this sermon with an allusion to the central credo of *Deuteronomy*—the *Shema*—urging the tribes to “love the Lord your God, and to walk in His ways . . . to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (v. 5).

On the way to their lands, the two and one half tribes erect an altar in the area around the Jordan river (v. 10). This act stirs the rest of

the tribes to battle against their brothers. The ten tribes see this as an act of idolatry, if not an attempt to supplant Shilo itself as the central place of worship. The tribes see the settlement on the east bank as a fundamental break with the covenantal structure. Would two peoples, with two centers of worship, two separate religions, now become the norm? The two and one half tribes respond that their intentions have been misconstrued. It was never their intention to split away from the people and the land; it was precisely their *own* fear of being read out of the covenantal destiny that motivated their action:

“We have done this out of anxiety, saying, ‘In time your children might speak to our children, saying, ‘What have you to do with the Lord, God of Israel? For the Lord *has made the Jordan a border between us and you, children of Reuben and Gad; you have no part in the Lord.*’ Thus your children shall make our children cease fearing the Lord.’ Therefore we said, ‘Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice; but that it may be a witness between us and you, and our generations after us . . . *that your children may not say to our children in time to come, ‘You have no part in the Lord’*” (vv. 24-5).

The war is averted, and the tribes return to their cities in peace and harmony. Reuben, Gad and half of Menashe remain outside of the land of Israel proper. Yet they remain part of the covenantal people, sharing in its struggles and destiny as it plays itself out in the historical drama.

## NOTES

1. It was with a great measure of satisfaction that after developing the thesis of this paper, I discovered that many of the insights parallel those of my esteemed teacher, Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, in ch. 13 of his *Pirkei Mo'adot* (Jerusalem, 1986).
2. Abravanel suggests in his comments to the first verses in our section that either Reuben and Gad owned much cattle besides the cattle captured in battle, or that they were more “devoted” to their wealth than their counterparts. He does not cite any textual evidence for either claim.
3. The phenomenon of chiasmic structures (A-B-B-A), or, in Hebrew, *hakkala nigudit*, is not limited to the poetic sections of the Bible. This literary phenomenon appears in narrative as well as legal sections, within verses, between verses, as well as between whole chapters and sections. See the discussion in M. Seidel, *Hikrei Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 2-10; R. Weiss, *Mehkerei Mikra* (Jerusalem 1981), pp. 259-273; Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 95-97.
4. See *Ibn Ezra to Numbers 1:20* for a discussion of the organizing principle

- of the tribal groupings.
5. *Genesis* 48:5. For a fascinating discussion of this episode, see Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville, 1991), pp. 127-132.
  6. The land of Israel is later described in the Bible with the exact same term, “*Lifnei Hashem*,” e.g., *Jonah* 1:2, highlighting the identification of Eden with Israel. In both, God’s presence is manifest intensely, and in both, sin leads to exile and banishment. The land of Israel is thus Eden writ large, a notion highlighted in various *midrashim* regarding the location of the garden, etc. See also *Kuzari* 2:14.
  7. On the issue of the “evil” line from Cain and the contrasting “righteous” line from Seth, see William Henry Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* (New York, 1895), pp. 46-49; Robert B. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven, 1977), pp. 138-166; David Sykes, *Patterns in Genesis* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bernard Revel Graduate School, 1985), pp. 46-61.
  8. *Sheit—ki shat li Elokim zera aber tahat Hevel, ki harago Kayyin* (*Genesis* 4:25).
  9. *From Father to Son*, pp. 173-174.
  10. Rav Yoel Bin Nun once noted that in the first communication from God to Abraham in the Land of Israel, God’s promise encompasses only Abraham’s progeny—“*Le-zarakha eten et ha-arets ha-zot*” (*Genesis* 12:7). It is only after Lot has left that God states, “*Leha etenenna u-le-zarekha*” (13:15). Only once Lot is no longer a factor in the covenantal scheme can the land be fully given exclusively to Abraham.
  11. As Radak (following Onkelos) notes in his commentary to this verse (13:9), the plain sense of the words *yamin* and *semol* here is north and south.
  12. Indeed, Mitsrayyim is one of the sons of Ham (10:6), from the genealogical line cursed by Noah as a result of Ham’s sexual immorality. Abraham’s experience in Egypt simply confirms this reality, as he encounters a society where people’s wives are stolen and given over to others. Later in the story, we will see that Sedom itself is indeed Egypt-like, as when the townspeople demand to rape the visitors and Lot offers his daughters to the mob in their place. In the final episode, Lot himself is sexually violated by his daughters, paralleling the violation of Noah by his son Ham. On the character of Lot, see also Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereishit* (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 121-129, and Raymond Harrari, “Abraham’s Nephew Lot: A Biblical Portrait,” *Tradition* 25:1, Fall 1989, pp. 31-41.
  13. See, for example, Nehama Leibowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-358; Leah Frankel, *Perakim baMikra* (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 32-159; Hayyim Hamiel, *Mayya-nei Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 88-115.
  14. In their comments to 37:1.
  15. It is crucial to note that earlier in the narrative, it was the younger brother Jacob who left the covenantal land eastward towards Aram. In this instance, however, the exile is imposed rather than freely chosen, and is in fact reversed when Jacob returns to the land. Indeed, it is striking to note that the Bible seems to parallel the travels of Abraham, who left the east to settle in Canaan, and those of his grandson Jacob.

Abraham leaves Aram, stops in Haran, and eventually enters the land of Canaan, first stopping at Shekhem-Elon More, where he receives the covenantal promise of possession of the land. He then builds an altar there to God. Following this, Abraham proceeds southward, building another altar near a place called Beit-El (*Gen.* 11:31-32; 12:6-8). Later, Abraham will travel to find the place, “*ba-makom*,” on Mt. Moriah near Jerusalem, settling eventually in Be’er Sheva and Hevron (*Gen.* 22-23). In parallel fashion, Jacob, fleeing his brother Esau, leaves his father’s house in Be’er Sheva on his way to Haran, encountering the place, “*Va-yi-fga ba-makom*” (a place which *Hazal* in the *Midrash* identify with the site of the Temple, Moriah) (*Gen.* 28-29). Jacob names this place Beit-El and builds an altar to God on that spot (28:18-19). He then proceeds on his journey, eventually reaching Aram, his ancestral home in the east. Later, Jacob will return to the land of Israel, first entering at Shekhem-Elon More and building an altar to God (33:18-20). Continuing his odyssey, he will return to Beit-El to once again build an altar to the Almighty and receive the covenantal promise of possession of the land (35:1-12). Eventually, Jacob returns to Hevron, to the house of his father Isaac, and settles there himself (35:27; 37:1,14). Jacob is the brother who leaves the land but is able to return. He is able to retrace the steps of his grandfather, to become “Abraham II,” as the father of the Jewish people, in this case the 12 tribes. See also *From Father to Son*, Chapter Four.

16. In his commentary to ch. 32, Abravanel already raises the possibility that the tribe of Reuben chose to remain on the east side of the Jordan because of its sense of shame at losing the leadership to the tribe of Judah. The members of Reuben, claims Abravanel, felt it below them to enter the land of Israel, where they would be positioned lower in the hierarchy of tribes than those younger than they. He thus anticipates our suggestion regarding the significance of the tribe of Reuben in the story and its connection back to the events at the end of *Genesis*. He does not, however, speak to the issue of the significance of the “*mikne*” in the story and its relationship to the Lot and Esau episodes, nor the role of Menashe in the narrative. In addition, he does not discuss the motivation behind Moses’ reaction and the subsequent “playing out” of the story in the Book of *Joshua* that is presented below.
17. This insight was pointed out to me by my friend and colleague, Rabbi David Silber. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers—The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 268.
18. The thorny problem of why only half of the tribe of Menashe was involved in the settlement of Transjordan has unfortunately not been treated at great length in classical or modern Jewish exegesis. An intriguing solution to this dilemma was proposed by R. Mordechai Breuer in his *Pirkei Mo’adot* (Jerusalem, 1986), ch. 13. From the point of view of Jacob, Menashe together with Efrayim was brought into the patriarchal family. As such, he inherits the land like all other tribes. But from the perspective of Joseph, Menashe is the first-born who has been supplanted by Jacob’s action, parallel to Reuben. From this perspective, Menashe is one more first-born who has been *nidhe*, and thus is a candidate for exile from the land to the east. Thus, on one level, he is just another tribe, while on

another, he is a “former” first-born. The resolution of these two perspectives is the division of the tribe of Menashe into two parts. In this way, both perspectives are represented in the actualization of biblical history and destiny. For more detailed background on Rabbi Breuer’s methodology of “perspectives,” see the introduction to *Pirkei Mo’adot* and his essay, “*Torat haTe’udot shel Ba’al Sha’agat Arye*,” in *Megadim*, vol. 2, Winter 1987, pp. 9-22. See also now the excellent article by my esteemed teacher and friend, R. Shalom Carmy, “Introducing Rabbi Breuer,” as well as R. Breuer’s first exposition of his approach in English, “The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction?,” which appear in the seminal volume, *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, Shalom Carmy, ed. (Northvale, 1996).

19. See, for example, the article by Rav Yoel Bin Nun, “*HaArets veErets Kena’an baTorah*,” *Megadim*, vol. 17, Fall 1992, pp. 9-46, and my comment, “*Sarei Alafim*,” *Megadim*, vol. 20, Summer 1993, pp. 103-104.