

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTIONS

Joshua is all about God keeping his promise to give his people the land. Why do you think God made that promise in the first place? What was his aim in bringing the people into Canaan? What do you think his aim is in saving us?

How might the way we answer these questions affect how we respond to what God has done?

QUESTIONS

Read Joshua 22:1-9

Recap – how are the tribes of Reuben Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh different from the other tribes, and what is going on here?

Now that God has fulfilled his promises to his people, how are they to respond?

What does this teach us about God's goal in giving them the land?

What does it teach us about God's goal in our salvation?

READ Joshua 22:10-20

Why do the rest of Israel react so strongly to what the two and a half tribes have done?

What does this teach us about how we should view sin?

Why do we sometimes find the idea of separating ourselves from the sins of other hard? How does this passage help us?

Can you think of times when you have taken strong action against sin in your own life?

Is there sin in your life at the moment that you need to take strong action against?

READ Joshua 22:21-34

What is the reason for the two and a half tribes building this altar?

What does this concern show about their priorities?

How can we express that same concern for the next generation (the children of others as well as our own if we have them)?

PRAY

Joshua 22:1-34



'Joshua' at a glance

Ever since Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, God's people had been homeless. He promised Abraham a land for his descendants where they could live securely, telling him in Genesis 15:13-16 that they would be slaves for 400 years before finally receiving the land. Abraham's family grew and moved to Egypt. After their slavery, God brought the people out through Moses and got them to the border of this Promised Land. Moses then died and it was down to Joshua to take them into the land God was giving them.

The book of Joshua follows the adventures of Israel as they enter the land, judge the people living there, and settle into their allotted inheritances. It's a remarkably upbeat book, with only the occasional hint that all is not well with God's people. The punchline of the story comes in Joshua 21:45, "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed: all came to pass."

Where this passage fits in...

The people have entered the land, defeated the inhabitants and allotted territory to each of the tribes. There is still much to be done, but the war of conquest is over. 'Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.' (21:45). The question now is 'how will the people respond to God's gracious gift of rest in the land he had promised?'

Theme Sentence

In response to God's promised rest, his people should love the Lord and walk in all his ways.

Application

Respond to God's goodness with love of the Lord, hatred of sin and concern for the future of his people.

[RA]

Commentary

[these notes follow the 15 March 2015 sermon at Emmanuel]

The final three chapters of Joshua describe three gatherings of the people at which Joshua urges the people to respond by clinging to the Lord and serving him faithfully. In chapter 22 the focus is on the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh.

1-3

This is the fulfillment of the promise made to Joshua in 1:12-18, and before that to Moses in Deuteronomy 3:18-20. These tribes had inherited land on the East side of the Jordan that had already been conquered by the whole of Israel. Since they had been helped in conquering that land, they were commanded to cross the Jordan with the other tribes and take the lead in helping the rest of Israel conquer the land of Canaan (see 4:12). This they have done, obeying everything that Moses, Joshua and ultimately the Lord have commanded them.

4-9

Now the land has been conquered and God has given rest to the rest of Israel, it is time for the two and half tribes to return to their own inheritance. After five years of fighting they are to return home to their wives and children, who are living in their inheritance on the East side of the Jordan. In addition, they are returning with large amounts of wealth captured during the conquest (v8). God has fulfilled his promises and blessed them.

Joshua tells the people to respond to God's goodness with careful obedience and love for the Lord. Note how these two things are intertwined in v5. To truly love the Lord and cling to him means to walk in his ways and obey all his commands. This is God's ultimate purpose in giving the people the land, that they would live in relationship to him, obeying him and enjoying his blessing.

10

The two and a half tribes build an altar by the Jordan on their way home. The author gives us the same information at this stage of the story that the rest of the tribes of Israel would have had – we're not told why the altar was built, only that it was of 'imposing size', it was meant to be seen and couldn't be ignored. But Deuteronomy 12 had made it clear that the people of Israel were not to build altars and sacrifice wherever they pleased. This is what the nations that have been conquered did, who worshipped other gods. The people of Israel are to have one sanctuary where they sacrifice to God. To build more altars is the first step on the road to idolatry.

11-12

When the people of Israel hear what the two and a half tribes have done, they recognize the seriousness of it and prepare for war.

13-17

Before going to war, the people send a high-ranking delegation to the two and half tribes. The alleged sin is described in three ways, a 'breach of faith', 'turning away from the Lord' and 'rebellion against the Lord' v16. It calls to mind the sin of Peor (Numbers 25) where the people engaged in sexual immorality and idolatry, and the Lord sent a plague on them. Sin has serious consequences. Note the key role played by Phinehas in both that episode and this chapter.

18-20

The people are concerned that sin in one part of the land will mean disaster for the whole congregation. If the two and a half tribes rebel, then the Lord will be angry with the whole congregation (v18) and will make the rest of the tribes rebels too (v19). Sin has corporate effects as the people learned in the incident with Achan (chapter 8). That is why the Israelites take it so seriously. Note the passion of these tribes to obey the Lord, which means dealing with anything that might prevent them from doing so. They refuse to be dragged into idolatry by the two and a half tribes.

21-29

The two and a half tribes protest their innocence: they did not build the altar for burnt offerings. It is not meant to be an alternative to the altar in the tabernacle. So they are not guilty of ignoring Deuteronomy 12 and rebelling against God. In fact the opposite is true. It is because of their concern for obeying the Lord, and in particular that their children might obey the Lord, that they have built this altar. They worry that because the Jordan is such a formidable barrier between the two groups of tribes, in years to come the children of the tribes in Canaan might deny access to the tabernacle to the children of the two and a half tribes. In doing so, they would 'make our children cease to worship the Lord.' The altar they have built is there to somehow witness to all future generations that the two and a half tribes also serve and follow the Lord.

30-34

The remaining tribes are satisfied with this explanation and the rest of the people of Israel bless God when they hear the news.

So both groups of tribes show a passion for obedience to the Lord, the one side by seeking to deal with those that would lead them astray, the other by seeking to prevent problems that might cause their children to stray.