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# Joshua 22

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## Joshua 22:1–34

## East Israel Returns to their Land and Builds an Altar

### Outline of Chapter 22:

- Vv. 1–9 **Joshua dismisses the two and a half tribes to the other side of the Jordan**
- Vv. 10–20 **West Israel objects to the altar built in east Israel**
- Vv. 21–29 **East Israel clarifies the purpose for building this altar**
- Vv. 30–34 **Phinehas and west Israel are satisfied with the explanation**

### Charts:

- v. 11 **Reasons Why the Altar was Built on the East Side of the Jordan**
- v. 11 **Reasons Why the Altar was Built on the West Side of the Jordan**

**Introduction:** Being that I am dreadfully anal about time lines, at the end of Joshua 21, we should go to Joshua 24:1–28, which is Joshua’s last message to the people of Israel prior to dismissing them to their land (Joshua 24:28). At this point, we will return to Joshua 22, where Joshua has a special audience with the 2½ tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. It appears that Phinehas arranged this last message of Joshua to fall at the end of the book of Joshua because it made such a fitting end to the book which bears Joshua’s name.

In Joshua 22, we will give some direct attention to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. We go from this ending of great mutual respect between Joshua and these tribes for the help which they provided in the securing of the land west of the Jordan; and here Joshua will dismiss them to return to their land and families on the other side of the Jordan. In the second half of the chapter, these same tribes will erect an altar on their side of the river Jordan. To the casual reader of the Bible, this may not give him any cause for thought. However, there will be one place and one place only from which sacrifices will be made. There will not be sacrifices made in a half-dozen cities or even in two different cities. Although the center of their religion will be moved to a couple of different cities, it will always be in one place because they worship One God and He will offer just one sacrifice in one place at one time for their sins.

Because the building of a different altar in a place other than where God had specified constitutes such an evil, the heads of Israel realized that action must be taken. The assumption was that Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh were involved in apostasy and Israel had been warned continually about that. In fact, in v. 5, Joshua will warn these 2½ tribes specifically to follow Jehovah God and to follow all of His mandates. Therefore, the remaining 9½ tribes, upon seeing a huge altar on the other side of the Jordan, realized that they had to act, even if the result was civil war.

Phinehas, who appears to be the spiritual leader of Israel at this time, takes with him ten men, representatives from the ten tribes of Israel. The heads of all twelve tribes will meet at an unspecified site east of the Jordan. Phinehas and the other heads of Israel will explain what the problem is to the other 2½ tribes. In fact, Phinehas will compare the problem that they are facing to the sin of Achan and to the falling away at Peor—two national tragedies. The 2½ tribes will explain that the altar is really a monument, but not a functioning altar, as there is but one altar to God. It was to stand as a monument to the connectedness of the twelve tribes. Their concern was that the 9½ tribes would, way off into the future, see themselves as separate from the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan, and somehow cut them off from the worship at the altar of the One True God. This was not to be a backup altar, but a monument, an altar which their children and their children’s children would see, and recognize that the tribes on both sides of the Jordan were one and that they all worshipped One God Jehovah. This altar stood as a testimony to that fact. The NIV Study Bible gives the most succinct summation of this chapter: *The two and a half*

*tribes from east of the Jordan, faithful in battle, are now commended by Joshua and sent to their homes. But their “altar of witness”...was misunderstood, and disciplinary action against them was narrowly averted.*<sup>1</sup>

Now, let’s cover a different aspect of this chapter. What is interesting here, is the lion’s share of this chapter will not involve Joshua directly, yet it will be fairly detailed. Joshua will dismiss the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh; and what will follow in vv. 10–34, where they build a second altar, does not mention Joshua at all. When the Israelites west of the Jordan react, what they do about it, the choosing the men and the resolving of the crisis, is all done apart from Joshua. The key figure is Phinehas, who is the only person mentioned by name. Phinehas is the son of Eleazar, the high priest, and therefore the heir to the throne of the high priest. What we theorized in the book of Deuteronomy is that Joshua took up the writing chores at the end of Moses’ life, having been the amanuensis of Moses. We will make the same hypothesis here: that Phinehas is the amanuensis of Joshua, and that, at the retirement of Joshua, will continue to record the events which impacted the history of Israel. In the English, the transition will seem seamless; for those with the KJV, it will sound like Joshua and Phinehas both speak Old English. However, in the Hebrew, we will go from a fairly simple vocabulary combined with a generally simple sentence structure, to a more confusing sentence structure, with not a strong change in vocabulary. At the first portion of this chapter, we will hardly consider other translations, as the Hebrew is simple enough and there is a great deal of agreement between the various translators. But, at v. 10, we will begin with translations which actually contradict one another, and thereafter, we will find ourselves going back to the various translators every few verses after that in order to get both the meaning and the translation right.

Because of the possible change of author and the fact that Joshua is not mentioned from v. 10 on, a logical question would be whether this is recorded in the proper chronological order. This can reasonably be affirmed. It would be natural for Joshua and the various tribes to be attending to their own particular needs; it would be a good time for Joshua to retire, although it is unlikely that they ever thought of it like that. It would be a natural time for Phinehas to take over the reigns of leadership, both Joshua and Eleazar being old. But, what most places this in a historical context is the natural flow from Joshua dismissing the 2½ tribes with his blessing, their going to Gilgal before crossing over the Jordan, and then the building of the altar right near Gilgal across the Jordan from West Israel. That appears to be a very natural sequence of events. It would seem less natural for vv. 1–9 to occur, and then, a few decades later, the 2½ tribes to think of building this altar right near the border for the reasons which they will give. Another contradicting factor is that no particular judge will be mentioned, which likely places these events before the book of Judges.

What is occurring in this book is a quiet, subtle, unspoken change. We would think that following the war upon Canaan that Joshua should assume authority and rule over Israel. In all actuality, no such provision for rulership had ever been stated or implied. Joshua had specific marching orders, as found in Joshua 1:2–3, 7–8: “*Moses, My servant, is dead. How, therefore, arise, cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given to you, just as I spoke to Moses...Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the Law will not depart from your mouth, but you will study it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.*” Moses also publically commissioned him back in Deut. 31:1–8, which followed God’s choice of Joshua to succeed Moses (Num. 27:15–23).

The second thing that we should note about this chapter is that, because it is narrative and because the issues are fairly clear, the interpretation throughout will be easy. We will run into several difficult verses; however, understanding what is being said will be quite easy, with the exception of vv. 10–11—the issue there is what side of the Jordan River did the 2½ tribes build the altar on. Certainly not an issue of any great theological import, but one of the many details which should be worked out.

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<sup>1</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 317.

## Joshua Dismisses the Two and a Half Tribes to the Other Side of the Jordan

Literally:

Smoother English rendering:

**Then called Joshua for the Reubenite and for the Gadite and for a half of a tribe of Manasseh.**

Joshua  
22:1

**Joshua then summoned representatives from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh.**

The verb is the Qal imperfect of qârâ' (קָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *call, proclaim, read*. Strong's #7121 BDB #894. Joshua is simply calling for or summoning the tribes which will live on the other side of the Jordan. These two and a half tribes have fulfilled their obligations as brothers, so Joshua is going to call them in to thank them and then he will dismiss them to their own land.

The background is that the lots have just been divided up for all of Israel. There is no reason to think that the lots were given out and each tribe went to its land immediately. The sense is that some lots were thrown in Gilgal, some were thrown in Shiloh; but all of Israel stayed until all the lots had been cast and all the land had been distributed. This would only make sense, as there was additional dividing up of the land in order to make the division fair (recall that the tribe of Simeon, for instance, was given land within the boundary of Judah; the Levites apparently received their cities last, but the other twelve tribes needed to know which cities would be occupied by the Levites.

Edersheim: *It must have been with a heavy heart that Joshua saw them [these 2½ tribes] depart from Shiloh. It was not merely that to himself it would seem like the beginning of the end, but that misgivings and fears could not but crowd upon his mind. They parted from Shiloh to comparatively far distances, to be separated from their brethren by Jordan, and scattered amid the wide tracts, in which their nomadic pastoral life would bring them into frequent and dangerous contact with heathen neighbours. They were now united to their brethren; they had fought by their side; would this union continue? The very riches with which they departed to their distant homes (22:8) might become a source of danger. They had parted with Jehovah's blessing and monition from the central sanctuary at Shiloh. Would it remain such to them, and they preserve the purity of their faith at a distance from the tabernacle and its services? Joshua remembered only too well the past history of Israel; he knew that even now idolatry, although publically non-existent, had still its roots and fibres in many a household as sort of traditional superstition.<sup>2</sup>*

**And so he spoke unto them, "You have guarded all that commanded Moses, a servant of Y<sup>e</sup>hovah; and so you have listened [and obeyed] at my voice for all that I commanded you.**

Joshua  
22:2

**Then he said to them, "You have carefully guarded all that Moses, the servant of Jehovah, commanded you; and so have listened and obeyed my voice as well in all that I commanded you.**

We have a couple verbs here which we have looked at before. The first is the Qal perfect of shâmar (שָׁמַר) [pronounced *shaw-MAR*] and it means *keep, guard, watch, preserve*. Strong's #8104 BDB #1036. The second verb we'll glance at is the Qal imperfect of shâma' (שָׁמַע) [pronounced *shaw-MAH*] is the simple word for *listen* and we find it used in that way throughout Scripture (Gen. 3:10 16:11 Psalm 6:8). However, it is also used in the sense of: *to listen intently, to listen and obey, to listen and give heed to, to hearken to, to be attentive to, listen and take heed to, listen and take note of, listen and be cognizant of* (Gen. 3:17 39:10 Ex. 3:18). It is by the context that we can determine whether it is the simple act of listening or the act of listening attentively to and obeying. Strong's #8085 BDB #1033. They asked for the land on the other side of the Jordan and Moses granted that to them, provided that they continued to stand with the other tribes of Israel in taking the remainder of the land. They fulfilled that obligation and, after the death of Moses, continued in their military support.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 334.

For reasons that I do not fully grasp, this is one of the most celebrated events of Scripture—that the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh chose their inheritance to be east of the Jordan, yet they stayed with the remaining 9½ tribes to conquer the land of Canaan. Whereas, this is admirable, as well as expected, there are few Old Testament incidents which are mentioned with so much frequency. The decision to give them this portion of land, provided that they finished helping conquer the land of Canaan, is found way back in Num. 32. In Deut. 3, in Moses' message to the people of Israel, he reminds these 2½ of their responsibility in this regard. At the end of Joshua 1, prior to the conquering of the land, Joshua confirms with the heads of these 2½ that they will fulfill their obligation to their brothers. In this passage, Joshua affirms that they had met their commitment and had performed admirably.

**“You have not forsaken your brothers these many days as far as the days the this and you have kept a charge—a commandment of Y<sup>e</sup>howah your God.**

Joshua  
22:3

**“You did not forsake your brothers all these days until today and you have kept the responsibility, the commands of Jehovah your God.**

The first verb is the Qal perfect of *ʿāzaʿv* (אָזַעַו) [pronounced *aw-ZA<sup>B</sup>V*] means *to leave, to forsake*. Strong's #5800 BDB #736. This verb is preceded by a negative. Recall that Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had chosen the land on the other side of the Jordan. They could have settled in right there and stopped fighting; however, at the command of God, they continued with their brothers to deal with the Canaanites on the other side of the Jordan.

We have a series of words which begin with the masculine singular demonstrative adjective *zeh* (זֶה) [pronounced *zeh*], which means *here, this*. Strong's #2063, 2088, 2090 BDB #260. This is followed by the plural noun *days* and the masculine plural adjective *raʿv* (רַב) [pronounced *rah<sup>B</sup>v*], which means *many, much, great*. Strong's #7227 BDB #912. I don't exactly follow why *this* is in the singular and the noun and adjective are in the plural. This is all followed by *as far as the day the this*. This phrase is rendered as *these many days unto this day* (Rotherham, Young); *these many days to this day* (NASB); and *for a long time now—to this very day* (NIV).

Then we have a rather poetical choice of words. We have again the word for *keep, guard*—*shāmar* (שָׁמַר) [pronounced *shaw-MAR*] again. This is immediately followed by the noun *mish<sup>e</sup>mereth* (מִשְׁמֶרֶת) [pronounced *mish<sup>e</sup>MEH-reth*], which means *a charge, a responsibility, a commission*. Strong's #4931 BDB #1038.

In this visit, Joshua is recognizing the faithfulness of these two and a half tribes. It is unclear whether this is a ceremony or simply a formal discharging of their duties.

**“And now has given rest Y<sup>e</sup>howah your God to your brothers as which He promised to them. And now turn and go for yourselves to your tents unto a land of your possession which gave to you Moses, a servant of Y<sup>e</sup>howah beyond the Jordan.**

Joshua  
22:4

**“And now Jehovah your God has given rest to your brothers as He had promised them; therefore, you may return to your tents in the land of your possession which Moses, the servant of Jehovah, gave to you on the other side of the Jordan.**

The first verb is the Hiphil perfect of *nûwach* (נִוַּחַ) [pronounced *NOO-ahk*], which means *rest, cause to rest, set down, lay down, deposit, leave*. In the Hiphil, this means *to deposit, to set down, to cause to rest*. Strong's #5117 (and 3240) BDB #628. The second verb is the Piel perfect of *dâʿvar* (דַּבַּר) [pronounced *daw<sup>B</sup>-VAHR*], which means *to speak, to declare, to proclaim, to announce*. In the Piel, it is stronger and it can be translated *to promise*. Strong's #1696 BDB #180. The variant reading here is *as which He promised to you*.

Joshua hereby dismisses these tribes to return to their loved ones and to the land which they claimed roughly seven years previous, back in Num. 32.

**“Only take extreme responsibility to do the commandment and the law which commanded you Moses, a servant of Y<sup>e</sup>howah, to love Y<sup>e</sup>howah your God and to walk in all of His ways and to keep His commandments and to cleave to Him and to serve Him with all of your heart and with all of your soul.”**

Joshua  
22:5

**“Only take care to commit to the commandments and to the law which Moses, the servant of Jehovah, commanded you—that is, to love Jehovah your God and to walk in all of His ways; and to keep His commandments and to cling to Him and to serve Him with all of your heart and all of your soul.”**

V. 5 begins with the adverb *raq* (רַק) [pronounced *rahk*] means *only, provided, altogether, surely*—it carries with it restrictive force. Strong’s #7534 & #7535 BDB #956. This is followed by the Qal imperative of Joshua’s verb of the day, *shâmar* (שָׁמַר) [pronounced *shaw-MAR*] and it means *keep, guard, watch, preserve, take responsibility*. Strong’s #8104 BDB #1036. Perhaps I should just mention the verses where this does not occur? This is followed by the adverb *m<sup>e</sup>’ôd* (מְאֹד) [pronounced *m<sup>e</sup>-ODE*] means *exceedingly, extremely, greatly, very*. Strong’s #3966 BDB #547.

To us, the distance between the two portions of Israel does not seem that great. However, Joshua warns these tribes to not forsake the God of their fathers and to continue in His commandments. In part, Joshua is no doubt thinking back to one of the sermons of Moses which he no doubt recorded. **“Now, this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which Jehovah your God has commanded to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are about to go over to possess, so that you and your son and your grandson might revere Jehovah your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. O Israel, you should listen and take extreme care to do this, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as Jehovah, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Listen, O Israel! Jehovah is our God; Jehovah is one! And you will love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanded you today, they will be on your heart; and you will teach them diligently to your sons and you will talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you get up.”** (Deut. 6:1–7; see also Deut. 5:29 6:17 10:12 11:13, 22). It will be the words of Joshua which will ring in their ears of these 2½ tribes when they decide to build the new altar.

Joshua instructs these 2½ tribes to love God with all of their heart and with all of their soul. NIV Study Bible: *Both Moses and Joshua saw that obedience to the laws of God would require love and service from the heart. In the ancient Near East, “love” was also a political term, indicating truehearted loyalty to one’s king.*<sup>3</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch: [Because Joshua was aware of the] *changeableness of the human heart...[he] appends to the acknowledgment of their fidelity in the performance of their duty the pressing admonition, to continue still to observe the law of Moses faithfully, to walk in the ways of the Lord and serve Him with the whole heart, which was simply a repetition of what Moses had impressed in a fatherly upon the hearts of the people (see Deut. 4:4, 29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13, etc.).*<sup>4</sup>

**And so blessed them Joshua and so sent them away and so they went out unto their tents.**

Joshua  
22:6

**Finally, Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went out to their tents.**

The second verb is the Piel imperfect of *shâlach* (שָׁלַח) [pronounced *shaw-LAHKH*], which means *to send, to send forth, to send away, to dismiss, to deploy*. Strong’s #7971 BDB #1018. The feeling is that everything went well and now Joshua can send these men back to their tents, and, from there, back to the other side of the Jordan, where their wives and children were; and where they had not been for at least seven years.

<sup>3</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 158.

**And to a half of a tribe of the Manassite gave Moses in the Bashan and to their half gave Joshua with their brothers on a side of the Jordan westward. And also when sent them away Joshua unto their tents and so he blessed them.**

Joshua  
22:7

**And to the half tribe of Manasseh, Moses gave the Bashan and to the other half, Joshua gave them land with their brothers on the west side of the Jordan. Therefore, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he also blessed them.**

In the middle of this verse we have the wâw conjunction and the adverb gam (גַּם) [pronounced *gahm*] which means *also, in addition to, moreover, furthermore*. Strong's #1571 BDB #168. The wâw consecutive in that sentence could be rendered *then*. Right now, the relationship between Joshua and these two and a half tribes is like a honeymoon.

There are times when the author is very methodical, which is a part of Joshua's style of writing. Not only are these details recorded, he again points out that Manasseh was split into two tribes, and each took a possession of land on opposite sides of the Jordan. The first tribe's possession was recorded in Joshua 13:1–7 and the second in Joshua 17. This is often typical of Joshua's writing. One thing which I noticed when I took notes under Bob Thieme is that, when I went into automatic pilot, I often wrote down word-for-word phrases and sentences which Bob had repeated many, many times; and which I had already written down as often (this was just the opposite of some people I knew who wrote very few notes and, if they thought they wrote down a doctrine before, then they did not repeat writing it down when they heard it again). My feeling is that Joshua is doing almost the same thing. He may not be on automatic pilot, or recording things word-for-word, but some things stick out in his mind and he mentions them again. Also, he is aware that some readers of God's Word may not read every chapter, so a little repetition now and again should not be a problem. Barnes has a somewhat different, and probably more apropos, explanation: *The insertion of this explanation about the half tribe, and the repetition of Joshua's farewell, are examples of a marked characteristic of very ancient writers—and of Hebrew writers as much as any—that of giving a completeness and finish to each section of their story. The Jewish historian scarcely ever quotes or reminds, but repeats so much as may be necessary to make his account of the transaction in hand fully intelligible by itself.*<sup>5</sup> Keil and Delitzsch similarly explain: *To us such repetition appears superfluous; but they are closely connected with the copious breadth of the early historical style of the Hebrews, which abounded in repetitions.*<sup>6</sup>

**And so he spoke to them to say, "In much wealth return to your tents and in very much cattle, in silver and in gold and in bronze and in iron and in greatly increased clothing. Divide a spoil of your enemies with your brothers."**

Joshua  
22:8

**And he also said to them, "With this great wealth, return to your tents—with this large number of cattle, with the silver, gold, bronze and iron; with your increased wardrobe. Divide this spoil of your enemies up with your brothers."**

In this verse we have the repetition of the bêyth preposition, which can be rendered *in, among, into, against, with, at, through, by*. No Strong's # BDB #88. Because we have another adverb here, ġîm (גַּיַם) [pronounced *ġeem*], which is generally rendered *with*, I rendered bêyth as *in*, in order to distinguish the two. Many translators render bêyth with the word *with*. Strong's #5973 BDB #767.

Also in this verse we have the Hiphil infinitive absolute of râḇvâh (רַבַּוּ) [pronounced *raw<sup>b</sup>-VAWH*], which means *to become much, to become many, to multiply, to increase in population and in whatever else*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to become many, to make much, to multiply, to increase, to enlarge, to cause to greatly increase*. Here, in the absolute, it acts almost like an adjective. Strong's #7235 BDB #915. The word for *clothing* is followed by m<sup>e</sup>ôd (מְאֹד) [pronounced *m<sup>e</sup>-ODE*], which means *exceedingly, extremely, greatly, very*. Strong's #3966 BDB #547.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 404.

<sup>6</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 158.

There were some rewards because they supported their brothers in the war to control Canaan. These rewards were very material. God blessed them with cattle, metals and with clothing. It appears as though this was the pay of most soldiers in the ancient world—the spoil from the victory over their enemies. The verb found here is the Qal imperative of *châlaq* (חָלַק) [pronounced *chaw-LAHK*], which means *to divide, to apportion, to allot, to share*. Strong's #2505 BDB #323. We don't do the same thing in war anymore, as we are very prosperous in the United States, so such a thing is unnecessary. However, the Israelites had pretty much what they had carted out of Egypt on their backs, and that was almost 50 years old. This is why Achan was so tempted by the cloak he found in Ai.

Now, both men and cattle were a part of the spoils of war (Num. 31:26 Deut. 20:14). Those who went to war had been instructed early on to divide their spoil with those who did not. **Then Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, "You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers of the congregation, take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the spoil between the warriors who went out to battle and all of the congregation."** (Num. 31:25–27; see also I Sam. 30:23–25).

**And so they returned and so they went, sons of Reuben and sons of Gad and a half tribe of the Manassite away from sons of Israel out from Shiloh, which [is] in a land of Canaan to go out unto a land of the Gilead, unto a land of their possession which they were given possession of in them in accordance with a command of Y<sup>e</sup>howah by a hand of Moses.**

Joshua  
22:9

**So the sons of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh returned and went out from Israel, out from Shiloh, which is in Canaan, and they went to the land of Gilead, the land they possessed and were possession of in accordance with the commandment of Jehovah through the hand of Moses.**

*Out from* and *away from* are both the *mîn* preposition. In this verse, we also have the feminine singular noun *ʾăchûzzâh* (חֲזָזָה) [pronounced *uh-khooz-ZAW*], which means *possession*. Strong's #272 BDB #28. This is soon followed by its verbal cognate, the Niphal (passive) perfect of *ʾăchaz* (חָזַז) [pronounced *aw-KHAHZ*]; and it means *to grasp, to take hold of, to take possession of*. In the Niphal, the passive stem, it means *to be given possession of, to make oneself a possessor of, to have possession of*. Strong's #270 BDB #28.

The eventual destination of the 2½ tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh is the land of Gilead and Bashan. *Gilead* is used in a general sense to refer to the entire area conquered by Israel on the other side of the Jordan (just as the Bible occasionally uses the term *Amorites* or *Canaanites* to refer to the people in general who were west of the Jordan). **And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had a very large herd of cattle; therefore, when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and observed that it was a very suitable place for livestock. So the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation...and they said, "If we have found grace in your sight, then let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan." And Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, everyone who is armed for battle, will cross with you over the Jordan in the presence of Jehovah, and the land is subdued before you, then you will give them the land of Gilead for a possession."**<sup>7</sup> (Num. 32:1–2, 5, 29).

The returning to their tents, as spoken of throughout this chapter meant not just to return to where they were camping near Shiloh, but to return to their property on the other side of the river Jordan. The actual movement would have been to their tents near Shiloh; then they would have packed up and gone to Gilgal, camping on the west side of the river Jordan, where they had camped upon entering into the land of Canaan; then they will cross

<sup>7</sup> Recall that Moses would not be going across the Jordan with them.

the river and go into their land on the east side of the Jordan. These details are not given because the writer<sup>8</sup> of this portion of God's Word did not accompany them, and therefore did not record all of their movements.

### Return to Outline

## West Israel Objects to the Altar Built in East Israel

**And so they went out unto [the] districts round the Jordan [or, unto Geliloth the Jordan] which [is] in a land of Canaan; and so they built—the sons of Reuben and sons of Gad and half a tribe of the Manassite—there an altar by the Jordan; an altar large to an appearance.**

Joshua  
22:10

**So the sons of Reuben Gad and Manasseh went out to Geliloth by the Jordan, in the land of Canaan, and they built there an altar—a very large altar to see—by the Jordan.**

What they went out to was the feminine plural of *g<sup>e</sup>līylāh* (גְּלִילוֹת) [pronounced *g<sup>e</sup>lee-LAW*], which means *region, border, boundary, territory, districts*. Strong's #1552 BDB #165. The REB and the Septuagint both take this as a proper noun Geliloth, which is the plural of Gilgal, and the NRSV alludes to this possibility. We find this particular name only back in Joshua 18:15, where it is a bordering city of Benjamin. A problem is that Gilgal is on the west side of the Jordan, which is in Canaan. Edersheim points out that being *in the land of Canaan* is in direct and intentional contrast to the land of Gilead in the previous verse. The question is where exactly did they build this altar. I will deal with that for the next verse when we examine at the various translations of both of these two verses together.

When describing where this altar was built, we have the adverb *shām* (שָׁם) [pronounced *shawm*], which means *there, thither, whither*. Strong's #8033 BDB #1027. What they build is the masculine singular noun *miz<sup>e</sup>bēach* (מִזְבֵּחַ) [pronounced *miz-BAY-ahkh*], which means *altar*. The dagesh here changes the pronunciation of the *bēyth* to *b* instead of *v*. Zodhiates suggests, due to the context, that the meaning would be better understood as *monument*, rather than *altar*. Strong's #4196 BDB #258. It is further modified by the adjective *gâdôwl* (גָּדוֹל) [pronounced *gaw-DOHL*], which means *great* (in magnitude, extent and number). Strong's #1419 BDB #152. This is followed by the lamed prefixed preposition and the masculine singular noun *mar`eh* (מַרְעֵה) [pronounced *mahr-EH*], which means *the act of seeing, sight, appearance, that which is seen*. Strong's #4758 BDB #909.

Before I began studying the Old Testament as carefully as I have, I thought that Israel had altars all over; or, at least in particular cities. Israel has but one altar because there is but one God. Israel was never to become confused as to Who ruled over them—there was one God, the God of Israel, Jesus Christ. Our Lord would die one time upon one altar for all sins of all time. Therefore, this had to be paralleled as closely as possible. Having sacrificial altars all over Israel obscures our understanding of the cross. Therefore, building a sacrificial altar on either side of the Jordan was something which smacked of heresy.

There are a lot of critics of Scripture, and some of them want to see the *natural evolution* of the worship of many gods to the worship of one God. Therefore, they do not like that Israel had one altar and don't want this kind of worship to occur until much later in Israel's history because it interferes with their preconceived notions. Scofield notes: *The fact that only one altar was used by the whole nation as early as this time is strong evidence against the erroneous contention of certain critics that centralization of worship (in Jerusalem) did not take place until the reformation of Josiah (II Ki. 22:8–20).*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I lean toward Joshua being the author up to v. 9 (with Phinehas as his secretary); and that Phinehas picked up the pen, so to speak, to record God's Word at v. 10. Phinehas would have remained in Shiloh, as either first or second in command of all things spiritual (it is unclear as to how much of a role his father, Eleazar the High Priest, is playing at this time); and Joshua would have taken possession of his own inheritance. That Joshua went to the land apportioned to him is never stated, but implied by both Joshua 23:1 and 24:1.

<sup>9</sup> *The New Scofield Reference Bible*; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 283.



And so heard sons of Israel to say, “Behold, built, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of a tribe of the Manassite, the altar towards the front of a land of Canaan to a region [of] the Jordan to the region beyond sons of Israel.”

Joshua  
22:11

The sons of Israel then were heard to say, “Observe, Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh built an altar which faces the land of Canaan in the region of the Jordan opposite the sons of Israel.

What will happen hereon in this chapter is a change for the book of Joshua. Joshua’s name and personal involvement will not be mentioned. It is possible, if not likely, that Joshua is not writing or dictating the last couple of chapters of this book, but that does not necessarily have to be the case.

For this verse, we will just glance at a couple of other translations of vv. 10–11:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And when they came into the circles of the Jordan, which were in the land of Canaan,—then did the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh build there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of large dimensions, And the sons of Israel heard say,— Lo! the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar in front of the land of Canaan, in the circles of the Jordan in the region opposite the sons of Israel.
NASB	And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance. And the sons of Israel heard <i>it</i> said, “Behold, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar at the frontier [Lit., front] of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, on the side <i>belonging to</i> the sons of Israel.”
NIV	When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side,...
The Septuagint	And they came to Galaad of Jordan, which is in the land of Chanaan; and the children of Ruben, and the children of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasse built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to look at. And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the sons of Ruben, and the sons of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasse have built an altar at the borders of the land of Chanaan at Galaad of Jordan, on the opposite side to the children of Israel.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and they come in unto the districts of the Jordan, which <i>are</i> in the land of Canaan, and the sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh, build there an altar by the Jordan—a great altar for appearance. And the sons of Israel heard, saying, ‘Lo, the sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh, have built the altar over-against the land of Canaan, on the districts of the Jordan, at the passage of the sons of Israel.’

Where the altar was built is actually two prepositions, `el (אֶל) [pronounced *e/*] (Strong's #413 BDB #39), which means *in, into, toward, unto, to, regarding*; and mûwl (מִוֶּל) [pronounced *mool*] (Strong's #4136 BDB #557), which means *in front of*. Together they mean *towards the front of*. After *land of Canaan* we have `el again and the feminine plural of g<sup>e</sup>lîylâh (again) (גַּלְיָלָה) [pronounced *g<sup>e</sup>lee-LAW*], which means *region, border, territory, districts*. Strong's #1552 BDB #165. So far, this gives us: **And so heard sons of Israel to say, “Behold, built, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of a tribe of the Manassite, the altar towards the front of a land of Canaan to a region [of] the Jordan...”**

After *Jordan* we have the preposition `el (אֶל) [pronounced *e/*], followed by `êber (עֲבֵר) [pronounced *GAY<sup>e</sup>-ver*], which means *region across, beyond, side*. Strong's #5676 BDB #719. Together, they mean *to the region beyond, to the opposite region, towards a region, towards the region opposite one's face, over against*. Now we have: **And**

so heard sons of Israel to say, "Behold, built, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of a tribe of the Manassite, the altar towards the front of a land of Canaan to a region [of] the Jordan to the opposite region of sons of Israel."

Now, if you look back on the various translators, you will notice that different translators have taken different positions. The NASB and the NIV have this altar built on the west side of the Jordan. The NIV Study Bible further suggests that Geliloth is a site east of Shiloh, yet west of the Jordan.<sup>10</sup> Barnes concurs with that opinion.<sup>11</sup> Young doesn't seem to take a position, as the Hebrew is difficult at this point. The Septuagint and Rotherham clearly have the altar being built east of the Jordan. Before discussing this, I should point out (1) there are not any obvious pressing theological issues here. It is more of a matter of curiosity than one of serious significance. (2) We are not dealing with some great contradiction either. V. 10 sounds as though the altar was built on the west, and v. 11 sounds as though it was built on the east. Certain translators have slightly altered one verse or the other in order to make their translation seem smoother, or to simply interpret for us where the altar was built. (3) The number of translators who line up on one side or another is not a valid indicator of who is right or wrong. We have seen one or two places where every translation missed the mark, and hundreds of places where Young and Rotherham hit the mark, but no one else did.<sup>12</sup>

### Reasons Why the Altar was Built on the East Side of the Jordan

1. First we will take the logical approach: the tribe of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh lived on the east side of the Jordan, so it would make the most sense for them to keep their building projects on that side of the river. If they built something which was offensive in the land of Benjamin, then it would be a given that the tribe of Benjamin would just wander over to it and raze it.
2. Although the Israelites camped east of the Jordan for perhaps a month, their families were camped in Gilgal, west of the Jordan, during the time that all the warfare took place. This appeared to also be their base of operations. The families of the 2½ did not stay there (they moved to the area east of the Jordan which had been conquered by the Israelites), but the men of the 2½ tribes did live there. Therefore, it would be reasonable for them to go their first, prior to crossing the Jordan and rejoining their families on the other side.
3. When it says that the 2½ tribes built the altar *there* by the Jordan; even though they stayed for a time at Gilgal, that does not mean that they erected this altar at Gilgal. *There* could be the general area of Gilgal. Crossing the Jordan, looking back to their brothers across the river, would make the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh think about the separation between the tribes in the future. This would still place them in the general area of Gilgal (Geliloth). Admittedly, interpreting v. 10 could go either way when it comes to just exactly where the altar was built.
4. In the original Hebrew in verse 11, it is fairly clear that we are on the opposite side of the Jordan from the rest of Israel. That is what the preposition *ʿel* and the word *ʿêber* mean.
5. The altar was built large so that those on the other side (the west side) of the Jordan could see it.
6. Had this been built on the west side of the Jordan, the first thing that should have gone through the minds of the 9½ tribes is *why on earth would the 2½ tribes build an altar on this side of the Jordan on which to offer sacrifices?* If the natural border of the Jordan prevents them from taking part in worship on this side

<sup>10</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 317. Their translation of v. 11, which places the altar on the Israelite side has no foundation in the original language. It is added to support their particular position.

<sup>11</sup> *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; pp. 404–405.

<sup>12</sup> You may wonder why that is so. The KJV is like the modern-day Microsoft Word. It is afforded more respect and reverence than it really deserves. Although it is a good translation, it is not the best and the Apostle Paul did not use the KJV. Determining the best translation is partially a matter of preference. Just as for some, Microsoft Word might be the better choice (as opposed to WordPerfect), for some, Today's English Version (and I grimace when I say this) might be the most appropriate Bible translation (that's the Good News Bible). If you are after dead-on accuracy, Young's first, and Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible* is close behind. If you want good accuracy yet something which is fairly readable, then the NASB. If you want a lot of interpretation, a fair translation, and very good readability, then the NIV would be for you. And, if your vocabulary is severely limited or you are a very young person, TEV would be apropos. I have left out many translations, all of which have their strong and weak points.

### Reasons Why the Altar was Built on the East Side of the Jordan

of the Jordan, it would be incongruous to construct another altar on which to worship on that side of the Jordan.

7. If you pursue the other possibility, that the altar was built west of the Jordan, the only verse which allows for this is v. 10; however, logically, this is faulty; and Scripturally, one would have to have to do damage to v. 11 to take this position.

### Reasons Why the Altar was Built on the West Side of the Jordan

1. Now, having made all of those points, I need to make mention of one more thing, which may render them irrelevant. According to J. Vernon McGee, archeologists had searched for this altar for a long time on the east side of the Jordan and could not find it; later, they discovered the remains of the altar on the west side and these remains are there today.<sup>1</sup> I don't have any other verification of this outside of his book.
2. The sum total of the NIV Study Bible's comment is: *...more likely it was a site east of Shiloh along the Jordan River.*<sup>2</sup> Since they made this comment, I am surprised that they did not substantiate their translation with the appropriate archeological find. In any case, I am going to stick with my view until I find some more conclusive evidence. My thinking is that it is possible that the find was bogus or questionable. Archeologists who believe the Bible often have one thing in common with archeologists who believe in evolution—the too often find what it is they are looking for.
3. Now, since I have opened the door to the possibility that the altar was built on the western side, let me add another reason why the 2½ tribes may have built the altar on the west: this would indicate that they worshipped the One True God Who dwelt on the west side of the Jordan.
4. Another reason that these tribes may have built the altar on the west side rather than on the east is the fact that they were not going to actually use it, so it did not need to be on their side of the Jordan.
5. Finally, the 2½ tribes built the altar large so that they could see it from the east side.

**Conclusion:** It is my opinion that, for the reasons given, that the altar was built east of the Jordan; however, even as I read through these points, I feel like flip-flopping on this issue.

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In the past couple of verses, when we have this crisis, you should notice the conspicuous absence of Joshua's name. Furthermore, we don't have anyone named who brings this information to Joshua. So, if I was going to make a judgment call, I would say that Joshua is likely retired and that he has left the rulership of Israel in the hands of the elders of Israel. It would be a reasonable hypothesis that Phinehas had become the amanuensis of Joshua and is the one who wrote the final chapters.

**And so heard sons of Israel and so gathered all of [the] assembly of sons of Israel [in] Shiloh to a rising against them to war.**

Joshua  
22:12

**The sons of Israel heard so they gathered together in Shiloh with the intent of rising up and going to war with their brothers.**

The last couple of words are a bit difficult to sort out, so let me give you a couple of other translations:

*The Emphasized Bible* And when the sons of Israel heard all the assembly of the sons of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up against them to war.

NASB And when the sons of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh, to go up against them in war.

*Young's Lit. Translation* And the sons of Israel hear, and all the company of the sons of Israel is assembled at Shiloh, to go up against them to war;

The second verb in this verse is the Niphal imperfect of qāhal (קָהַל) [pronounced *kaw-HAHL*], which it means *to assemble*; it is only found in the Niphal and the Hiphil. Strong's #6950 BDB #874. In Joshua 18:1, the

Israelites left their main camp in Gilgal and assembled in Shiloh for the remainder of the land to be distributed. Here, they are gathered again, which indicates that they had gone to their inherited portion of land already (and this would logically follow, since the 2½ tribes were returning to their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan and that their altar was noticed by other Israelites, who were probably Benjamites moving to their territory).

At the end of this verse we have the Qal infinitive construct of *ʿâlâh* (אָלָה) [pronounced *gaw-LAWH*], which means *to go up, to ascend, to rise*. Here, in the Qal infinitive construct (in Job 5:26), it would mean *a rising of, an ascending of, a climbing of, a springing up, a shooting forth of*. Strong's #5927 BDB #748. After *against them*, we have the lamed preposition and the masculine singular noun *tsâbâʿ* (צָבָא) [pronounced *tsaw<sup>h</sup>-VAW*], and it can mean *army, war, or warfare*. Strong's #6635 BDB #838. It is almost used here like a verb.

What the sons of Israel believe has happened is that these two and a half tribes have gone apostate by establishing this other altar opposite them on the other side of the Jordan. In the Law, they had been given several warnings not to stray from Jehovah God. You might think that they are overreacting, but Scripture was quite clear to them at this point. In Deut. 12:1–4, Moses warns against following the practices of the heathen and mandates that the children of Israel destroy the altars and religious artifacts of the heathen in Canaan. Then he says, “*And you will rejoice before Jehovah your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place you see, but only in the place which Jehovah chooses in one of your tribes—there you will offer your burnt offerings and there you will do all that I command you.*” (Deut. 12:12–14). And even more on point: “*If you hear in one of your cities which Jehovah your God is giving you to live in, a saying that worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods (whom you have not known), then you will investigate and search out the matter and inquire thoroughly concerning it. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, then you will certainly strike down the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, completely destroying it and all that is in it, along with its cattle with the edge of the sword. Then you will gather all its spoil into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all of its spoil with fire as a whole burnt offering to Jehovah your God; and it will remain a ruin forever. It will never be rebuilt.’*” (Deut. 13:11–16). It is obvious that the 9½ tribes assumed that this was an altar set up in opposition to or as a substitution for the altar in Shiloh and that it would therefore be their mandate to put those 2½ tribes down. The mention of Shiloh in Joshua 18:1 and here indicates that it was the spiritual center of Israel during this time period; this is where the tabernacle was.

John Calvin suggested that these 2½ tribes should have given this some thought first. *We know how sternly the law prohibited the use of two altars; because it was the will of God that His worship should be restricted to one place. When, therefore, from the very appearance it could not fail to occur to the mind of any one that they were establishing a second altar, who would not have condemned them as guilty of sacrilege, for introducing rites and ceremonies at variance with the law of God? And since it might so naturally be regarded as a wicked deed, they ought certainly to have consulted their brethren in so grave and important a matter; and it was especially wrong to pass by the high priest, when the will of God might have been learned from his lips. They were deserving of blame, therefore, because they acted as if they had been alone in the world, and did not consider what offence might easily arise from the novelty of their proceedings.*<sup>13</sup>

**And so sent sons of Israel unto sons of Reuben and unto sons of Gad and unto half of a tribe of Manasseh in a land of the Gilead, Phinehas ben Eleazar, the priest;**

Joshua  
22:13

**However, first the sons of Israel sent to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the priest;**

Both Phinehas and Eleazar are priests; therefore, it is difficult to determine whether this title still refers to Eleazar. Eleazar is probably still alive and was involved in the distribution of land to the tribes. He will die in Joshua 24 at the very end. Since the book of Joshua is not entirely chronological, we only know that we are in the vicinity of the time of Eleazar's death. However, what is natural is for his son, a spiritual leader at that time, to take up some

<sup>13</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 159.

of the leadership duties, which is what he is doing here. And we have already discussed the fact that this probably took place immediately after the distribution of land. The fact that Phinehas is the only person named in the latter portion of this chapter and the fact that this is the first chapter where Joshua is not personally involved is reason enough to think that Phinehas recorded the events found in this chapter (and perhaps the remainder of the book of Joshua).

Now Phinehas was an extraordinary spiritual leader in Israel—one about whom most believers know little. His grandfather is Aaron, the first High Priest over Israel, as well as being the brother of Moses. Moses insisted that he was not a public speaker, which is how Aaron was brought in. However, even though Aaron was not God's choice as the spokesman for Moses, Aaron did become the High Priest to God, who represented man to God. Moses, on the other hand, represented God to man, the two of them together a shadow of the hypostatic union of our Lord Jesus Christ. Aaron had four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar—the first two of whom took their spiritual duties as priests lightly and they were killed at the altar (Ex. 6:23 Lev. 10:1–2 I Chron. 6:3). Eleazar was the second person to hold the office of High Priest, an honor which was passed down to his son, Phinehas (Ex. 6:25 I Chron. 6:4 Ezra 7:5). Interestingly enough, it appears as though the name *Phinehas* is Egyptian in origin (according to BDB, ZPEB and *The New Bible Dictionary*). In the Hebrew, it is *phîyn<sup>e</sup>hâç* (פִּינְחָס) [pronounced *peen-KHAWS*], and BDB gives this as equivalent to *Pe-nehasi*, which is Egyptian for *Nubian*, which would be a reference to the Blacks of Egypt. Strong's #6372 BDB #810. This would suggest that Phinehas was very dark complected from birth. It would not be out of the ordinary for Phinehas to have some Egyptian ancestry.

We run into Phinehas as more than just a name in Num. 25. Israel had, early on in their separation from Egypt, turned away from God to the gods of Moab, and God had sent a plague which had begun to decimate their numbers. God ordered Moses to take the leaders of the people and to execute them in the sight of everyone. Phinehas was rather enthusiastic about all this and killed a woman who was probably the temple priestess and one of her converts while they were engaged in sex and this effectively put an end to the plague (Num. 25:1–9 Psalm 106:28–31). Apparently, this infiltration of false religion had ultimately come through Midian, and God declared war on the Midianites. Phinehas was one of the generals to go to war against Midian and the nation of Midian was slaughtered (Num. 31:1–54). Phinehas is not mentioned again until this chapter, where he is either the High Priest or acting High Priest (again, the time frame for the death of his father is not completely clear). Here, Phinehas will assume the authority and make the final decision concerning Reuben, Gad and Manasseh and their altar at their border. If I was a betting man, I would bet that Joshua and Eleazar are still alive, but not functioning as leaders but rather as sages at this point, retired for all intents and purposes. His leadership position in this passage and in Judges is inferred, but not stated outright until I Chron. 9:20.

We will not hear from Phinehas again until Judges 20:28, which actually takes place soon after Joshua 24. At that point, Israel will be engaged in a civil war against the tribe of Benjamin, who will mediate questions between Israel and God. Apart from these few things, we know nothing about Phinehas, save for some genealogical mentions in I Chron. 6:4, 50 Ezra 8:2. The Phinehas found in I Sam. 2:34 4:4, 11, 17 14:3 Ezra 8:33 is a different Phinehas.

We may have forgotten Phinehas and his impact on the early history of Israel—however, the Hebrews did not. Eli, the priest, named one of his sons Phinehas, a far less successful man in the realm of spiritual things than his namesake (I Sam. 2–4). A second Phinehas was the father of the priest Eleazar, who was one of those who returned from Babylon (Ezra 8:33 I Esdras 8:63). The final high priest prior to the destruction of Jerusalem was also named *Phinehas* (Josephus War IV iii 8). *Phinehas* was also the name of the treasurer of the Temple when Jerusalem fell. He apparently gave the Romans some of the wealth of the Temple (Josephus War VI viii 3).<sup>14</sup>

**and ten chiefs with him, one chief one chief for a house of a father for all tribes of Israel and a man, a head of a house of their families for [the] thousands of Israel.**

Joshua  
22:14

**along with ten chiefs, one chief for each tribe east of the Jordan.**

<sup>14</sup> Taken from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 4, p. 277.

Let's look at a couple of renderings here:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	...and ten princes with him, one prince of an ancestral house for each of the tribes of Israel,—they being severally heads of their ancestral houses among the thousands of Israel.
NASB	...and with him ten chiefs, one chief for each father's household from each of the tribes of Israel; and each one of them was the head of his father's household among the thousands of Israel.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and ten princes with him, one prince, one prince, for a house of a father, for all the tribes of Israel, and each of them a head of a house of their fathers, for the thousands of Israel.

*One chief, one chief* (or, *one prince, one prince*) is their way of saying one prince per household, a household referring to each remaining tribe of Israel. After *Israel*, we have the *wâw* conjunction and the masculine singular of *ʿîysh* (יִישׁ) [pronounced *eesh*], which means *man*. Strong's #376 BDB #35. In some translations, *ʿîysh* is also rendered *each* or *each one*. What follows *ʿîysh* is the masculine singular construct of *rô`sh* (רֹשׁ) [pronounced *roshe*], which means *head, top, chief, front, choicest*. Strong's #7218 BDB #910.

What is simply being said, albeit not so simply, is that each of the remaining nine and a half tribes had one representative each, along with Phinehas. The vocabulary seems a bit more complex in this chapter and the sentences less simply constructed. This would be another reason why this chapter could have been written by someone else.

Note that these men do not go off half-cocked. They don't immediately send in the Marines—they go and speak to the heads of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh first. You will recall what Moses said to his people concerning a situation like this: “*You will investigate and search out the matter and inquire thoroughly.*” My thinking is that this delegation went to the heads of the 2½ tribes more to dissuade them from what they have done, rather than to investigate the matter; but, luckily, the result will be the same.

**And so they went out unto sons of Reuben and unto sons of Gad and unto a half of a tribe of Manasseh unto a land of Gilead; and so they spoke to them, to say,**

Joshua  
22:15

**Then they met with the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh in the land of Gilead, and spoke with them, saying,**

The immediate concern was the possible falling away of their brothers.

**“Thus says [the] entire congregation of Y<sup>e</sup>howah, what [is] the treachery [or, infraction] the this which you have acted treacherously against [the] God of Israel to return the day from following Y<sup>e</sup>howah in your building of for yourselves an altar for your rebellion of the day against Y<sup>e</sup>howah.**

Joshua  
22:16

**“This is the question on everyone's mind in the congregation of Jehovah: what is with this infraction that you have committed against the God of Israel? You have, this day, done an about face from follow Jehovah to building an altar of rebellion against Jehovah.**

Let's see how a few others rendered this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Thus say all the assembly of Yahweh—What is this act of treachery which ye have committed against the God of Israel, that ye should turn back, to-day, from following Yahweh,—in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel, to-day, against Yahweh?
NASB	“Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, ‘What is this unfaithful act which you have committed against the God of Israel, turning away from following the LORD this day, by building yourselves an altar, to rebel against the LORD this day?’

*Young's Lit. Translation* 'Thus said all the company of Jehovah, What is this trespass which ye have trespassed against the God of Israel, to turn back to-day from after Jehovah, by your building for you an altar, for your rebelling to-day against Jehovah?

Before we approach the translation of this verse, I want you to notice several things: when the meaning of the verse is fairly clear in most translations, then I generally present these three translations, the reason being that Young and Rotherham are extremely literal and that NASB is quite literal without being anal about it (like myself, Young and Rotherham). Furthermore, the NASB makes every attempt to give a literal translation and yet place that translation into language which is modern in vocabulary and construction (for me, if a person were to have but one Bible, it would be the NASB; no other Bible strikes such an outstanding balance between a literal translation which is both reasonably accurate and faithful to the original and, at the same time, readable). A second thing that you might notice about Young and Rotherham's translation is the use of the word *ye*. In case you did not realize, this is the Old English plural of *you*, a clarification that we lack in the English. I also present several translations because you may personally want to skip over the comments which I make concerning the Hebrew.

The first word we will look at is the masculine singular noun *ma'al* (מַעַל) [pronounced *MAH-gahl*], which is generally translated *transgression, faithlessness, trespass* which I will update it with the more modern *infraction*. Strong's #4604 BDB #591. This is soon followed by the verbal cognate *ma'al* (מַעַל) [pronounced *maw-GAL*], which means *to act treacherously, to act unfaithfully, to commit an infraction, act treacherously*. *Commit an infraction* might be a more updated version of this verb. Strong's #4603 BDB #591. This very act was described in the book of Leviticus: "If any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who live among them, offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice, and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to Jehovah, that man will be cut off from his people." (Lev. 17:8–9).

We have the very common verb, the Qal infinitive construct of *shûw*<sup>b</sup>v (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo<sup>b</sup>v*]; which means *to return, to turn*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996. This is followed by the words *the day*, which are reasonably rendered *today* or even *this day*.

Soon thereafter, we have the compound preposition *mê'achar* (מֵאַחַר) [pronounced *may-ah-KHAHR*], which is made up of *achar* (אַחַר) [pronounced *ah-KHAHR*], which means *behind, after* (Strong's #310 BDB #29) and *min* (מִן) [pronounced *min*], which means *from, out of* (Strong's #4480 BDB #577). Together, they can be rendered *from, from after, from (being) after, from behind*. This combination is used quite often when one leaves something which they have previously followed, and can therefore be rendered *from following*.

This boils down to the two and a half tribes on the other side of the Jordan have built an altar, presumably an altar which is in complete rebellion against God, as there was to be only one altar from which sacrifices were to be offered to God.

In the next several verses, Phinehas will name two particular incidents in the recent past of Israel: the sin of Achan, who took some things from the city of Jericho which were dedicated to God; and the sin of Peor, where many Israelites became involved with the phallic cults. In making comparisons between those two incidents and what the 2½ tribes are doing, Phinehas is making three points: (1) what they have done is a sin on a grand scale; (2) this sin will affect all twelve tribes; it will not be confined just to them; and, (3) Phinehas and the rest of Israel will be forced to do something about it. Now, perhaps

**“[Was it] too little to us a sin of Peor which we did not cleanse from ourselves unto the day the this; and so was the plague in a congregation of Israel?** Joshua 22:17

**“Was it not enough, the sin of Peor, from wick we obviously have not cleansed ourselves even to this day, bringing a plague upon the congregation of Israel?**

With this chapter, we have entered into a new world; partly of vocabulary, but mostly of sentence structure. As I progress further and further into this chapter, I would lay odds that it was not written by Joshua but by someone else. Another point to consider: when there were certain actions that Joshua did not take part in, these were

glossed over or ignored, or very little detail was given (the prominent exception being the incident in Joshua 2 of Rahab and the spies—an incident where Joshua handled the debriefing afterwards). Here we have great detail of this incident, and without a mention of Joshua, causing me to think that Joshua was not directly involved and that he did not record this.

The first phrase of this sentence is rather difficult, so let me offer what other translators have done:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Too little for us was the iniquity of Peor, from which we have not cleansed ourselves unto this day,—although the plague came upon the assembly of Yahweh;
NASB	'Is not the iniquity of Peor enough for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves to this day, although a plague came on the congregation of the LORD,...
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	Is the iniquity of Peor little to us this day—and the plague is in the company of Jehovah,...

This verse begins with the interrogative particle *hă* ( הַ ) [pronounced *heh*], which acts almost like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence so that you immediately recognize that what we have here is a question. We often use some form of the verb *to be* along with a question mark at the end to indicate that this is the word found in the Hebrew. Strong's #none BDB #209. This is followed by the adverb *m'ē aṭ* ( מ'עַ אַטְ ) [pronounced *m'ē-ĠAHT*], which means *a little, fewness, few*. Actually, this is a strange little word. It can be ❶ used as a substantive when followed by the genitive of a noun (i.e., *a little water, a little food*—Gen. 18:4 43:2<sup>15</sup>); ❷ used as an adverb and rendered *a little, a little time, for a little, too little, a little while, shortly, presently, little by little*; ❸ and it may be used as an adjective, *small, few*. Strong's #4592 BDB #589.

The sense here is that *wasn't the plague which we endured at Peor enough to set us straight? Didn't we learn from that, which we all observed?*

We only find mention of the name of Phinehas a handful of times in Scripture, and one is in conjunction with the sin of Israel in Peor. You will recall that from Peor was from where Balaam began to curse Israel, but God turned cursing into blessing (Num. 22–24). While the people were below, some of them began to become involved with the women and gods of the Moab and Midian. One man went so far as to bring a Midianite woman into the camp of Israel, presumably a priestess of Baal, in order to have sex with her. Phinehas took action and drove a spear through their bodies during their act of carnality (Num. 25:1–9). Since Phinehas was the man of God who acted at Peor, he is known for this throughout Israel, and can therefore easily use this incident in an illustration. Despite the quick action of Phinehas when the evil was brought into the camp of Israel, nevertheless, 24,000 men died as a result of the sin of Peor (Num. 25:11). The tie-in, of course, is that the Israelites of that time became involved in heathen worship as well (Phinehas is assuming this is what has happened to the 2½ tribes).<sup>16</sup>

**“And you will turn away the day from following Y<sup>h</sup>owah and he is and you rebel the day against Y<sup>h</sup>owah and tomorrow into a whole of a congregation of Israel he is angry.**

Joshua  
22:18

**“If you today turn away from following Jehovah then it will come to pass while you rebel against Jehovah that tomorrow, He will be angry with the entire congregation of Israel.**

The Hebrew is fairly straightforward in this verse, just awkwardly constructed insofar as we are concerned. The point which is being made is that their rebellion today will result in the punishment of Israel as a whole tomorrow. God dealt with Israel in a collective and exclusive sense throughout their history. Israel's only hope was to excise the cancerous portion of their congregation in order to be delivered in times of apostasy (see Lev. 10 Num. 16 25).

<sup>15</sup> I am taking this directly from H.W.F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; ©1979 by Baker Books; p. 493; obviously, this sounds a lot more like an adjective in the examples given.

<sup>16</sup> Being a person who enjoys language, I noticed that Barnes, in *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 405, wrote: *there were still those amongst them who hankered after Baal worship...* This was the first time I have seen this term outside of western movie.



**“And now if unclean a land of your possession, pass over into a land of [the] possession of Y<sup>e</sup>howah where stands there a tabernacle of Y<sup>e</sup>howah and take possession in our midst. And against Y<sup>e</sup>howah do not rebel and [against] us, you will not rebel in a building for yourselves an altar other than an altar of Y<sup>e</sup>howah our God.**

Joshua  
22:19

**“Now, if it is unclean east of the Jordan, then pass over the river and assume possession of land in our midst. Do not rebel against Jehovah and do not rebel against us. You will not rebel by building an altar other than the one altar of Jehovah our God.**

This verse is a mouthful, and we have to examine what others have done:

*The Emphasized Bible*

Howbeit if unclean be the land of your possession do ye on your part come over into the land of the possession of Yahweh, where abideth the habitation of Yahweh, and take your possession in our midst,—but against Yahweh do not rebel, nor against us rebel, by building yourselves an altar apart from the altar of Yahweh our God.

NASB

‘If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD’s tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD, or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves, besides the altar of the LORD our God.

*Young’s Lit. Translation*

‘And surely, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over for you unto the land of the possession of Jehovah, where the tabernacle of Jehovah hath tabernacled, and have possession in our midst; and against Jehovah rebel not, and against us rebel not, by your building for you an altar, besides the altar of Jehovah our God.

Near the end of this verse, we have two prepositions thrown together: bil<sup>e</sup> ʿădêy (בְּ לֹעַדַּי) [pronounced *bill<sup>e</sup>-uh-DAY*], which means, *apart from, except, without* (Strong’s #1107 BDB #116). With the preposition mîn, it means *apart from, without, besides, except*.

The representatives from Israel proper all that, if these 2½ tribes are living in a land which is unclean, they can return to the west side of the Jordan and take some land their along with their brothers. However, they are counseled not to rebel against God and against them by building an altar, as Jehovah their God *lives* in the tabernacle on the other side of the Jordan, and that is where He receives the blood offerings. Since there is One God, there is only one tabernacle (tent of worship).

The NIV Study Bible is a bit off the mark when they suggest that the land east of the Jordan River is not properly the inheritance of Israel. Israel would only occupy a fraction of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and to Moses. Although originally, it was implied they were only to occupy the Land of Canaan, so that they did not have too much land over which to occupy, this did not exclude them from any of the rest of their promised inheritance. Phinehas is not saying that it is wrong that they are living east of the Jordan—the issue is apostasy and if they are too far from the rest of the population of Israel, then they are given the option of simply returning to the west side of the Jordan and taking a possession of land there. Again, Phinehas is affording the opportunity for them to deal with this problem apart from war.

**“[Did] not Achan ben Zerah act unfaithfully in the devoted thing and upon all of a congregation of Israel was wrath (and he [was] a man—one!) [Did] he not perish in his iniquity?”**

Joshua  
22:20

**“Didn’t Achan, son of Zerah, commit a terrible infraction with regards to that which was under the ban and didn’t that bring great wrath upon all of Israel? And he was but one man! And did he not perish in his iniquity?”**

This is one sentence and it is difficult to put it into one sentence. The vocabulary is not as difficult as the structure. It begins with the sign of a question. I got around this by phrasing the question twice. Here is how others dealt with this:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Did not Achan son of Zerah commit an act of treachery with a devoted thing, and upon all the assembly of Israel came wrath,—so that not he—one man alone died in his iniquity?
NASB	‘Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the ban, and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.
NIV	When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.
<i>Young’s Lit. Translation</i>	Did not Achan son of Zerah commit a trespass in the devoted thing, and on all the company of Israel there was wrath? and he alone expired not in his iniquity.’

Let’s work on this a bit at a time. We have, after *Achan ben Zerah*, the Qal perfect of *mâ’al* (לַיַּחַד) [pronounced *maw-AL*], which means *to act treacherously, to act unfaithfully, to commit an infraction*; when followed by the *bêyth* preposition, it means *to take something by stealth*. The KJV consistently translates this as *transgress or trespass*. Most of the time this transgression is specifically *against* someone, either God (II Chron. 28:19 Neh. 13:27) or one’s spouse (Num. 5:12, 27). BDB, which occasionally does nothing more than list the various way a word has been translated, bypasses the KJV altogether and translates this as *act unfaithfully, act treacherously*. Strong’s #4603 BDB #591. This is followed by its noun cognate, *ma’al* (לַיַּחַד) [pronounced *MAH-ğahl*], which is generally translated *transgression, faithlessness, trespass*. Strong’s #4604 BDB #591. We had these two together back in v. 16 as they tend to show up together.

When translating this literally, we lose some of the meaning. The point is not that Achan died for this sin, but that he was not the only one under discipline, nor was he the only person to die. We have the word for *man* followed by the numeral *’echâd* (אֶחָד) [pronounced *eh-KHAWD*] and it means *one, first*, but it can also mean a *composite unity*. Although BDB gives a possible meaning as *only*, there are but a handful of verses which would substantiate that meaning. In fact, in the back portion of BDB, the words *only* and *alone* have a several Hebrew words which are used and in that way translated; but *’echâd* is not one of them. Therefore, I will break faith with these other translators and let my literal translation stand. Strong’s #259 BDB #25.

What happened, if you will recall, is that Israel destroyed the city of Jericho and had been instructed by God to devote the entire city and all of its possessions to God—that meant that everything was to be burned. These Israelites had been living out in the desert for forty years and what they had on their backs had become old. When Achan saw this great coat and a few other items, he couldn’t help himself and he took them. After all, if he surreptitiously took a few items which were to be burned anyway, what harm could that be? We know by hindsight that God would give a great many cities and therefore a great deal of spoil into the hands of Israel. He did not know that at that time. After he took the things which belonged to God, Israel was defeated at the city of Ai, a much smaller and less imposing city than Jericho. The entire congregation suffered because of the choice which Achan made (see Joshua 7). Also, 36 men died during the initial assault on Ai as a result of his sin (Joshua 7:5).

Keil and Delitzsch write: *The allusion to this fact is to be understood as an argument a minori ad majus, as Masius has shown. “If Achan did not perish alone when he committed sacrilege, but God was angry with the whole congregation, what think ye will be the consequence if ye, so great a number, commit so grievous a sin against God?”*<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis is that he is one man, and as the act of one man, he brought great wrath upon all of Israel. The result, was, of course, his death. The point Phinehas is making is that this altar was not the construction of one man; so if one man brought on such a wrath upon all of Israel, imagine what the result would be of so many men doing such an evil. I want you to grasp the line of reasoning that Phinehas is presenting. Because of the supposed apostasy of the 2½ tribes, all of Israel might be faced with discipline from God. Phinehas is making it clear that the other 9½ tribes have to act, otherwise, the resulting vengeance of God would take them out of this world as quickly as it would the 2½ tribes.

<sup>17</sup> Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 160.

## Return to Outline

### East Israel Clarifies the Purpose for Building this Altar

**And so answered sons of Reuben and sons of Gad and a half of a tribe of the Manassite, to say to heads of families of Israel,**

Joshua  
22:21

**Therefore, the sons of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh answered the heads of the families of Israel:**

There is an explanation for the altar and the 2½ give this explanation. We learn here, as this story unfolds, as to their purposes of the building of this altar. I would not be surprised if Phinehas was not recording this information within days of its occurrence, given the immediacy and order of events found in these verses.

**“The Mighty One, God, Y<sup>e</sup>howah; the Mighty One, God Y<sup>e</sup>howah; He keeps knowing, and Israel, he keeps knowing, if in a rebellion and if in an act of unfaithfulness against Y<sup>e</sup>howah, you [singular] will not deliver us the day the this.**

Joshua  
22:22

**“God, the Mighty One, Jehovah—He knows, as does Israel, if we are in rebellion against Him and involved in a serious infraction against Jehovah, He will not spare us this day.**

This verse begins with the repetition of three words. The first is masculine singular noun *ʾêl* (אֵל) [pronounced *ALE*], and it means *god, God, mighty one, strong, hero*. Strong's #410 BDB #42. Then we have *ʾêlôhîym* (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced *el-o-HEEM*] and this word can refer to the Godhead or to foreign gods. Strong's #430 BDB #43. This is followed by *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*. None of these words are in the construct, although some translators so render them. For your edification, let's give a few different translations below:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	El-Elohim-Yahweh, El-Elohim-Yahweh he knoweth, and Israel he shall know, if in rebellion, or if in treachery against Yahweh do not save us this day;
NKJV	“The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know—if <i>it is</i> in rebellion, or if in treachery against the LORD, do not save us this day.”
Owen's Translation	The Mighty One, God, Yahweh; The Mighty One, God, Yahweh; he knows and Israel let itself know if in rebellion or in breach of faith toward Yahweh spare us not today.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	‘The God of god—Jehovah, the God of gods—Jehovah, He is knowing, and Israel, he doth know, if in rebellion, and if in trespass against Jehovah (Thou dost not save us this day!)

The words spoken by the representative of these 2½ tribes have an oath-like ring to them. It is a first step in denying any wrongdoing. The title of God given here indicates that these 2½ tribes are fully cognizant of the exclusivity of their God. “To you it was shown that you might know that Jehovah, He is God—there is no other besides Him.” (Deut. 4:35). “For Jehovah your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God Who does not sow partiality, nor does He take a bribe.” (Deut. 10:17). “Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts; I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me...Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any Rock besides Me? I know of none!” (Isa. 44:6, 8b). Thus said Jehovah to Cyrus, His anointed, “I am Jehovah, and there is no other besides Me; there is no God...Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, Jehovah? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior—there is none except Me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” (Isa. 45:1a, 5a, 21b–22; see also Isa. 46:9–10). “**For there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.**” (Acts 4:12).

In the middle of the verse, we literally have *He knows, and Israel, He knows—if...* Although we, in the English, often capitalize the pronoun *he*, there is no such provision in the Hebrew. In fact, there just aren't any capital letters in the Hebrew. We do have the personal pronoun used twice (it is only inserted for emphasis; it is not

necessary in the Hebrew). In this verse, the personal pronoun is used twice; first in reference to God, and secondly in reference to Israel. What is clear is that all of the facts are known by God, and Israel knows that if they are in rebellion against God, then they will not be spared that day. The final verb is the Hiphil imperfect of *yâsha*ʿ (יָשָׁא) [pronounced *yaw-SHAHQ*], which means *to deliver, to save*. This verb is found only in the Hiphil and Niphal. Strong's #3467 BDB #446. With the verb is the negative particle.

These 2½ tribes begin by noting that they realize fully that if they are in rebellion against God, not only will He know, but He will remove them from this earth. These 2½ tribes realize that they are in a serious situation here and their spokesman chooses his words carefully. First order of business is to agree completely with Phinehas—there would be no escaping rebelling against God.

Barnes: *The repeated invocation of God, and that by His three names (El, Elohim, Jehovah...), makes the earnestness of the protestation. The conduct of the two tribes and a half has often been noted as exemplary. They had had a grave and capital crime most unexpectedly laid to their charge, of which they were entirely innocent. Yet there is no word of reproach or recrimination in their vindication of themselves. They are contented simply to repudiate the false accusation and to explain the real motives of conduct.*<sup>18</sup> They do not turn things around and begin accusing the other 9½ tribes of any wrongdoing. They are innocent of the charges laid upon them; they believe that they are innocent of these charges; and they explain their purposes and motivation to Phinehas.

**“For our building an altar to turn from following Y<sup>e</sup>howah and if to cause to ascend upon him a burnt offerings and a tribute offering; and if to make upon him sacrifices of peace offerings, Y<sup>e</sup>howah Himself will seek for.**

Joshua  
22:23

**“...for building to turn away from following Jehovah and if it was built to offer upon it burnt offerings, tribute offerings and peace offerings—Jehovah Himself will seek for us.**

Let's look at a couple of other translations just to clear up some minor points:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	...that we should build for ourselves an altar, to turn back from following ,—or if that we might cause to go up thereon ascending-sacrifice or meal-offering, or if that we might offer thereon peace offerings let himself require it;
NASB	“If we have built us an altar to turn away from following the LORD, or if to offer a burnt offering or grain offering on it, or if to offer sacrifices of peace offerings on it, may the LORD Himself require it.
Owen's Translation	For building (for ourselves) an altar to turn away from following Yahweh or if we did so to offer (on it) burnt offerings or offerings or if to offer on it peace offerings, may Yahweh himself take vengeance.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...we are building for ourselves an altar to turn back from after Jehovah, and if to cause to go up on it burnt-offering and present, and if to make on it peace-offerings—Jehovah Himself doth require it.

The first verb is the Qal infinitive construct of *bânâh* (בָּנָה) [pronounced *baw-NAWH*], which means *to build, to rebuild, to restore*. Strong's #1129 BDB #124.

It's been a long time since we've been in Leviticus, so we're going to examine some of the verbs and nouns from that book. The third verb is the Hiphil infinitive construct of *ʿâlâh* (עָלָה) [pronounced *gaw-LAWH*], which means *to go up, to ascend, to rise*. Strong's #5927 BDB #748. What would be offered upon it is the feminine singular noun *ʿôlâh* (עֹלָה) [pronounced *gaw-LAW*]<sup>18</sup>—a word which is related to the word for *climb, ascend* and it can be consistently rendered *burnt offering*. Strong #5930 BDB #750. Then we have the *wâw* conjunction and the feminine singular of *minchâh* (מִנְחָה) [pronounced *min-KHAWH*], which means *present, tribute offering or gift*. Strong's #4503 BDB #585.

<sup>18</sup> Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 405.

Then we have the lamed preposition again with The Qal infinitive construct of ʿāsâh (הַעֲשֵׂה) [pronounced ʿaw-SAWH] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. What will be made upon the altar will be the masculine plural construct of zeᵇvach (זֶבַח) [pronounced ZEH<sup>B</sup>-vakh], which is one of the several words for *sacrifice*; its verb cognate meaning *to slaughter an animal for sacrifice*. Strong's #2077 BDB #257. This is followed by the masculine plural of shelem (שְׁלֵמִים) [pronounced SHEH-lem], which means *peace-offerings, sacrifice for alliance or friendship*. Strong's #8002 BDB #1023. So far, this gives us: **“For our building an altar to turn from following Y<sup>e</sup>howah and if to cause to ascend upon him a burnt offerings and a tribute offering; and if to make upon him sacrifices of peace offerings...**

Then we have God's proper name, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular pronoun, for emphasis, and the Piel imperfect of bâqash (בָּקַשׁ) [pronounced baw-KAHSH], which means *to seek, to search, to desire, to strive after, to attempt to get, to require, to demand, to ask, to seek with desire and diligence*. The only given meaning in Gesenius which is close to what others have given is *to require, to demand*; however, there are only a handful of passages which support this meaning, so I will go with the more common rendering of the verb. This verb is not found in the Qal. Strong's #1245 BDB #134.

These are the representatives from Reuben, Gad and Manasseh; the point that is being made is that they realize if they make any kind of sacrificial offering upon this altar, regardless of the reason for, then God Himself will seek after them (and the inference, of course, is severe discipline). They fully understand that and they are stating that here for the record. **“Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to Jehovah before the tent of Jehovah, bloodguilt is to be reckoned to that man and he will be cut off from among his people.”** (Lev. 17:3–4). Now they will give the reason why they erected this altar:

**“And if not from fear from a word we made this, to say, in a time to come will speak your sons to our sons, to say, ‘What to you and to Y<sup>e</sup>howah, God of Israel;**

Joshua  
22:24

**“Therefore, did we not make this altar out of fear that someday your children would say to our children, “What is the relationship between you and Jehovah, the God of Israel?”**

This will require some more unraveling. Who thought I would ever miss the simple style of Joshua?

*The Emphasized Bible* ...if, indeed, we have not rather, out of anxiety and of purpose done this thing, saying,— In a time to come your sons might speak to our sons, saying, What have ye to do with Yahweh, God of Israel;...

NASB “But truly we have done this out of concern, for [lit., from] a reason, saying, ‘In time to come your sons may say to our sons, “What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?’

*Young's Lit. Translation* ‘And if not, from fear of this thing we have done it, saying, Hereafter your sons do speak to our sons, saying, What to you and to Jehovah God of Israel?’

What we have is a rather complex sentence structure. The gist is, *and are we not doing it for this reason* (said in anticipation of what the other 9½ tribes might allege), *therefore, the actual reason for building this altar is...* (and that would take us into v. 27). Furthermore, I don't think that the sentence really ends with this verse but continues into the next. What will throw the reader immediately is *and if not from fear from a word*; admittedly, the first time I read this, I thought they were presuming what the other tribe would allege and they were putting that to rest as well. However, the idea here is that, *if not for this reason, then what?* That is, there could be no other reason for constructing this altar other than what is given below. They are actually concerned that the tribes on the other side of the river will eventually see the natural border between them and become antagonistic toward them (and the arrival of these representatives from the 9½ tribes supports this view).

Literally, this verse reads: **“And if not from fear from a word we made this, to say...** What follows is the adverb mâchâr (מָחָר) [pronounced maw-KHAWR], which means, literally, *tomorrow*; but figuratively can stand for *in time to come, in the future, later on, down the road* (chronologically speaking). Strong's #4279 BDB #563. What they allege is the sons of the 9½ tribes will claim there is a natural border between them and that, in essence, allows

for a spiritual border between them. The REB gives the sense here: The truth is that we have done this for fear that the day may come when your children will say to ours, “What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?”

Now we have the idiom which is difficult to render. It begins with the interrogative *mâh* (מַה) [pronounced *maw*], which means *what, how*. Strong’s #4100 BDB #552. This is followed by *to you* [plural]. Now, what we should look at are some of the less literal translations to get a better feel for what is said. We have broken into idiom and ellipsis, which is not in the pattern of Joshua:

NAB	We did it rather out of our anxious concern lest in the future your children should say to our children: ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?’
NJB	The truth is, we have done this as a precaution: in the future, your descendants might say to ours, “What connection do you have with Yahweh, God of Israel?”
NRSV	No! We did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?’
REB	The truth is that we have done this for fear that the day may come when your children will say to ours, “What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?”

Rarely do I look at the same verse with two sets of translations, but the first few gave us a more literal view and the second group gave us a more interpretive view. The explanation given is very likely. Israel, many times, would construct monuments which would be there for their children to learn from. Then Joshua said to them, “Cross again to the ark of Jehovah your God into the middle of the Jordan and each of you will take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. Let this be a sign among you, so that, when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you will say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ Therefore, these stones will become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.” (Joshua 4:5–7). The spiritual essence of Israel has always been tied indelibly to her history.

“ ‘And a boundary made Y<sup>e</sup>howah between us and between you [all], sons of Reuben, and sons of Gad—the Jordan. Not to you a portion in Y<sup>e</sup>howah.’ And your sons are caused to cease our sons to not fear [or, respect] Y<sup>e</sup>howah.

Joshua  
22:25

“ ‘Obviously Jehovah made the Jordan a boundary between you and us, you sons of Reuben and Gad; and you therefore have no portion with Jehovah.’ In this way, your sons may cause our sons to cease to revere Jehovah.

And, again, this is not an easy verse to unravel:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, your Reubenites and Gadites; you have no part in the Lord. So your children might make our children cease from fearing the Lord.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	...seeing that a boundary hath Yahweh put between us and you, ye sons of Reuben and ye sons of Gad—even the Jordan, ye have no portion in Yahweh,— so might your sons cause our sons to cease from revering Yahweh.
NASB	“For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between us and you, <i>you</i> sons of Reuben and sons of Gad; you have no portion in the LORD.” So your sons may make our sons stop fearing the LORD.’
<i>Young’s Lit. Translation</i>	...for a border hath Jehovah put between us and you, O sons of Reuben, and sons of Gad—Jordan; ye have no portion in Jehovah—and your sons have caused our sons to cease, not to fear Jehovah.

In this verse, we have the repetition of the preposition *bayin* (בֵּין) [pronounced *bah-YIN*] or *bêyn* (בֵּינָם) [pronounced *bane*]. When found once, this word is translated *in the midst of*; however, here, it is found twice, and that corresponds most closely to our word *between*. Strong’s #996 BDB #107.

The meaning is not difficult to ascertain. Let's just look at a couple verbs. In the midst of the verse, with the children of the 9½ tribes as the subject, we have the Hiphil perfect of *shâ<sup>b</sup>vath* (שָׁבַת) [pronounced *shaw<sup>b</sup>-VATH*] is the word for *cease, de cease, rest [because something has been completed]*. Strong's #7673 BDB #991. This is followed by the lamed preposition, the negative particle and the Qal infinitive construct of *yâê<sup>r</sup>* (יָרַע) [pronounced *yaw-RAY*] means *fear, fear-respect, reverence, to have a reverential respect*. Strong's #3372 BDB #431. The concern of the 2½ tribes is that years later, their children's children's children may be cut off from the rest of Israel due to the natural boundary of the Jordan River—we think nothing of crossing over a body of water, because we live in a world of bridges and boats and ferries. However, this was not the case for the people of that time. In fact, it was the Jordan River which kept the peace between the peoples of Canaan and Og and Bashan and the other peoples east of the river. It was not an easy thing to go from one side to the other—not as a large group. This natural body of water could potentially serve as a border to keep the sons of the sons of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh from participating in their spiritual heritage.

**“And so we said, we will make, if you please, for us to build an altar, not for a burnt offering and not for a sacrifice;**

Joshua  
22:26

**“Then we decided that we would build, if you would allow, an altar, not to be used to offering burnt offerings or sacrifices upon it;**

The language is a little stilted; others render this as:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	We said therefore, Let us prepare, we pray you, to build us an altar,—not for ascending-offering, nor for sacrifice;...
NASB	“Therefore we said, ‘Let us build [lit., prepare to build for ourselves] an altar, nor for burnt offering or for sacrifice;
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And we say, Pray let us prepare for ourselves to build the altar—nor for burnt-offering nor for sacrifice—

Prepare is the word we usually render *make*; it is the Qal imperfect of *âsâh* (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *âaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. The 2½ tribes make it clear that this altar was never intended to offer sacrifices upon. This would be a monument on their side of the Jordan that their progeny could always point to in order to establish a link between the tribes living on both sides of the river. This was the reason for making the altar huge. It had to be something which the 9½ tribes could see from the west side. That is, years and years down the road, if the 2½ tribes came to west Israel to worship and they were refused, they could escort a delegation into Benjamin, to the River Jordan, and point across that river to the altar which matched the altar of the tabernacle—so that their children would never be cut off from their spiritual heritage.

**“for he [will be] a witness between us and between you and in our generations after us to serve the service of Y<sup>h</sup>owah before His faces with our burnt offerings and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings and do not say your sons in times to come to our sons, not for your portion in Y<sup>h</sup>owah.**

Joshua  
22:27

**“as it will be a witness between us and in the generations to come; that we may still perform the service of Jehovah in His presence with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and peace offerings, so that your sons do not later say to our sons, ‘You have not portion in Jehovah.’**

The first verb is the Qal infinitive construct of *âvad* (עָבַד) [pronounced *âaw-VAHD*], which means *to work, to serve, to labor*. Strong's #5647 BDB #712. What follows is the definite article and the noun cognate *âvôdâh* (עֲבֹדָה) [pronounced *â<sup>v</sup>o-DAWH*], which means *labour, service*. Strong's #5656 & 5647 BDB #715. Literally, these would be rendered *to serve the service of*.

At first, this verse can be confusing. It seems to say, at first, in v. 26, that this is not for burnt offerings, etc.; and in this verse it seems to say that it is for burnt offerings. However, this altar acts as a witness that they may continue to come to the true tabernacle to worship and to offer their offerings there without the other 9½ tribes saying that they have no part in the service of God. The NIV Study Bible: *the altar, presumably of uncut*

stone...was to serve as a testimony to the commitment of the Transjordan tribes to remain loyal to the Lord and to their continued right to worship the Lord at the tabernacle—even though they lived outside the land of promise. It constitutes the sixth memorial monument in the land noted by the author of Joshua.<sup>19</sup>

Such memorials were common in Israel. Today, we have photographs, written documents, libraries. Although the relationship between the tribes was recorded, as was the distribution of land, there was nothing to insure that these documents would always be accessible. They fully realized that a century from then, the documents—the Bible—could be lost, misplaced, and/or in shreds. In fact, the documents which guaranteed their spiritual heritage—the Israelites did not relate to those documents at that time as God's Word. In fact, about the only person who did was Joshua, and I don't know whether he realized that the division of the land was a part of that document. However, the people of Israel in general were not fully aware that God's Word was being recorded—this was something that was more or less recognized by a few heads of state as well as most of the descendants of Aaron. Most of the Israelites realized that what Moses recorded was the Word of God. They did not grasp, although Joshua apparently did, that this was continued by Joshua. Phinehas, who wrote this chapter and perhaps the remainder of Joshua, also seemed to realize this.

When Jacob and Laban parted company, after Laban took advantage of Jacob for years because of Jacob's love for Rachel, Jacob stood up some stones on end to mark that they had come to an agreement and a dissolution of their partnership (Gen. 31:44–46). Joshua himself will set up a large stone under an oak by the tabernacle as a witness that he had recorded his last words and added them to the Law of God (Joshua 24:26).

**“And so we said, and he [the altar] is because they say [that] unto us and unto our seeds in time to come and we would say, ‘See a copy of [the] altar of Y<sup>e</sup>howah which built our fathers not for a burnt offering and not for a sacrifice, for he [is] a witness between us and between you.’**

Joshua  
22:28

**“And this will stand in case they say that to us or to our descendants in future times, so that we may say, ‘Examine the copy of the altar of Jehovah which our fathers built—not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, but as a witness between you and us.’**

The literal Hebrew is a little obtuse, but the meaning of the verse is fairly clear. This altar was built to stand as a witness throughout the next several generations to indicate that the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan will still have a portion with the children of Israel. To help with this, let me give you a few fairly literal translations, which go back to v. 26, side-by-side some which convey the meaning, but are not quite as word-for-word literal. You will notice that I arranged the order from most literal to least literal:

*Young's Lit. Translation*

And we say, Pray let us prepare for ourselves to build the altar—nor for burnt-offering nor for sacrifice— but a witness it *is* between us and you, and between our generations after us, to do the service of Jehovah before Him with our burnt-offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace-offerings, and your sons do not say hereafter to our sons, Ye have no portion in Jehovah. And we say, And it hath been, when they say so unto us, and unto our generations hereafter, that we have said, See the pattern of the altar of Jehovah, which our fathers made—not for burnt-offering nor for sacrifice—but a witness it *is* between us and you.

*The Emphasized Bible*

We said, therefore, Let us prepare, we pray you, to build us an altar,—not for ascending-offering, nor for sacrifice; but that a witness it may be between us and you and between our generations after us, that we are to do the service of Yahweh, before him, with our ascending offerings and with our sacrifices, and with our peace-offerings,—that your sons may not say, in time to come, to our sons, Ye have no portion in Yahweh. Therefore said we, And it shall be, when they [so] say to us or to our generations in time to come,—that we will say— Behold ye the pattern of the altar

<sup>19</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 318. The NIV Study Bible summarized these back in Joshua 10:27, as did I.



of Yahweh, which our fathers made, not for ascending-offerings nor for sacrifice, but that a witness it might be between us and you.

NASB

“Therefore we said, ‘Let us build an altar, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it shall be a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, that we are to perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices and with our peace-offerings, that your sons may not say to our sons in time to come, “You have no portion in the LORD.” ‘ Therefore, we said, ‘It shall also come about if they say *this* to us or to our generations in time to come, that we shall say, “See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it is a witness between us and you.” ’ ’ ”

NIV

“That is why we said, ‘Let us get ready and build an altar—but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.’ On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no share in the LORD.’ And we said, ‘If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD’s altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’ ”

REB

‘We resolved to build an altar, not for whole-offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you, and between the generations to come. Thus we shall be able to perform service before the LORD, as we do now, with our whole offerings, our sacrifices, and our shared-offerings; and your children will never be able to say to our children in time to come, “You have no share in the LORD.” And we thought, if ever they do say this to us and to our descendants, we will point to this copy of the altar of the LORD which we have made, nor for whole-offerings and not for sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’

TEV

So we built an altar, not to burn sacrifices or make offerings, but instead, as a sign for our people and yours, and for the generations after us, that we do indeed worship the LORD before his sacred Tent with our offerings to be burned and with sacrifices and fellowship offerings. This was to keep your descendants from saying that ours have nothing to do with the LORD. It was our idea that, if this should ever happen, our descendants could say, ‘Look! Our ancestors made an altar just like the LORD’s altar. It was not for burning offerings or for sacrifices, but as a sign for our people and yours.’ ”

At the end of v. 28, we have the Qal imperative of *râ`âh* (רָאָה) [pronounced *raw-AWH*], which means *to see*. Strong's #7200 BDB #906. In that verse, we have the feminine singular construct of *tabnîyth* (תַּבְנִיִּת) [pronounced *ta-<sup>b</sup>v<sup>e</sup>-NEETH*] and it means *model, resemblance, pattern, figure*. Found in Ex. 25:9, 40 I Chron. 28:11 Ezek. 10:8 Strong's #8403 BDB #125.

So you see the entire reason for building this altar is so it will stand for generations to come, to preserve the unity between the tribes, and to secure the ability of the 2½ tribes to worship God with their brothers.

**“A profanity to us from us to rebel against Y<sup>e</sup>howah and to turn the day from following Y<sup>e</sup>howah to build an altar to a burnt offering, for an offering, and for a sacrifice apart from [the] altar of Y<sup>e</sup>howah our God; that [is] before faces of His tabernacle.”**

Joshua  
22:29

**“It would be blasphemous for us to rebel against Jehovah and to turn from following Jehovah this day by building an altar for burnt offerings, offerings, or for sacrifices rather than using the true altar of Jehovah our God which stands before the His tabernacle.”**

Again, this is a verse which is fairly clear in the various English translations, but it will require a lot of work to explain the vocabulary and syntax. It begins with the substantive *châlîylâh* (חַלְיֵלָה) [pronounced *khaw-LEE-law*], which means *far be it [from me or you]*. BDB clarifies this as *ad profanum!*; whatever the hell that is in exclamatory

Latin. Gesenius clears this up with the explanation that this means, literally, *to profane [something]*. This substantive, called an adjective by Gesenius, is an exclamation of abhorrence. The KJV renders this with the questionable phrase *God forbid* (which borders on taking God's name lightly). What is interesting is that we don't find this used by Joshua, or by Moses, for that matter, as, prior to this, it is only found thrice in Genesis (Gen. 18:25 44:7, 17) and twice in Job (Job 27:5 34:10). This is followed by the lâmed preposition and the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural suffix; it should be rendered *a profanity to us*. Strong's #2486 BDB #321.

This is followed by the phrase *from us to rebel*. This first phrase is variously rendered: *Far be it from us that we should rebel* (Owen); *far be it from us to rebel* (NAB, NJB, NIV, Young); *far be it from us that we should rebel* (NASB, Rotherham). In fact, I was surprised as to how closely the various translators agreed here.

The second *offering* mentioned is the feminine singular of *minchâh* (מִנְחָה) [pronounced *min-KHAWH*], which means, simply, *offering*. Strong's #4503 BDB #585.

After the word *sacrifice*, we have the preposition *mîn* and then lâmed and the masculine noun *bad* (בַּד) [pronounced *bahd*] and it means *separation, by itself, alone*. Most translators ignore the lâmed preposition. When followed by the preposition *mîn*, it means *apart from* or *besides*. Strong's #905 BDB #94.

They say that it would be profanity to build an altar on which to offer burnt offerings which is different from the altar which is in front of the tabernacle.

### Return to Outline

## Phinehas and West Israel Are Satisfied with the Explanation

**And so heard Phinehas, the priest, and chiefs of the congregation and heads of families of Israel who [were] with him the words that spoke sons of Reuben and sons of Gad and the Manassite; and so he [i.e., what was said] was pleasing in their eyes.**

Joshua  
22:30

**So, what Phinehas, the priest, the chiefs of the congregation, and the heads of the families of Israel were pleased with the explanation of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh.**

The last verb in this verse is the Qal imperfect of *yâṭaʿ* (יָטָא) [pronounced *yaw-TAʻV*], which means *to be good, well, to be pleasing, to do good, to deal well, to make glad, to make a thing good*. Strong's #3190 BDB #405. There is no neuter pronoun in the Hebrew, so the masculine singular is used to stand for what they heard. The explanation of the 2½ tribes was reasonable.

**And so said Phinehas ben Eleazar the priest unto sons of Reuben and unto sons of Gad and unto sons of Manasseh, "The day we know that in our midst [is] Y<sup>e</sup>howah, in that you did not commit against Y<sup>e</sup>howah the treachery the this; now you have caused to be delivered [the] sons of Israel from a hand of Y<sup>e</sup>howah."**

Joshua  
22:31

**Therefore, Phinehas ben Eleazar, the priest, spoke to the sons of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh: "We know today that Jehovah is in our midst, inasmuch as you did not commit a serious infraction against Jehovah; you therefore delivered the sons of Israel from the vengeance of Jehovah."**

After saying that Jehovah is in their midst, we have the relative pronoun, where we would have expected the explanatory preposition. Rotherham renders it *in that*; Both Owen, the KJV, the NASB and Young render it *because*. The relative pronoun is *ʿăsher* (אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced *ash-ER*], and it is generally translated *that, which, when* or *who*. It is also used as a particle of relation, a sign of relation or a connecting link. As a connective, it can mean *so that, in that, since, for that, inasmuch as, forasmuch*. Although a fairly specific particle of relation in other Semitic languages, it has been weakened considerably in the Hebrew and it demands another word to

define more precisely the relation.  $\`{A}$ sher also functions as a conjunction and be rendered, *that, in order that, because that, because, for*. Strong's #834 BDB #81.

What Phinehas meant by causing the sons of Israel to be delivered from the hand of Jehovah is that the *sons of Israel* are all of the people of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh; that there would have been an attack by the other 9½ tribes against all of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh; and the explanation of their representatives saved their people from what would have been a devastating civil war.

There has been a quiet progression in the past few book of the Bible which is easy to miss: we are seeing less and less of a visible presence of God. The pact which was forged between the tribes that day was, to Phinehas, a sign that God was among them. The tabernacle was a sign that God was among them (Ex. 25:8 Lev. 26:11–12). Some day in the future, all mankind will recognize that God is with the Jew: **Thus proclaims Jehovah of the armies, "In those days ten men from the nations of every language will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zech. 8:23).**

**And so returned Phinehas ben Eleazar, the priest, from sons of Reuben and sons of Gad from a land of the Gilead unto a land of Canaan unto sons of Israel; and so they caused to return a word.**

Joshua  
22:32

**Then Phinehas ben Eleazar, the priest, returned from his meeting with the sons of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan and he brought with him this explanation herein given.**

With this verse, we are back to a very simple vocabulary; however, context would still dictate that this was Phinehas recording this portion of Scripture. Had Joshua been mentioned by name, then it would have been up for grabs as to who wrote the last few verses of this chapter.

**And so pleasing the word in eyes of sons of Israel, and so blessed God, sons of Israel, and they did not speak to make against them to the war, to destroy the land where sons of Reuben and sons of Gad were settled in her.**

Joshua  
22:33

**And this explanation was met with favor by the sons of Israel, who blessed God and no longer spoke of making war against their brothers, the 2½ tribes.**

The verb *blessed* is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, so it refers to *sons of Israel* and not to *God*, Who is the object of the verb. This was a great relief to them that they did not have to go to war against their brothers. *Blessing God* would have involved a great deal of thanksgiving and appreciation.

Now note that Joshua is still not mentioned, nor is Eleazar, the High Priest. Phinehas goes to the people of Israel and gives the explanation of the eastern tribes and they find the explanation satisfactory. This would indicate that Joshua is probably retired (my thinking is that their retirement was less formal than ours is—he may have still been considered their political leader, even though Phinehas was acting as the political leader). The other explanation is that Joshua has passed away by this time (there is no reason to assume that these final few chapters are in chronological order).

**And so proclaimed sons of Reuben and sons of Gad<sup>20</sup> concerning the altar that "a witness him [or, it is] in our midst that Y<sup>e</sup>howah [is] the God."**

Joshua  
22:34

**Therefore, the sons of Reuben and Gad proclaimed that the altar stood as a witness in our midst that Jehovah is God [or, therefore the sons of Reuben and Gad named the altar "a witness in our midst that Jehovah is God"].**

Unfortunately, there is a difference of opinion as to the ending of this last verse. Since various translators default to various manuscripts, we can get a feel for the differences below:

<sup>20</sup> The Septuagint adds *and the half tribe of Manasseh*.

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	So the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad named the altar [at Witness]; a witness it is between us, That Yahweh is God.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	So the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar a witness; a witness it is between us, that Yahweh, He is God [or, the God]. (an alternate reading)
KJV	And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar <i>Ed</i> ; for it <i>shall be</i> a witness between us that the LORD <i>is</i> God. I had to check another KJV to make certain about naming the altar <i>Ed</i> . I thought that maybe it was an abbreviation.
NASB	And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar <i>Witness</i> ; "For," <i>they said</i> , "it is a witness between us that the <i>is</i> God." You will recall that the italics in the NASB indicate that the word is not found in the Hebrew.
NKJV	The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar, <i>Witness</i> , "For <i>it is</i> a witness between us that the LORD <i>is</i> God."
Owen's Translation	And called the Reubenites and the Gadites the altar for it is a witness between us that Yahweh is God.
The Septuagint	And Joshua gave a name to the altar of the children of Ruben, and the children of God, and of the half tribe of Manasse; and said, It is a testimony in the midst of them, that the Lord is their God.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad proclaim concerning the altar, that 'it is a witness between us that Jehovah <i>is</i> God.'

Okay, the first thing you are wondering, above all else, is *what the heck is this "Ed" crap?* *Ed* is not found in most of the Hebrew manuscripts, nor is it found in the Septuagint or in the Vulgate.

As to the differences, Rotherham tells us that the reading *called the altar a witness* is found in two early printed editions, the Aramaic and the Syriac codices. The Aramaic, Septuagint, Syriac and Vulgate have the full *Jehovah, He is the God*.<sup>21</sup>

The first verb is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *qârâ* (אָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *call, proclaim, read*. It often means *to name* something, but this is more of a proclamation than a specific name. Strong's #7121 BDB #894.

After *witness*, we find the preposition *bêyn* (בֵּין) [pronounced *bane*], which means *in the midst of, between, among*. Strong's #996 BDB #107. Affixed to this is the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural suffix. When we put this altogether, it will still seem somewhat cumbersome. Some Hebrew manuscripts lack the word *witness*, and this would give us: *And so proclaimed sons of Reuben and sons of Gad concerning the altar that "it is in our midst that Y<sup>e</sup>howah [is] the God."* However, my thinking is that this doesn't help much; and since this is found also in the Greek, it was likely in the original manuscripts. The meaning to be derived from this verse is that the 2½ tribes proclaim that this altar stands as a witness in their midst that Jehovah is God. Since we have a history of long names in ancient history, the meaning of this verse is likely: *Therefore, the sons of Reuben and Gad named the altar "a witness in our midst that Jehovah is God."*

This is followed by the explanatory preposition *kîy* (כִּי) [pronounced *kee*], which means *when, that, for, because*. Strong's #3588 BDB #471. Then we have, literally, *Jehovah the God*. I think that we can easily derive the meaning that it is the altar which is in their midst which proclaims that Jehovah is God.

The final question that we need to consider is, what about this altar? It seemed harmless enough. Was there a problem with it, despite the fact that it was not used to offer sacrifices upon? We do not have Jehovah God consulted anywhere in this chapter. I mention that because what we have here is suspect, even though it is not an altar whereupon sacrifices will be offered. The first person who painted a picture of Jesus; the first person who made a statue of Mary, certainly they did not design these images to be worshipped. Although that was not their intention, man, being what he is, now believes that Jesus had long hair; and some factions of believers and unbelievers have an inordinate respect—a respect which borders on worship—for Mary, misnaming her Mary, the

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 256.

mother of God. Since this altar is never mentioned again, it is reasonable to suppose that its building was harmless. Did it accomplish its intended purpose? As I said, it is never mentioned again. It is an act of human thinking which results in something whose rightness is nebulous.

McGee took a similar view. He said: *On the surface, the building of this altar sounds like a good idea and many commentators have placed their seal of approval upon it. However, let's take more than a cursory look at this altar...in the Tabernacle was the brazen altar for sacrifices. There was to be no other. Deuteronomy 12:27 says, "And thou shalt offer thy burnt-offerings, the flesh and the blood sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh."* Israel was told to destroy all other altars. *"But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves"* (Exodus 34:13). There was to be but one exception, in Deuteronomy 27:4–8, where Israel is told to take twelve stones out of the Jordan River and put them up as a memorial. The two and one-half tribes never crossed over Jordan and the river actually divided them from their brethren. This altar recognized that division. This altar was *prima facie* evidence that they were divided. It made way for the division later on. Right now Israel is divided east and west. It is nine and one-half tribes versus two and one-half tribes at this point, but later on it will be a north and south division with ten tribes in the north against two tribes in the south.

The brazen altar in the Tabernacle typifying the redemptive work of Christ, was a place of unity. And friends, I can meet with any man who will exalt Jesus Christ. In John 17:20, 21 Jesus prayed, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* There is an organic unity of those who are in Christ. The altar speaks of the death of Christ as a sacrifice.

As the two and one-half tribes built a bloodless altar which had divided Israel, today those who are liberal in their theology have divided the church. They have accused fundamentalists of being schismatic, but it is liberalism that has departed from the blood. They have put up...[a bloodless altar], if you please. They worship at a "bloodless" Christ. Like the two and one-half tribes, their conduct reveals that they have departed from the truth. Our Lord said, *"Ye shall know them by their fruits."* Several hundred years later the Lord Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and came to the country of the Gadarenes. The people living there were from the tribe of Gad, and they were still living on the wrong side of the Jordan River. Our Lord came upon a demon-possessed man and gave them permission to enter a herd of pigs nearby. The Gadarenes were in the pig business! Can you imagine an Orthodox Jew in the pig business? They had failed to follow the commandments of God. They were on the wrong side of Jordan.

Liberalism has indeed divided the church. It has erected a beautiful altar, a "bloodless" Christ, one who never actually lived, one without deity, one without ability to save humanity.

My friend, have you crossed over Jordan? Have you entered into the rest of redemption which Christ offers? <sup>22</sup>

From here, we should proceed to Joshua 24:1–27.

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1.J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 96. I should point out that Keil and Delitzsch also felt that the altar was built west of the Jordan. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 159.

2. *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 319.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; pp. 98–99.