

We now come to a peculiar situation – a perceived error of judgment that could have annihilated Israel from within. But, instead, it strengthened Israel. It was a time when Israel had not yet fallen to corporate lies and sin. Later, these sins would proliferate, but for now Israel stood firm and feared God more than man. Hence they were ready to obliterate three tribes rather than incur God's wrath. Today, we fear men more than we fear God, and so His wrath comes down to us repeatedly. It is why we all suffer, because of the evils of some within the churches. As for me, I will not accept or be at peace with fellow believers who openly sin against the Lord. It is why, as a church, we have not been part of the wider Church... not because it is our intention, but because it is what others have decreed by their aloofness and hatred.

### Verses 1-6

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.

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6.

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

Canaan now divided up, and cities of refuge established, Joshua called for the elders and chiefs of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh – the three having their land on the east of the Jordan (the other half of Manasseh was on the west. Dan also had land both sides of the Jordan, though Dan's western boundary was on the coast of the Mediterranean, they were not called to the meeting).

When the heads of the three tribes assembled before Joshua and the high priest, Joshua spoke. He commended them for doing what Moses required, and for obeying Joshua, and they now had rest from their labours and wars. Therefore, he said, go to your tents and then to your new lands on the east of Jordan. Perhaps because the three tribes were not physically linked to the other tribes, being separated by the Jordan, Joshua warned them to retain godliness and God's laws, and to Love Jehovah, and live their lives totally loyal to God's commandments. Serve God with all your hearts! Joshua then blessed them and they went away to their tents.

What we see here is the equivalent of modern Christians being told to 'reform and be reforming'! Without this continual following of the Lord we cannot maintain godliness or fight off evils and our own imaginations. This is daily, hourly, second-by-second. It is not something we do when we feel like it, or when it is rarely brought to mind! And this is what Joshua was telling the three tribes.

### Verses 7-9

1.

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,

2.

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.

3.

And the children of Reuben and 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.

Scripture reminds the reader of this division of the tribe of Manasseh into two distinct parts, east and west'. To the east this consisted partly of Bashan and partly of Gilead. When Joshua sent the eastern part away, he reminded the chiefs that when they went they would be supported for a very long time by having great riches, and with large numbers of cattle, iron, brass, gold and silver, plus rich clothing, all gleaned as war booty, to be given out to all the families in their tribe.

The three tribal chiefs then left Shiloh and travelled east over the Jordan to join their tribes, leaving the main bulk of Israel in the west. Thus, they left Canaan and entered Gilead, which ran south, parallel to the Jordan. They went to "*the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord...*"

Do YOU take possession of the promises of God in our day? Or, do you cower before the modern Canaanites who threaten our safety? Do you cling to the promises, which are now and forever, and believe what God says – if we obey He will be with us? If you do not, then you disbelieve and peace and His promises will not be found... until you believe and act accordingly. As always, God's promises are always conditional!

### Verses 10-14

1.

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.

2.

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.

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3.

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.

4.

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,

5.

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.

The tribes in Moses' day were often at odds with Moses, Aaron and Joshua. In-fighting was normal for them. Now we come to an incident that almost broke out as inter-tribal war. The chiefs of the three tribes who were returning from Joshua decided to build "*a great altar*" on the eastern banks of the Jordan. The altar was to be conspicuously large. It appears that the altar was built at the crossing-point the tribes used before going to do battle against Jericho, at the mouth south of the river joining the Sea of Galilee. ("against the land of Canaan" = opposite, facing Canaan. "at the passage of..." = where Israel crossed from the east).

The news of the altar quickly reached all the other tribes, whose tribal soldiers gathered outside Shiloh. They were afraid, angry, and wanted to obliterate the three tribes. But, an envoy was sent to discover the reasons for the altar. These included Phinehas/Piyněchac ('mouth of brass'), grandson of Aaron, son of Eleazar the high priest, and himself a priest, known to be favoured by the Lord. He went with ten princes (chiefs) representing the complaining tribes.

The tribes preparing for war were incensed – they had seen God crush those who defied him, and they thought the three tribes on the east were declaring independence from the tabernacle in the west. They were afraid the three tribes would thus bring shame and punishment from the God Who had only just given them lands, power and peace: they would rather totally defeat their three fellow tribes than incur the wrath of God. The problem, though, was the western tribes did not know why the altar was built. At least they sent an envoy before launching an attack, which would have decimated Israel.

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Even today, Christians can become agitated against other believers without knowing the facts. My ministry proves this to be fact, as we have been accused of all manner of evil simply because we do not share the sins of our fellows and prefer to know sound doctrine rather than useless teachings. They see us as risking the wrath of God by continually reforming, whereas WE see the same danger in their refusal to truly believe and continually seek God's face! Unlike the ancients, they do not send an envoy to find out our position, but prefer a readiness to go to war! Thus, what should be unity in the faith, has become disunity because of their injured pride and sense of superiority.

### Verses 15-20

1.

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,

2.

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?

3.

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,

4.

But that ye must turn away this day 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.

5.

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.

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6.

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.

It would have been prudent to consult the other tribes before erecting an altar, but should fellows be subjected to war because of a lack of sense? As Matthew Henry remarked, *“God does, and men should, overlook the weakness of an honest zeal.”*

The ten princes and the son of the high priest therefore approached the three tribal leaders, who were probably still there after building the altar.

They accused the three tribes of a ‘trespass’ against Jehovah, and of turning away from God by building their own altar in rebellion. They added that perhaps the three tribes thought the sin of Peor was of no consequence, though it took until taking Canaan to purge themselves of the evil. (Peor was a false god of the Moabites, the equivalent of Baal, and followed by disobedient Hebrews and Moabites alike, including the prostitution of the women, bringing a holy plague upon the Hebrews). The tribes who confronted the three were terrified that God would similarly destroy them if the altar was erected as a separate, alternative, tabernacle altar.

The spokesmen told the three tribes to return to Shiloh to worship the true God rather than rebel against Him and the other tribes by building an alternative altar. They reminded the three chiefs of the sin of Achan when they encountered Jericho, and the wrath of God because of it. They did not want God to punish all the tribes if only three were rebellious: *“that man perished not alone...”*.

It is a fact that when Christians allow sin to grow amongst themselves, God can and does punish the whole of Christian fellows. As I have said, many perceive our ministry and church as beyond the pale; they castigate us amongst themselves. But, they refuse to meet with us and ask simple questions! In other words, we are their convenient scapegoat, unable to confront the supposed errors of our ways in their eyes and minds. It is much easier than receiving the reasons for our existence, and is a very sad state for them to be in!

### Verses 21-30

1.

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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,

2.

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,)

3.

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;

4.

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?

5.

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.

6.

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

7.

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.

8.

Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time

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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.

9.

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.

10.

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.

The three tribal elders must have been shocked and dismayed, but knew the other tribes were very serious. They held out their hands with palms shown, in an act of innocence... 'If we are guilty of what you say, then do not let the Lord save us this day... God knows if we are rebellious or sinning'. 'He knows if we have built an altar for a false god, or to burn sacrifices instead of at the tabernacle.' In their defence the three said their children's children would know the truth and the other tribes' children would not be able to say to the children of the three tribes – you have nothing to do with Jehovah!

The elders of the three tribes then explained why they had built an altar – to be a memorial of the unity of all the tribes, built because they were on the east side of the river and so physically apart (Re the Jordan: "... a border between us and you..."). 'It was not built to remove us from the Lord God or as an alternative for burning sacrifices.' The altar was built on the same pattern as the one in the tabernacle, not for sacrifices, but as a testimony of our combined brotherhood, not as an alternative tabernacle altar.

### Verses 31-34

1.

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.

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2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

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.

When all was said, Phinehas, the princes and elders who had gone with him, were very pleased. Phinehas told the leaders of the three tribes that God was with them all that day, because there was no transgression against Him, and therefore no punishment or war. It is always the worst possible situation, to be under the wrath of God. What others can inflict on us is as nothing by comparison.

The spokesmen for Israel then returned to Shiloh rejoicing in the confirmed faith of the three tribes to the east, after crossing the ford to enter Canaan. They then told the waiting tribes what had been said and done. The whole of Israel then rejoiced at the good news.

The tribes of Gad and Reuben (Manasseh is not referred to) also rejoiced, and named the altar *Ed* (pronounced 'Ay-eed'), meaning a testimony to the brotherhood of all the Israelites, and as a proclamation that "the Lord is God". That is, Jehovah is 'elohiym.

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