**Joshua**

Chapter 22

*Eastern Tribes Return Home*

**Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh 2 and said to them, “You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. 3 For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. 4 Now that the Lord your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul.” 6 Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes. 7 (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan with their brothers.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them, 8 saying, “Return to your homes with your great wealth—with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing—and divide with your brothers the plunder from your enemies.” 9 So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the Lord through Moses. 10 When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. 11 And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side, 12 the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them. 13 So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 14 With him they sent ten of the chief men, one for each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans. 15 When they went to Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh—they said to them: 16 “The whole assembly of the Lord says: ‘How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? 17 Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the Lord! 18 And are you now turning away from the Lord? “ ‘If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. 19 If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. 20 When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.’ ” 21 Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: 22 “The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the Lord, do not spare us this day. 23 If we have built our own altar to turn away from the Lord and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the Lord himself call us to account. 24 “No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, ‘What do you have to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? 25 The Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the Lord.’ So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the Lord. 26 “That is why we said, ‘Let us get ready and build an altar—but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.’ 27 On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the Lord at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no share in the Lord.’ 28 “And we said, ‘If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the Lord’s altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’ 29 “Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the Lord our God that stands before his tabernacle.” 30 When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of the Israelites—heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. 31 And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, “Today we know that the Lord is with us, because you have not acted unfaithfully toward the Lord in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the Lord’s hand.” 32 Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. 33 They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived. 34 And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the Lord is God.**

**22:1–34** The two and a half tribes from east of the Jordan, faithful in battle, are now commended by Joshua and sent to their homes. But their “altar of witness” (see vv. 26–27, 34) was misunderstood, and disciplinary action against them was narrowly averted. (CSB)

**22:1** The 2½ tribes that had received their land on the east side of the Jordan River before the conquest of Canaan west of the river. Cf Nu 32; Dt 3:12–20; Jsh 13:8–32. (TLSB)

**22:2** *all that Moses … commanded.* Moses had ordered them to join the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan (Nu 32:16–27; Dt 3:18). (CSB)

**22:3** *keep the charge*. Lit, “the keeping of the command”; i.e. their “duty.” Cf 1:12–15.

**22:4** *tents*. Hbr can also refer to more permanent “homes,” probably the meaning here. (TLSB)

**22:5** *love the Lord… serve him with all your heart.* Both Moses and Joshua saw that obedience to the laws of God would require love and service from the heart. In the ancient Near East, “love” was also a political term, indicating truehearted loyalty to one’s king. (CSB)

Summary of how Israel is to respond in faith under the Mosaic covenant. *love* … *walk* … *keep* … *cling* … *serve*. These verbs guide believing Israelites in their response of faith. Israel’s actions flow from the Lord’s prior deep affection displayed through His acts of deliverance. (Cf 1Jn 4:19.) (TLSB)

**22:6–7** *blessed*. Blessing in its highest sense invokes the name of the Lord for spiritual and physical well-being. Joshua may have used a liturgical formula, such as the Aaronic blessing of Nu 6:22–27, or v 8 may quote the actual words of the blessing. (TLSB)

**22:8** If these are the actual words of Joshua’s blessing, he gives the tribes a peaceful dismissal (like our “Depart in peace”) and speaks of their being able to share their wealth (giving to others is a blessed activity and a blessing for the giver, Ac 20:35). (TLSB)

*wealth*. Spoils of war from Jericho had been devoted to destruction at God’s command (ch 6). But thereafter, Israel was allowed to keep the spoils from their victories and amassed a great quantity of their enemies’ livestock, metals, and clothing. (TLSB)

*divide with your brothers.* Moses also had seen the need for a fair sharing of the spoils of war (Nu 31:25–27). (CSB)

Fellow tribesmen who had stayed behind in Gilead, east of the Jordan, to protect their families and livestock. (TLSB)

**22:9** *Canaan*. Land west of the Jordan. (TLSB)

*Gilead*. Land east of the Jordan. (TLSB)

**22:1–9** In the first of his three farewell sermons, Joshua dismisses the eastern tribes after they faithfully finished the work they promised to do. Commitment, responsibility and faithfulness to our word are not always present among us. The commitment and faithfulness of the Lord in saving us from our enemies is proven by the cross of Christ, who grants us faith and faithfulness. • When we finish the tasks You give us, “Lord, dismiss us with Your blessing, Fill our hearts with joy and peace; Let us each, Your love possessing, Triumph in redeeming grace. O refresh us; O refresh us, Trav’ling through this wilderness.” Amen. (*LSB* 924:1) (TLSB)

**22:10** *Geliloth.* Understood in the Septuagint to be Gilgal, next to Jericho; more likely it was a site east of Shiloh along the Jordan River (18:17). (CSB)

*altar of imposing size*. Lit, “large in regard to appearance.” The altar may have been large to make it clear to the other tribes that they were not trying to hide a small, secret altar. (TLSB)

**22:11** *when the Israelites heard.* Anxiety about apostasy led to hasty conclusions. They thought the altar had been set up as a rival to the true altar at Shiloh. (CSB)

**22:12** *gathered at Shiloh.* In the presence of God at the tabernacle. (CSB)

*to go to war against them.* To take disciplinary action (cf. Dt 13:12–18; Jdg 20). (CSB)

Cf Dt 13:12–18, which tells what Israel is to do if fellow Israelites start to worship other gods. In their assumption about the eastern tribes’ action, the western tribes are following this command. (TLSB)

**22:13–14** A prestigious delegation is sent to try to turn the Transjordan tribes from their (supposed) act of rebellion against the Lord. (CSB)

**22:13** *Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest*. Eleazar is the son of Aaron (Ex 6:23) and the high priest at the time of Joshua. Phinehas is thus the grandson of Aaron; he will be the high priest at the death of Eleazar. First mention of Phinehas in Jsh. Cf Nu 25:10–13; Ps 106:28–31 for his righteous actions earlier. (TLSB)

**22:14** *chiefs*. Tribe of Levi is represented by Phinehas. The 9½ tribes each have a representative chief (including a chief from the half-tribe of Manasseh west of the river). Thus there are 10 chiefs plus Phinehas. (TLSB)

**22:16** *whole congregation*. They speak as though the eastern tribes have already rejected the true God and are no longer part of the congregation. *breach of faith*. See note, 7:1. *rebellion*. Allegation (not the reality) is that by building the altar, the eastern tribes have revolted against the Lord. (TLSB)

*How could you … ?* The accusations were very grave: You have committed apostasy and rebellion. (CSB)

**22:17** *Peor.* Where some of the Israelites became involved in the Moabite worship of Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1–5). (CSB)

Lit, “the sin *of* Peor”; refers to Israel’s evil action recorded in Nu 25 involving “Baal of Peor.” Baal was the Canaanite male fertility god, said to be the son of the Canaanite’s chief god, El, and his wife, Asherah. (TLSB)

*plague*. Refers to the divine punishment described in Nu 25:8–9. (TLSB)

**22:18** *tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel*. The Lord deals with His people as one body; therefore, all the tribes of Israel will feel His just anger if the 2½ tribes have rebelled against Him. Thus, the 9½ tribes seek to end the problem, even by means of war, so they are not affected by God’s wrath because of collective retribution. (TLSB)

**22:19–20** Western tribes extend a generous offer to the eastern tribes; they can return to the west side of the Jordan and even take some of the western tribes’ land for their own. They reason that losing some land is preferable to losing God’s covenant and experiencing His judgment. The delegation believes the tribes can reconcile the matter peacefully. (TLSB)

**22:19** *is defiled.* By pagan worship, corrupting its inhabitants. (CSB)

Western tribes reason that the eastern tribes might consider the land east of the Jordan to be spiritually unclean, perhaps due to the absence of the tabernacle there. The tabernacle is the place of various rites prescribed by the Lord to take away spiritual uncleanness. (TLSB)

*the Lord’s land.* The promised land proper had never included Transjordan territory. Canaan was the land the Lord especially claimed as his own and promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (CSB)

Land west of the Jordan, where the tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Lord, was. The Law of Moses had said that the Lord would choose one place where He would cause His name to dwell (Dt 12:5, 11); that was the tabernacle and later the temple. Those words prepared for the redeeming work of Jesus, the new temple (Jn 2:18–22). (TLSB)

*other than the altar of the Lord*. The altar of the Lord, prescribed in Ex 27, was at the tabernacle, presently at Shiloh, west of the Jordan.(TLSB)

**22:20** *Achan … the whole community of Israel.* See note on 7:1–26. (CSB)

Probably refers to the 36 Israelite soldiers who died at the first attempt to capture Ai (7:5); they died at Canaanite hands because of Achan’s guilt. Less likely that this refers to the death of Achan’s family, since the Hbr of 7:24–25 is ambiguous as to whether the family of Achan was executed along with him. (TLSB)

**22:22** *The Mighty One, God, the Lord!* See note on Ps 50:1. The repetition of the sacred names gives an oath-like quality to this strong denial of any wrongdoing. (CSB)

In their vehement and solemn oath of denial, the eastern tribes invoke three names of the true God: El (The Mighty One), Elohim (God), and Yahweh (the Lord). (TLSB)

**22:23** *offerings*. cf Lv 1:3–3:17; 6:14–23; 7:11–18. Dt 12:13–14 gives an explicit command not to offer burnt offerings anywhere except at the Lord’s one designated location: His tabernacle and later the Jerusalem temple. The offerings at Mount Ebal (8:30–35) were by special divine command and thus did not violate the prohibition. The offering of sacrifices only at the Lord’s one altar points forward to the once for all sacrifice of Jesus on the one cross at Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**22:26–27** *nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness*. Purpose of their altar is the same as that of the heap of stones that Jacob and Laban set up in Gn 31:43–52: a witness between them. It was never intended to function as a sacrificial altar. (TLSB)

**22:27** *the service of the Lord*. Worship that God prescribed esp in Lv. (TLSB)

*in His presence*. Emphasizes that the location of their service would not be at the replica altar they have just built but at the tabernacle at Shiloh (18:1). Cf v 29. (TLSB)

*witness.* The altar, presumably of uncut stone (see 8:31; Ex 20:25), was to serve as a testimony to the commitment of the Transjordan tribes to remain loyal to the Lord, and to their continued right to worship the Lord at the tabernacle—even though they lived outside the land of promise. It constitutes the sixth memorial monument in the land noted by the author of Joshua (see note on 10:27). (CSB)

**22:28** *copy of the altar of the Lord*. Replica altar near the Jordan is to serve as a type of the true altar at the tabernacle at Shiloh. (TLSB)

**22:30** *heard* … *it was good in their eyes*. Mixed metaphor, common in languages when idioms are used. (TLSB)

**22:31** *the Lord* *is in our midst*. Refers to His gracious presence in Israel, not to His omnipresence. Peaceful resolution proves that the Lord has been present in grace with the whole nation. The Lord is present according to His grace with His covenant people through His OT means of grace: His Word, ark, tabernacle, altar where atonement takes place, and His sacred institutions, such as circumcision. (TLSB)

*you have rescued the Israelites.* Their words prevented a terrible punishment that the other tribes were about to inflict as a divine act of judgment (consider the implications of v. 20). (CSB)

If the original allegations had been correct, the hand of the Lord would have fallen in judgment on Israel. By not committing sin, they spared Israel that judgment.

**22:33** *report*. Concerning what the altar truly meant and about the peaceful resolution. (TLSB)

**22:34** *name.* Such extended names were common in the ancient Near East. (CSB)

*Witness*. Even inanimate objects can serve as witnesses or reminders. The replica altar silently witnesses to the truth that the real altar resides at the tabernacle and that the eastern tribes are a part of Israel, though separated from the tabernacle by a river. (TLSB)

**22:10–34** The misunderstanding about the altar is peacefully resolved. Believers still carry their old sinful natures; therefore, misunderstandings or false accusations sometimes flare up among them. But the power of God’s Word and Spirit working in our hearts can bring about genuine reconciliation and peace. • When we presume guilt on the part of others, lead us, O Lord, to listen humbly and to speak the truth in love. May Your name be blessed as Your Spirit cleans our ears of unfounded skepticism and our tongues of loveless criticism. Amen. (TLSB)