

Joshua 22:1-10

Chp. 22 An altar at the boarder

“So much more a lot sooner”

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I. Intro

For seven years Israel had been mostly faithful to following God but now they were entering into a time of peace. Nations and people often lose in “peace” what they have gained in war as they no longer depending or cling upon the Lord as they did so during battle. One of the mysteries that will be revealed in eternity is why so many of us believers preferred living on the borders adjacent to the promises and blessings of God, venturing over to fight battles and gain perishable bounty but never moving there permanently. This chapter reveals the decision for those 2 ½ tribes of soldiers who fought along their brethren for 7 years so that they could inherit the promises yet returned to their homes on the other side was not based upon:

- Laziness or complacency
- Neither was a lack of love or obedience.

If not those things what then? It was as those who wondered in the wilderness; **a simple lack of trust** in the God who promised such things would be able to provide something better than what they could for themselves.

II. Vs. 1-3 Remaining faithful while being faithless

Vs. 1-3 Joshua gives these soldiers from the 2 ½ tribes on the eastern side of the land of promise what amounts to an honorable discharge after they had served seven years in securing the land of promise for their brethren. But their return home was almost the cause of a civil war as we shall see next week. Remember that these two and half tribes were to remain in the army based upon a promise they made twice once with Moses and once with Joshua at his inauguration as leader of the nation, (Deut. 3:12-20, Josh. 1:12-18). It is for this reason that Joshua says in verse 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.*”

For seven years these two ½ tribes had been away from family fulfilling the promise they made both to Moses and Joshua. **There is much to be admired by these men who had set aside what they thought was best for them that may obtain what was promised to others.** But there is also something very sad about it as they had been separated from their families and none of that was necessary. Their separation was based upon the decision to accept what they felt was best for their lives instead of receiving what God had promised. **Oh they kept their word to Moses, they obeyed the voice of Joshua but they couldn't trust God's Word.**

There are far too many “*borderland*” believers, (**good folks**) who have traded in trusting God for settling for things outside of His blessings. One day we all will see **the magnitude of what encompassed** all the Holy Spirit spoke of through the apostle Paul in Ephesians saying that “*every spiritual blessing in heavenly places*” was ours and what we willingly (with out coercion) traded it in for. For the lack of a mustard seed of faith we so often lose sight of the vistas from the mountains that would have moved to reveal endless lands of promises from the provision of

His abundant grace. Don't get me wrong we will be rejoicing in His glorious presence but what we shall see is that we could have been enjoying *so much more a lot sooner!*

During those seven years of battles and appropriation of the promises to each tribe **these guys walked in what was rightly their own inheritance had they only chosen to trust God above what they thought was best.** I wonder if at any time as they walked through the land of promise if they thought to themselves, "*What was I thinking; I endured separation from my loved ones for so little when all of this could be mine without any separation.*" They had obeyed the Lord on behalf of others but couldn't trust Him in their own lives and such is the mystery with regards to our own lives.

III. Vs. 4-8 Choosing those who didn't chose you

Vs. 4-6 I can not overstate this point as we read the words of Joshua in verse 4 "*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.*" Go to *your tents* while your brothers enjoy *their houses*, go to the land of *your possession* while your brothers enjoy *all of the Lord's blessed inheritance*. And this sacrifice was not what God had for them but rather what they chose for themselves. My brothers and sisters **when will we learn that trust and surrender to God rewards us with far more than we can ever accomplish apart from them?** Here we are told that Joshua admonished them and then blessed them. This was just a reiteration of the promise the whole nation made back in chapter 8 where they promised to each other before the Lord to be faithful to the Lord. The motive for their obedience had to be love for the Lord their God. If they loved Him, then they would delight in walking in all His ways and obeying all His commandments. First the threefold admonishment:

- A. They were faithful to keep **their word** now Joshua says, “*Hey guys be faithful to keep **God’s word!***” What an appropriate word to those who showed the character to keep their word but not enough character to be faithful to God’s Word. Saint’s we far too often find it easier to trust people who even with the best attentions are unable to keep their promises all the while finding impossible to trust God who can not ever break His. *Along every life I know (especially my own) lies unopened promises discarded not for lack of opportunity, not because they were outside of our grasp but rather simply because we didn’t trust the Lord enough have put a treasure in them.* Oh the riches of God’s grace that stand unclaimed to those who are in such desperate need for them. There are in our country billions of dollars that go unclaimed every year from folks who didn’t realize or had forgotten that they had funds available to them. But far worse than this is these fellows who knew that they had unlimited blessings available to them yet they just didn’t think that they were as valuable as the scant pennies they had chosen for themselves.
- B. They were faithful to love their brethren enough to leave their loved ones and sacrifice their lives in order that 9 ½ tribes would inherit what God had promised. So here Joshua looks out at these wonderful folks and says, “*Guy’s go back and apply the same love you showed to your brethren to Your God.*” Had they of done this they would not have settled outside of His blessings. The apostle of love, John, wrote in 1 John 4:19 “*We love Him because He first loved us.*” Could it be that they failed to trust God for what He had promised because they didn’t receive His love for them? I can say that in my own life

that this is often the case. “*I’m not worthy, I don’t deserve it*”, we cry. But friends that is only applicable if the basis of His blessings is dependent upon our righteousness! It isn’t, it is based upon God’s righteousness which was imparted to us by faith in Christ.

- C. Notice the order here they are first to **hear God** then to **Love Him** and now finally **walk in His ways, keep his commandments, hold fast to Him and serve Him with your heart and soul**. Joshua nails it here as their problem appears to have been based upon their doing before they ever realized their being in the Lord. It seems as though they sought to walk in His ways, keep His commandments, hold fast to Him and serve Him before they heard His heart towards them and them simply responded to God in love. So how about you **have you heard God’s heart towards you?** In that well quoted verse in Jeremiah 29:11 the Lord reminds the nation of the verge of captivity because they had walked away from Him that, “*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*” You see God knew His thoughts towards His people but His people had forgotten them and acted as much.

Ah but notice that Joshua didn’t send them away back home to their tents and goods with just an admonishment. No he sent them back with a blessing as well! To give an admonishment without a blessing would be like providing a car with out the fuel to make it go. Folk’s it is not wrong for you and I to ask God’s blessings upon our lives as apart from His hand and power we are unable to be a blessing. That raises two specific reason for our lack of blessings both addressed by James in James 4:2-3:

- a. Vs. 2 “You do not have because you do not ask.”
- b. Vs. 3 “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

It is interesting to note that these words of Joshua sound similar to the words the Lord said to Aaron and his boy's in Numbers 6:24-27 where He said, *“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

Vs. 7-8 Because of their obedience Joshua didn't send them home empty handed as verse 8 says that Joshua said to them, *“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.”* This yet again is another way that God was speaking to their heart about His abundant blessings if they would just trust Him. When they trusted God they were blessed yet we are told in verse 9 that they took the plunder and returned to the land outside of the promises of God. You would have thought that they would have said, *“Hey wait a minute, seeing that God blesses us this much just because we honored our word how much more will He bless us if we trust Him and enter into the land of promise? That's it I'm going to get the wife kids and cattle and head on over to the land of promise!”* Now saint's that is not all that different then us when you think about it as we live close to border between the world and Christ seeing the blessings, receiving a little plunder but not willing to head out into the fullness of what He has for us.

IV. Vs. 9-10 Worshiping at the alter of fear

Vs. 9 Finally we are told that they “*departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead*”, God’s word never called the country of Gilead the land of promise. In fact, God told Abraham in Genesis 17:8 that He was giving, “*to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.*”

These fellows were leaving behind far more than the Children of Israel they were leaving behind the possession of the blessing and the promises of God. They had sought what was best for them but had to pay for what was a blessing given by God for others. How many times is that the situation for the people of God? Oh dear ones learn this lesson so that you don’t miss out on what the Lord so wants to bless you with.

Vs. 10 As the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh made their way east they would have passed landmarks that brought back all the memories of the great things God had done and apparently their hearts began to disturb them, as they built a “*great, impressive altar*” and according to their own words in verse 24 they had done so out of fear.

Now an altar was what folks used for worship and according to verse 24 it was for “*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?”*” Oh does that not sum up the problem as they were indirectly worshiping their fear of trusting the Lord. That being the fear; why not just move across and enjoy the land of promise? The reason is that they simply didn’t think even after receiving the spoils walking in the blessings of God that what God had for them was better than what they had chosen for themselves.

They no doubt were happy to be going home but they were also saying good-bye to their brothers whom they had fought alongside. And most importantly they were leaving behind the nearness of the tabernacle where the presence of God dwelt along with the land that God had promised to bless. All of this caused them to become insecure and fearful they were going home to the land that they had chosen for themselves but that caused them to feel isolated from the nation of Israel.

When you read Numbers 32, you will discover that there is no record that Moses consulted the Lord about this decision. Moses' first response was that of anger mingled with fear, lest God judge the nation as He had at Kadesh Barnea. What Moses was concerned about was that the men of Reuben, Gad, and the ½ tribe of Manasseh do their share in fighting the enemy and conquering the Promised Land which they agreed to do. There's no question that Canaan was God's appointed land for His people; anything short of Canaan wasn't what He wanted for them. The two and a half tribes made their decision, not on the basis of spiritual values, but on the basis of material gain; for the land east of the Jordan was ideal for raising cattle. The fact remains that by making this decision, these 2 ½ tribes divided the nation and separated themselves from the blessings of the land of Canaan. They were farther away from the tabernacle and closer to the enemy. The two and a half tribes portray believers who have experienced the blessings and battles of Canaan—their inheritance in Christ—but prefer to live on the border, outside God's appointed place of blessing.

They decide to solve the problem which they created by building a large altar of stones by the Jordan River, on the Canaan side, as a reminder to everybody that the two and a half tribes also belonged to the nation of Israel. Had these tribes been living in the land of Canaan where they belonged, nobody would have questioned their nationality. But living outside the land, they

gave the impression that they were not Israelites. This is now the eighth memorial erected in Canaan but it's the only one erected to let people know they're God's people. Warren Wiersbe makes this observation as it relates to Christianity today saying, *"In recent years we've seen a spate of "religious" bumper stickers, jewelry, decals, and other items (including mirrors and combs with Bible verses on them), all of which are supposed to help identify the owners with Jesus Christ. While these things might occasionally open doors of opportunity for witness, **how much better it would be if our Spirit-led conduct and speech made the lost sit up and take notice.**"*