



Joshua Dismisses the Eastern Tribes Joshua 22

Introduction

Finally, all the land had been distributed. The cities of refuge and the cities for the Levites had been appointed. The people of Israel had done all that Moses had commanded them, and God had fulfilled every promise He had spoken to them. *All came to pass* (Joshua 21:45). Now all the tribes were free to go home.

Outline of Joshua 22

- I. Dismissal of Eastern Tribes - Joshua 22:1-9
- II. Dispute over Eastern Altar - Joshua 22:10-34

I. Dismissal of Eastern Tribes - Joshua 22:1-9

- A. Words of Commendation - Joshua 22:1-3

Joshua assembled the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who had territories east of the Jordan River, to give them an honorable discharge. He recounted their deeds and service. Then, he formally dismissed them to go to their homes.

- 1. They had been obedient - 22:2

"You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you."

- 2. They had been faithful - 22:3

"You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day...but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God." Moses had told them to fight beside their brethren until victory was assured for all and they had done so. They had obeyed Moses, Joshua, and the LORD. Joshua carefully mentioned each point of their obedience.

Perhaps the apostle Paul had this scene in mind when he wrote to Timothy, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7). How wonderful to be able to say at the end of your life that you finished the charge you received from the Lord. Do you know God's charge to you regarding the battle for purity in your life, Christian service, stewardship of time, talent and treasure, carrying out the Great Commission?

At the end of His earthly life Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30)! The plan of salvation which was God's charge to Him was completed. All who believe, put their

trust in Him, and obey His commands in the Bible can know the joy and satisfaction of Jesus' *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:23).

- B. Charge to Obey - Joshua 22:4-5

"Now, therefore, return and go," Joshua told them, releasing them to their possessions. *"But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you"* His command contained five parts:

- 1) *"To love the LORD your God,*
- 2) *To walk in all His ways,*
- 3) *To keep His commandments,*
- 4) *To hold fast to Him,*
- 5) *To serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."*

Is your heart's desire to obey these five commands? Do you strive to obey to the best of your ability?

- C. Blessing - 22:6

So Joshua blessed them and sent them away to their tents. The conquering generation lived the rest of their days in peace and blessing in their inheritance. This much at least may be a picture of future bliss when our warfare is over and we rest secure at last.

- D. "Severance" Pay - 22:8-9

"Return with much riches to your tents". Joshua reminded them of their wages. They were returning with livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron, and much clothing. God has ways of taking care of His servants. *God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love* (Hebrews 6:10).

So the tribes departed to the land of their possession which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

II. Dispute over Eastern Altar - Joshua 22:10-34

- A. The Reason for the Altar - Joshua 22:10

When the tribes reached the Jordan, perhaps they realized what it would mean to live across the river from their brothers. They could become alienated and perhaps eventually not even be considered part of the nation. Therefore, before crossing, they built an altar so the other tribes would see it and be reminded of their brethren.

How do you choose where to live? Is it near your church and church friends or do you choose to live where there may be more space or prestige, yet so far away that fellowship is difficult and you become alienated?

An altar was not an unusual monument when you consider all the idols of the pagan nations they had seen and their own tabernacle, with its laver and altar. Of these, the altar was the only item accessible for them to model.

B. The Reaction - Joshua 22:11-12

1. Hearsay - 22:11

Rumors and tragedies often begin something like this, *Now the children of Israel heard someone say*. In this case, someone misunderstood the purpose of the altar, perhaps without the purest motive. They reported, *“Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan....on the children of Israel’s side.”* Were not the eastern tribes also the children of Israel? Apparently not in the reporter’s mind. Just as the eastern tribes feared, a “them” and “us” mentality was already developing against them.

2. Hostility - 22:12

When the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them. As with most rumors, it took awhile to circulate. The reporter may have made the statement in the privacy of home or to only a few friends but soon all Israel knew, or thought they knew, and wanted to go to war against their brethren.

C. A Reasoned Response - Joshua 22:13-20

Rash action can be avoided by finding out the facts. God has promised to give us discernment. One of the marks of Christian maturity is the ability to discern (Hebrews 5:14), and discernment requires sufficient facts before taking action.

1. Finding the facts - 22:13-14

Wisely, a fact-finding commission was sent consisting of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron and probably High Priest at this time, and ten tribal chiefs. They went after the tribes who had crossed the Jordan to Gilead to consult with them.

2. Leaping to conclusions - 22:15-16

When they found the tribes they stated their case, but in a rather accusatory manner. *“What treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn*

away this day from following the LORD in that you have built for yourselves an altar that you might rebel this day against the LORD?” Talking is better than fighting, but this kind of talking soon leads to fighting. Guilt was presumed.

3. Learning from the past - 22:17-20

Two tragic examples of “*treachery*” were fresh in their minds. They did not want to repeat former errors.

a. The iniquity of Peor - verses 17-19

In the wilderness, Balaam enticed Israel to sin by arranging for their seduction by pagan Moabite women. They took part in the licentious worship of Baal of Peor (Numbers 25:1-8; Deuteronomy 4:3), and as a result a plague killed twenty-four thousand people. Only the bold, aggressive action of Phinehas had stayed the plague.

The people were right to fear any sign of turning from God and His judgment on rebellion. We should fear these things too. For, *“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry”* (1 Samuel 15:23). However, this was not the case with the eastern tribes.

Phinehas began to work toward a solution by first seeking an explanation for the altar. He suggested that the uncleanness of their new environment had influenced them. He then made a generous offer for the tribes to return and settle among their brothers. Room would be found for them.

b. The sin of Achan - verse 20

The second example of recent treachery was Achan’s trespass in taking *the accursed thing*, bringing wrath on the whole nation and causing defeat on the battlefield (Joshua 7:1-26). The examples were specific and revealed the thinking of the accusers. However, they did not apply, for the eastern tribes had no intention of rebellion or trespassing.

D. Answer of the Eastern Tribes - Joshua 22:21-34

1. A soft answer - 22:21-23

A soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). The eastern tribes began by agreeing that if they were guilty of rebellion and treachery they would deserve punishment.

2. The explanation - 22:24-29

However, they had acted out of fear that in future years

their descendants would be confronted with, “*What have you to do with the LORD God of Israel...the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us...you have no part in the LORD.*” They greatly feared future alienation from fellowship and worship, “*Your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the LORD.*”

Are you also afraid that your children and grandchildren, or other loved ones, will be discouraged from fearing the Lord? Do you seek to encourage and strengthen their faith in the Lord Jesus?

The eastern tribes explained that they had intended the altar to be an altar of witness to their unity in God and not an altar of sacrifice. It is ironic that their act, designed to promote unity, was nearly a source of division. In the same way, our enemy, Satan, takes our best intentions and twists them in the minds of others, causing misunderstanding. The eastern tribes, with tact and truthfulness, managed to convince the delegation that rebellion was the farthest thing from their minds (Joshua 22:29).

E. Peace Restored - Joshua 22:30-34

1. Delegation pacified - 22:30-31

When Phinehas and the heads of the tribes heard the words of the eastern tribes, *it pleased them* and they perceived “*that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD.*” The tribes were proclaimed not guilty by the high priest.

2. Western tribes pacified - 22:32-34

So the thing pleased the children of Israel and the children of Israel blessed God. What a happy ending after coming so close to war!

F. The Danger of Causing Divisions

The danger of division is one of the first dangers the early Church faced, and is one of the most persistent. The apostle Paul closed his letter to the Romans, *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions... and avoid them* (Romans 16:17). Paul was very alert to the problem of divisions because he had dealt with it in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 1:11-17).

Listed among the things God hates we find *one who sows discord among brethren* (Proverb 6:16-19). Like a smoldering fire, division is unrecognized at the outset. It grows until full-blown schism develops that can be virtually irreconcilable. Few churches escape the devastation of division and misunderstanding. It is Satan’s work. No wonder Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matthew 5:9).

Applications

1. Are you a peacemaker or do you sow discord? If you truly seek peace, how can you practice being a peacemaker in your church?
2. Do you pray for individuals involved in disagreements to be reconciled?
3. Do you remain silent rather than spreading rumors? What else can you do to help quell rumors before they cause divisions?
4. Do you seek facts and promote understanding rather than taking sides when there are disagreements in your church? Do you seek to promote unity and edify others by *speaking the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15) rather than contributing to controversies?
5. How will you help encourage and strengthen the faith of others in your family?