

Eastern Tribes Return to Their Lands

Joshua 22:5 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."

Although their military commitments were ended, their spiritual commitments would never end.

The writer employs six infinitives to emphasize the seriousness of Joshua's charge. The passage is a series of quotations from the book of Deuteronomy (6:5; 10:12; 11:13–22; 30:6, 16, 20; etc.).

The tribes are: (1) To do (perform) all the commandments of the law (Deut 6:1);

(2) to love the Lord always (Deut 6:5). But love is an emotion which is not contained but expressed. Jesus taught, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15).

As a Christian you are not obligated to believe someone who claims to love the Lord Jesus if you don't see in that person a willingness to obey the Lord's commands.

These tribes could only truly say they "loved" God when they were willing to express that love in obedience;

(3) to walk in the Lord God's commandments. Remember how frequently Paul challenged the believer to "... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph 4:1; see also Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12);

(4) to keep the commandments of the Lord (see Deut 6:2);

(5) to cleave unto Him heartily (the Hebrew is to cleave "into" Him as a branch unto a vine [Jn 15] and as the believer is "rooted and grounded" in the love of Christ, Eph 3:17);

(6) to serve the Lord with all your heart and soul (1 Sam 12:24).

Joshua 22:6 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.

Having been commended, commissioned, and charged, the one-half tribe of Manasseh began to return to Bashan.

Especially blessed as this tribe was with riches, they were to divide their spoils among the needier brethren. Thus, Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh departed from the assembly of Shiloh.

An Altar by the Jordan

Joshua 22:10 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.

No sooner had the two and one-half tribes arrived at the banks of the Jordan than they erected a great altar to see, large and visible in all directions. When this came to the attention of the other tribes, the whole congregation ... gathered ... at Shiloh, to go up to war.... The children of Israel had assumed that their brethren erected the great altar for an evil intent.

Most commentators hold that the tribes were concerned that Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh had thought to establish a center of worship to rival Shiloh. This, however, is unlikely because the altar was too close to Shiloh and too distant from the Transjordan tribes to effect such a purpose. It is more likely that the Israelites assumed the two and one-half tribes were attempting to separate themselves totally and finally from their brethren. If the western tribes found themselves in battle, they should no longer rely on the eastern tribes to fight for them, to finish the task of driving the heathen out of Canaan. As will be seen, whatever they assumed was incorrect. What can we learn about assumptions?

Joshua 22:13 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. :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,

When cooler heads prevailed, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, led a group of the heads of each family on a fact-finding mission to the two and one-half tribes.

This august group would surely emphasize the seriousness of the situation; and Phinehas was the ideal person to head up the mission, for he represented the high priest and had been zealous in purifying the nation Israel when she fell prey to sin with Baal-peor (Num 25).

Joshua 22:16 “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.

John J. Davis summarizes the charges against the eastern tribes as falling into three categories. “In verses 16ff., the charge against the two and one-half tribes takes the form of three kinds of sin.

In verse 16, reference is made to a trespass (Heb *ma’al*). The word for trespass as used in this verse is the same one employed in 7:1, in connection with the sin of Achan.

The sin of the two and one-half tribes was also likened to the ‘iniquity of Peor’ (vs. 17). The iniquity of Peor had as an essential element idolatry and open disobedience to God’s will with regard to worship (cf. Num 25).

Finally, their sin is described as an act of rebellion (vs. 18–19)” (Davis, pp. 85–86).

Joshua 22:20 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.’ ”

If the eastern tribes did intend to rebel against Israel and have defiled their inheritance by their intention, they must repent and forsake their inheritance for the good of all Israel.

Achan is elicited as an example of the sin of one affecting all. Israel could not chance that again.

Joshua 22:21 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.

The repetition of the phrase is a favorite Hebrew form of emphasis. But more, employing the three names of God together, El, Elohim, and Jehovah (or Yahweh), each twice repeated, expresses the great horror with which the two and one-half tribes learned of the assumptions made by their brethren.