

THE MEMORIAL ALTAR EAST OF JORDAN

BIBLE TEXT : Joshua 22:1-34

LESSON 176 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Psalm 26:8). .

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Joshua 22:1-34

¹ Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh,

² And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you:

³ Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God.

⁴ And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, *and* unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan.

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.

⁶ So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents.

⁷ Now to the *one* half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given *possession* in Bashan: but unto the *other* half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them,

⁸ And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.

⁹ And the children of Reuben and the

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

East of Jordan

Just before the Israelites were ready to enter Canaan, they passed through a country of very good pasture land. The green fields of waving grass looked good to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh; and as they had much cattle, they asked permission of Moses to settle there, east of Jordan.

Moses and the people were frightened at such a question. They were afraid God would let judgment come upon them if they did not go all the way God had planned for them. Moses thought they might be trying to get out of fighting the battles that still lay ahead of them in Canaan. But the Reubenites and Gadites promised that as soon as they had their families settled in homes, their men of war would go across Jordan and help conquer Canaan.

God said that it would be all right for them to do as they had planned, so Moses and the people were satisfied to let the two and a half tribes settle in Gilead. Their soldiers went with the rest of the Israelites across Jordan, and for seven years they fought side by side with them until enough of the land was subdued to give everyone a home.

Rest

Now the land was at rest. All was peaceful and quiet. And how rich the Israelites were! They had captured great quantities of gold and silver and brass and fine clothes and cattle, and God had let them keep it. When Joshua sent the two and a half tribes to their homes, he told them to divide the spoils with their brothers who had stayed home to take care of the families. There would be enough to share so that no one would want for anything.

Giving Thanks

Their life would be prosperous, but they must remember something: they must not forget to honor God, and to thank Him for all He had given them. They had been told before that they must teach the Law to their children, and talk about it day and night. They had done this while they had been in need of God's help to fight their battles; but now that victory was won they must be careful not to neglect the God who had made them victorious.

When we are going through hard places and feel the great need of help, we feel we must pray. Then we call upon God in desperation, and pray until the answer comes. Do we pray as faithfully when the battle is won? Do we think to talk to Jesus as often as when we wanted His help? He wants us to praise Him in prayer, whether we need help or not. And if we do not need help for ourselves, there are many other people who need to be prayed for.

The Altar

The Jordan river separated Canaan from the inheritance of the two and a half tribes. When the returning soldiers came to the

children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

¹⁰ And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that *are* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to.

¹¹ And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.

¹² And when the children of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

¹³ And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest,

¹⁴ And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one *was* an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel.

¹⁵ And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead, and they spake with them, saying,

¹⁶ Thus saith the whole congregation of the Lord, What trespass *is* this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?

¹⁷ *Is* the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord,

¹⁸ But that ye must turn away this day

river, they decided to build an altar.

At this time the Tabernacle was pitched at Shiloh, in Canaan. The command of God was that everyone must go there to offer sacrifices. Because of all the idol worship by the people who had been conquered, the Israelites were given very strict orders not to build altars for sacrifices anywhere else.

Now comes word to the Israelites in Canaan that the tribes of Reuben and Gad are building an altar beyond Jordan. What can this mean? Have they forgotten the true God already? What if God lets judgment fall upon all of them for this disobedience?

The Israelites gathered at the Tabernacle and decided to go to battle against their brothers who, they thought, were rebellious. But, first, they sent a committee to find out if it was really true that they had built the altar. A prince was chosen from each tribe to go with Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the high priest.

The Accusation

When they came to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, they said: "What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?"

Phinehas reminded them of the judgment that had come upon Israel the time they had begun to worship the idols of Moab. A plague had struck among them as punishment, and some of the people *were* still suffering from it. Would these two tribes and the half-tribe now do something else that might bring more suffering upon them?

The priest and the princes went on to tell them that if they could not live here in Moab without worshiping strange gods they had better come on over into Canaan, and live with the rest of the Israelites.

The Answer

The people listened to all these accusations, perhaps very much surprised. They had not meant to rebel against God. They said: "The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, . . . that we have built us an altar." Let God be the judge whether or not they were being disobedient. If they had disobeyed God, He would prove it by destroying them; they were willing to take the judgment themselves. But if they lived, all men would know that they meant no harm in building the altar.

Explanations

They realized that they were a long way from the Tabernacle, and evidently they did not plan to take their little ones there; so the children would never know what the altar of God looked like. By building this altar to look like the one at the Tabernacle, the children could see for themselves what the altar was like and they would not forget about the worship of the true God.

Then, too, the children of the Israelites from Canaan might forget about their cousins who lived in Gilead, and when they came through that land they might think it was a heathen country. If they saw an altar built after the pattern of the one at Shiloh, they would realize that these people must know the true God, too.

The Reubenites and Gadites promised never to offer sacrifices upon the altar they had built. When the priests and the princes heard these explanations, they decided that their brothers had not sinned. And when they carried the message back to the Israelites in Canaan, they, too, were pleased.

"And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the

from following the Lord? and it will be, *seeing* ye rebel to day against the Lord, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.
¹⁹ Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession *be* unclean, *then* pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord'S tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the Lord, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the Lord our God.

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 perished not alone in his iniquity.

²¹ Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel,

²² The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if *it be* in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord, (save us not this day,)

²³ That we have built us an altar to turn from following the Lord, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the Lord himself require *it*;

²⁴ And if we have not *rather* done it for fear of *this* thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?

²⁵ For the Lord hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the Lord: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the Lord.

²⁶ Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice:

²⁷ But *that* it *may be* a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the Lord before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the Lord.

altar Ed: for it shall be a witness between us that the LORD is God."

Although the people of these tribes had not trespassed against the Lord at this time, we do find that later they were the first to be carried into captivity. Their being so far from the true place of worship made it easy for them to forget Gad. We can learn from that that we are much safer when we are near other Christian people so we may worship with them and talk about the things of God. If it is absolutely necessary for us to be away from the house of God, He can give us power to stand true. But if we through neglect or selfish desires move far away, we are in danger of losing the love of God out of our hearts.

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Psalm 65:4).]

QUESTIONS

- 1 Which tribes had stayed east of Jordan?
- 2 Why?
- 3 What did they promise to do after their families were settled?
- 4 How long were the fighting men of the two and one half tribes in Canaan?
- 5 What did they do on the banks of Jordan when they returned?
- 6 What did the Israelites do when they heard about the building of the altar?
- 7 What explanation did the two and one half tribes give?
- 8 Whom were the Israelites to worship? Where?
- 9 Whom do we worship? How?

²⁸ Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should *so* say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say *again*, Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it *is* a witness between us and you.

²⁹ God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the Lord our God that *is* before his tabernacle.

³⁰ And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which *were* with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them.

³¹ And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, This day we perceive that the Lord *is* among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord.

³² And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad, out of the land of Gilead, unto the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought them word again.

³³ And the thing pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God, and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt.

³⁴ And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: for it *shall be* a witness between us that the Lord *is* God.