

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 22

The Eastern Tribes Return Home

At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 2 and said to them, “You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. 3 You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God. 4 And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to 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 to their tents. 7 Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their brothers in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their homes and blessed them, 8 he said to them, “Go back to your tents with much wealth and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers.” 9 So the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the people of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land of which they had possessed themselves by command of the LORD through Moses.

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. (CSB)

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 true-hearted 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)

The Eastern Tribes' Altar of Witness

10 And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. **11** And the people of Israel heard it said, “Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.” **12** And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. **13** Then the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, **14** and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. **15** And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, **16** “Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, ‘What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the LORD? **17** Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD, **18** that you too must turn away this day from following the LORD? And if you too rebel against the LORD today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. **19** But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the LORD's land where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among

us. Only do not rebel against the LORD or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the LORD our God. 20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity.” 21 Then the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, 22 “The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the LORD, do not spare us today 23 for building an altar to turn away from following the LORD. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the LORD himself take vengeance. 24 No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? 25 For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the LORD.’ So your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD. 26 Therefore we said, ‘Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, 27 but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, “You have no portion in the LORD.”’ 28 And we thought, ‘If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, “Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you.”’ 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away this day from following the LORD by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!” 30 When Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes. 31 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, “Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD.” 32 Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the chiefs, returned from the people of Reuben and the people of Gad in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the people of Israel, and brought back word to them. 33 And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled. 34 The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, “For,” they said, “it is a witness between us that the LORD is God.”

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 *people of Israel 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)

what is this breach of faith? 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 unclean.* 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 ... all congregation of Israel.* 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!* 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. (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 delivered the people of Israel. 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 *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)