

Joshua 22:1 ¶ Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh,

Joshua 22:2 And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you:

Joshua 22:3 Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God.

Joshua 22:4 And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, *and* unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan.

Joshua 22:5 But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Joshua 22:6 So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents.

The division of the land was complete. Joshua called the men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh that had been given land east of the Jordan to tell them that they were now free to go home. He acknowledged that they had kept their end of the bargain by staying to help their brethren fight as they took possession of the land west of the Jordan; commentators note that it had taken seven years give or take. Joshua gave the men one final warning before they headed out. He urged them to be diligent in keeping the commandments that the LORD had given the people through Moses. He urged them to love the LORD, to be passionate and fervent about obeying the LORD, to cling to their faith in Him and to serve Him with all their heart and soul. Then he blessed them as they went on their way.

I think it is important to remind ourselves from time to time that love is a choice and can therefore be demanded by God. He is not going to force someone to love Him, but He can demand that love from those who expect to benefit from His blessings.

Joshua 22:7 Now to the *one* half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given *possession* in Bashan: but unto the *other* half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them,

Joshua 22:8 And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.

Joshua 22:9 And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

I had to read other translations to understand that this section tells us how Joshua blessed these tribes. He told them to return home with great riches, including livestock, silver, gold, brass, iron and clothing and share the spoil they had gotten from the enemy with their brethren at home.

So the men from the 2.5 tribes east of Jordan left the camp at Shiloh to go home to the land of Gilead.

Joshua 22:10 ¶ And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that *are* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to.

Joshua 22:11 And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.

Joshua 22:12 And when the children of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

On their way home the men from the 2.5 tribes east of Jordan built a great altar by the river at the place where Israel had crossed over. These verses indicate that the altar was west of Jordan; though some argue that the wording implies that it was east of Jordan. When the tribes west of Jordan heard what they had done, they took it as a sign that their brothers were choosing to rebel against the LORD and serve false gods. So they proceeded to gather together to meet them in battle.

Joshua 22:13 And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest,

Joshua 22:14 And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one *was* an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel.

Joshua 22:15 And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead, and they spake with them, saying,

Joshua 22:16 Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass *is* this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?

At least the tribes west of Jordan had the sense to send a delegation to determine the facts behind the actions of their brethren. Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, headed the delegation, which included ten leaders from each tribe that were chosen to accompany him. They didn't beat around the bush about their purpose. They questioned the men from the 2.5 tribes as to why they had so quickly chosen to rebel against the LORD.

Joshua 22:17 *Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the*

LORD,

Joshua 22:18 But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, *seeing* ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

Joshua 22:19 Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession *be* unclean, *then* pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD'S tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God.

Joshua 22:20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

They continued by making the comparison to what had happened at Peor when the LORD had struck the congregation with plague for such action. They even acknowledged that they were still experiencing repercussions from that time. They noted how the LORD held the whole congregation accountable when there was blatant sin in the camp, e.g., the situation with Achan and his family. The delegation then offered to share from their own inheritances to provide for the 2.5 tribes west of Jordan if they did not think they could gain the victory in their own inheritance to cleanse the land. Again, they assumed that the 2.5 tribes had built the altar in defiance to the LORD.

Thought: Are you willing to confront others in the family of God with their sin with an attitude of wanting to help? Are you willing to sacrifice for the spiritual benefit of another?

Joshua 22:21 ¶ Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel,

Joshua 22:22 The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if *it be* in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,)

Joshua 22:23 That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require *it*;

Joshua 22:24 And if we have not *rather* done it for fear of *this* thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel?

Joshua 22:25 For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD.

Joshua 22:26 Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice:

Joshua 22:27 But *that* it *may be* a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD.

Joshua 22:28 Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should *so* say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say *again*, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it *is* a witness between us and you.

Joshua 22:29 God forbid that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn this day from following the LORD, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the LORD our God that *is* before his tabernacle.

The men from the 2.5 tribes answered the charges by telling their brethren that they had it all wrong. They basically declared that the LORD God knew their hearts, and they were unafraid. They were looking to the future and wanted to establish a visible altar of testimony to their commitment to serve the LORD along with their brethren west of Jordan. They weren't looking to dishonor God and defy His order that only the priests could offer sacrifices and offerings commanded by God at the tabernacle. They wanted to ensure that future generations of Israelis on both sides of the river stayed unified in the worship of the LORD. This altar was meant to be a testimony to that truth.

Joshua 22:30 ¶ And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which *were* with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them.

Joshua 22:31 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, This day we perceive that the LORD *is* among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.

Joshua 22:32 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad, out of the land of Gilead, unto the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought them word again.

Joshua 22:33 And the thing pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God, and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt.

Joshua 22:34 And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: for it *shall be* a witness between us that the LORD *is* God.

Phinehas and the delegation were pleased with the answer of the men from the 2.5 tribes. They expressed their gratitude in knowing that there was nothing in their actions to provoke the LORD's anger. So the delegation returned to report what they had learned to the rest of the people. All the tribes were unified in their desire to worship the LORD and follow His commandments.

We're told that the people of Reuben and Gad called the altar a name that meant, "A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God."

Principle: Rational dialogue prevents evil actions prompted by wrong assumptions.