

# Jumping To Conclusions

Joshua 22



After the campaign in Canaan was complete, the Reubenites, Gadites, and ½ of Manasseh, departed from Joshua and the rest of the Israelites to be reunited with their families on the east side of the Jordan River. Before crossing, they decided to set up an altar as a memorial to the unity that existed between them and the rest of the tribes who were remaining on the west side.

When Joshua and the rest of the tribes heard of the altar, they interpreted it as the establishment of a rival worship. As a result, the whole assembly gathered at Shiloh to go to war against their brothers.

Joshua 22 is a classic example of what can happen when people fail to communicate properly with each other. Presumption and pre-judging often cause unnecessary misunderstanding and strife. Read Chapter 22 of Joshua to see what happens.

- *Joshua summons and blesses the three tribes (22:1-9)*
- *The three tribes build an imposing alter (22:10-29)*
- *The Israelite delegation departs in peace (22:30-34)*

## What does it say?

## What does it mean?

Joshua 22:1-34



<sup>1</sup> Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh <sup>2</sup> and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. <sup>3</sup> For a long time now -- to this very day -- you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. <sup>4</sup> Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. <sup>5</sup> But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."

<sup>6</sup> Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes. <sup>7</sup> (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan with their brothers.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them, <sup>8</sup> saying, "Return to your homes with your great wealth

Who were the three tribes that Joshua summoned?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Read Numbers 32:1-5. What did these tribes request of Moses before the land of Canaan was conquered?

What was Moses' response to them in Numbers 32:20-24?

Did these tribes keep their promise?  
(see Joshua 1:16-18; 4:12-14)

## What does it say?

-- with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing -- and divide with your brothers the plunder from your enemies."

<sup>9</sup> So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the LORD through Moses.

<sup>10</sup> When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. <sup>11</sup> And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side, <sup>12</sup> the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

<sup>13</sup> So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead -- to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. <sup>14</sup> With him they sent ten of the chief men, one for each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.

<sup>15</sup> When they went to Gilead -- to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh -- they said to them: <sup>16</sup> "The whole assembly of the LORD says: `How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? <sup>17</sup> Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the LORD! <sup>18</sup> And are you now turning away from the LORD?"

"If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. <sup>19</sup> If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the LORD's land, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the LORD our God.

<sup>20</sup> When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things,

## What does it mean?

In verse 5, what was it that Joshua exhorted the three tribes to do?



What did the three tribes do before crossing over to their land on the east side of Jordan?

### Altar

*Altar comes from the word, altus, which means "high." Altus implied any raised structure with a flat top, on which offerings to a deity were placed or sacrifice made.*

How did the Israelites respond to their building an imposing altar, and why do you think they responded in the way they did?

What were the four questions the Assembly of Israel asked the three tribes?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## What does it say?

did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin."

<sup>21</sup> Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: <sup>22</sup> "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day. <sup>23</sup> If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account.

<sup>24</sup> "No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?' <sup>25</sup> The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you — you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the LORD.' So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the LORD.

<sup>26</sup> "That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar -- but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.' <sup>27</sup> On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no share in the LORD.'

<sup>28</sup> "And we said, 'If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD's altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'

<sup>29</sup> "Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle."

<sup>30</sup> When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community — the heads of the clans of the Israelites — heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. <sup>31</sup> And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD is with us, because you have not acted unfaithfully toward the LORD in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the LORD's hand."

<sup>32</sup> Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. <sup>33</sup> They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived.

<sup>34</sup> And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God.

## What does it mean?

Read Numbers 25:1-13. What was the sin of Peor?

Why was Phinehas, son of Eleazar, famous among the Israelites?

When one person sinned in Israel the entire nation suffered for it since the nation as a whole was under the covenant. What happened when Achan sinned? (Joshua 7:1-5)

Why did the three tribes build the altar by the Jordan River?

How did Phinehas and the leaders of the community respond to the tribes' explanation for the altar?



## **APPLICATION — So What Does This Mean in My Life?**

1. When somebody does something that you disagree with, do you tend to react and expect the worst? Are you quick to assume wrong motives before you have all the facts?

Who do you have the most trouble with in this regard, right now?

2. Perhaps the following verses can help you in this area:

*“Love does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*1 Corinthians 1:5-7*

Commenting on this last verse, Charles Hodge wrote:

*“bears – concealing or excusing the faults of others, instead of gladly disclosing them.  
believes – is not suspicious, but readily credits what men say in their own defense.  
hopes – hopes for the best with regard to all men.”*

*“Love can ennoble even the ignoble by believing the best.”  
William Barclay*

3. This incident showed the cruciality of unity for the prosperity of Israel. Likewise, unity is crucial to the life of the church — so much so that Jesus prayed to the Father on behalf of the church that He would “make them one”. Is there a way you could increase the unity of our church by resolving a conflict, or by encouraging someone you know?

4. Why are people so quick to jump to negative conclusions?

5. What kind of issues do today’s Christians jump to judgement over?