

Joshua 07-11-02a

This is Friday, the 2nd of November, 2007. We continue our study in the book of Joshua. We're at chapter 22, approaching the threshold of the end of the book.

We just have a few more chapters left to go. Chapter 24 will close out this historic account. Let's take a moment as we begin to pause and reflect on the grace of God in the person of the Holy Spirit and in the presence and the preservation of His Word and prepare ourselves to look at this passage together.

Shall we pray? Father, it is a recognition of our lowly estate and our lack of resource and our lack of merit when we contemplate all of the things that you have done for us in granting to us eternal life, granting to us a place in your plan and purpose, adopting us as your sons, calling us by your name and giving us as a gift to the Lord Jesus Christ, enrolling us in the future with the coming kingdoms and granting us so much potential and so much opportunity all through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. We thank you for the place that you have assigned us. We thank you for the opportunities that we have.

We thank you for the sustenance, the grace that you have made available to us, specifically through your Word and through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We pray that as we spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your Word that the things that the Holy Spirit has imparted to each one of us will be active and manifest and that we can both be blessed and be the source of blessing for others as we spend our time together centered on the truth of your Word. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we ask it in His name.

Amen. Well, as I mentioned last time, the book of Joshua divides rather neatly into three parts. You have the first part that we studied where they come across the Jordan, attack Jericho, Ai, southern campaign, northern campaign.

Then you have the time of occupation where the tribes are given their tribal inheritance and they split up to go and take possession of that which has been given to them by God and which they have laid hold of by faith and obedience and the fulfillment of God's promise to drive out their enemies before them. Then this third section, beginning in chapter 20 and going through chapter 24, it's five chapters, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24. These chapters give us the life in the land section.

You're going in and conquering the land, then you're possessing the land, now you're living in the land. This is the three phases and we're in that third and final phase. So we saw in chapter 21 that the first provision was the cities of refuge.

Remember that? What do you do in terms of distinguishing? And there is just this one crime that is specifically addressed. It is the taking of a human life by intent with malice

of forethought. That's a crime.

Homicide is not a crime. It is still an awful thing, but if you didn't mean to deprive your fellow Israelite of his life, there is provision. And it sort of reminds us of the difference between intentional and unintentional sin.

This was distinguished, if you recall, in the sacrifices we studied in the first several chapters of Leviticus. There are sins that are committed for which atonement can be made. There is a sin of the high hand, a rebellious sin, a malice of forethought, vindictive, anti-God, sort of shaking your fist at heaven sort of thing that is in a completely different category.

You find this all through the Bible. You can go to the last few chapters of the New Testament and there is a sin unto death. You can pray for believers who wind up in a spiritual dire straits and then you can also find that there are some who get entangled in a kind of sin for which you should not pray.

And so you have the same sort of thing here with the orderly disposition of these. And the avenger of blood can't go in and whack the perpetrator before the trial. And so the cities of refuge allow time for someone to flee and be protected by the Levites until they can be returned to their community and be tried with a fair trial, mouths of multiple witnesses and so on, and the case is disposed.

If it turns out that they are not guilty of murder, but only guilty of manslaughter, they return to the city of refuge and live out the remainder of their days until the death of the high priest, whichever comes first, their own death or the death of the high priest. Chapter 22 gave us the provision for the Levites. Because their inheritance is the greatest, I mean, think of it, if you had a choice, what tribe would you choose to be born into and have your inheritance with in Old Testament days? It's a no-brainer for me.

If I had a choice, people say, well, angel comes up and says, well, Sam, you know, we're going to pop you into the Old Testament past there. What tribe would you like to live with? Where would you like to be associated? Well, I don't even have to hesitate. I would want to be a Levite.

I would want to be able to go and spend my time around the tabernacle or the temple and to be associated with the things of God and be close to His presence in the Shekinah that dwells in the Holy of Holies. Where else would you want to be? Why would you want to be any place other than there where you can learn the most and see the most and be the closest to the presence of God? Well, that's chapter 22, the inheritance of the Levites. And they are assigned cities within the territories of the other tribes.

And they are guests, in a sense. These cities belong to the tribes. And we know this from later passages where these cities clearly belong to Benjamin or to Reuben or to Ephraim

or to one of the tribes.

Levites dwell there, but it's not a city owned and operated by the Levites. They are given housing. They are given space.

And there was probably a Levitical quarter or a Levitical neighborhood. But we know that they were free to live other places as well by the time of Christ. A lot of the priests live in Jericho.

And Jericho is not a Levitical city. Many of the priests live in Jerusalem itself. Jerusalem is not a Levitical city.

You have Nab and places like this where you have a lot of Levites congregate and they are not necessarily exclusively Levite. There is a mixture. So that was chapter 21.

Now we come to chapter 22. And it says, the Eastern tribes return to their lands. So keep in mind where we are.

Third phase of the book. This is how do you dwell in the land. And so it begins here.

Let's read a little bit of this. Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Right away we know who we're talking about.

These are the tribes that have their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. They got theirs first. They settled for land that's not specifically part of the land of promise.

It's on the other side of the Jordan. It's the Transjordan. And the deal was, okay, you can drop off your wives and kids, but you've got to come fight with your brethren.

So for the last seven years, the warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh have joined with their brethren on the west side of the Jordan, fighting the southern campaign, fighting the northern campaign, squelching and driving out and eradicating all of the Ites that live in the land. Well, that phase is over with now. So these guys are ready to go home.

So Joshua called them and said to them, You have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. You have not left your brethren these many days up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. Now this is an interesting word to which we will return, this word charge.

And now the Lord your God, verse 4, has given rest to your brethren as he promised them. Now therefore return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 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.

So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. What do you think they did once they got to their tents? They started breaking down their tents and packing their stuff up and saying their farewells. They have been on this long campaign.

They have marched with their brethren, and now they are going to divide. They are going to split away, and they are going to go across the Jordan back to their families. Now to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half, 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 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. 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.

Seems pretty clear. There is a spoil that attaches to conquest. Why does he split out specifically the half-tribe of Manasseh? Manasseh is split on each side of the Jordan.

And there's this special section here, beginning in verse 7 and verse 8, and he tells the half-tribe that's going on the other side of the Jordan, Take a bunch of spoil with you. Why doesn't he say that to the rest of the Manassehites that are on the western side? Well, their spoil is the territory. So there was an apportionment, there is a dividing of treasure and silks and gold and silver and plunder and heads of cattle and goats and whatever else they had.

And they said, you take this back. This is something to take back across the Jordan with you. As sort of a reward, a reimbursement, a remuneration above and beyond their keeping their promise.

This is a token of their gratitude for their faithfulness and their seven years of service where they didn't really have a stake in how the battle turned out other than the fealty to their brethren. So they take this back. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.

Reuben Gad, half-tribe of Manasseh, return. Now, everybody is together and everyone is under a single command and a single authority and they're all of like mind and they're all at close quarters up until this point. Two and a half tribes are now leaving.

And there's going to be a separation. In verse 10 it says, when they came, this is the two and a half tribes, 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 the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a great impressive altar. Now the children of Israel heard someone say, it's always this way, well, they said, someone said, I heard through the grapevine that this happened.

Someone said, behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the edge, on the frontier, on the border of the land of Canaan in the region of the Jordan on the children of Israel's side. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together in Shiloh to go to war against them. What on earth? No sooner, they haven't even gotten back home yet, and the other ten tribes are ready to come up against them.

Ten plus Levi. Even the other half of Manasseh is going to march up against them. What is the problem here? Well, this is what happens when we have something that interferes with communication.

Many times it's a separation. Sometimes it is just an issue that arises where we're not talking for some reason, and an action is performed by one party, and the other party immediately puts an interpretation on that action, believes they understand that action, finds fault with that action, and is ready to go to battle. This is something measured in days here.

These guys haven't even been gone a week. How long does it take to go from Shiloh to the Jordan? It's not even a day's journey. And they probably spent a day, went over there, camped, and then they spent a couple of days building this very big altar.

And so their brethren immediately say, something has got to be done. They are literally up in arms. They are ready to go to battle and go hack these guys up with swords, pierce them with spears, pummel them with whatever weapons they've got.

Why? Why would an altar raise such a ruckus? Well, we keep reading, The children of Israel sent Phineas, the son of Eleazar the priest. You remember Phineas. He is the famous guy at the incident of Baal Peor, when they had all those strange women being brought into the camp, and Phineas is the guy that stopped that whole deal.

He is the grandson of Aaron. He is the son of Eleazar the priest. So, Phineas is sent to the children of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, because by the time all of this word gets out and all the noise is up, the two and a half tribes have gone on across and have gone home.

And with him, ten rulers. One ruler from the chief house of every tribe of Israel. So these are the princes of the ruling clans of each tribe.

Each is the head of the house of his father among the divisions of Israel. The most senior guy. The guy who has the say-so for each tribe.

They came to the children of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and spoke with them, saying, verse 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? Why are they so nervous about this? You think, well, what's wrong with worshiping God? It seems like Abraham built altars hither and yon, Jacob built altars hither and yon. Well, if you recall, back in Deuteronomy, Moses brought the law down from the mountain, and God said, You will build an altar, and you will worship in the place of my choosing in the land. God will choose the place.

And everybody in Israel knew that that place was wherever the Levites set up the tabernacle. That's where the altar of God is. There will be no other altars.

Remember the feasts, where all the men have assembled three times a year and come down? That's the place. But why are they so nervous? Why are they ready to go to war against these two and a half tribes? Look at verse 17. Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us? Now, what do we know about the iniquity of Peor? Well, keep your finger here and turn back to Numbers chapter 25.

Just a refresher. We looked at this some weeks ago. Israel was in the Acacia grove.

The people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

The Lord said to Moses, Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. So Moses said to the judges of Israel, Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor. And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

When Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, our same Phineas that we see so many years later, when he saw it, he rose from among the congregation, took a javelin in his hand, went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. Those who died in the plague were twenty-four elephs, twenty-four thousands.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous

with my zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my zeal." False worship. Building altars and worshipping Baal instead of God. Therefore, say, Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel.

The name of the Israelite was Zimri, the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. The name of the Midianite woman was Cosby, and so on. That's the incident of Baal Peor.

That's what we're talking about back in Joshua chapter 22. So who's talking here? This is the guy who has experience with it. Now think about this.

This is where we end up with, whatever you want to call it, prejudice or we jump to conclusions. Most of the time when we are quick to jump to a conclusion, when we are quick to misinterpret someone else's actions, it's because we've gotten burned or we've had an experience. We are quick to say, Oh, I've seen this before.

I know what this is. We do this in all different kinds of ways. Someone who has had a near relative sicken and die with a certain set of symptoms, if you start to see those symptoms in someone else, what's the first thing that comes to your mind? Oh, no.

My relative who died of cancer started out with this kind of stomachache. I wonder if this is that. We make these associations.

It's the way our mind works. If someone smiles and shakes our hand and we find out the next day that they betrayed us, well, the next time someone smiles and shakes our hand, we are more wary. We tend to think, Oh, I've seen this before.

We make these associations. It's how our mind works. The problem is that if we are not careful, we can jump to wrong conclusions and we can act on those based on past experience and we stop asking questions.

The good thing that is done here is that Phineas and the elders of Israel go and ask. They don't assemble the armies, which is what they are ready to do. Did you notice that? In verse 12, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war.

You know how the hotheads are. They are brandishing the swords and the spears and the shields and they are ready to go. Let's go down there.

It's like a lynch mob. Cooler heads prevail. Phineas says, let's take a delegation and go find out.

Let's go ask them. But when Phineas gets there, what does he say? He doesn't say,

what's up with the big pile of dirt and rocks? He says, what are you doing departing from the Lord God, committing treachery and rebelling against the Lord? So, this is how it looks and this is how he presents it. So, it's great that they didn't go down there with swords and attack them and people are saying, wait a minute, wait a minute, stop the bloodshed.

They did at least go with what you might call a diplomatic mission. But the diplomatic mission is making these accusations. Well, they get their answer.

He says in verse 17, is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us from which we are not cleansed until this day? We're still paying for that mistake. And nobody knows better than Phineas what it took to stop God's wrath on that day. He was the guy with the javelin.

But 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. You are not only going to bring destruction on your heads, but you're going to bring it on all of us. How do we know that? Skip down to verse 20.

Did not Achan, the son of Zerah, commit one trespass in the accursed thing and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? They're thinking, look, you're going to mess this up for all of us by your rebellion, by this act of disobedience. We're all going to suffer because of your mistake. You're dragging us all down with your bad judgment.

Now, in between there, he says, verse 19, Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, cross over to the land of the possession of the Lord, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Do not rebel against the Lord, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar in addition to or besides the altar of the Lord. Now, what's the argument here? Phineas is saying, what's your rationale? What are you thinking, building this altar? Are you trying to sanctify your inheritance? Are you trying to get God to bless your land because it's still full of people that are not Israelites? If the land is not clean, well, come over here where God's altar is, because the presence of God authenticates and sanctifies the land.

And if you're worried that being on the other side, it's not clean enough, and you've got to try to do your own sort of righteousness, build your own religious worship system over there, well, look, we'll give you some of our land. We would rather give up some of our inheritance than have you risk all of us getting destroyed by the Lord. Think about Baal Peor and that great plague.

Think about what happened with Achan, where other innocent people died because of one man's mistake. We don't want to suffer because of you, so if you're not comfortable over there, and you feel like you need to sanctify it some kind of way, well, come over here. That's his argument.

So once again, he is sort of imputing to them. He's trying to figure out what they're up to, what their thinking is. But all of this is based on the conclusion that they have built an altar in violation of God's law, and their purpose is to worship with it.

It's a fair assumption. Somebody says, it's an altar. This kind of misunderstanding happens all the time, where you're trying to do something, and somebody says, wait a minute, that's an X, where X is something forbidden.

X is something wrong. You're trying to build a fence to keep your dog in, and you misjudge, and you take six inches of your neighbor's yard. They come out and say, you're trying to make your lot bigger.

No, I'm trying to keep my dog in, and I made a mistake. I'm sorry, I'll move my fence. This wasn't my intention at all.

But people, especially if someone's already got a bone to pick, if they've already got a prejudice, if they already look at you with a very dim squint, then they're going to put the worst interpretation. And this is human nature. We tend to do this.

We look at people with whom we disagree. We look at people with whom we have a bad history, and we are quick to draw the worst conclusion, quick to put the worst face on things. And this is not objectivity, and this is not just.

Phineas, you can understand why he might draw this conclusion and why he's sensitive. I was talking earlier this week about how you can get sensitized to a thing when you have a bad experience with it. You get a little house dust blowing in the air and your histamines get to flowing.

Then anything will set them off. One dog nips your heel when you're on a walk and you start looking at all dogs with great suspicion and giving them a wide berth. Somebody has a crime committed.

A teenager vandalizes their car. Well, now they start looking askance at all teenagers. This is human nature.

This is what the ten tribes are doing. They saw what happened with Achan. They saw what happened with Baal Peor.

And now they are sensitized. And this is a good instinct. We don't want anybody messing up our relationship with God, but they are doing an injustice to these two and a half tribes.

They're fellow warriors who they have just parted from in great peace and brothers in arms, greetings and farewells and so on. Just overnight, they're ready to suspect him of this horrible, grievous, spiritual crime. And it should not be so.

Brothers ought to give one another the benefit of the doubt. And I am the first to tell you that none of us are immune from this. I'm not immune to it.

I make this mistake. All of us do. We are quick to jump to bad conclusions.

So, the children of Reuben in verse 21, the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, answered and said to the heads of the division of Israel, The Lord God of gods. This is a beautiful phrase in Hebrew. This is El, Elohim, and Yahweh all put together.

It's an unusual and very emphatic term. They say, what's the matter with you? You think we don't respect God? God is the God of gods. He is the Elohim of Elohim.

He is Yahweh the Lord. There's no lack of worship and respect and love and obedience and faithfulness toward God on our part. The Lord God of gods.

The Lord God of gods. Let me just set you straight right now. We are 100% dedicated to the Lord our God.

He knows and let Israel itself know. If it is rebellion or treachery against the Lord, then kill me now. You would be justified in killing us if this were the case, but it's not.

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. I'll stand here and may the Lord strike me dead, if that's my intention, is basically what these tribes are saying. In fact, we have done it for fear, for a reason, saying in time to come, your descendants may speak to our descendants saying, what have you to do with the Lord God of Israel? You all are over across the river.

We don't trust you anymore. You're not over here worshiping and participating in our relationship with God. The Lord has made the Jordan a border between you and us.

You children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no part in the Lord, so your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the Lord. They would ostracize them and shove them aside.

This sort of happens later on. Remember the relationship between Judea and Samaria? What happened? Those are their brethren up there, but they have fought against them, and so they push them away. No Samaritan can come near.

Well, way, way back, the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh saw that this might take place, that by virtue of separation and by virtue of misunderstanding, and of course, it comes true before they can even get home. Their brethren are already suspicious of them, and they haven't even unpacked their gear yet. And they say, look, we said in verse 26, let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar,

not for burnt offering, not for sacrifice, but as a witness between you and us and generations after us, that we may perform the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, with our peace offerings over there in the land.

We will come over, so that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, you have no part in the Lord. We said it will be that when you say this to our generations in time to come, we'll say, here is the replica of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, not for burnt offering, not for sacrifice, it is a witness between you and us. It is a reminder.

It is a token. We remember right here at the Jordan, we have put a symbolic altar. Anytime we look in your direction, we're going to see that symbolic altar.

That is the direction of worship. We're not going to actually altar on it. It's an offer of sacrifices on that altar.

It's a reminder. It's a token. It's a symbol.

And this, in fact, is exactly what the entire Levitical worship system is. It itself is not the real thing. It is a shadow of good things to come.

By the law comes the knowledge of sin. The law is a schoolmaster. It brings to Christ.

The blood of goats and bulls cannot cleanse. Those sacrifices have to be repeated over and over. They are a token.

They are a reminder. They are a memorial in advance of what Christ is going to do. Well, this shadow altar for those two and a half tribes is a reminder.

And anybody that says, hey, you all have no part in Israel, they say, what do you mean? We've got a shadow here. Well, what does this all signify? How do we do interpretation and application from this? We'll pause here and take our break, and when we come back, we'll try to translate this into terms that are meaningful for us. Let's pause here and take our break.