

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS

### LESSON 14B

### JOSHUA

### CHAPTER 22

**Memory Verse -- Joshua 22:5,** *“But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”*

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 22 records the send off of the eastern Trans – Jordanian tribes back to their territories. It was a touching scene. But an incident committed by the returning Reubenites, Gadites and Manassites nearly plunged the nation into a civil war that would have permanently divided and fragmented the young nation. For the first time in Israel’s history, Israel will cease to be called merely a PEOPLE of Israel but the NATION of Israel. She has a home, a

Constitution and a mass of people linked to the father of the faithful Abraham.

Mission is accomplished and it is time to return home. The testimony of these two and one half tribes is exemplary. They kept their word given to Moses and Joshua. They fought side by side their brothers and did not return to their families until the Land of Promise was conquered and settled. They trusted the LORD to watch over their loved ones while they fought God’s battles in the Conquest of the Promised Land. It was now time to return home. But for long-term cooperation, the two and one half tribes will do something that nearly sparked a fire of civil war that could destroy a nation.

But cool heads prevailed and the battle was averted. The will of the LORD was fulfilled and peace reigned in this new nation.

There are many lessons to be learned in this present study and meditation of this chapter. Our knowledge of God is further increased in this study. The sanctity of life and the issue of capital punishment are dealt with when considering the cities of refuge. Broken human relationships can often be avoided if understanding and judgment of the parties involved are properly handled.

The following outline provides an easier hold of the three chapters:

- a) The Send-Off (22:1-8);
- b) The Altar of Witness (22:9-34).

## **COMMENTARY**

### **The Send-Off – 22:1-8**

The conquest of the Land was completed. It was time for the forty-thousand warriors drawn from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to return to their territories and families across the River Jordan. Obviously, their respective families must have been anxiously waiting during those seven long years for their return. But God's work and will required haste and families must not stand in the way of the work of God. These two and one half tribes must honour their word to Moses and Joshua. They were given the Trans-Jordan property of the kings of Sihon and Og on condition that their fighting men helped their brethren conquer the rest of the Promised Land across the River Jordan in Cis-Jordan. They kept their promise.

Joshua called them to him. He commended them for their loyalty and integrity. First, Joshua openly acknowledged their faithfulness in obeying all the commandments of the LORD through Moses. Secondly, Joshua was gratified that they had fully cooperated by submitting to his

leadership. Next, he commended them for their loyal comradeship with their fellow brethren during all those years, and had faithfully kept the LORD'S charge to them (22:1-3). The LORD had given their fellow brethren rest in the Land as promised. They could now return to their homes across the Jordan River. Having commended the two-and-the-half tribes, Joshua exhorted them to diligently obey the Law of Moses which the LORD had commanded them. They ought to love the LORD God, to live their lives in accordance with the ways of God, to obey the commandments of God, to remain steadfastly close to God, and to serve God with all their heart and whole being (22:5).

Then Joshua did something very wonderful. He instructed the children of Israel to share the booty of war with the returning two-and-the-half tribes. The booty included "very much cattle," silver and gold, brass and iron, and a lot of clothes (22:8). These things were for the families of the returning tribes, who remained at home on the other side of Jordan. This was a very generous act on the part of Joshua. Honours and rewards were not only for those who fought in the battles but also for those who stayed at home to perform the important and

necessary duties of guarding the home-front.

### **The Altar of Witness – 22:9-34**

And so the children of Reuben, and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh departed from Shiloh and made their journey back to their families on the eastern side of Jordan. One can imagine this touching scene of fellow comrades-in-arms that embraced and bade one another farewell and God-speed. When the returning tribes reached the west banks of Jordan, they built a great altar by the river.

The children of Israel on the western side heard of this and their anger was aroused. Then all Israel gathered together at Shiloh where the Tabernacle of the LORD was located. They decided to go “to war against them” (22:12). They sent a strong delegation of ten chiefs, each from a tribe, under Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the priest, to confront the returning eastern tribes. The choice of Phinehas to lead the delegation showed the gravity of the matter. Phinehas was noted for his righteous zeal for the LORD. He would strongly act against any Israelite, who would blatantly sin and incur the anger of the LORD.<sup>1</sup> More than this was the fact

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 25:6 And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of

that this was a spiritual matter. The priest of the LORD must be present in the confrontation with their brethren.

The delegation met the returning eastern tribes at the western banks of Jordan. They spoke straight to the point to the returning soldiers. They charged them for committing a sin against the LORD God by the erection of an altar (22:16). They warned that this was a sin of rebellion against the LORD. This sin would affect all of them, citing two previous cases—the sin of Peor and that of Achan, the son of Zerah.<sup>2</sup> Then the delegation proposed to them that if the eastern territories of Trans-Jordan were not suitable, they could move over to live with them on the western side of Jordan, where the Tabernacle of the LORD was. They should not

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Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping *before* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 7 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; 8 And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

Joshua 7:1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

rebel against the LORD and all Israel by building another altar other than the altar of the LORD their God (22:19).

This zeal for the LORD'S honour and truth expressed by the western tribes was right. God's holiness must not be compromised no matter what. They had just bid one another farewell for a job well done. A few moments later they were about to kill for the honour of the LORD. There must not be sentimental feelings in the work for the LORD. God's people must be very impartial in all matters pertaining to God and His work and Word. The building of another altar by the eastern tribes was construed as a man-made worship and sacrifice to God, as God had chosen the place for a proper worship and offering of sacrifices at Shiloh at that time. The western tribes were ready to go to war against the eastern tribes. The children of Israel were now in danger of being fragmented and the eastern tribes destroyed.

The children of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh aptly responded. Immediately after hearing the righteous anger of the representatives of the nine and one half tribes, they invoked the name of the LORD twice: "the LORD He is God." The LORD God knew, and all Israel would know whether they had rebelled and sinned against the LORD

by erecting the altar in order to turn away from the LORD and to perform the various burnt, meat, and peace offerings (22:22). They explained that the erection of the altar was motivated by a fear that future generations of the western tribes might sever their relationships with the eastern tribes on the ground that the Jordan River separated them. The altar, which they built, served only as a "witness" or a reminder for future generations so that their children might be allowed to offer their sacrifices to the LORD on the western side where the Tabernacle of the LORD was. They reassured Phinehas and the delegation of nine and one half tribes that they had no intention to rebel and sin against the LORD. The eastern tribes sincerely and solemnly repudiated the charge against them because they had no unfaithful intention. They invoked the name of the LORD twice and they were prepared to be severely punished by the LORD and Israel. The building of the altar was motivated by a godly anxiety for the future.

The explanation of the eastern tribes pleased Phinehas and the ten chiefs. They commended that they had no intention of sinning against the LORD. The western tribes then blessed the LORD and returned home. A terrible and horrible war in which all the eastern tribes would be

annihilated was averted. They called the new altar “ED” meaning “a witness”.

### PRACTICAL VALUE

The episode illustrates that we should not quickly jump to conclusions without first ascertaining the motive of the other person’s action. While zeal for the purity of faith and the holiness of God ought to be upheld; these reasons should not result in hasty and unwise judgements. There is a place for controversies and differences to be honestly, openly and humbly discussed and deliberated. Both parties involved must maintain a spirit of meekness and behave in a way that would honour and glorify God.

The delegation led by Phinehas was magnanimous when they suggested that the eastern tribes come over to live with them, and they were prepared to give part of their land to them if they felt that the Trans-Jordanian land was unclean. Francis Schaeffer’s remarks on this are right and good: *Once more, here is the tragedy of the modern church! Our spirituality and our brotherhood often stop at the point of material possessions. In the early church, this was not so. The Christians had things in common not because there was a law to this effect, not because this was*

*an enforced Marxist-Engels communism, but because they loved each other. And a love that does not go down into the practical stuff of life, including money and possessions, is absolute junk! To think that love is talking softly rather than speaking the truth and to show love in practical ways is not unbiblical. We must say with tears that the evangelical church in our generation has been poor at this point*<sup>3</sup>

God’s absolute truth must never be compromised. While God is love, God is also holy, and one may not choose or emphasize either one of these attributes of God by downgrading either one. God’s holiness and love are inseparable, inextricable. Today, compromise is rampant in the Christian church. Absolute standards according to God’s Word have been downgraded, and compromise is the acceptable way. Christians who have strong values are derided as “rigid” and “narrow-minded.” God’s church is not a democracy in which standards of life are made by majority votes. The church lives under the Kingship of Jesus Christ, who has entrusted the care of His blood-bought flock to pastors and elders, who are to feed, to guard, to protect and to discipline it.

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, page 288.

While the reason given for the erection of another altar is acceptable to Phinehas and the ten chiefs of Israel, it is a dangerous precedent. John J. Davis has this to say: *The unifying factor in ancient Israel was not her culture, architecture, economy, or even military objectives. The long-range unifying factor was her worship of Jehovah. When the central sanctuary was abandoned as the true place of worship, the tribes then developed independent sanctuaries, thus alienating themselves from other tribes and weakening their military potential. The effects of this trend are fully seen in the period of the Judge.* <sup>4</sup>  
 AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Joshua 22:1-8; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1-6.

**TUESDAY:** Joshua 22:9-20; Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

**WEDNESDAY:** Joshua 22:21-34; Proverbs 2:1-17.

**THURSDAY:** Joshua 22:1-34.

**FRIDAY:** Joshua 22:1-34.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is the biblical basis for fellowship and friendship in the believer's life?

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2. The two and one half tribes kept their vow and did not return to see their families for seven years till the work of the LORD was done. Can this be the basis for a fulltime worker to go on a mission trip and not see the family for seven years? Can this be applied to a Christian leaving his family to go into China to do business?

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<sup>4</sup> John J. Davis, *A Commentary on Joshua-2 Kings*, page 87.

3. What is a stronger bond than the altar built by the two and one half tribes to keep the nation of Israel united as one in years to come?

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4. What aroused the western tribes to anger? Was their anger justified? What lesson can we draw from this episode?

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5. Was the explanation given by the two and one half tribes a biblical one?

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6. Do not jump to conclusion but hear the person out first. Is this good advice? What if the evidence is overwhelming against the person who is a pastor, should judgement be held in abeyance till the pastor is given a chance to explain? For example a pastor is charged with plagiarism. The evidence from his writing proves that he has plagiarised. Can judgement be made still if the pastor keeps silent after he is confronted to deny or confess the charge?

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