

## Chapter 22

**What action did Joshua take next (vv. 1-4)?** The Eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had performed well. Called before their general, they were commended for keeping their word to God, Moses, and Joshua, by fighting alongside their brothers in the conquest of Canaan (cf. [Numbers 32](#); [Joshua 4:12-14](#)). For seven long years these men were separated from their wives and families, but now the battles were over, the land was divided, and it was time to go home. So, Joshua dismissed those soldiers with honor.<sup>1</sup>

**What warning did Joshua give them (v. 5)?** The returning soldiers also left with six solemn exhortations by Joshua ringing in their ears: (a) **be very careful to keep the commandment and the Law**, (b) **love the LORD your God**, (c) **walk in all His ways**, (d) **obey His commands**, (e) **hold fast to Him**, and (f) **serve Him with all your heart and all your soul**. This charge, short but passionate, called for obedience, love, fellowship, and service. Their military obligations were fulfilled, but Joshua reminded them of their abiding spiritual commitments which were conditions for God's continued blessing.

Like an anxious parent, who sees a son or daughter leave home for a place where the young person would be separated from spiritual influences, Joshua delivered his earnest charge to the departing warriors. He was perhaps fearful that their separation from the rest of the tribes might cause them to drift away from worshipping the Lord and to embrace idolatry.<sup>2</sup>

**How did Joshua bless the Eastern tribes as he sent them off (vv. 6-8)?** As the weary but happy soldiers left, they took with them a substantial portion of spoils from the enemy, with instructions from Joshua to share the plunder with their brothers who had remained at home. Extensive wealth was acquired by the soldiers, including herds, metals, and clothing. But why should those who had not endured any of the pain and peril of the conflict enjoy any of the spoils? Possibly many of the men who remained behind would have preferred to go to war, but who then would have raised the crops and protected the women and children? The principle was firmly established that honors and rewards do not go only to those who carry arms but also to those who stay home to perform the commonplace duties ([1 Samuel 30:24](#)).<sup>3</sup>

**On their return trip what did the Reubenites, Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh do (v. 10)?** Leaving Shiloh, the armies of the eastern tribes set out for home, undoubtedly recalling the Jordan crossing, the fall of Jericho, and their shared victories with the western tribes. As they neared the Jordan, however, they sensed a potential growing separation. The Jordan was no ordinary river; bordered by high mountains and a wide, oppressive valley, it formed a formidable natural boundary that heightened fears of permanent division. Concerned that distance would weaken the bonds forged through years of shared struggle, the tribes sought a lasting symbol of unity.<sup>4</sup>

So, they decided to erect a large, visible altar near the banks of the Jordan --- not as a rival place of worship, but as a witness to their shared faith and their common right to worship at the tabernacle altar. The altar symbolized that their unity rested in their common worship as one people of God.

**How was that action of building an altar perceived by the rest of Israel (vv. 11-12)?** These tribes evidently intended the altar to be a replica of the bronze altar in the tabernacle courtyard at Shiloh (cf. v. 28). If so, it is easy to understand why the other tribes reacted so violently to its construction. They initially perceived it as some kind of idol, or at least as an unauthorized altar for illegitimate worship, since God had prohibited the building of altars in the land apart from the one He had ordained ([Deuteronomy 12:1-14](#)).

On the basis of what they had heard (v. 11), the Israelites concluded that this was an act of rebellion against the Lord—a setting up of a second altar of sacrifice in direct violation of the Mosaic Law ([Leviticus 17:8-9](#)). They feared it was intended to rival the altar at Shiloh and that, in time, it might become an idolatrous center of worship.

Moreover, they were concerned that if such rebellion went unpunished, the entire nation would suffer God's discipline (v. 18).

**What action did the Israelites take (vv. 13-14)?** Faced with apparent compromise and disobedience of God's commands, the Israelites called for a war of judgment against their brothers. And, though one must admire their zeal for truth and their jealousy for purity of worship, it is good that wisdom prevailed over rashness. A decision was made to begin by vigorously objecting to the two and one-half tribes action in the hope that they would abandon their project. War could thereby be avoided. Eleazar's son Phinehas, noted for his righteous zeal for the Lord (Numbers 25:6-18), headed a deputation of 10 tribal rulers whose responsibility was to confront the others.<sup>5</sup>

**When the delegation of the western tribes arrived, what was their major concern (vv. 15-20)?** They were concerned that the Lord's displeasure would fall on the entire nation of Israel based on the action of two and one half tribes. They cited two examples of one man's sin resulting in judgment of the entire nation..... the sin of Peor brought God's judgment on the whole nation (Numbers 25), as did the sin of Achan (Joshua 22:20; cf. chapter 7).<sup>6</sup>

Also, it was magnanimously suggested that if those of the two and one-half tribes felt the land east of Jordan was defiled, that is, not sanctified by God's presence, the Western tribes would make room for them on their side of Jordan. This was a generous, loving offer potentially involving great cost.<sup>7</sup>

**How did the Eastern tribes reply to the concern of the Western tribes (vv. 21-29)?**

**vv. 21-23.** Instead of responding to the fierce reproof in anger, the Eastern tribes in candor and sincerity solemnly repudiated the charge that the altar they erected was in rebellion against God. Invoking God as a witness they swore twice by His three names—El, Elohim, Yahweh (the Mighty One, God, the LORD), affirming that if their act was in rebellion against God and His commands concerning worship, they deserved His judgment.

**vv. 24-25.** Why then was the second altar built? They earnestly explained that it was occasioned by the geographic separation of their people and the effect this might have on future generations.

**vv. 26-29.** The Eastern tribesmen made it clear that they were fully aware of God's laws governing Israel's worship; their recently erected altar was *not* intended as a place for burnt offerings and sacrifices (cf. v. 23). It was simply a memorial altar, a witness to all future generations that the tribes east of the Jordan were indeed a part of the nation of Israel and that the Eastern tribes a right to cross the Jordan and worship at Shiloh.<sup>8</sup>

**How did the Israelite leaders respond (vv. 30-34)?** The other tribes were pleased by this explanation, and war was averted. The eastern tribes called the altar *A Witness*, meaning that it was a witness between the tribes on both sides of the Jordan that the Lord is the true God.<sup>9</sup>

There was a happy ending to this grave crisis. The explanation of the representatives of the Eastern tribes was fully accepted by Phinehas and his delegation as well as by the other tribes when report was made to them. In fact, the nine and one-half tribes on the west of the Jordan were glad ... and praised God. In concluding the whole matter, Phinehas expressed deep gratitude that no sin had been committed and that the wrath of God was not incurred.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 365.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 256.

<sup>10</sup> Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 367.