

Ed the Altar

Scripture Text: Joshua 22:1-6

About the Text:

- 1) In Numbers 32 we're told how the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh desired to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan.
- 2) Moses told them that they could do such as long as they went to war with the rest of Israel to conquer and occupy the lands on the west side.
- 3) Joshua 4 tells us that these tribes went armed into the western part of the land and they fought.
- 4) After the wars were completed, these men then returned to the eastern side of the Jordan to be with their families who had settled there in the mean time.
- 5) Joshua 22 is the story of their return and the events surrounding that return.
- 6) Let us notice some lessons from this chapter.

From Joshua 22 we learn about...

I. FELLOWSHIP

1. Read Joshua 22:1-9
 - 1) Reuben, Gad, and Half of Manasseh return with blessings.
 - 2) They had done their job in fighting along side of their brethren.
 - 3) They were faithful to their task.
 - 4) Consider the blessings they had as a result of being faithful.
 - a. The blessing of the faithful.
 - b. Much riches
 - c. Very much cattle.
 - d. Silver, Gold, Brass, Iron.
 - e. Very much raiment.
2. When we are faithful to the Lord's designs, then we have God's blessing and fellowship.
 - 1) Consider Deuteronomy 28:8
 - 2) We have God's blessing for being faithful to Him. Consider Luke 11:28
 - 3) We have fellowship with God.

3. We also have the blessing of fellowship and unity with our brethren.

1) 1 John 1:7

2) Unity is desired by God. John 17:20-23

3) Unity is something for which we must endeavor. Ephesians 4:3

4) Unity is beautiful Psalm 133:1

II. FALLING OUT

1. Read Joshua 22:10-20

1) When these tribes returned, they built a great altar near the Jordan river.

2) Word got back to those on the western side that this had been done.

3) The rest of the nation then gathered for war with them at Shiloh.

4) Before they went to war, they sent Phinehas and 10 princes to ascertain the situation.

5) Phinehas ask them why they would trespass and rebel against God in building this altar.

6) Phinehas reminds them of the sin a Peor where some went to worship Baal and 24,000 were killed by God (Numbers 25).

7) He also reminds them of the sin of Achan who trespassed in the devoted things at Jericho (Joshua 7).

8) Phinehas was worried that something similar would happen here and the rest of Israel wanted nothing to do with it.

2. Consider that there is appropriate concern expressed here.

1) The eastern tribes had erected a seemingly religious object, an altar.

2) Perhaps some thought they were returning to a patriarchal system.

a. Noah used an altar (Genesis 8:20).

b. Abraham used an altar (Genesis 22:9).

c. Isaac used an altar (Genesis 26:25).

d. Jacob used an altar (Genesis 35:1).

3) Many concluded that they were abandoning the law of Moses.

4) They were concerned that there would be division in Israel.

5) They were also concerned that the Lord would punish them for this as well.

6) First and foremost, however, they wanted to do things the Lord's way.

- 7) We also need to be concerned for doing things the Lord's way.
 - a. Consider 1 Peter 4:11
 - b. Even Jesus took this attitude. John 12:49-50
- 3. We see appropriate action taken in response as well.
 - 1) Israel gathered for war at Shiloh.
 - 2) They wanted to be prepared for the worst.
 - 3) They sent Phinehas and others as ambassadors to represent their concerns.
 - 4) We need to take appropriate action in response to potential division.
 - a. Jesus told us to head off concerns when a brother sins against us through the same kinds of actions. Consider Matthew 18:15-20.
 - b. Consider the actions of the apostles and elders in acts 15.
- 4. We cannot afford to sit idly by when problems arise.

III. FACT FINDING

- 1. Read Joshua 22:21-29
 - 1) The two and a half tribes responded that God knows whether they transgressed or not.
 - 2) They state that if they have built this altar for worship purposes for the Lord to require it of them.
 - 3) Rather, however, they had different intentions.
 - 4) They desired for their children to remember that they too worshiped with the rest of Israel in Jerusalem.
 - 5) They did not want the rest of Israel saying to them that they had no part with the Lord since they were on the east side of the Jordan.
 - 6) They agreed that they ought not to rebel against God and worship in an unauthorized way.
- 2. The two and a half tribes respected God's knowledge of all things.
 - 1) They knew the principle of Jeremiah 17:10
 - 2) They knew not to be like the wicked of Psalm 10:4
- 3. The two and a half tribes recognized God's authority over their lives.
 - 1) They understood Deuteronomy 5:32
 - 2) Proverbs 3:5-6

4. The two and a half tribes offer a reasonable explanation for their actions.

- 1) They wanted a memorial for their children to remember that they were part of Israel too.
- 2) Their answer was consistent with the principles of Colossians 4:6
- 3) And also Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:15

5. Today, if we are going to have peace in the religious world today we must recognize God's written word, the Bible, as the only authority for religious practices today – 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- 1) We also must do this respecting God's knowledge
- 2) Recognizing God's authority.
- 3) And presenting reasonable truths.

IV. FAIRNESS

1. Read Joshua 22:30-34

- 1) When Phinehas heard their statement he was pleased with it.
- 2) He concluded that they had not transgressed God's will.
- 3) He concluded that fellowship still existed among them.
- 4) He concluded that God would not punish them for their actions.
- 5) So he returned to the rest of Israel and told them the story.
- 6) They, in turn, received the information and accepted it.
- 7) Thus there was peace in Israel.
- 8) They called that altar "Ed" or "witness" as a testimony that both sides acknowledged Yahweh as God.

2. We learn that in order to be fair with those with whom we have a falling out, we need to hear the other side of the story.

- 1) Phinehas did what the law prescribed: Deuteronomy 13:12-14.
- 2) Consider also Proverbs 18:13
- 3) Nicodemus also said (John 7:51).
- 4) James 1:19-20

3. We learn that Phinehas discerned between the secular and the religious.

- 1) It was not the two and a half tribes intention to use the altar in a religious way for worship.

- 2) It was merely a secular altar to memorialize the nations unity.
- 3) We must make the same distinctions in worship today.
- 4) For example, musical instruments are fine to use for secular purposes.
- 5) However, such would be wrong to use for religious purposes as they are unauthorized for the church.
- 6) Only singing is acceptable to God (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, et. al.)

4. We learn that fellowship rests upon issues related to salvation.

- 1) Phinehas and the rest of Israel were very concerned that the Lord would punish them and that they would be lost as a result of the two and a half tribes efforts at worship.
- 2) He concluded that they had not trespassed against God and so fellowship could remain.
- 3) Moreover, they didn't go to battle against their faithful brethren.
- 4) We need to judiciously consider avoiding battle against the faithful.
- 5) Consider Galatians 5:13-15

1. In considering lessons from Joshua 22, let us remember...

- 1) Fellowship
- 2) Falling Out
- 3) Fact Finding
- 4) Fairness

2. Invitation

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