

Joshua Chapter 22 Commentary

1 ¶ Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, 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: 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. 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. 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. 6 So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. 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, 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. 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.

Since the Lord has given Israel rest from their enemies (meaning; the inhabitants are not seeking to war with Israel now) Joshua gives Reuben, Gad, and the one-half tribe of Manasseh, release to go to their possession given to them by Moses on the east side of Jordan. He commends them for keeping their word of promise and standing and fighting faithfully with their brethren.

Joshua also warns them to keep all the commandments of the law, which God has given Israel. Though we be divided by the river Jordan, it does not give you leave to not faithfully, and wholly, follow God. Joshua, as the leader of Israel, blesses them, and they go to their homes.

One lesson we can draw from this is: when we give our word to others, we should perform and fulfill our promise. Another lesson we can draw from this is: if we are separated from our Christian brethren, or our church home in this world, by some circumstance; we are to continue to live the Christian life to the full. Separation from the brethren is no excuse for disobeying Christ Jesus.

Consider Jesus in incarnation: Jesus was constantly faithful to God the Father when he was separated, from his rightful position on the throne of God in heaven, and dwelt here in time on earth in a body of flesh. Surely, the constant obedience of Christ is a goad to us to faithfulness for us.

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. 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. 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. 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, 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. 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, 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? 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, 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. 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. 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.

The two and one-half tribes on the east of the river Jordan build an altar. It is a large altar that can be seen from afar. The tribes, who inherit the land of promise, hear of the building of this altar. They believe that these two and one-half tribes have forsaken God and turned to idolatry. The High Priest's son, Phinehas, and the heads of those in the land of promise get together, go to these two and one-half tribes and lay out their charges against them, reminding them of the anger of God and the destruction that idolatry has caused Israel.

They tell them; if you are going to turn to idolatry because the river Jordan separates us, gather up all you have and come into the land of promise. We will make room for you to be together with us, that you fall not out by the way. Oh, what great lessons we can learn from these, who are showing true brotherly love to those, who they believe have fallen out of the way of the Lord.

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, 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,) 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; 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? 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. 26 Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

The two and one-half tribes give answer to the charges that are laid against them. They assert that we have not built an altar upon which we will offer sacrifices, for the Lord's altar of sacrifice in the altar before the tabernacle. They assert; we have built this altar as a memorial and a reminder to our children, and to your children, in the future generations. A reminder, to both of us, that we are brethren, even though the river Jordan separates us.

Another lesson for us; do not draw wrong conclusions of others who are separated from us about their actions, without first consulting with them of the intent of their hearts and minds. This is exactly the principle we are taught in: *Mt 18:15-17; 15 ¶ "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."*

People have often forgotten this principle of God's doctrine. Many divisions of the church, of churches, and of church bodies, have been caused by failure to effectively communicate the truth of God's teaching. Men have drawn lines in the sand, and disconnected themselves from Christian fellowship by these lines, which they set by their own fleshly whims and not by "***thus saith the Lord.***" Many of these divisions could have been settled peacefully; if men had taken time to gather all involved in one group, and lay the intents of their hearts out to one another, always, in brotherly love, guiding each other back to "***thus saith the Lord.***"

In the end, we see the fruit of faithful inquiry of the actions of others. Israel at first intended to destroy these tribes for turning to idolatry. After their peaceful negotiations, Israel is brought to peaceful resolution and fellowship is restored between them. The altar is named Ed, which means *a witness, a testimony, a recorder*. We to have an altar of witness, and testimony, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Praise the Lord for brethren, who seek to fellowship in the unity of "***thus saith the Lord.***"