

*Joshua Chapter 22: Civil War is Averted in Israel*  
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## INTRODUCTION

Once the national fighting is over, Joshua dismisses the 2 ½ tribes who have fulfilled their pledge to fight alongside their brethren. On their way home they build an altar, which is misinterpreted as idolatry. Before going to war the 9 ½ tribes send a delegation, which discovers that the altar was built as a sign of unity, that all 12 tribes east and west of the Jordan are one nation under God. The way this conflict is handled teaches us several things about conflict resolution that should be emulated. And Joshua 22 also reveals a rest that God provides His people which enables them to serve Him freely.

## ISRAEL'S HISTORY PRIOR TO THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

- God frees Israel from Egypt (Ex. 12:29-41).
- God leads Israel to the Promise Land, but they refuse to enter (Num. 13:1-14:12).
- Israel is cursed to wander in the wilderness for 40yrs (Num. 14:20-35).
- Moses is not allowed to enter the Promise Land (Num. 20:5-12, 24; 27:14).
- Joshua is appointed by God to replace Moses (Num. 27:15-23; Deut. 31:14).
- God delivers two Amorite kings into Israel's hands. (Num. 21:21-35; Deut 2:24-3:10).
- God brings Israel back to the Promise Land (Num. 33:40-56).

## JOSHUA CHAPTERS 1-11: *Conquest of the Promise Land*

**Joshua Chapter 1:** *Victory before Entering the Land*

**Joshua Chapter 2:** *The Two Spies Confirm God's Word about the Promise Land.*

**Joshua Chapter 3 & 4:** *The Parting of the Jordan River, Israel's Crossing, and the Stones of Remembrance*

**Joshua Chapter 5:** *A Tuning Point in Israel's History*

**Joshua Chapter 6:** *The Lord Delivers Jericho into Israel's Hands*

**Joshua Chapter 7:** *Israel's Sin and their Subsequent Defeat at Ai*

**Joshua Chapter 8:** *Israel's Victory Over Ai*

**Joshua Chapter 9:** *Failure to Seek the Lord's Counsel, Treaty with the Gibeonites*

**Joshua Chapter 10:** *"The Lord God of Israel Fought for Israel" (10:42)*

**Joshua Chapter 11:** *The Lord Fulfills His 600yr Promise Concerning the Land*

## JOSHUA CHAPTERS 12-21: *The Division of the Promise Land*

After defeating 33 kings Israel divides the Promise Land to the 12 tribes: Reuben, Gad, ½ Manasseh (East), Judah, Ephraim, ½ Manasseh (West), Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Though further conquest remains, Israel controls the Land enough to possess it. God was true to His word; everything He said came to pass.

## **Joshua Chapter 22: *Civil War is Averted in Israel***

### **The 2 ½ Tribes East of the Jordan River have Fulfilled their Obligation**

**22:1-4**, In Num 32:1-32 the 2 ½ tribes ask for land east of the Jordan and pledge to fight with their brethren until they too have their land inheritance. In Deut 3:18:20 Moses repeats the charge. In Jos 1:12-18, as Israel is about to start conquering the Land, Joshua reminds them of their pledge. And after fighting 7yrs<sup>1</sup> in the land of Canaan, Joshua releases the 2 ½ tribes from their obligation.

**22:5-6**, Joshua encourages the 2 ½ tribes to continue their faithfulness to their Lord. God said something similar to Joshua in 1:7 and these words are identical in many ways to what God said to the nation in Deuteronomy: 6:4-5; 10:12-13; 11:13-17, 22-25. God promised that if they obeyed Him, He would drive out the nations and give them rest. What's the key to entering God's rest? Belief and obedience.

### **The 2 ½ Tribes Return to their Lands with many Spoils of War**

**22:7-9**, at the end of 22:6 Joshua blesses the 2 ½ tribes. These verses show how he blessed them. They received many spoils from war and Joshua charges them to divide these with those who stayed behind to establish their land east of the Jordan, Num. 32:16.

### **As they Return Home, the 2 ½ Tribes Build a Great Altar by the Jordan River**

**22:10-12**, as the 2 ½ tribes make their way home, they stop before crossing the Jordan and build a great big altar on the West side of the Jordan River. When the 9 ½ tribes hear of it, they prepare for war against the 2 ½ tribes. Why? As the next verses show, the 9 ½ tribes think that this altar represents idolatry.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 14:10 shows that the battles in Joshua 6-11 lasted approximately 7yrs, i.e., Caleb is now 85yrs old and God kept him alive 45yrs, which makes him 40yrs old at Kadesh Barnea, before the wilderness wanderings. Deut 2:14 reveals that the wilderness wanderings lasted 38yrs. Thus, 40yrs + 38yrs = 78yrs + **7yrs** = 85yrs old.

## Possible Civil War in Israel Over the Great Altar, a Delegation Investigates

**22:13-16**, before they go to war, the children of Israel send a delegation of 10 rulers (including ½ Manasseh [West of Jordan]) that is led by Phinehas, Eleazar's son.<sup>2</sup> This altar represents *treachery* and rebellion. The Hebrew word for "treachery" means *disloyalty* or *infidelity* (it's the same word used for Achan's sin in ch. 7). They think that the 2 ½ tribes are committing infidelity against God with the Canaanite gods, represented by this altar.

**22:17-18**, these verses reveal why the 9 ½ tribes reacted so strongly. What's at stake? If the 9 ½ tribes are right, then God's wrath could come down upon the entire nation as it did in Num 25:1-9 (regarding the sin of Peor) where Phinehas played a key role in turning back God's wrath.... 24,000 died in that incident, Num 25:9.

**22:19-20**, the altar built by the 2 ½ tribes represents a threat to God's altar that is before His tabernacle at Shilo. This is the only one where sacrifices are to take place. The danger is repeated again, but this time using Achan as the object lesson. The whole congregation of Israel is in danger of God's wrath if this is allowed.

Also notice that in verse 19 the 9 ½ tribes are willing to suffer in order to prevent this tragedy. They are willing to give up some of their land so that the 2 ½ tribes can come West of the Jordan if they deem their land "unclean."<sup>3</sup>

## The 2 ½ Tribes State the Reason why they Built the Great Altar

**22:21-23**, their reply in Hebrew begins with the three names used for God, which are better rendered as the ASV or NIV renders them: *The Mighty One, God, Jehovah (Lord)*. The 2 ½ tribes are willing to accept full responsibility for their actions before the Lord. They are absolutely confident that they have not sinned against God.

**22:24-29**, this whole thing becomes rather ironic because instead of seeking to separate from the 9 ½ tribes by following after other gods, the 2 ½ tribes built the altar to prevent the future separation of Israel. The altar would serve as a unifying witness between the two sides living east and west of the Jordan that the God of Israel is the God of both.

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<sup>2</sup> Phinehas leading this delegation represents a transition in the high priesthood, from Eleazar, the father, to Phinehas, the son. This follows Eleazar's transition, he took over for his father Aaron, Num 20:25.

<sup>3</sup> As to why the 2 ½ tribes might think that their land is "unclean" (22:19), it's only a guess, but they may've thought this because the land they possess east of the Jordan was not part of the Promise Land God originally promised Abraham. In any case, the 2 ½ tribes didn't think their land was unclean; this is not why they built the altar. They intended it to be a sign of unity for the nation of Israel and nothing more.

## The 9 ½ Tribes Understand why the Great Altar was Built and Rejoice

**22:30-31**, the delegation lead by Phinehas is pleased to hear the real reason why the altar was built. The 2 ½ tribes did not commit an infidelity against God. Thus, God's wrath will not visit the nation.

## The Delegation Returns and Reports

**22:32-34**, the delegation brings back good news and everyone rejoices and blesses God. They drop their plans to go to war against the 2 ½ tribes. The 2 ½ tribes are in wholehearted agreement with the 9 ½ that the **Lord is God**.

## CONCLUSION

### Conflict Resolution

The way Israel handled this situation teaches us some things about handling conflict. (1) a strong reaction is sometimes necessary. Israel potentially faced God's wrath; thus, they prepared for war, (2) if a strong reaction is called for, weigh it carefully. Israel prepared for war, but they didn't go to war until they had all the facts, and (3) talk to the other side before you go to war. Dialogue and discern the facts. Then (and only then) if war is justified, go to war.

### Entering God's Rest

Why were the 2 ½ tribes able to return home from the fighting? Because God gave them rest. This is a refrain that is repeated in Joshua: 11:23; 14:15; 18:1; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1. Yes, fighting remains but even that will be done by God through the individual tribes, Jos 13:6; Jd 1:1-3. Thus, Israel has control of the entire Promise Land, which enables them to (as we see in Jos 22) go home and begin enjoying the Land.

But how did Israel enter God's rest, how do we enter His rest? Belief and obedience. God told Israel that He would conquer the Canaanite nations for them that no one would be able to defeat them (Deut 1:17-24). Israel trusted and obeyed Him. Thus, they were able to enter God's rest.

The wilderness generation did not trust and obey God. So they failed to enter God's rest and this is to be an example for us today, Heb 3:7-19. But what Promise Land has God conquered for us that enables us to serve him freely? He's given you eternal life (Jn 6:47), so hell has been conquered. He's given you His Holy Spirit, so you don't have to rely on your flesh to live the life He's given you, Rom 8:11-13, and by means of this He continues to fight for you just as He kept fighting for Israel.

Israel had much fighting left to do, but God's aid did not stop after Joshua 11. He promised them that He would continue fighting for them, Jos 13:6. How about you, do you have fighting left to do in you life? Are you trusting and obeying Him so that He will fight for you? It's not just in the big things that He requires our obedience. It's in the little things, the every day things.....and if we're obedient, we will enter His rest.