

Joshua's Story • Commander Joshua in the Promised Land

Lesson #59 - "Epilogue – Part 2 of 3" - •Chapter 21 thru the first half of Chapter 24• •HANDOUT•

► This lesson begins with Chapter 21 and the giving of the Levitical Cities that were to be appointed for the Levites, which had been commanded during the time of Moses.

In Chapter 22 opens with Joshua sending home the armies of the three tribes who elected to live on the Eastern side of the Jordan. These tribes fighting men have been fighting with Israel to settle the Promised land since the day they crossed over the Jordan, seven years prior. Now that the land had been fully distributed to the tribes, the eastern tribes' army were able go back to their families and their lands on the other side of the Jordan.

In Chapter 23 Joshua will give two exhortations plus a warning to the Leaders of Israel as they begin to live fully in the Land of Promise.

This lesson covers only the first half of Chapter 24, which will renew the Covenant between God and Israel. [We will leave the reminder of Chapter 24 to our final study lesson.]

► Joshua 21:1-2 • Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, "The LORD commanded, through Moses, that you give us towns to live in, with pasture lands for our livestock."

Q: The Levites were to receive no land inheritance like the other tribes. So, how are we to understand their request for towns and pasture land?

► Had the whole process of giving land to the Levites been left to the generosity of each tribe this could have ended up being a rather hit-and-miss situation. However, God provided guidelines that helped prevent that from happening. Each tribe was to give four Cities, with the exception of little Naphtali, who was to give only three. The tribe of Judah, with the embedded tribe of Simeon scattered within Judah, was to give nine Cities, probably because of the immense size of their inheritance. There were 48 Levitical Cities.

The chapter closes with this thought: *"The LORD gave Israel rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled."*

Q: Since the Levites would not receive a land inheritance, what is the purpose of these Levitical Cities which were given to the Levites by the other tribes?

CHAPTER 22

► Joshua called together the armies of the Reubenites, The Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to speak to them. These were the fighting men from the three tribes who chose to settle on the East side of the Jordan. Even though these three tribes would not need to cross the Jordan in order to possess their Land, they had agreed to Moses' request that the tribes would send their fighting men with the rest of Israel to assist the rest of Israel to take possession of the Land the Lord was giving them. Joshua said to the men gathered in front of him:

► **Joshua 22: 1-6** • "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For a long time now--to this very day--you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as He promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul."

Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes.

Q: What did Joshua mean by using the word "rest" when he said, "Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest, as He promised?"

Q: What is the caution that precedes Joshua's blessing to these soldiers?

Q: What five things does Joshua say the soldiers and the tribes they represent were to do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

► The soldiers began their trek home to their families on the East side of the Jordan. It had been seven long years but the work had been accomplished. Also, they were returning with great riches, goods taken as the spoils of war.

But before they crossed over the Jordan, they stopped and built a large, very impressive Altar. It was so immense in size that it was visible to everyone living in the Transjordan region. Even Israel's tribes who were living on the West side – the Canaanite side – became aware of this Altar, and they were furious.

They gathered together at Shiloh with the intention to go to war with their brothers who had chosen to live on the East side of the Jordan and who had built this Altar on the West side.

Q: Why would Israel view the building of this altar as so grave a problem that it warranted war?

But, a very good decision was made to confront the East side tribes before taking military action ...

► Phinehas, son of Eleazar the High Priest, was selected to be the one to confront to the East side tribes. Phinehas took with him ten rulers, one ruler from from each of the ten West-side tribes.

Phinehas asked: "The whole assembly of the LORD says: `How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an Altar in rebellion against Him now?"

► Phinehas then recited a list of Israel's historic rebellions over the years, all of which had cost Israel dearly. He included in this historic recitation both the treasonous act of Balaam and the shame of Achan at Ai.

He continued: "Don't you understand that if you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow He will be angry with the whole community of Israel?"

Phinehas pleads with them: "Please do not rebel against the Lord, or against us by building an altar for yourselves."

The East Side Tribes answer and explain why they built the altar.

► **Joshua 22:24-27; 29** • "The truth is, we have built this altar because we fear that in the future your descendants will say to ours, 'What right do you have to worship the Lord, the God of Israel? The Lord has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and you people of Reuben and Gad. You have no claim to the Lord.' So your descendants may prevent our descendants from worshiping the Lord.

"So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, but as a memorial. It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the Lord at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings.

Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. Only the altar of the Lord our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose."

► The explanation of the East side tribes was not only fully understood but it was accepted, which led to the entire matter being resolved. The story closes with this foot note:

Joshua 22:34 • And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: "A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God."

CHAPTER 23

► **Joshua 23:1-3** • After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, summoned all Israel--their elders, leaders, judges and officials--and said to them: "I am old and well advanced in years. You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you.

Q: What significance can we glean from the opening statement that a "long time had passed" when Joshua summoned the people, with the intent to speak to them?

Q: What are the things Joshua wants to communicate when he summons the elders, heads, judges, and officers of Israel together?

Q: What are the two categories into which Joshua organizes his thoughts?

Exhortation #1 are the things Israel must **remember to do:**

Exhortation #2 are the things Israel must **remember to avoid:**

Q: What is Israel's greatest defense against being lured to apostasy as a nation?

▶ Chapter 23 closes with Joshua giving Israel a warning: They should not suppose that being the recipients of God's blessings made them immune to His judgment.

He asks each man to acknowledge God's faithfulness in his own personal life and to remember that everything the LORD God has spoken has indeed come to pass; not one word has failed.

Furthermore, just as God has been faithful to bless their obedience, God will also be faithful to curse any later disobedience. Israel's covenant with God has, at its foundation, the truth that there is always a blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. [ref: Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28]

CHAPTER 24

▶ Chapter 24 opens with Joshua once again calling for an assembly of Israel, but this time at Shechem. [The last assembly was at Shiloh, Israel's new base camp.] He calls for the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel to present themselves before God. This will be Joshua's final call for such an assembly.

His purpose is three-fold: [1] To review Israel's full history beginning with Abraham to the present; [2] To remind the people of God's faithfulness thru-out all their history –their escape from Egypt, their sojourn in the Wilderness, and in the land of Canaan; [3] To enter into a re-established Covenant where the people solemnly swear to be faithful to Yahweh, and Him alone, from this time forward.

Q: Where is Shechem and why is it important to Israel?

▶ Current History:

▶ Ancient History: [ref: Genesis 12:6-7; 33:18-20; 34; 35:4]

▶ Future History:

Q: What is significant about Joshua calling for the elders, leaders, judges, and officials of Israel to present themselves before God at Shechem?

**Joshua has one final challenge to give to Israel.
He gives the challenge by giving Israel a choice.
This will conclude our study of Joshua ...**



Next Time • Lesson #60

“Joshua's Final Challenge to Israel”

