

Joshua Chapter 22

Verses 1-6: The “Reubenites, Gadites”, and “half tribe of Manasseh” did as they had promised Moses (Num. chapter 32; Deut. 3:12-20), and later Joshua (1:12-18): they remained in the army until all the land had been conquered.

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

“Reubenites ... Gadites ... Manasseh”: The tribes from east of the Jordan had helped their people conquer the land west of the river. Now they were ready to go back to their families to the east.

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:"

“Moses ... commanded you”: Clearance from Moses and Joshua for these tribes to possess land east of the Jordan was of God (verse 9; 24:8; Num. 32:30-33).

The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh had received their land on the eastern side, with the understanding that they would help the other tribes get settled in their land on the western side. They have stayed and fought with the other tribes for over 7 years now. They have done exactly what they had promised Moses that they would do. It appears they have remained for the separation of the Promised Land, as well. Now, Joshua had called them to release them to go home to their families.

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."

For the space of fourteen years, which is the commonly received notion of the Jews; Seven years according to them the land was subduing, and seven more spent in dividing it. And then these tribes were sent for and dismissed. All this time they stayed close by their brethren, and assisted them in their wars, and never requested to return to their wives and children, until they had an order from their general.

"But have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God": For what both Moses and Joshua commanded them was from the mouth of the Lord. So that in obeying them, they obeyed him.

We see that Joshua has high praise of them, for staying with their relatives of the other tribes, and helping them win their land.

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."

As he promised them (as in Joshua 21:44; see Deut. 12:9).

"Therefore now return ye, and get ye unto your tents": Not their military tents in the army, from which they now came to Joshua, but their houses, as the Greek version, and their cities, as the Targum. They having been so long used to tents in the wilderness, and during the wars in Canaan, this was a familiar word for their dwellings.

"And unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you, on the other side Jordan": Before his death, on condition of doing what they now had done; even the land of Gilead and Bashan, beyond Jordan.

The other nine and a half tribes on the west side of Jordan have settled into their new homes, and are at peace. Joshua releases the fighting men of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh to go and rejoin their own families.

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."

The ten commandments, and all other laws, both ceremonial and civil.

"Which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you": In the name of the Lord, to keep and observe.

"To love the Lord your God": Of which keeping the commands of God is an evidence, and which is the true principle and motive of hearty, sincere, and cheerful obedience to them.

"And to walk in all his ways": Which he has prescribed, all his ways of worship, paths of duty, faith, truth, holiness, and righteousness.

"And to keep his commandments": Whether moral, ceremonial, or judicial: whether of natural and moral obligation, or of positive institution. "And to cleave unto him": And not depart from his ways, worship, word, and ordinances.

"And to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul": In the strictest and affectionate manner. This advice Joshua thought proper to give them, and instill a persistent instruction into them, now they were about to leave their brethren, and go on the other side Jordan. Where they would be at a distance from the tabernacle, altar, and service of God. And might be under temptation to relinquish it, and set up another form of worship elsewhere.

Joshua gives them one last admonition to stay faithful to God. The fact that he uses the word diligent, shows that they must be very careful to keep God's commandments. They must not take

God casually. This must be a deep commitment in their hearts. The best proof of our love for God is keeping His commandments. Jesus said the following pertaining to that.

John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

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

Dismissed them from his presence with a blessing, in order to go to their own country. This he did by wishing them well. Praying to God for a blessing on them, their persons, and families. Who had been so useful in assisting their brethren to get possession of the land of Canaan. Some think this blessing includes gifts and presents he bestowed on them.

"And they went unto their tents": Here the word means their military tents in the camp of Israel, to which they returned, in order to take with them their goods, their substance and riches. And their part of the spoil of the enemy, which of right belonged to them.

It seems their families had not moved into the cities they had conquered, and were still living in tents.

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,"

The kingdom of Og (see Deut. 3:13).

"But unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward": Of which an account is given, and the border of their lot described (Joshua 17:1).

"And when Joshua sent them also unto their tents, then he blessed them": It seems as if this half tribe was separately dismissed and blessed. They being more nearly related to Joshua, who was of the tribe of Ephraim, and so had a more particular dismissing and blessing. And he took his leave of them in a different and affectionate manner. Kimchi makes mention of a seeking, or exposition of theirs, which says, that after they had taken leave they stayed two days, and returned and took leave a second time. And which he understands of them all, and not of the half tribe only. But it is plainly the half tribe that is only spoken of.

It is interesting that the lot the half tribe of Manasseh received on the west side of Jordan was directly across the river from the half tribe of Manasseh on the east side. Joshua was acting as an agent of the LORD, when he spoke a blessing on 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."

To the half tribe of Manasseh only, though some think also to the other ten tribes.

"Saying, return with much riches unto your tents": That is, return to their own land, and habitations there, with whatsoever riches they had got from the spoil of the enemy.

"And with very much cattle": They had taken from them, and fell to their share, and for which they had good pasturage in Gilead and Bashan, and therefore very proper to take with them.

"With silver and with gold, and with brass, and with iron": Whether in massive pieces, or wrought up into vessels, which they found in the houses of the Canaanites when they plundered them.

"And with very much raiment": Some no doubt very rich and costly, such as their kings, princes, nobles, and great personages among them wore.

"Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren": According to Jarchi and Kimchi, this is spoken to the half tribe of Manasseh, to divide their spoil with the tribes of Reuben and Gad. But it rather means the dividing the above spoil, when they came to their own country with their brethren they left behind. Who as they were employed in guarding and defending their cities, their wives and children, herds and flocks, in their absence, they had a right to part of the spoil. It was but reasonable they should have their part of the spoil to carry with them. And this seems to be the true reason of their being separately addressed, and dismissed and blessed.

All of this wealth they had received, when they defeated the armies before them. Not all of the tribe had come with them to fight. Joshua reminds them to share their wealth they had received, with their brothers who had stayed at home and kept their herds. The wealth of Canaan was now, the property of all of the tribes of Israel.

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."

First to the camp to take their substance, and then set forward to their own land.

"And departed from the children of Israel": From the rest of them, for otherwise they were children of Israel also.

"Out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan": For here the camp of Israel was, as well as the tabernacle.

"To go unto the country of Gilead": To the land of their possession.

"Whereof they were possessed": Gilead is put for the whole country on the other side Jordan, as the land of Jazer, and the kingdom of Bashan. Which the two tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, were possessed of.

"According to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses": For when they moved to have that country, Moses, it seems, consulted the Lord about it. Who declared it to be his will they should have it, on performing what they promised (see Num. 32:1).

The tabernacle was set up at Shiloh. This was where Joshua had called them to bless them and release them. The land west of the Jordan was spoken of as Canaan here, and the east side of Jordan was spoken of as Gilead. Moses had gotten permission from the LORD for them to possess land on the eastern side of Jordan.

Verses 10-14: The erection of a second, unauthorized "altar", however innocently intended, would violate the principles laid down in the Mosaic legislation (compare Lev. 17:8-9; Deut. 12:1-14; 13:12-15). The rest of Israel assumed they were setting up their own religion. So they planned to go to war against these three tribes to punish them for forsaking God, as they had been instructed (Deut. 13:14-17).

The situation carried with it an apparent danger of political disunity and apostasy (verses 16-20). Only by the assurance of the two-and-one-half tribes east of the Jordan that their altar was not intended to be used as a sacrificial altar, but only as a witness to their right to the Lord's established altar (compare Exodus 23:17; Deut. 16:16-17), west of the Jordan, was the threat of civil war dispelled.

"An altar by Jordan": The special altar built by the 2-1/2 tribes near the river, though well-meant, aroused suspicions among western tribes. They feared rebellion against the Shiloh altar that served all the tribes in unity. When challenged, men of the eastern tribes explained their motives to follow the true God, be in unity with the rest of Israel, and not be regarded as outsiders. The explanation met with other Israelites' approval.

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."

To the banks of it, or the sand heaps. Some take the word to signify, which were thrown up to restrain the waters from overflowing. Some by Geliloth understand a place so called. And Jerom says it was near Jordan in the tribe of Benjamin. But rather the word signifies the meanders, windings, and turnings, of the river; and such circuits and compasses it fetched near Jericho, as the same writer observes. Where we may suppose these tribes went over, and at a place where the river jetted out into the land of Canaan.

"The children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, built there an altar by Jordan": Or "then"; that is, when they had passed over the river into their own country. For which Josephus is express; and certain it is, that the altar was built not on the Canaan side of Jordan, but on the opposite side, as is clear from (Joshua 22:11). And indeed they had no right to build on any other ground than their own. And they pitched upon a spot where the river jetted out into the land of Canaan, as most proper to erect it on. To be a witness, that though separated from the rest of the Israelites

by the river Jordan, yet were a part of them, and had a right to join them in the service of God. And bring their sacrifices to the altar of God in the tabernacle, as more fully appears in some later verses.

"A great altar to see to": Built up very high, so that it might be seen at a great distance.

The altar was large enough to see from a long distance. It was most probably a tall stack of stones as a memorial. It does not explain whether this altar was just on the inside of the eastern bank or the western bank of the Jordan River.

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."

Those that dwelt in the land of Canaan, for otherwise, as before observed, the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan were Israelites also. And this is a further proof that the altar was built on their side, or those in the land of Canaan would have known of the building of it. And have seen them at it. And not come at the knowledge of it by hearsay only, as it seems they did, it being reported to them by some who had been in those parts, and had seen the structure.

"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": Which clearly shows it was on the other side of the Jordan.

"In the borders of Jordan": On the banks of it, or in one of the meanders and windings of it, at a place where it ran out and fetched a compass in the land of Canaan.

"At the passage of the children of Israel": Where they passed over when they first came into Canaan, and where those tribes also passed over at their return; supposed to be the Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing (John 1:28).

The children of Israel were greatly alarmed by the altar.

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."

Of the building the altar in the above place, namely, the nine tribes and a half settled in the land of Canaan.

"The whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh": Where the tabernacle and altar of the Lord were, whose cause they undertook to avenge. Being injured as they imagined by the altar the other tribes had built, and where they could consult the Lord by Urim and Thummim, if needful. Here they repaired from the several places around, where their tribes were settled. Not the whole body of the people, but their heads and representatives.

"To go up to war against them": To consult about it, and to prepare for it, which they were obliged to do by the law of God. As in the case of a city, so of a tribe drawn aside to idolatry. And which they imagined was the case of these tribes, or at least what they had done had a tendency to apostasy from the true worship of God. Which they were zealous to defend at the hazard of their lives. And though it should issue in a destruction of one or more of their tribes (see Deut. 13:12).

The children of Israel thought this to be an altar to take the place of the altar at Shiloh. They were ready to go to war against their brother tribes, because they felt they were blaspheming God.

Verses 13-20: "Phinehas" is the priest who took drastic measures to stop a plague that broke out after the Israelites engaged in idolatry and sexual immorality at Peor (Num. 25:1-13). He wisely decided to find out all the facts before doing anything rash and followed the principles for conflict resolution found in (Deut. 13:12-14). Not surprisingly, Phinehas compared the actions of the East-Jordan tribes to the disobedience of the Israelites at "Peor".

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,"

In the land of Canaan.

"Sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead": They were possessed of, and had now returned unto and dwelt in. Here they sent an embassy to them, to inquire into the truth of what they had heard, and the reason of it, before they went to war with them. Or proclaimed it, or took any further steps towards it. And which they were obliged to do by the above law, when there was any suspicion of idolatry, and any good ground and reason for it (Deut. 13:14). And at the head of this deputation was;

"Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest": A man zealous for the Lord of hosts, and his glory, of which there is an instance in (Num. 25:7). And so, a fit person to be employed in this affair, who would be faithful, bold, and zealous, as well as capable of giving advice and counsel to both parties, if needful.

Phinehas is mentioned several times in an important role regarding spiritual things. He was probably the priest that was next in line to be high priest after Eleazar. Phinehas could speak for the LORD in this matter.

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

The nine tribes and a half, so that the half tribe of Manasseh sent a prince, as well as the whole tribes.

"And each one was a head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel": That is, among the rulers of the thousands of Israel. And so, the Greek version calls them chiliarches, rulers of thousands. For the people were divided into tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands, over whom there were distinct rulers (Exodus 18:25). Now these were among the chief of them, of the highest rank and authority. They were the chief princes, heads of several tribes; a very honorable delegation this! The son of the high priest, and ten princes, the heads of the tribes. These were chosen and sent, partly in honor to their brethren beyond Jordan, and partly that they might carry the greater authority with them, and prevail upon them to hearken to them.

There were ten princes, because the half tribe of Manasseh sent a prince along with the princes from the other nine tribes. The prince from each tribe represented his tribe in this matter.

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,"

The committee came thither. They either sent for the chiefs among the two tribes and a half, to meet them at some place, or they, having a notion of their coming, assembled together to receive them, and hear what they had to say to them.

"And they spake with them, saying": As follows; very probably Phinehas was the mouth of the whole, for there could be but one speaker.

This is the sensible thing to do, before they go to war against their brothers.

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?"

By whom they were sent, and whom they represented. And they do not call them the congregation of Israel, but of the Lord. Because it was not on a civil but religious account they were come, and not to plead their own cause, but the cause of God. And not so much to show a concern for their own honor and interest as for the glory of God.

"What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel": They took it for granted that they had committed a sin. And that so great, they were not able to express the greatness of it in all its aggravated circumstances, and plainly suggest it was idolatry. Which was too premature, when as yet they had not inquired into it. But their zeal for God, and his honor, hurried them into this hasty step.

"To turn away this day from following the Lord": They intimate, that they had begun a revolt from the worship of God, which is aggravated by their falling into it so soon. Having received so many favors from God, and had so lately seen such wonderful appearances of his power and

goodness. And had just had such excellent instructions, exhortations, and cautions given them by Joshua, when he dismissed them.

"In that ye have built you an altar": Which they supposed was to offer sacrifices upon. Whereas there was to be but one altar, and that in the place which the Lord should choose to put his name in. And which he had now chosen, where all sacrifices were to be brought and offered up (see Exodus 20:24).

"That ye might rebel this day against the Lord?" Against the commandment of the Lord expressed in the places referred to. Which they charge with rebellion against himself, a very high and heavy charge indeed! But they should first have inquired whether they were guilty of the trespass. Or with what view they had built the altar, whether for sacrifice, or for some other use. But they took it for granted it was for sacrifice.

They believe this altar is a slander against God. This is the question they have brought. They assumed that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had turned their backs on God. They are asking them to explain themselves.

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,"

The worshipping of that idol, when in the plains of Moab; the history of which (see in Num. 25:2). Was that so small a sin, that another must be added to it, or a greater committed? Since building an altar seemed designed not for a single action of idolatrous worship, but for the continuance of it. Whereas the sin of Peor was only committed at one time, and not continued in.

"From which we are not cleansed until this day": Not cleared from the shame and disgrace of it, or the guilt of it expiated or removed. But it might be expected, as in the case of the golden calf, that God would still at times punish for it, when provoked by new crimes. Or the sense is, that there were those among them that were infected with the same contagion, and whose inclinations were to commit the same, or like sin of idolatry.

"Although there was a plague in congregation of the Lord": Of which twenty-four thousand died (Num. 25:9).

This incident with Peor had to do with the worship of a false god. Phinehas was involved in getting the plague stopped, when he ran a javelin through a man and woman involved in the sin. Many of the Israelites were killed in that incident. These Israelites feared a repetition of that.

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

From the worship of the Lord, as the Targum, and so on (Joshua 22:16). Not content with the former transgression, but must add this revolt unto it, and at a time which sadly aggravates it.

"And it will be, that seeing ye rebel to, day against the Lord": Against the Word of the Lord, as the Targum, and so on (Joshua 22:16).

"That tomorrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel": Or, in a little time, if a stop is not put to this revolt, the whole body of the people will suffer for it. Here they express a concern for the whole nation of Israel, as well as for the glory of God. For sometimes the whole congregation has been charged with the sins of individuals, and punished for it, as a case after mentioned shows (see Joshua 7:1).

This had happened so few years ago, that they were still very conscious of the wrath of God that fell from this. They are afraid the wrath of God would fall upon all of them, because of this.

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."

That is, if it was judged to be so by them, because not cleansed from the sins of the former inhabitants of it by sacrifice. Or because there was no altar in it to offer up sacrifice for the expiation of sin.

"Then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord's tabernacle dwelleth": If you repent of the choice you have made of a country to dwell in, quit it, and come over into the land of Canaan, which the Lord has taken possession of. And residence in, and where his tabernacle is fixed, the place of his presence and worship, and where an altar is erected to sacrifice upon.

"And take possession among us": They were willing to quit possession of their own, and make room for them in each of their tribes. And even though they straitened themselves, and parted with much of their estates, rather than they should make a schism, or go into idolatrous practices. Which was a brave, noble, spirit indeed, and showed their great concern for the honor and glory of God, and his worship. And their love to their brethren, and affectionate regard for their spiritual welfare, above their own private, personal, and temporal good.

"But rebel not against the Lord": The Word of the Lord, as the Targum. Either Christ the essential Word, the Angel of Jehovah's presence, or his word of command.

"Nor rebel against us": By breaking off from us, and setting up another religion or form of worship.

"In building you an altar beside the altar of the Lord our God": Which ought to be common to both, and no other to be set up against it, or used beside it.

They are offering the opportunity for Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh to receive land on the west side of Jordan, if there is a hindrance on the east side for them to stay loyal to God. They are concerned about them wandering from the teachings of 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."

One that descended from Zerah the son of Judah (Joshua 7:18).

"Commit a trespass in the accursed thing": In taking what was devoted to sacred uses.

"And wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel?": And which was what was feared now. And this instance is brought to show that such fears were not groundless.

"And that man perished not alone in his iniquity": Which seems to confirm the notion of those who think that his children suffered with him. Though it may be observed, that it was through his sin that thirty-six men were slain by the men of Ai, (Joshua 7:5).

They are remembering that the sin of one man affects the whole nation of Israel. The sin of one Israelite (in the case of Achan) could have brought disaster to all of the nation. The only thing to do is come against the sin immediately, to show they are not in agreement.

Verses 21-29: Four times the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh declared that they had no intention of offering sacrifices on this "replica" of Yahweh's altar (22:23, 26, 28-29). The altar's location on the Israelite (west) side of the Jordan verifies this (22:11). Had they really intended to offer sacrifices on it, these East-Jordan tribes would have built it on the east side of the Jordan.

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,"

By some person whom they appointed to deliver the answer in their name.

"And said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel": Who were over those that were rulers of the thousands of Israel. Persons of greater authority than they, being princes of the respective tribes to which they belonged.

Up until this time, they did not understand what the complaint of the Israelites was. They certainly had not had opportunity to defend themselves. Now they speak in defense of what they have done.

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,)"

That Jehovah whom we, no less than you, acknowledge and adore as the God of gods, infinitely superior to all that are called gods. The multiplying of his titles, and the repetition of these

words, show their zeal and earnestness in this matter, and their abhorrence of the very thoughts of it.

"He knoweth": To him we appeal who knoweth all things, and the truth of what we are now saying. "And Israel he shall know"; not only our present words, but our future and constant course shall satisfy all Israel of our perseverance in the true religion. Our brethren the Israelites that dwell in the land of Canaan, whose representatives you are. Shall know, not only by our present declaration, but by our future conduct, and strict adherence to the pure worship of God in time to come. That it was never our view by what we have done to depart from it.

"If it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord": With a design to rebel against his word, and transgress his command.

"Save us not this day": This is said with respect to God, and as an apostrophe to him, as Jarchi, Kimchi, and Abarbanel observe. As expressing their desire to have no mercy shown them by him, but that vengeance might be taken on them by him, to whom all things were naked and open. And who full well knew whether they were guilty or not. Or else the address is to Phinehas, and the princes, that they would rise up and put them to death by sword, if this appeared to be the case. Or that all the other tribes would rise up, and make war against them, and cut them off with the edge of the sword, and not spare them.

God knows the intention of their hearts. He is God, He already knows why they built the altar. The two and a half tribes were horrified that the other tribes thought they had sinned against God. They are saying, if we have truly sinned against God, do not even try to help us.

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];"

That is, we desire, as we deserve, to be cut to pieces, and not saved, if it should appear to be our view. In building this altar, to revolt from the pure worship of God.

"Or if to offer thereon burnt offering, or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings": Even to the Lord himself. They declare that as they had no design to apostatize from God, and worship idols. So it was not their intention to offer any kind of sacrifice on the altar they had built, even to the Lord himself. And they take notice of every kind of offering, to remove every charge of this sort from them. And to purge themselves of every imputation of this nature. Then;

"Let the Lord himself require it": Seek it out, who is the omniscient God, and revenge it. Who is the Lord God Almighty, just and true.

They are saying, if they have sinned against God in this matter, God will pass judgement and punishment upon them.

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?"

So far, they suggest, were they from doing this, in order to turn from the pure worship of God. And introduce idolatrous worship, that it was to guard against everything of that kind for the future. And through fear of it, and anxiety and distress of mind, lest some time or another there should be any temptation to it in their posterity, had they built this altar.

"Saying, in time to come your children might speak unto our children": Or "tomorrow", in a short time after your heads, and ours, are laid in the grave, your posterity will accost us.

"Saying, what have you to do with the Lord God of Israel?" You are aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel and live in a foreign land, and not in the land of Canaan. Are separated from us by the river Jordan, are a different people from us, and have nothing to do with the tabernacle of the Lord, and the service of it. Or with the altar of the Lord, to offer sacrifice on it. Now as they returned to their own country, or when they got there, such anxious thoughts and fears rose up in their minds. Which they communicated to one another, and thought of this expedient to prevent what would be so fatal to their posterity. The Targum is, "you have no part in the Word of the Lord God of Israel" (see John 13:8).

This is saying that this is a memorial for their children to see, and know that they are indeed recognizing God, the same as the Israelites on the other side of Jordan are. The memorial shows that even though there is a river between them and the other tribes, they are all Israel. They all serve the One True God.

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."

And by it separated them from them, as if they were a distinct people. Not that this was really the case, but so they feared it would be represented in time to come. For though Jordan was the border of the land of Canaan, strictly so called, eastward (Num. 34:12); yet it did not exclude the land of the two tribes and a half from being part of the land of promise. For the Amorites, which before inhabited it, and were driven out of it, were Canaanites, and were one part of the people, whose land the Lord promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18).

"Ye children of Reuben, and children of Gad, have no part in the Lord": In his covenant and promises, in his worship, word, and ordinances. These are things you have nothing to do with, being separated from us his peculiar people. Or "have no part in the Word of the Lord", as the Targum, the promised Messiah, being without, or separated from him, as the Gentiles are said to be (Eph. 2:12).

"So shall your children make our children cease from fearing the Lord": From worshipping the Lord. The fear of the Lord being often put for the whole worship of God, external and internal (Eccl. 12:13). By behaving in the above manner towards them, they would be the cause and

occasion of their apostasy from the true God. And it would be in effect to say to them, "go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. 26:19).

Perhaps without the altar, even the nine and a half tribes on the west of Jordan will say, that the two and a half tribes on the east side of Jordan are not part of Israel. They might even try to stop their children from worshipping God.

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

One to another, in order to prevent the apostasy of our children from God. Their departure from his worship, and going into idolatry.

"Let us now prepare to build us an altar": Get materials ready, and set about it instantly, without any delay. While the thing dwells upon our minds.

"Not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice": Not for offerings of any kind required by the law. Neither for sin offerings nor trespass offerings, nor any other not named.

This altar they have built, is not to take the place of the altar in the tabernacle. It is not an altar to sacrifice to God on.

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."

That we are one people, worship one God, and serve at one altar. Of which this built was a resemblance, and would put them in mind of it.

"That we might do the service of the Lord before him": In the tabernacle, and at the altar. In the place where he had chosen to put his name and dwell.

"With our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings": To be brought at stated times, or as occasion required.

"That your children may not say to our children, in time to come, ye have no part in the Lord": Nor right to his altar, and so forbid them offering their sacrifices on it. Or "have no part in the Word of the Lord," as the Targum. The Messiah, whose sacrifice was typified by the sacrifices of the legal dispensation. And all such, who offered theirs in the faith of that, had a part in it, and their sins were expiated by it.

This altar is not an altar to God, but a memorial to show the right of Reuben's, Gad's, and the half tribe of Manasseh's children to worship God in the tabernacle, or temple with the other nine and half tribes. Three times a year the people would travel to the place where the presence of God

was to worship. The tabernacle would be that place, until the temple is built in Jerusalem and then it will be.

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."

To prevent any such usage of our children, and that they might have a ready answer to give.

"That it shall be, when they should so say unto us, or to our generations, in time to come": As above suggested, that they were a separate people from them, and had no interest in the Lord, nor right to his altar, nor concern in his worship.

"That we may say again": In reply, that is, our posterity.

"Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made": Which exactly agrees with the Mosaic altar. And which they could never have framed in so exact a manner if they had not seen it, and served at it. Wherefore this was a plain proof of their being originally worshippers of the same God. Partakers of the same altar, and were in the faith, fellowship, and communion of Israel.

"Not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices": Of any sort, that was not the intention of erecting it.

"But it is a witness between us and you": That we worship the same God, and are of the same faith and fellowship.

The altar would be a constant reminder to all generations, that the tribes on the east side of Jordan had every right and privilege in the temple that the tribes on the west side of the Jordan had.

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."

Against the command of the Lord, who ordered one altar to be made. To which all sacrifices were to be brought from the several parts of the land of Israel, and there to be offered on it. Or; "against the Word of the Lord", as the Targum. Christ typified both by the altar and the sacrifices on it. And who is but one, one priest, one sacrifice, one altar, one Mediator and Savior.

"And turn this day from following the Lord": Apostatize from him, and from his worship.

"To build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices": Which was never our intention, or ever entered into our hearts to erect one for such a purpose.

"Besides the altar of the Lord our God, that is before his tabernacle": It standing in the court of the tabernacle before the holy place.

This is repeating again, that this altar they have built is a memorial, and is not to take the place of the altar in the tabernacle.

Verses 30-34: Calling the altar "Witness" symbolized the tribes' commitment both to unity and truth (Yahweh is God). This reminds New Testament believers that neither purity of worship nor unity alone is enough. The two must be held together for God to be honored.

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."

For he was, being the son of Eleazar the high priest, so the word "priest" (Joshua 22:13); is to be joined, not to Eleazar but to Phinehas.

"And the princes of the congregation": The ten princes, who were sent by the congregation of Israel, one out of each tribe.

"And heads out of the thousands of Israel": These are the same with the princes, and this belongs to their title. Who were heads of the Chiliarches, or those who were rulers of thousands in Israel.

"Which were with him": With Phinehas, who were joined with him in the embassy, and now present with him.

"Heard the words that the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh; spake": In defense of themselves, explaining the meaning and design of the altar they had built.

"It pleased them": They were not only satisfied with their answer, but highly delighted with what they had done. As tending to preserve the common faith and fellowship of Israel.

We see from this that Phinehas and the princes had been sincere in their fear that the two and a half tribes on the east side of Jordan had blasphemed the name of God. They feared that all Israel, including them, would be punished. They are very pleased when they heard the explanation of what the altar is for. They are relieved for themselves, and for the two and one half tribes on the east side of Jordan as well.

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."

As the mouth of the delegation, and in their name.

"Said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh": The representatives of them assembled together on this occasion.

"This day we perceive that the Lord is among us": His Shekinah, as the Targum. His powerful Presence in preserving their brethren from committing a trespass, as they feared. His gracious Presence smiling upon them. And as the God of peace and order, and not of confusion, uniting and cementing their hearts in love to one another.

"Because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord": Which they were fearful and jealous of they had. But they found that the Lord had been good and gracious in preserving them from it.

"Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord": Into which they would have fallen, had that been the case. And would have felt the effects of the divine resentment and punishment, but now they were secure from them.

He is saying they see now that they had not sinned at all, and that there would be no chastisement from God on any of them for this.

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."

Being fully satisfied with the relation of things that had been given them, and having taken their leave of the assembly.

"Returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad": The Greek version adds, "and from the half tribe of Manasseh". Which, though not in the Hebrew text, is undoubtedly meant.

"Out of the land of Gilead": Which, though only a part of the country these tribes inhabited, is put for the whole. And it is not improbable that the assembly might be held in it.

"Unto the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel": The rest of the children of Israel who dwelt in the land of Canaan, properly so called.

"And brought them word again": Reported the whole affair. Related all that had passed, and acquainted them with the intention and design of their brethren erecting the altar. And what had been the issue of their embassy to them.

Now that they are convinced the two and a half tribes had not sinned in building the altar, they returned to their own tribes of Israel and reported to them the good news. They will not have to fight their brothers. This was a relief to everyone.

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."

They were quite satisfied with the account of things, and were pleased and delighted with what their brethren, the other two tribes, had done.

"And the children of Israel blessed God": Returned thanks to him, that there was no trespass committed against him. And no schism like to be made among them, nor any wrath to come upon them.

"And did not intend to go up against them in battle": For though upon first hearing of their building an altar, which they supposed was for idolatry, they had intended to make war against them. But now understanding the design of that building, they laid aside all thoughts of that kind.

"To destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt": Which they judged by the law in (Deut. 13:12), as they were obliged to do. The Greek version here adds also, "and the half tribe of Manasseh". And renders the last clause, and "they dwelt in it"; continued to dwell in it undisturbed by their brethren.

Joshua, Eleazar, and Phinehas had tried to do the will of God in all of their ministry. Everyone was pleased, there was no sin involved. The battle against Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh was called off.

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."

Which signifies a "witness". They caused such an inscription to be put upon it, or this word to be engraved on it, that so the intention of erecting it might be known in future time. That it was not for sacrifice, but to be a testimony of their being one with their brethren on the other side Jordan, in worship, faith, and fellowship.

"For it shall be a witness between us that the Lord is God": Is the one God, the God of them both, of all Israel. Whether on the one or the other side of Jordan. To be worshipped by them in one and the same manner. And their sacrifices to be offered to him on his altar before the tabernacle.

"Ed" sometimes goes before words that mean altar. This then, was a short way of saying altar. This altar was a memorial to God. It recognized the importance of God in all of their lives. It was also a constant reminder to all twelve tribes that they were one nation under God.

Joshua Chapter 22 Questions

1. Who called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh to talk to them?

2. What understanding did Moses have with them about their inheritance on the east side of Jordan?
3. How long have they stayed and fought for the tribes on the west side of Jordan?
4. Why had Joshua called them?
5. Why did Joshua praise them?
6. What does Joshua release them to do, now that there is peace?
7. What does he admonish them to do?
8. What is the best proof of your love for God?
9. How do we know their families at home had not moved into the cities?
10. What does the author believe interesting about Manasseh's inheritance?
11. What are they to share with their brethren, when they reach home?
12. What was the western side of Jordan called collectively?
13. What was the eastern side of Jordan called?
14. What was the altar, probably?
15. Why were the other tribes alarmed at them building the altar?
16. What did the congregation on the west side of Jordan want to do about the altar?
17. Who went to talk to the tribes on the eastern side of Jordan about the altar?
18. He is mentioned several times in an important role regarding _____ matters.
19. Why were there ten princes with him?
20. What complaint did the ten princes and Phinehas make?
21. What incident were they remembering that frightened them?
22. Why was the congregation afraid?
23. What offer did they make to Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh's tribes?
24. Who sinned, and God punished the whole congregation?
25. How did they reply to the complaints?
26. _____ knows the intention of their hearts.

27. Who really should be their judge?
28. Why had they built the altar?
29. What would the altar be a constant reminder of?
30. How did Phinehas react to their explanation?
31. What did Phinehas and the princes do, after they understood?
32. What did they name the altar?
33. What does the altar recognize?