

Bible Study May 19, 2021

JOSHUA 22 AMPLIFIED VERSION

3. Eastern tribes return home

1Then Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 2He told them, “You have done as Moses, the servant of the LORD, commanded you, and you have obeyed every order I have given you. 3During all this time you have not deserted the other tribes. You have been careful to obey the commands of the LORD your God right up to the present day. 4And now the LORD your God has given the other tribes rest, as he promised them. So go back home to the land that Moses, the servant of the LORD, gave you as your possession on the east side of the Jordan River.

Before the conquest had begun, these tribes were given land on the east side of the Jordan River. But before they could settle down, they had to first promise to help the other tribes conquer the land on the west side (Numbers 32:20-22). They had patiently and diligently done what they had promised, and Joshua commended them for doing it. At last, they were permitted to return to their families and build their cities. Follow-through is vital in God’s work. Don’t give in to the temptation to quit early and leave undone what God has asked you to complete.

5But be very careful to obey all the commands and the instructions that Moses gave to you. Love the LORD your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul.”

6So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went home.

7Moses had given the land of Bashan, east of the Jordan River, to the half-tribe of Manasseh. (The other half of the tribe was given land west of the Jordan.) As Joshua sent them away and blessed them, 8he said to them, “Go back to your homes with the great wealth you have taken from your enemies—the vast herds of livestock, the silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and the large supply of clothing. Share the plunder with your relatives.”

9So the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the rest of Israel at Shiloh in the land of Canaan. They started the journey back to their own land of Gilead, the territory that belonged to them according to the LORD’s command through Moses.

The Eastern Tribes Build an Altar

10But while they were still in Canaan, and when they came to a place called Geliloth near the Jordan River, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh stopped to build a large and imposing altar.

11The rest of Israel heard that the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar at Geliloth at the edge of the land of Canaan, on the west side of the

Jordan River. 12So the whole community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and prepared to go to war against them. 13First, however, they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to talk with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 14In this delegation were ten leaders of Israel, one from each of the ten tribes, and each the head of his family within the clans of Israel.

15When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 16“The whole community of the LORD demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel. How could you turn away from the LORD and build an altar for yourselves in rebellion against him? 17Was our sin at Peor not enough? To this day we are not fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire community of the LORD. 18And yet today you are turning away from following the LORD. If you rebel against the LORD today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

For the story of how Israel turned away from God and began to worship Baal of Peor, see Numbers 25:1-18.

19“If you need the altar because the land you possess is defiled, then join us in the LORD’s land, where the Tabernacle of the LORD is situated, and share our land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar other than the one true altar of the LORD our God. 20Didn’t divine anger fall on the entire community of Israel when Achan, a member of the clan of Zerah, sinned by stealing the things set apart for the LORD? He was not the only one who died because of his sin.”

For the story of Achan, a man who allowed greed to get the best of him, see Joshua 7.

21Then the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the clans of Israel: 22“The LORD, the Mighty One, is God! The LORD, the Mighty One, is God! He knows the truth, and may Israel know it, too! We have not built the altar in treacherous rebellion against the LORD. If we have done so, do not spare our lives this day. 23If we have built an altar for ourselves to turn away from the LORD or to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings, may the LORD himself punish us.

24“The truth is, we have built this altar because we fear that in the future your descendants will say to ours, ‘What right do you have to worship the LORD, the God of Israel? 25The LORD has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and you people of Reuben and Gad. You have no claim to the LORD.’ So your descendants may prevent our descendants from worshiping the LORD.

26“So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, 27but as a memorial. It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings. Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no claim to the LORD.’

28“If they say this, our descendants can reply, ‘Look at this copy of the LORD’s altar that our ancestors made. It is not for burnt offerings or sacrifices; it is a reminder of the relationship both of us have with the LORD.’ 29Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or

sacrifices. Only the altar of the LORD our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose.”

The tribes were concerned that without some visible sign of unity between the people on the two sides of the Jordan, their descendants might be more prone to conflict with one another. The altar, patterned after the altar of the Lord, was to remind these people that they all worshiped the same God. Often we need to be reminded of the faith of our ancestors so that we do not repeat their mistakes or experience unnecessary division. How can believers today model faithful traditions for the next generation of believers? We should take time to invest in those who are younger than us so that they will know how to live faithfully.

30When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of Israel—heard this from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were satisfied. 31Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, replied to them, “Today we know the LORD is among us because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD as we thought. Instead, you have rescued Israel from being destroyed by the hand of the LORD.”

32Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the other leaders left the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and returned to the land of Canaan to tell the Israelites what had happened. 33And all the Israelites were satisfied and praised God and spoke no more of war against Reuben and Gad.

34The people of Reuben and Gad named the altar “Witness,” for they said, “It is a witness between us and them that the LORD is our God, too.”

JOSHUA 23 AMPLIFIED VERSION

4. Joshua’s farewell to Israel

1The years passed, and the LORD had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old, 2called together all the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel. He said to them, “I am now a very old man. 3You have seen everything the LORD your God has done for you during my lifetime. The LORD your God has fought for you against your enemies. 4I have allotted to you as your homeland all the land of the nations yet unconquered, as well as the land of those we have already conquered—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 5This land will be yours, for the LORD your God will himself drive out all the people living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.

Some of the land that Joshua had assigned to the various tribes remained unconquered. Israel’s gradual occupation of the land had an ecological reason (see Exodus 23:29-30), a military reason (see Judges 1:19), and a theological reason (see Judges 2:20–3:4). Israel’s ensuing unfaithfulness delayed the settlement process by several centuries; instead of driving out the remaining Canaanites, Israel absorbed them, bringing God’s people even greater temptations to unfaithfulness. Joshua knew this to be a real danger (Joshua 23:15-16). We need to root out sinful influences in our lives rather than allow them to lead us into sinful practices.

6“So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left. 7Make sure you do not associate with the other people still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear by them or serve them or worship them. 8Rather, cling tightly to the LORD your God as you have done until now.

Joshua was dying, so he called all the leaders of the nation together to give them his final words of encouragement and instruction. His whole message can be summarized in this verse: “Cling tightly to the LORD your God.” Joshua had been a living example of those words, and he wanted that to be his legacy. For what do you want to be remembered, and what do you want to pass on to those you will leave behind? You can leave them nothing better than the encouragement to hold on to God and the example of a person who did.

9“For the LORD has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you. 10Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the LORD your God fights for you, just as he has promised. 11So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

12“But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, 13then know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the LORD your God has given you.

Joshua knew the nation’s weak spots. Before dying, he called the people together and gave commands to help them where they were most likely to slip: (1) Follow all that is written in the Book of Instruction without turning aside; (2) don’t associate with the people remaining in the land or worship their gods; and (3) don’t intermarry with them. These temptations were right in their backyard. Our associations and relationships can be temptations to us as well. It’s wise to identify our weak spots before we break down. Then we can develop strategies to overcome these temptations instead of being overcome by them.

14“Soon I will die, going the way of everything on earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the LORD your God has come true. Not a single one has failed! 15But as surely as the LORD your God has given you the good things he promised, he will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely destroy you from this good land he has given you. 16If you break the covenant of the LORD your God by worshiping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly vanish from the good land he has given you.”

This chilling prediction about the consequences of intermarriage with the Canaanite nations eventually became a reality. Numerous stories in the book of Judges show what the Israelites had to suffer because of their failure to follow God wholeheartedly. God was supremely loving and patient with his people, just as he is with us today. But we must not confuse his patience with us as approval of or indifference to our sin. Be careful about demanding your own way, because it might have unintended, painful consequences.