

JOSHUA

3. How many cities were given to the families of Gershon?
4. How many cities were given to the families of Merari?
5. Which family possessed Shechem?
6. Who possessed Kedesh?
7. Who possessed Ramoth-Gilead?
8. What was the total number of cities given to the Levites?
9. How many of these were cities of refuge?
10. Were any of God's promises left unfulfilled?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 22

Vv. 1- 9 *The dismissal of the eastern tribes.* The war of conquest had been finished. Land had been distributed to the tribes receiving an inheritance west of the Jordan. The three eastern tribes had fulfilled their promise of assisting to conquer the land, and they were now ready to return to their possessions east of the Jordan. Joshua called the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh and sent them home from Shiloh.

Vv. 10-20 *An altar erected at Jordan.* When the three eastern tribes reached the valley of the Jordan River they stopped on the west side and erected an altar. Their actions were reminiscent of the two memorials which Joshua and the children of Israel erected in the Jordan Valley when they crossed over on dry land near Jericho. Their motive in building this altar was misunderstood for a time, and it nearly caused a civil war in Israel.

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

Vv. 21-34 *A reason given for the altar.* The eastern tribes explained that their purpose in erecting the altar was reasonable. They had not built the altar in order to have their own place to worship. They were not trying to abandon the sanctuary which had been set up at Shiloh. It was not their purpose to offer strange sacrifices to a heathen god. They had erected the altar as a reminder to their brethren on the west that Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were an integral part of Israel.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Avoid the very appearance of evil.* The eastern tribes had not been very careful to prevent giving the wrong impression to their brethren. They erected an altar which had the appearance of being in competition with the altar at Shiloh. The Apostle Paul has written that Christians should avoid the very appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). It should be the aim of every Christian to dress in such a way that he would not be mistaken for a lewd person. He should conduct himself so as not to be thought of as one who is riotous and unruly. In every aspect of his life he should be careful of the appearance he makes.
2. *Zeal without knowledge is dangerous.* Phinehas led the children of Israel to war against the eastern tribes. On the surface, it had appeared that the eastern tribes were in rebellion against the Lord. Without making full inquiry into the matter, the ten princes who were with Phinehas and all the armies of Israel were ready to begin civil war. Phinehas charged the Gileadites with committing iniquity, similar to that practiced in Peor. They were compared to Achan, who committed a trespass in

the accursed thing. After the eastern tribes explained their actions, the other Israelites were satisfied; and civil war was averted. In many similar instances today, people jump to conclusions and condemn their neighbors on circumstantial evidence. Their zeal in striving to do what is right is admirable; but when zeal is based on insufficient evidence or inaccurate information, dangers of every sort arise.

3. *Out of sight; out of mind.* The eastern tribes were afraid that they would be forgotten by their brethren west of the Jordan. This was their reason for building an altar after the pattern of the altar at Shiloh. They knew that people soon forget their friends who are absent. Parents become unmindful of children who are away from home and neglect to pray for them. Children move aged parents to rest homes and are negligent in not observing their birthdays and other special occasions. Missionaries are sent to the field and forthwith forgotten. Such things ought not so to be, and every effort should be made to establish means for remembering those who are absent.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Dismissal of the Eastern Tribes 22:1-9

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.

1. *When were the eastern tribes dismissed?* 22:1

The eastern tribes were summoned to accompany Joshua across the Jordan as he made his plans for the conquest of Canaan (1:12 ff.). Since this summons began the account of the war, their dismissal might be considered a proper conclusion to the history of the conquest. Some suppose these auxiliaries were sent back home immediately after the conquest was concluded. If such be the case,

the account of their returning east of the Jordan is not in its proper place in the text. It may seem only natural for the history of the conquest itself to be completed fully before any other narratives were introduced; but since the eastern tribes were dismissed from Shiloh and the tribes assembled there for the first time during the casting of the lots for the land, the dismissal of the eastern tribes probably did not occur until after lots had been cast. When the other tribes had received land assigned to them, the eastern tribes were allowed to return to their inheritance east of the Jordan. The narrative is doubtless in chronological order.

2. *What did Moses command them to do?* 22:2

Moses misunderstood the three tribes' reason for asking to settle east of the Jordan. He thought that they were afraid to go into Canaan. Such a fear would have been similar to the one which swept over Israel at Kadesh-Barnea after the sending of the twelve spies (Numbers 13). The eastern tribes explained that they were not afraid to go into Canaan. They were willing to go and to help conquer the land. They only requested to be allowed to settle east of the Jordan when the conquest was concluded. When Moses heard them say they would go and fight, he said they would be free to return home to the territory east of the Jordan. These tribes had done this, and so they were allowed to go to their portions of land.

3. *Where did these tribes get their riches?* 22:8

As Joshua blessed the tribes, he said, "Return with much riches." They had cattle, silver, gold, brass, iron, and very much raiment. It is finally described as "spoil." This spoil would have come to the tribes as they conquered the many cities in Canaan. They were allowed to take spoil of every city except from the city of Jericho. This city with all of its goods was dedicated to the Lord as the firstfruits

of the land of Canaan. After Jericho fell, Israel was free to take spoil from every other city. The eastern tribes received a portion of this booty, and they were allowed to take it home to their possession.

An Altar Erected At Jordan 22:10-20

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.

4. *On what shore of Jordan did they build their altar?*
22:10

Since it is said that they erected the altar when they came unto the borders of Jordan, it is apparent that the altar was erected on the west side of the Jordan. Even though Phinehas and the other Israelites who were with him went "unto the land of Gilead" (verse 15), it still seems apparent that the altar was on the west bank of Jordan. Phinehas and his men would have been obliged to cross the Jordan and enter into the land east of the Jordan in order to hold a conference with the eastern tribes. The altar would have served its ultimate purpose best by being on the west side of the river, for there it would serve as a constant reminder to the western tribes.

5. *Why did the rest of Israel think of going to war?* 22:12

There was no separation of church and state in the days of Joshua. God was a ruler of Israel in a very real

sense. His laws were the laws of the state. He had ordained that there should be only one place of worship (Deuteronomy 12). When the eastern tribes set up another altar besides the one which was at Shiloh, the western tribes naturally supposed they were transgressing God's laws. They banded themselves together as a military force to punish the criminals.

6. *Who was Phinehas?* 22:13

Phinehas was the son of Eleazar, the high priest. He had proved himself to be zealous on behalf of the Lord when he punished those who committed iniquity in the days of Balaam while Israel was in Midian, across the Jordan River from Jericho. This same Phinehas had taken a javelin and slain Cozbi and Zimri (Numbers 25). He is to be commended for his zeal in enforcing the laws of God, but he and those who were with him should have made further inquiry before taking such drastic measures in the matter of the altar erected by the eastern tribes.

7. *Why did ten princes go with Phinehas?* 22:14

The ten princes were selected from the tribes of Israel who lived west of the Jordan. Each was the chief of a house in these western tribes. There were only ten tribes west of the Jordan since the three tribes east of the Jordan had already gone home. There were ten west of the Jordan since another part of the tribe of Manasseh had settled in the western section.

8. *Why was the building of an altar a sin?* 22:16

Phinehas considered the erecting of the altar as a trespass. He compared it to the iniquity which was committed in Peor. He also compared it to the sin of Achan (verses 17, 20). Phinehas believed the erecting of the altar was a direct violation of God's commandment that the people of Israel should bring their burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, heave offerings, vows, freewill offerings, and firstlings of their herds and flocks to the one place which

God should select as the center of worship (Deuteronomy 12:6, 7). God had given this commandment in order to prevent Israel from worshiping different gods in many different places in a manner similar to that followed by the Canaanites who lived in the land. Phinehas felt that such a sin should not go unpunished.

9. *What was the iniquity of Peor?* 22:17

The sin which was committed at Peor was of great consequences. Phinehas said that the congregation of Israel was not cleansed from that sin even in his day. On that occasion the people of Moab enticed the Israelites to sacrifice to their god, Chemosh; and lewd women among them enticed the men of Israel to commit fornication (Numbers 25:3, 4, 6). A ringleader in those sins was Zimri, a prince of Simeon. When God punished Israel in those days for those sins, twenty-four thousand Israelites were slain. Most of those must have been from Simeon since they were reduced to 22,200 in the second census from a much larger number of 59,300 in the first census. The short time which elapsed after the sin of Baal-Peor before the second census was not time enough for the tribe to recover from such a catastrophe.

10. *Why remember the sin of Achan?* 22:20

Israel had been given very specific instructions about taking spoils of war as they conquered Palestine. They were to be allowed the taking of spoils from every city except from the city of Jericho. Jericho was the first city they attacked. It was something of a firstfruits of the land to be given completely unto the Lord. As a result, they were expressly commanded not to take any kind of spoil of war from Jericho. When Achan saw a wedge of gold, a Babylonian garment, and some pieces of silver, he coveted these items and stole them. His bold and brazen disobedience of an express commandment of the Lord brought punishment not only upon himself but upon other

members of his household. Phinehas considered the erection of another altar a similar kind of brazen disobedience. He compared what he considered to be the sin of the eastern tribes to the sin of Achan.

A Reason Given for the Altar 22:21-34

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 of 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.

11. *What was the fear of the eastern tribes?* 22:24

The eastern tribes were afraid they would be forgotten by the rest of Israel. Their inheritance was east

of the Jordan, and the Jordan River formed a very natural boundary between them and the rest of the people. All of the Israelites were expected to attend the three annual feasts at the Tabernacle. There were other occasions when the whole congregation would gather together, and the eastern tribes were afraid that the western tribes would neglect to send a summons to them.

12. *In what way would an altar be a witness?* 22:27, 28

The altar which the eastern tribes erected at the edge of the Jordan was patterned after the brazen altar which stood in front of the Tabernacle. God had instructed the Israelites to make an altar which was five cubits long and five cubits wide. It was also to be three cubits high. Around it was to be a network or a grating. It was to have a ledge on it. Four horns were to be at the four corners of the altar. The altar which the eastern tribes built must have been built according to the instructions given in Exodus 27, and anyone who saw it would know they must have been a part of the nation of Israel or else they would not have had access to these plans. In this way, they identified themselves as being a part of Israel.

13. *Why were the rest of the Israelites pleased with the explanation of the eastern tribes?* 22:30

The western tribes could hardly have had any real desire to wage war against their brethren east of the Jordan, although they were willing to fight them in order to punish those who broke God's laws. They must have been glad when they found they did not have justifiable reasons for starting a civil war. The explanation was plausible. Surely the eastern tribes had no wicked motive in building the altar, and their wanting to be remembered was understandable. All of the leaders of Israel must have heaved a great sigh of relief when they heard the explanation.

14. *What was the meaning of the name given to the altar?*
22:34

The word, *ed*, means "a witness." The eastern tribes called this altar by that name for it was indeed a witness to their being an integral part of Israel. Joshua used this same word when he erected a stone as a memorial of Israel's making a covenant to serve God faithfully. Of his stone, Joshua said, "Behold, this stone shall be a *witness* to us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a *witness* unto you, lest ye deny your God" (Joshua 24:27).

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 22

1. Name the three tribes which settled east of the Jordan?
2. From what point were these three tribes dismissed?
3. Where did these three tribes erect an altar?
4. What name was given to the land possessed by the eastern tribes?
5. Whom did the children of Israel send to accost the eastern tribes?
6. How many princes of Israel were with him?
7. What earlier tragedy in Israel did the erection of the altar call to mind?
8. To the sin of what man did they compare this act of the eastern tribes?
9. What name was given to the altar erected by the eastern tribes?
10. What was the meaning of the name given to the altar?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 23

Vv. 1- 5 *A review of Joshua's work.* Joshua 23 is a digest of Joshua's address to the elders and officers of the children of Israel. The address was given sometime after the conquest was