

Deuteronomy 33:20–21

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Moses pronounced blessings on the tribe of Gad.

Moses continues the poem of blessing he pronounced upon Israel that he began in Deuteronomy 33:1. Next, Moses pronounced blessings on the tribe of Gad, son of Jacob by his maidservant Zilpah (Genesis 35:26). He began with a word of praise to the Suzerain God, saying, *Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad* (v. 20). The word “blessed” (Heb. “bārūk”) in this context does not refer to material possessions received by humans. Rather, it refers to praise offered to God for something He has done. Here, Moses called for all to bless the LORD because He *is the one who enlarges Gad*. This might include reference to the Gadites getting permission from the LORD to settle east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:28-42).

Human beings bless God by praising Him. Psalm 34 provides a good illustration of the usage of the term since David used it in parallel with the verb “to praise.” David said, “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1).

Moses then described the tribe of Gad as that which *lies down as a lion and tears the arm, also the crown of the head*. This is a graphic picture of the Gadites’ warlike, aggressive, and vicious nature. They fought well with the other tribes in the conquest of the Holy Land, and they were good at defending themselves against the other nations east of the Jordan River. Since Gad’s territory flanked the eastern border of Israel, their fierceness would be an important asset that would protect the entire nation (see map of territory in Additional Resources) .

In the next verse, Moses stated that *Gad provided the first part for himself* (v. 21). The Gadites, the Reubenites, and the half tribe of Manasseh received their tribal allotments east of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 3:12–17). Since these tribes had an “exceedingly large number of livestock” (Numbers 32:1) and since they thought the eastern side of Jordan would best meet their needs, they asked Moses to allow them to settle there. Moses agreed to grant their

request after they vowed to help their fellow Israelites conquer the land of Canaan on the west side of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:1–25).

So, after Israel's victory over King Sihon of Heshbon (Numbers 21:23-24) and King Og of Bashan (Numbers 21:33-35), Moses distributed ownership of their territories to these tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh. The territory of *Gad* was *the ruler's portion*, by far the best portion of land (see map) .

Receiving the best land of Canaan was the reward for when *Gad came with the leaders of the people*. This means that Gad occupied a position of leadership among the tribes of Israel during the conquest of the Promised Land. By fighting alongside the other tribes, Gad was said to have *executed the justice of the Lord, and His ordinances with Israel*. The Gadites fulfilled their obligation and were thus praised for their commitment to the covenantal laws of God. They indeed executed righteousness and lived according to God's precepts in their land.

Biblical Text:

²⁰ **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.
²¹ "Then he provided the first *part* for himself,
For there the ruler's portion was reserved;
And he came *with* the leaders of the people;
He executed the justice of the Lord,
And His ordinances with Israel.**