

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Joshua - Lesson 9 - Chps. 22-23

In Review

In our last lesson, the Israelites set up the tabernacle in a permanent place - in Shiloh, which is located in Ephraim about 35 miles north of Jerusalem. Chapters 13 through 19 describe the distribution of the land of Canaan to the various tribes by casting lots. Caleb and Joshua also received their inheritance. Cities of refuge were named for the protection of those who needed refuge from the avenger of blood. In addition, the Levites were given cities throughout Israel to live in since no tribal land was apportioned for them. Our last lesson ended with:

The Promise Fulfilled

Joshua 21:43 (NKJV) So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. **44** The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. **45** Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

After seven years of conquest, only one thing had not yet happened - not all of the Canaanites were driven out of the land. Some of them remained, though none *“stood against them.”*

The Eastern Tribes

In Joshua chapter 22, the two and a half eastern tribes are sent home after a job well done in helping their brethren. Let's review the history of these two and a half tribes who were given an inheritance on the *east* side of the Jordan River.

Numbers 32:1 (NLT) The tribes of Reuben and Gad owned vast numbers of livestock. So when they saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were ideally suited for their flocks and herds, **2** they came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the other leaders of the community. They said . . . **4** The Lord has conquered this whole area for the community of Israel, and it is ideally suited for all our livestock. **5** If we have found favor with you, please let us have this land as our property instead of giving us land across the Jordan River.”

6 “Do you intend to stay here while your brothers go across and do all the fighting?” Moses asked the men of Gad and Reuben. **7** “Why do you want to discourage the rest of the people of Israel from going across to the land the Lord has given them? . . .

Moses then accused the tribes of being like the ten spies who discouraged Israel from entering the Promised Land. Moses called them *“a brood of sinners”* and said they were making the Lord very angry with Israel.

16 But they approached Moses and said, “We simply want to build pens for our livestock and fortified towns for our wives and children. **17** Then we will arm ourselves and lead our fellow Israelites into battle until we have brought them safely to their land. Meanwhile, our families will stay in the fortified towns we build here, so they will be safe from any attacks by the local people. **18** We will not return to

our homes until all the people of Israel have received their portions of land. **19** But we do not claim any of the land on the other side of the Jordan. We would rather live here on the east side and accept this as our grant of land."

The tribes stood their ground and made their case. They would build cities for their families and pens for their livestock. Then they would go with their brethren to help them conquer their territories across Jordan. But after their duty was done, they would return to the east side and live there, accepting it as their inheritance.

Numbers 32:20 Then Moses said, "If you keep your word and arm yourselves for the Lord's battles, **21** and if your troops cross the Jordan and keep fighting until the Lord has driven out his enemies, **22** then you may return when the Lord has conquered the land. You will have fulfilled your duty to the Lord and to the rest of the people of Israel. And the land on the east side of the Jordan will be your property from the Lord. **23** But if you fail to keep your word, then you will have sinned against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. . . ."

25 Then the men of Gad and Reuben replied, "We, your servants, will follow your instructions exactly . . ."

28 So Moses gave orders to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of the clans of Israel. **29** He said, "The men of Gad and Reuben who are armed for battle must cross the Jordan with you to fight for the Lord. If they do, give them the land of Gilead as their property when the land is conquered . . ."

31 The tribes of Gad and Reuben said again, "We are your servants, and we will do as the Lord has commanded! **32** We will cross the Jordan into Canaan fully armed to fight for the Lord, but our property will be here on this side of the Jordan."

33 So Moses assigned land to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph. He gave them the territory of King Sihon of the Amorites and . . . King Og of Bashan . . .

That was then, and now we come to Joshua chapter 22 after the land west of the Jordan has been divided among the nine and a half tribes there.

Joshua Chapter 22

Joshua 22:1 (NLT) Then Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. **2** He told them, "You have done as Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, and you have obeyed every order I have given you. **3** During all this time you have not deserted the other tribes. You have been careful to obey the commands of the Lord your God right up to the present day. **4** And now the Lord your God has given the other tribes rest, as he promised them. So go back home to the land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you as your possession on the east side of the Jordan River. **5** But be very careful to obey all the commands and the instructions that Moses gave to you. Love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul." **6** So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went home.

It seems as if all is well. The eastern tribes kept their word to fight with their brethren. Now they were ready to go home to their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan; but a misunderstanding develops between the eastern tribes and the western tribes. On the way home, the eastern tribes build an "altar" and cause quite

an uproar. The Israelites were to have only one altar - at the Tabernacle in Shiloh on the west side of Jordan. There was to be no other. But . . .

Joshua 22:10 But while they were still in Canaan, and when they came to a place called Geliloth near the Jordan River, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh stopped to build a large and imposing altar.

11 The rest of Israel heard . . . and prepared to go to war against them. **13** First, however, they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to talk with the tribes . . .

In Deuteronomy 12:1-14, God had given explicit instructions through Moses regarding the place to worship God in the Promised Land - and regarding God's altar.

Deuteronomy 12:8 (NLT) “. . . Today all of you are doing as you please, **9** because you have not yet arrived at . . . the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. **10** But you will soon cross the Jordan River and live in the land the Lord your God is giving you. When he gives you rest from all your enemies and you're living safely in the land, **11** you must bring everything I command you—your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, your sacred offerings, and your offerings to fulfill a vow—to the designated place of worship, the place the Lord your God chooses for his name to be honored.

12 “You must celebrate there in the presence of the Lord your God . . . **13** Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings just anywhere you like. **14** You may do so only at the place the Lord will choose within one of your tribal territories. There you must offer your burnt offerings and do everything I command you.

At this time there was only one altar in Israel - at the tabernacle in Shiloh. When the western tribes heard that another “altar” had been built, they suspected that the eastern tribes were leading their people into idolatry. Deuteronomy gives instruction should this happen:

Deuteronomy 13:12 “When you begin living in the towns the Lord your God is giving you, you may hear **13** that scoundrels among you are leading their fellow citizens astray by saying, ‘Let us go worship other gods’—gods you have not known before. **14** In such cases, you must examine the facts carefully. If you find that the report is true and such a detestable act has been committed among you, **15** you must attack that town and completely destroy all its inhabitants, as well as all the livestock. **16** Then you must pile all the plunder in the middle of the open square and burn it. Burn the entire town as a burnt offering to the Lord your God. That town must remain a ruin forever; it may never be rebuilt.

Idolatry on this scale would not be tolerated in Israel and would be met with war. However, the above passage states that “*you must examine the facts carefully,*” and that is why the western tribes sent the delegation led by Phinehas the priest. However, while the delegation was on its way to determine the facts, the armies of the western tribes were preparing for battle.

Joshua 22:15 When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes . . . **16** “The whole community of the Lord demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel. How could you turn away from the Lord and build an altar for yourselves in rebellion against him? **17** Was our sin at Peor not enough? To this day we are not fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire community of the Lord. **18** And yet today you are turning away from following the Lord. If you rebel against the Lord today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

Phinehas was sensitive to the matter at Peor (Numbers 25). It was a terrible failure in Israel shortly before they were to cross over the Jordan. The Israelite men were enticed by the local women (who had been instructed by Balaam) to build an altar and sacrifice to Baal Peor, a Canaanite god. As a result of God's wrath, 24,000 Israelites died. Phinehas stopped the plague by being zealous for the Lord. God made Phinehas high priest *"because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel"* (Numbers 25:13).

Phinehas thought that the actions of the eastern tribes were treacherous - like what happened at Peor. In fact, they could probably see Mount Peor from where they were right now. It was all too much . . .

Joshua 22:19 "If you need the altar because the land you possess is defiled, then join us in the Lord's land, where the Tabernacle of the Lord is situated, and share our land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar other than the one true altar of the Lord our God. **20** Didn't divine anger fall on the entire community of Israel when Achan . . . sinned by stealing the things set apart for the Lord? He was not the only one who died because of his sin."

21 Then the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the clans of Israel: **22** "The Lord, the Mighty One, is God! The Lord, the Mighty One, is God! He knows the truth, and may Israel know it, too! We have not built the altar in treacherous rebellion against the Lord. If we have done so, do not spare our lives this day. **23** If we have built an altar for ourselves to turn away from the Lord or to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings, may the Lord himself punish us.

24 "The truth is, we have built this altar because we fear that in the future your descendants will say to ours, 'What right do you have to worship the Lord, the God of Israel?' **25** The Lord has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and you people of Reuben and Gad. You have no claim to the Lord.' So your descendants may prevent our descendants from worshiping the Lord.

26 "So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, **27** but as a memorial. It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the Lord at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings. Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no claim to the Lord.'

28 "If they say this, our descendants can reply, 'Look at this copy of the Lord's altar that our ancestors made. It is not for burnt offerings or sacrifices; it is a reminder of the relationship both of us have with the Lord.' **29** Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. Only the altar of the Lord our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose."

30 When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community . . . heard this . . . they were satisfied. **31** Phinehas . . . replied to them, "Today we know the Lord is among us because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord as we thought. Instead, you have rescued Israel from being destroyed by the hand of the Lord."

32 Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the other leaders left the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and returned to the land of Canaan to tell the Israelites what had happened. **33** And all the Israelites were satisfied and praised God and spoke no more of war against Reuben and Gad.

34 The people of Reuben and Gad named the altar "Witness," [KJV: called the altar Ed] for they said, "It is a witness between us and them that the Lord is our God, too."

The whole matter turned out to be a misunderstanding brought about by an unwise decision to build an “altar” (which was really a memorial) that was thought to be another working altar. Though the eastern tribes had good intentions, and they wanted the other tribes never to forget that they were a part of Israel, they caused a problem by *appearing* to be in rebellion against the law of God by building another “altar” that was not in the designated place of worship - Shiloh. After much discussion, it was decided that their intention was good, the altar was really a memorial, and so the matter was left to rest.

Joshua Chapter 23

We were first introduced to Joshua in Exodus 17 in the battle against the Amalekites. Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle and was recognized as a mighty warrior and military general. In Exodus 24:13, Joshua is called “Moses’ assistant.” Together, they climbed Mount Sinai, Moses going all the way to the top and Joshua not far away, waiting for Moses to return.

In Exodus 33, we find Moses and Joshua both inside the tent of meeting where the Lord spoke to Moses face to face. After Moses left the tent, Joshua stayed longer in the presence of the Lord. Here we see another quality of Joshua - he has a great desire to be in the presence of the Lord.

Another quality of Joshua is seen in Numbers 11 when God took some of the Spirit that was upon Moses and placed it upon the elders so that they could be a help to Moses. As God did this, His Spirit came upon them and they prophesied. Two of the seventy had not gathered at the Tabernacle, and yet they still prophesied where they were in the camp.

Numbers 11:27 And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”

29 Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!”

This shows us another quality of Joshua - that he was loyal to the man of God and to God’s institutions.

In Numbers 13, Moses sent out twelve spies to explore Canaan. Ten of the spies gave a bad report - a report filled with unbelief. Only Joshua and Caleb gave a report of faith - that Israel could indeed conquer the land through the help of the Lord. So here we see Joshua as a man of faith and trust - believing the Word of God to be true.

In Numbers 27, the Lord tells Moses to go up on a mountain overlooking the Promised Land. Moses sees it, but he will not enter in because of his rashness in striking the rock instead of speaking to it for water. Then:

Numbers 27:18 And the Lord said to Moses: “Take Joshua . . . with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him . . . **20** And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient . . .

Numbers 27:22 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. **23** And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

We see Joshua officially chosen by God to be the next leader over Israel. He would be the one who would inquire of the Lord through the priest as to the will of God for Israel. Joshua would be the one to lead the Israelites into Canaan. In Numbers 34:17, God commands that when they enter into the land, Joshua would be the one to divide the land, along with Eleazar the priest who would help to cast the lot.

Let's list these great qualities of Joshua: they are warrior, faithful assistant, worshiper, zealous for the man of God and house of God, and believer in the Word of God (obedient to the command of God). And because of these qualities, God made him leader over Israel.

And now we come to our final story in the book of Joshua. We will read Joshua's last words before he dies and is gathered to his fathers.

Joshua's Final Words to Israel

Joshua 23:1 (NLT) The years passed, and the Lord had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old, **2** called together all the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel.

Joshua and Caleb are in an exclusive club. Only these two men (of those over the age of twenty in Israel) were allowed to live and enter the Promised Land after Israel's great rebellion at the bad report of the ten spies. They are about twenty years older than the eldest Israelites.

He said to them, "I am now a very old man. **3** You have seen everything the Lord your God has done for you during my lifetime. The Lord your God has fought for you against your enemies. **4** I have allotted to you as your homeland all the land of the nations yet unconquered, as well as the land of those we have already conquered—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. **5** This land will be yours, for the Lord your God will himself drive out all the people living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

Joshua did all the Lord asked him to do. Some of the land was left to be fully possessed - there is always something for the next generation to do, but there are also the promises of God for each generation. God promised to work for the next generation, just like he worked for Joshua, just like he worked for Moses. Though there was some land left to be fully conquered, *all* the land had been allotted.

6 "So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left. **7** Make sure you do not associate with the other people still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear by them or serve them or worship them. **8** Rather, cling tightly to the Lord your God as you have done until now.

The residents of Canaan were a wicked, idolatrous people. The Israelites were commanded to separate themselves from them so that they would not adopt their ways. Separation from wickedness and idolatry would keep the Israelites from destruction.

Joshua 23:9 "For the Lord has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you.

Wait a minute! Weren't the Israelites defeated at Ai? Yes, but in the end, the Israelites defeated Ai and utterly destroyed it, so the above statement is correct.

10 Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the Lord your God fights for you, just as he has promised.

God tells every Israelite warrior that they are a thousand times more powerful than their enemies. But it's not *their* strength that wins the battle - it is the Lord that fights for and with each warrior.

11 So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

Love is the most powerful force on earth. God's love for mankind is so powerful and weighty that it caused God to form an elaborate plan to redeem mankind. The Israelites are commanded to "*be very careful*" to love the Lord. Love is something that needs to be planned, thought out, worked - handled with care.

12 "But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, **13** then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

God allowed a few of the Canaanites to remain in the land. These heathen peoples would be a test for Israel. They would either be subdued by the Israelites, or they would influence Israel to sin. Every generation has its tests. No generation is assured victory just because the last generation fought and won. Each generation must prove for itself that they are obedient servants of the Lord. The end result of adopting the customs of the Canaanites is to lose the land.

Furthermore, although a generation fought and won - they could lose out before their days are over. We need to carefully guard our victories so that they are not reversed through inattention.

14 "Soon I will die, going the way of everything on earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord your God has come true. Not a single one has failed! **15** But as surely as the Lord your God has given you the good things he promised, he will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely destroy you from this good land he has given you. **16** If you break the covenant of the Lord your God by worshipping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly vanish from the good land he has given you."

There are forever two paths in front of each one of us. One path is a road of obedience, faith, and love toward God which brings possession of the land and the joy of living victoriously in its borders. The other path is a road of disobedience, lack of care in loving God, and an adoption of the ways and customs of the heathen peoples. This path will bring disaster and loss of the land.

Every person, every generation, has two choices. Lack of care will result in being deceived into following the wrong path. We have to choose the right path and

travel down it with purpose and care. Simply not caring will cause us to be carried along with the multitudes on the wrong path.