

Joshua
The Danger of Assumptions
Joshua 22

Albert Einstein
Assumptions are made and most assumptions are wrong.

Henry Wrinkler
Assumptions are the termites of relationships.

Douglas Adams
The most misleading assumptions are the ones you don't even know you are making.

Agatha Christie
Assumptions are dangerous things.

Miguel Ruiz
We make all sorts of assumptions, because we don't have the courage to ask questions.

Joshua 22 is a case study of the danger of wrong assumptions.

Joshua 22 marks the end of seven long years of fighting.

Joshua dismisses the warriors from the tribes of Rueben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh.

vv. 1-9 start off on a high note. Joshua shares some parting words of blessing and admonition with these gallant warriors from the east side, acknowledging their faithful service in fulfilling what Moses commanded them in **Numbers 32** and Joshua reiterated in **Joshua 1**.

This must have been an amazing feel-good moment of celebration and unity.

Joshua's parting words in **v. 5** anticipate what he will say to the whole nation in the next two chapters and reecho the charge under which he has lived his whole life and exercised his extraordinary leadership.

Joshua appeals to the eastern tribes to remain loyal and faithful to Yahweh, and the root of it all is that they "*love Yahweh, cling to him, and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.*"

In both the Old and New Testaments, devotion to God is never a matter of cold conformity to a code of rules.

Keeping Yahweh's word is an expression of loving Yahweh's person.

Jesus said the entire Hebrew Bible hangs on a single command: "*You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*" (**Deuteronomy 6:5**), i.e., with everything you are and have,

and a second command which is like it—*love your neighbor as yourself* (**Leviticus 19:17-18**).

But then, this peaceful parting soon collapses into a disaster of disunity and near civil war, all because of some badly misplaced assumptions. On their way home, when these gallant warriors crossed the River Jordan—the boundary line of their tribal territories—they made a decision that caused a major eruption among the western tribes.

The biblical writer masterfully creates tension, as the motives and intension for what they did are not immediately revealed—only the ominous appearance of things.

v. 10 They build "an altar of imposing size."

Deuteronomy 12 "*Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that Yahweh will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings.*"

v. 12 The western tribes gather together at Shiloh with the intention of going to war with their brothers on the east side.

vv. 13-15 First, a delegation of the western tribes is sent east of the Jordan to see what can be done to resolve the matter before resorting to open conflict.

v. 16 "*breach of faith...committed against the God of Israel*" —the very same word used of Achan's sin in **Joshua 7:1**.

v. 17 "*the sin at Peor*", a grievous event that took place prior to Israel entering the promised land while they were encamped on the east side of the river, an event where the women of Moab seduced Israeli men into idolatry and immorality in **Numbers 25**. On both occasions, the sins of a few cost the entire nation dearly.

v. 20, "*Didn't you learn anything from Achan's sin and what happened at Ai?*" But this was more than a severe scolding. The delegation went so far as to offer a portion of their own inheritance, west of the Jordan, if the eastern tribes considered the territory they had received as "unclean".

The delegation presents a powerful and impressive case—both in terms of a stern rebuke and a generous offer. What's at stake is enormous. If the eastern tribes do not repent of this evil, they will be no better than the vile Canaanites, who had to be terminated and expelled from the land.

God warned Israel from the beginning, they too would fall under his judgment as the Canaanites did, if they violated

their covenant relationship with him. Yahweh would not tolerate idolatry and apostasy in this sacred Land he gave to Abraham as a means to bring salvation to the entire world.

vv. 21-29 The reply of the eastern tribes is both heartwarming and encouraging. They begin by giving glory to God, and they repeat it verbatim for emphasis—“*The Mighty One, Elohim Yahweh!*” “

They openly affirm their confession of Yahweh as the God of gods, in exactly the same way their western brothers had. They insist that Yahweh is the One before whom they stand, and their loyalty to him is total. They said, “*God knows; now let all Israel know!*”

vv. 22-23 They confess: If their intentions were, as the western tribes suspected, to set up a rival altar to the tabernacle, they deserve to die, and they would fully expect Yahweh to take vengeance on them. HOWEVER, that was neither their motive nor their intention.

They clarify: Because the River Jordan formed such a significant physical barrier between them and the rest of the nation, they were afraid it might create a division between them in future generations. Their service on behalf of the western tribes could easily be forgotten when the present generation passed away; so they thought some kind of visible reminder was needed.

vv. 25, 27 If later generations, west of the Jordan, began to think the easterners had no right to worship Yahweh at the tabernacle (“*no portion in Yahweh*”), because they did not live with the cool people on the western side, then their children would be excluded from fellowship with Yahweh. So, the altar was built, not as a place of sacrifice, but as a place of “Witness,” the very name given to the altar (**v. 34**)

v. 28 At last, the biblical writer brings relief to the tension of the biblical account. The large monument was, in fact, proof of their total integration within Israel, along with their full covenant rights and privileges.

vv. 30-31 After their clarification, there is great relief and all agree that this happy and peaceful outcome is certain evidence that “*Yahweh is in our midst.*”

What assumption gave reason for division and war, clarification gave reason for unity and joy, and it was all based on and sustained by their common conviction: *Yahweh is Lord.*

Both sides in this conflict were guilty of wrong assumptions.

Blinded by their own insecurity, the eastern tribes assumed everyone would understand. Fear led them to build that altar, and their insecurity ran so deep, they were unable to anticipate how their actions would be seen by others.

Insecurity traffics in self-pity, self-protection and self-justification. They behaved like victims without actually being victimized.

Insecurity blinds us of how we are being perceived by others. In our self-focused assumptions we are so locked into our own echo chamber, we fail to clarify our words, actions, and motives so that we avoid being misunderstood in the first place.

The western tribes assumed the worst of their brothers. They drew immediate conclusions in their zeal for the truth.

Fortunately, they had the good sense to confront their brothers directly and forcefully, which provided an opportunity for clarification and reconciliation.

Application

Over the past decade-plus, great divisions have formed among God’s people over political, social, racial, and, now, even medical issues. Everyone is yelling at each other from their own echo chambers and no one is listening to their brothers on “the other side of the Jordan”—those who may see a different and legitimate side to today’s political, social, racial, and medical issues.

Much of the conflict and ill will is due to misplaced assumptions and misinformation and a lack of courage to ask one another direct questions to discover personal motives and reasons behind their actions and words.

In all of our diversity, like Israel of old, the source of unity in the Church is the Lordship of Yahweh in the person of Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).

Each of us, submitting to Christ’s Lordship, will avoid the seductive pleasure of living simplistically in our own echo chamber. Instead, we will care enough to courageously love one another by confronting and communicating, and if necessary, directly and forcefully, in order to get clarity from what a brother or sister is saying or doing that offends us.

Jesus would say this is how we prove that we are his disciples, how we love one another, and as Israel of old, the incontrovertible proof that *Yahweh is in our midst.*

Like the western tribes, we must be ready to confront apostasy and idolatry that springs up in the Church. We must be vigilant

to defend the gospel and protect one another from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (**Hebrews 3:12-13**).

At the same time, we must be careful not to assume. We must start by drawing together not by drawing conclusions.