

Joshua 07-11-02b

Let's pick up our study now in Joshua chapter 22. There is this confrontation between representatives from the eleven tribes of Israel, Phinehas as the leader of the Levites, and ten other tribal leaders, including the half of the tribe of Manasseh that is on the west side of the Jordan. They have all gone across because this act has been performed, this construction has taken place, and there is a giant altar resembling the altar of God that the Levites attend in the vicinity of God's tabernacle.

There is this giant replica that has been constructed. And as I mentioned in answer to a question on the break, there is a little bit of lack of clarity in terms of the Hebrew text that is before us. It appears that what happened is that these two and a half tribes were leaving their brethren and they got to the Jordan, they stopped on the west bank and encamped.

And as they were about to leave and go to the other side of the Jordan, they had the idea that they should build this altar. And so as soon as they crossed, they built it on the Gilead side of the Jordan. But they had the idea and made the decision on the western side because they did not want to be ostracized and separated.

They said, look at this Jordan. These people are not going to let us come back. And so we will build this memorial replica of the altar.

We won't use it for sacrifice. There is not going to be any worship center here. It's sort of like Mount Rushmore.

We don't want to forget our foundations. We don't want to forget our roots. And so we will build this and it will be a testimony to generations to come that we share the same dedication to the God of Israel even though we are separated by this geographical feature of the Jordan River.

So they explain this in verses 22 and following there. Verse 28, we said it will be when they say this to us or our generations in time to come, we will say here is the replica of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made. Not for burnt offerings, not for sacrifices.

It is a witness. You see many of these memorial pillars erected for various things. The Eben Ezer that Samuel will raise later.

And it comes down to us as a reminder in the lyrics of a hymn. Here I raise mine Eben Ezer. And Eben Ezer or Eben Ezer means stone of help.

Thus far hath the Lord helped us. And it is a memorial. It is a memorial of a negative sort raised over the bones of Achan and his family.

There are memorials that are raised here and there. And that is what this is designed to

be. Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn from following the Lord this day to build an altar for burnt offerings, grain offering sacrifices beside the altar of the Lord our God which is before the tabernacle.

Now when Phineas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, children of Gad, children of Manasseh, this day we perceive that the Lord is among us because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord.

Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest, the rulers returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan to the children of Israel and brought word back to them. The thing pleased the children of Israel. Children of Israel blessed God.

They spoke no more of going against them in battle to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar witness. For it is a witness between us that the Lord is God.

Well, this was a very potentially serious misunderstanding, wasn't it? And it arose because of separation. If there was good communication, if the Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh had sent runners back saying don't panic, we're going to build this altar. But they didn't.

They didn't realize that it was going to cause such a gross misunderstanding when they built it. They thought this will be a reminder, this will be a memorial. And there was sort of a breakdown in communication.

They didn't realize it was going to cause a panic and bring people to war or they would have certainly taken some steps to prevent that. Now, the western tribes were preparing for war. Why? Well, they are remembering directives from God, such as Deuteronomy chapter 17, Leviticus chapter 17 and verse 8. God told the children of Israel, Whatever man of the house of Israel or of the strangers who dwell among you offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from among his people.

The altar should be at the door of the tabernacle. That's what Leviticus 17.8 says. In Deuteronomy chapter 12, verse 2 and following, you have a similar command from God.

Deuteronomy 12.2 says, Be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess all of the statutes and judgments, all the days you live on the earth, utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you dispossess serve their

gods. On the high mountains, on the hills, under every green tree, destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, burn their wooden images with fire, cut down their carved images of their gods, destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things.

Verse 5, Deuteronomy 12, You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses out of all your tribes to put his name for his dwelling place, and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There you shall eat before the Lord your God.

There you shall rejoice in all which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not do at all as we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. But, Deuteronomy 12, 10, When you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, and that's where we are, phase 3 of this book, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make his name abide.

There you shall bring all that I command you, burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, heave offerings, all the choice offerings which you bow to the Lord. You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and daughters, male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. Take heed to yourself, verse 13, that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see, but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes.

There you shall offer your burnt offerings. There you shall do all that I command you. So, very specific, very extensive, very emphatic command from God, and the other tribes in Israel are rightfully concerned, you are going to bring destruction on our heads from God.

Thankfully, these people who are zealous for the Lord, and zealous for obedience to his command, and are deeply concerned, also had the good sense to send a delegation, and bring these charges, and give the tribes a chance to respond. It certainly looks to them like this is disobedience. It certainly appears to be rebellion.

It certainly appears to be something that is going to be terrible. But they don't bring their swords, they don't send their armies, they don't come up to the gates of the cities of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan, and attack. They talk first.

Now, you think about it. We often have our natural human inclination. I remember long years ago, I would be in church, I would be listening to Bible teaching on tape or whatever, and many times there was teaching about what was called the old sin nature.

It had a little diagram of it. It's got an area of strength, and an area of weakness, and this, that, and the other, and it's inside your soul. Here's your soul with your memory center, and your volition, and your this, that, and the other, and here's the old sin nature.

It was this little diamond-shaped object. And I kept thinking, boy, this old sin nature, I wish I could get that thing out, just have a little surgery, and just cut that thing out and throw it away. It didn't dawn on me until later that to objectify the old sin nature, and say, well, it's this little thing inside me, that's really a dangerous thing.

I am sinful. It's not a sin inside me. It's me.

Nature means this is my quality. It's not a little thing. I can't say, oh, that little diamond-shaped thing inside, that's what made me do that.

That little thing is just running. No, no, no. It's me.

It's I. My choice. My decision. My thinking.

My priorities. My values. My goals.

I am guilty. Not a little black, dark thing inside me. That's shifting the blame to a little, well, shame on that old sin nature.

Probably had a little demon come in. What now? Yeah, the devil made me do it. Little devil-shaped thing inside me.

No, no, no. It's a nature. It's us.

Don't be shifting the blame off onto some little square on a diagram. It's me. I do this.

I screw up. I sin. And we have to retrain our thinking.

Paul in Romans chapter 12 does not say, get your old sin nature transformed. He says, be ye transformed. And the ye there is emphatic.

When we recite that verse on Sunday, don't miss that little word. Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed. I need transformation.

I need to think differently. I need to slow down and stop being quick to draw the sword. Quick to rattle against the shield and say, those people need to be cut down.

They're going to cause me problems. They're going to bring the wrath of God down. We stop at that point.

It's a good instinct. It's easy to justify. Well, these people are disobeying the Lord.

They're going to get us all in trouble. Right? Easy to rationalize. It's easy to vindicate and justify.

I am righteous. They are not. I'm doing the right thing.

They're doing the wrong thing. Well, just hold up. Go slow.

Have a talk. Get some communication going. Make sure you know exactly what the situation is.

All of us, I'm sure, I assume you've had the same experience I have, where you've got it in your mind exactly what happened. Well, this person just did this to aggravate me. I told them how it ought to be.

It's not that way. They're just disregarding me. This is rank rebellion.

I will come down on this like a ton of bricks. But if you stop and talk, you find out, well, if I had done what you said, look at these terrible things that would have happened because you didn't have all the facts. And I have actually done you a favor by not doing what you said to do.

And you can save yourself a lot of embarrassment if you slow down and say, well, good point and don't we make a great team instead of let's hack each other to pieces and have a big argument because I thought I was right. Now I'm embarrassed that I was wrong, etc. And this is a great model because there is righteous indignation in Israel over a perceived wrong.

Correct? If this was in fact an alternate worship place in violation of all of these extensive commands in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, would they not have been right to go to war against their brethren? Absolutely. God said stamp that stuff out. Anybody that leads you astray, anybody that falls in with the Canaanites, cut them off from their people.

Destroy them. Get rid of them. It's a death penalty offense.

But be sure you know what you're doing. Be sure you have found out all of the facts. This is the great message.

And to his credit, and you think about the prejudice that Phineas had to overcome here because Phineas has had close personal experience with this. He has seen Cosby come into the camp. He has been the guy to stamp this out.

I did it once and I'll do it again. Who wants to be first? Come up here. I've got the javelin.

But he stops and he speaks and he says, look, here's what we see. And when he hears the response, he is immediately placated. He's immediately pacified.

He immediately understands and he accepts the explanation. He doesn't get suspicious and say, well, is this a story you thought of just so we don't come to war? These are their brothers. They have fought side by side for seven long years.

These men have well and faithfully discharged their pledge. They said they would stick it out until the last dog was hung, until the last Canaanite was eradicated. And all the ones they're going to eradicate, they have eradicated.

These men are faithful men. They have demonstrated their integrity. And now they're going home.

And isn't it a good thing that Phineas and these other elders stopped and asked, instead of coming up there and launching a big attack and shedding blood in error? Well, it ought to be a reminder to us. We think about our memory verses. Look out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Put the interests of others ahead of yourself. Get some communication going. You know, one of the biggest obstacles to communication is our own pride.

There's a little nook, a little cranny, a little corner in our nature that sort of likes that righteous indignation thing. And you see some people out in our culture who really sort of cultivate this, and they're looking for something to attack. They're looking for something to picket, something to march against, something to write nasty letters to the editor over.

They're quick. They want to judge something. And usually this is, you know, you can do amateur psychology.

It's insecurity. You want to build yourself up by tearing down others. It's a pretty common human failing.

If we are truly secure as believers, we know who we are. We know why we're here. We know that we don't have any merit.

We're no better than anybody else. It's only the grace of God and the blood of Christ that separates us and sanctifies us and makes us anything special. What do we have that we did not receive? By grace.

That humility allows us to swallow our pride, to swallow our sense of being wounded, of being wronged. The hardest thing to overcome is when you feel like somebody has deeply wronged you to be civil and to ask questions and to set that aside and try to get the facts before you puff up and get on the defensive and start returning what you think has been a wrong that has been done. All of us do this.

So this is a great model. Many times over the 40 years in the wilderness we see Israel

giving us a negative example. This is what not to do.

Don't go three days into the wilderness and start complaining that God should never have brought you out of Egypt. Don't be sitting there grumbling and complaining against the God-appointed authority, Moses and Aaron. Don't grab the quail just because they're blown across the landscape.

Lots of negative examples in the 40 years of wandering. But the great thing about the book of Joshua is there are so many good examples. Examples of faithfulness, examples of obedience, examples of integrity, the great leadership of Joshua, the careful execution of the plan, the willingness to abide by the decisions in the fall of the lot, the willingness to abide by the decision to give women, the daughters of Zelophehad, an equal inheritance.

There was no riot. There was no mob. There was no lynch party that went after those ladies.

People respected the Word of God. They respected the leadership that God appointed. And here you see that this momentum carries forward.

It's one thing to have it in a time of war. It's one thing to have it in a time of taking possession and going into a new land and new cities and settling down and building houses and getting out of that itinerant and Bedouin sort of lifestyle that they've had for decades. It was an adjustment.

And now they continue to exhibit that same faithfulness and obedience and integrity and objectivity in the living in the land phase. And look at what it saves them. There was not a single life lost over this deal.

There was a passion. There was a righteous indignation. There was a huge, grievous misunderstanding.

And it could easily have resulted in hundreds of lives lost. Nobody died. Why? Because Phineas and the elders went and talked with these guys first and found out this was a big misunderstanding.

This wasn't what it appeared to be at all. Appearances are deceiving. Man looks on the outward appearance.

We are quick to judge on superficialities. And all of us realize that the longer we live, the more careful we become. If we gain any wisdom at all, we're more careful about jumping to conclusions based on appearances.

So, it's a great example. And what looked like evil was actually good. It is to prevent falling away from God.

It is to prevent a schism. It is to prevent forgetfulness of spiritual priorities that these two and a half tribes built this memorial. Now, we look around at denominations.

We look around at other brands and flavors of Christianity. And we can be quick to find fault. And there is plenty of fault to be found.

People can look at us and find fault with us. And some of it might be justified. We're all, hopefully, doing the best we can to understand God's Word and live in its light.

But it's progress for everyone. All of us came from somewhere. We didn't accept Christ as our Savior and the next day understand everything perfectly and become a light shining in a dark place for everyone.

We've gone through stages. And there were misunderstandings that we might have had for years that we eventually grew out of. We may still have understandings that we're in the process of growing out of.

We may have misunderstandings that we're nowhere near growing out of yet. But we're trying to tread that road. Trying to move in the upward path.

We have to remember other Christians are in the same boat. Any growing believer is somewhere that he's not going to be a year from now. If you're growing, you're making progress.

That means you're in a place where you need to make progress which means you've got some stuff wrong. Some things not figured out. Things are not right.

There's misunderstandings. Misapprehensions. Those who are strong, Paul says, are to bear with those who are weak.

If we are possessed of better understanding and more maturity, that gives us that much more responsibility to be flexible. To be patient. To be understanding.

To not let passion get the better of us. To not cause a weaker brother to stumble. You go over to Corinthians.

Both 1st and 2nd Corinthians have extensive discussions of the relationships between believers who differ in their maturity level. If we think that we've made some progress, well, that's great. That means that we are that much more accountable to be patient.

To be thoughtful. To be ready to grant the benefit of the doubt when someone less mature maybe isn't ready to give the benefit of the doubt. Remember how it was with the meat offered to idols? There were believers who thought, oh my goodness, you've got a piece of meat that was in the temple of an idol.

You can't possibly be spiritual. You can't possibly love the Lord Jesus and be taking this

kind of a cursed object into your house and making a meal out of it. And they were righteously indignant over this.

Well, more mature believers, what's the big deal? It's a rock. It laid in front of a rock for an hour. It's a great piece of meat.

Got it at a good price. Good stewardship. Getting this meat at a discount because it laid out there for an hour.

And I don't assign any importance to an idol whatsoever. It's just a piece of rock. What other people think about it is insignificant.

Let's eat and thank God for it. Two different points of view. It isn't about who's more right or who's more wrong.

It's about how do those two groups, how do people with those two different understandings treat each other? Get up on a high horse. You're going to judge. You're going to get an air of superiority.

You're going to backbite and nitpick and criticize and break fellowship. Can't come over to your house and eat. You've got that nasty idol meat in there.

Somebody else says, well, I'm not going over to your house because we can only eat lentils and stuff because you won't buy any decent meat. It's silliness. And it misses the point.

It is subjectivity. If we have any spiritual growth at all, we should be moving in the direction of objectivity. This is an example of that.

And notice how well it turns out. It is Phineas who speaks up. By the way, in the entire book of Joshua, this is the only place where someone besides Joshua is portrayed in a leadership role in Israel.

Everything else, it's Joshua. Joshua is the general. Joshua is the decision maker.

Joshua is the one who assembles the people. The one other guy who does something here in the whole book is Phineas. Joshua is the military leader.

Phineas is the priest. Joshua is God's representative of civil authority, military authority. He is as close as you could get to something analogous to the king, the single civil leader.

Phineas is the priest. But Phineas is no Casper milk toast. You know, you think, well, the priests, they probably just kind of stand around looking holy.

They're probably kind of pale and looking upward all the time. Don't forget Phineas with

the javelin. It was a Levite.

You think about those guys lifting those bowls and big sides of beef around. These guys were somebody to contend with. And I think Phineas was probably pretty physically impressive.

You think about the physics of driving a javelin through two living human bodies. Phineas did it. And he was no lightweight.

He was a formidable individual. But humility is strength under control. Phineas, the son of Eliezer, verse 31, Joshua 22, said to the children of Reuben, children of Gad, children of Manasseh, this day we perceive that the Lord is amongst us.

First thing out of his mouth. God is with us. God is in our midst.

What was Mary told to name the Christ child? You will call His name Immanuel, which is interpreted God with us. You will call His name Yeshua. He will save His people from their sins.

The Lord is among us. Immanuel. Because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord.

And it's interesting because there was no wrongdoing by Reuben, Gad, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh here. But Phineas says, you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord. What's he talking about? It sounds initially like, well, by not building an altar of worship you've delivered out of the hand of the Lord.

They were equally patient. They didn't get up in arms at being wrongfully accused. They didn't come out and have an equal level of attack and accusation against these elders of Israel.

They were patient. They communicated. And Eliezer says, you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord.

Because you were doing what was right, and because you were peaceable when we approached you, God is not going to be angry with us either for false worship in Israel or for taking a wrongful vengeance, mistakenly attacking our own. God is with us. We have been delivered out of the hand of the Lord.

Phineas returned, went back, brought back word to the rest, and the children of Israel were pleased. And the children of Israel blessed God. Notice, they didn't bless Phineas.

They didn't bless the Reubenites and the Gadites. They blessed God. Why? Viewpoint.

Objectivity. God was in this. They were looking to God.

They were trying to please God on all sides. And God made sure they didn't hurt each other. God made sure that there was not needless bloodshed.

God honors those who honor Him. It is the witness in verse 34. And this is really kind of funny in Hebrew when you read this because there's some kind of weird goings-on in the text.

And when you get to verse 34, literally in Hebrew, it says the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar Ed. The name of the altar is Ed. And what has happened here is the word is spelled with an ayin and a dalet.

Ayin is the guttural sort of an A sound and dalet is the D. And so when you look this up, it means witness. You find it, for example, in Deuteronomy 17 verse 6. Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses. He shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

And there you have it in the plural. Two or three edim. He shall not be put to death on the testimony of one Ed.

By the mouth, literally. Of one Ed. So the name of this big altar is Ed.

Ed the altar. Oh, what's that big pile of rocks there, daddy? Oh, that's Ed. Witness.

Testimony. And as is so often the case, there is a clever wordplay there. Because the ten and a half tribes were ready to go to war on the testimony of this one witness.

They saw the altar, somebody called it an altar, and they were ready to go kill their brethren on the testimony of that one Ed. But in reality, it is a witness to the loyalty and to the foresight and to the pledge that these tribes want to make to remain united with their brethren on the other side. So it's very clever.

It is a witness between us that the Lord is God. Just the opposite of what it was interpreted to be. And this is so often the case that we wrong each other by imputing bad motives where it's completely unjustified.

And we hurt ourselves, we hurt those we love, we hurt those around us by jumping to those sorts of conclusions. This is a wonderful example of faith and patience. And it ought to stick out in our minds.

It ought to be a giant altar of testimony in our souls to remember from this day forward that we are brethren. We are co-heirs with Christ. We have all been saved by grace.

And those with whom we associate, those that we know, are trying to please God, who are trying to grow and mature and prepare for life in the kingdoms to come. Why would we immediately suspect the worst and assume the worst and impute the worst to our own brothers? It's a tragedy. It's destructive.

It is the opposite of Ephesians chapter 4. It is the opposite of the whole body fitly joined together, building itself up in love. But it's easy to do because we are sinful. We are corrupt.

And it is only to the extent that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds that we can follow this great example of Phineas and the elders. This is the best generation you're going to find in the nation of Israel. These who took the land by conquest.

These who took the land into their possession. And these who learned to live in the land. They build the cities of refuge.

They make the smooth roads so that people can flee there for safety. They listen to their leadership. They pause and reflect.

They reconcile when there's a misunderstanding with their brethren. There will never be another generation in Israel any greater than these that Joshua led. And it's a wonderful thing to see good, positive examples in Israel because over the course of their history this is relatively rare.

Well, this brings us now to chapter 23. And we're going to pause and save this for next time because Joshua's work is done. And you get the idea in chapter 22 that it's either set slightly out of time and Joshua is already off the scene or Joshua is so elderly at that point that he's not really effectively leading anymore because Phineas steps up.

And there is no involvement of Joshua in any of that episode with the two and a half tribes. Or he may have just been out on a recon or he may have just said, Phineas, go take care of that. I'm going to stay here and wait to hear back.

It's interesting though that it could easily have been Joshua in chapter 22 and it wasn't. Why Phineas? I think there are two reasons. First of all, it is a priestly function, reconciliation.

Priests have the ministry of reconciliation. That's what Phineas does. He bridges the gap.

He crosses the Jordan to the other side to bring peace between these factions. When you get over to the New Testament and Paul talks about the Lord Jesus Christ who bridges the wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles, we are all one in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek.

Slave nor free. Male nor female. We are one in Christ.

Jesus Christ has the ministry of reconciliation. It is a priestly ministry. He reconciles man to God and he reconciles man to man.

And those roles are divided in the Old Testament pictures. You have Yeshua or Joshua who is the conquering leader who wins the victory and is faithful, never loses a battle.

And then you have Phineas who is the son of Eleazar, who is the son of Aaron, and is the priestly harbinger of justice in the incident of Baal Peor.

And yet, instead of killing a wrongdoer, in this case, he mends the broken fence. He resolves this huge misunderstanding. So there is a great foreshadowing of the multiple roles that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to fulfill in bringing about peace, united in common worship of the Lord God.

So we will pick up and begin a study again in the book of Joshua at chapter 23 next week. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the graphic illustrations we have of principles and doctrines that guide us and give us insight and understanding into how we should live our lives before you. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enliven and impress these truths upon us so that we will remember them and be guided by them in the days ahead. And that our lives, both individually and collectively, will reflect your glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.