

“Trouble by the Jordan”

Joshua chapter 22

Scripture Ref: 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Cor 9:10-13; Prov 8:13; James 1:19-20; Jer 17:9; 1 Chron 5:25-26

1. Joshua 21:43-45 summarized all that God had done up to that point:

"Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers; not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

2. Now the Eastern tribes are going to return to their lands

22:1 Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the 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 commanded you. 3 You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. 4 And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. **5 But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast 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 half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half of it Joshua gave a possession among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, 8 and spoke to them, saying, "**Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.**" 9 So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

3. Exhortation:

- a. **Keep God's word**
- b. **Commit to live for Him**

c. Share in all things...

John 14:23-24

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

1 Cor 9:24

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

2 Cor 9:10-13

10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 12 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

An Altar by the Jordan

10 And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan -- a great, impressive altar. 11 Now the children of Israel **heard someone say**, "Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan -- on the children of Israel's side." 12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them. 13 Then the children of Israel sent Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, 14 and with him ten rulers, one ruler each from the chief house of every tribe of Israel; and each one was the head of the house of his father among the divisions of Israel.

***Prov 18:13** He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.*

4. Two mistakes here –

- a. #1 – Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had erected this alter without any communication to the other tribes about their intentions. (Failure to communicate!)**

- b. **#2 – The remaining tribes were ready to go to war against their brothers – assuming the worst... “heard someone say”**

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

15 Then they came to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying, 16 "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD: 'What **treachery** is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to **turn away** this day from following the LORD, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the LORD? 17 Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed till this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD, 18 but that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? And it shall be, if you **rebel** today against the LORD, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. 19 Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, then cross over to the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the LORD, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides 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 did not perish alone in his iniquity.'"

5. This is a serious charge – Phinehas has charged them with...

- a. **Treachery – or trespass- they have crossed the line!**
- b. **Turn away – Backsliding, falling away from God**
- c. **Rebel – the strongest word, to deliberately resist God**

6. He reminds them of two incidents that happened...

- a. **The “Iniquity of Peor” – where the Israeli men had gotten involved sexually with the Moabite women, and 24K had died from a plague**
- b. **The “Sin of Achan” – which caused their defeat at Ai, and 36 men died**
- c. **Both of these sins affected the whole congregation!**

21 Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh answered and said to the heads of the divisions of Israel: 22 "The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know -- if it is in rebellion, or if in treachery against the LORD, do not save us this day. 23 If we have built ourselves an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer on it burnt offerings or grain offerings, or if to offer peace offerings on it, let the LORD Himself require an account. 24 **But in fact we have done it for fear**, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your descendants may speak to our

descendants, saying, "What have you to do with the LORD God of Israel? **25 For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us, you children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no part in the LORD.**" **So your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the LORD.'** 26

Therefore we said, 'Let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, 27 but that it may be a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, "You have no part in the LORD.'" 28 Therefore we said that it will be, when they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say, 'Here is the replica of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, though not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between you and us.' 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn from following the LORD this day, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for grain offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the LORD our God which is before His tabernacle."

7. Now this is a fine defense, but I have to point out a few flaws in their argument...

8. FLAW #1 – Their defensiveness reveals that they realize they have erred.

- a. **They feel they have to cite God's name six times, and then take this firm oath on the name of the Lord. They're basically saying, "God knows our hearts are pure and our motives are sincere."**
- b. **They got it half-right, God does know their hearts – but of course they don't know their own hearts – Jer 17:9 makes that clear**

Jer 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

- c. **People often shield all sorts of questionable activities by saying, "But the Lord knows my heart, you don't. Who are you to judge me?"**
 - d. **When our actions are questioned, we often get defensive, but in reality, if our actions are *questioned by many*, perhaps we should look at our actions.**
 - e. **When a whole nation misinterprets what is supposed to be a good activity and it brings them to the brink of war, then there's got to be something wrong with the activity.**
- 9. FLAW #2 – They claim to have acted out of fear. Fear of what? Fear that being so far away might isolate them from the others, and their descendants may question their faith.**
- a. **Maybe – but we have to remember that they chose to stay on the east side of the Jordan.**

- b. And they did so in God's permissive will, because that was NOT part of the land God had given them. They were to cross over.
 - c. In Numbers 32 we saw that *“they saw the land, that it was good for livestock”*
10. The perfect will of God is what God has for you – your life – your calling!
- a. When you are in God's perfect will, that is the place that you will be most fully used of the Lord
 - b. Most fulfilled – your perfect fit!
 - c. You can choose the permissive will, and God will not abandon you – but it is not His perfect plan!
11. IOW they chose what they felt worked better for them – was more convenient for them – they chose what I believe was **SECOND BEST**.
- a. And they were not concerned about their children THEN -
 - b. ...sometimes when we make decisions based on sight, and not on the Lord, we don't see the future ramifications...
12. **FLAW #3** – “For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us”.
- a. They are saying that “God put this border between us” – which is not really an accurate account.
 - b. **THEY** chose to stay on the east side of the Jordan, not God.
 - c. Remember, when the Israelites came up out of the river back in chapter 4, Joshua also built an altar of witness in the same spot, from twelve stones out of the river.
 - d. It was to remind the people that they had left the old life behind, they had come up out of the river to this new life in the land.
 - e. So there are two conflicting altars now, built side-by-side. Joshua's altar was to the glory of God, to the life of God expressed through his people.
 - f. This new altar is to human expediency and human wisdom, to the desire to live where they want to live and say, "God bless the whole thing."

30 Now when Phinehas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. 31 Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh, "This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD."

32 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the rulers, returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of

Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them. 33 So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God; they spoke no more of going against them in battle, to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt.

34 The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar, Witness, "For it is a witness between us that the LORD is God."

13. So Phinehas and the people were satisfied of their intentions, they would not experience God's wrath – there would be no civil war.

a. But is that the end of the story?

14. What is the application of all this???

a. There are times in our life where we chose the permissive will of God.

b. When we do so we are choosing the second best.

c. God still loves us – God is still with us – God will still use us...

d. But we must understand that there may be implications that we don't see that will come as a result of choosing second best.

e. NO. There is a sad historical footnote in 1 Chronicles:

1 Chronicles 5:25-26 "But they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Til'gath-pilne'ser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manas'seh...."

f. Thus ends the history of these people who wanted God to bless their self-serving plans

15. Things to take away from this:

a. Am I allowing my wisdom to make my decisions apart from the Lord?

b. Am I assuming the worst about someone?

c. Am I taking action without regard to how it might affect others?

d. BIGGER – am I seeking the perfect will of God for my life, or am I settling for second best?

i. How? God does not hide it from us, He is willing to reveal to us – if we will ask

ii. Ask – and HEED – in this case God had given them the instructions – they just decided to change Gods plan and live on the east side of the river.

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