

Joshua Chapter 22: v. 1-34. – A Dangerous misunderstandingIntroduction

In the last three chapters of the book of Joshua we are confronted with three counseling sessions. The first session is with Joshua and the soldiers of the two and a half tribes which is chapter 22: v. 1-9.

The second counseling session is contained in Chapter 23 and the final one in Chapter 24.

These chapters are a challenge by Joshua to encourage God's people to respond appropriately to God's faithfulness in supplying their land and providing all that they needed.

In the first counseling session Joshua speaks to the soldiers of the tribes whose families had settled on the other side of the Jordan. They had been away from their wives and families for 7 years. They had completed their obligation to help with the conquest of the land.

There were 40,000 of them as described in Joshua 4: v. 12-13.

Joshua now gathers them together to give them words of commendation and advice before they set off to their new homes.

In the counseling session Joshua says 3 main things.

1. He Praises the tribe for their obedience – v. 1-3

The tribe not only obeyed what Moses commanded them to do, but they obeyed Joshua as the leader in all that he commanded them to do practically.

For 7 years they had put the interest of the nation before their own comforts.

They were men of the word and their integrity was 100%.

They were also faithful to their own Jewish people.

There is one thing that we need to notice in these verses that is a transferable principle for us today.

Let us turn back to Joshua Chapter 1: v. 12-15

¹² And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying,
¹³ "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.' ¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, ¹⁵ until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD's servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

Joshua didn't assume that this tribe would obey Moses' instructions, they were under a new leadership now. Joshua reminded them of the promise that they had made to Moses.

This tribe was not just following personalities; they were following and obeying God.

Now for an application.

Our commitment is to follow Jesus Christ and God's word, the Bible. Sometimes when a Pastor leaves a Church, some members stop attending that Church. The reason for this is that they are following a leader or personality and not Jesus Christ and God's word. They may not admit to it, but this is the reality of the situation.

Sometimes these people backslide, because their faith is in the Pastor and not Jesus Christ.

It takes a mature Christian to maintain their integrity to follow Jesus and God's word, during changes of leadership.

2. Joshua counseled them to live righteously – v. 5-6.

Verse 5-6 is a summary of a number of verses in Deuteronomy. They are contained in Deuteronomy 6: v. 5, 10: v. 12, 11: v. 13, 22 and 30: v. 6, 16, 20. These words are also repeated in Matthew 22: v. 36-38.

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment.

We know from our study that the Jewish army had experienced victory in Canaan because Joshua loved God and obeyed His word. (Joshua 1: v. 7-8) This was the secret of their success. However this tribe was now moving away from the direct leadership of Joshua and they would be responsible for their own spiritual life and walk with God.

Joshua gave them several spiritual challenges.

The first was to love God. This was the most important challenge. The motive for their obedience had to come from a love for God.

Jesus said in John 14: v. 15 “If you love Me keep my commandments” Love had to be the overriding factor in their obedience.

If they loved God, then they would want to walk in His ways and keep His commandments.

The second main challenge was to hold fast to God.

The word hold fast which is used in the N.K.J. version is the Hebrew word which means to “Cling to”.

There is a product in the U.K. that we call “Cling Film”. It is the same as “Saran Wrap” in Japan. It is used to wrap around food so that no air can get into the food. In the U.K. it is used every day to wrap around home-made sandwiches. The wrap or cling film is so tightly connected to the food that it is kept fresh.

Joshua was telling these soldiers that they need to be so closely connected to God that nothing would get in the way of their relationship.

The third challenge was to serve God. They had been serving God as soldiers for 7 years, but now they were to return to their families and be involved in civilian life. Joshua was concerned that they still made time to serve God.

3. Joshua rewards the soldiers for their service. – v. 7-8.

In v. 7-8 we are told that Joshua sent the soldiers to their new home with “much riches”. They had silver, gold, bronze, livestock and lots of clothing. These were part of the spoils of war. It was their reward for a job well done.

Joshua told the soldiers to divide the goods amongst their brethren. These were the men who stayed behind to guard their families and their belongings.

Moses had established the principle of sharing the spoils of war with those who remained behind to care for the families. (Numbers 31: v. 26-27)

Practical applications from this first counseling session

1. People who serve God in any Christian ministry need to be commended for their service.

In a number of Churches that I know, at every Church anniversary service, the Pastor recognizes every department in the Church and thanks them for their ministry. They are then prayed for. In my last Church in England at every Church anniversary service we used to do something similar. Perhaps I should introduce this at our next Anniversary service in October?

2. We need to continually cultivate our love relationship with God.

When we first become a Christian our relationship with God can be very exciting. However as the years go on and things happen in our life, our love for God can grow dim. It is still there but it is not the bright light that it was, it is more like the night light that you have in Japanese homes that is in the middle of those two ringed florescent bulbs. You have the security of knowing that God is still there, but you are not so excited about serving Him anymore.

What should we do?

Well when we want to improve our marriage relationship, we might go out on a date evening with our wife, perhaps buy her some flowers, spend some quality time together etc.

It is the same with God, we need to spend some quality time with Him. Have you ever thought of spending a morning or an afternoon or evening, reading your Bible and praying? If you find this difficult to do on your own then you can find a friend to do it with. We can't give God flowers, but perhaps we can increase our offering one week, or send a gift to a Missionary or Christian worker who has a need.

The greatest gift we can give God is our lives.

(Romans 12: v. 1-2)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We may not feel that we have much to offer God, but He will take what we give Him and use it for His glory.

We now come to the second half of Chapter 22. This is the title of the sermon which I am calling a dangerous miss-understanding.

Read Joshua 22: v. 10-34 in N.L.T.

¹⁰ **But** while they were still in Canaan, and when they came to a place called Geliloth^[a] near the Jordan River, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh stopped to build a large and imposing altar.

¹¹ The rest of Israel heard that the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar at Geliloth at the edge of the land of Canaan, on the west side of the Jordan River. ¹² So the whole community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and prepared to go to war against them. ¹³ First, however, they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to talk with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of

Manasseh. ¹⁴ In this delegation were ten leaders of Israel, one from each of the ten tribes, and each the head of his family within the clans of Israel.

¹⁵ When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ¹⁶ “The whole community of the LORD demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel. How could you turn away from the LORD and build an altar for yourselves in rebellion against him? ¹⁷ Was our sin at Peor not enough? To this day we are not fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire community of the LORD. ¹⁸ And yet today you are turning away from following the LORD. If you rebel against the LORD today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

¹⁹ “If you need the altar because the land you possess is defiled, then join us in the LORD’s land, where the Tabernacle of the LORD is situated, and share our land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar other than the one true altar of the LORD our God. ²⁰ Didn’t divine anger fall on the entire community of Israel when Achan, a member of the clan of Zerah, sinned by stealing the things set apart for the LORD^[b]? He was not the only one who died because of his sin.”

²¹ Then the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the clans of Israel: ²² “The LORD, the Mighty One, is God! The LORD, the Mighty One, is God! He knows the truth, and may Israel know it, too! We have not built the altar in treacherous rebellion against the LORD. If we have done so, do not spare our lives this day. ²³ If we have built an altar for ourselves to turn away from the LORD or to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings, may the LORD himself punish us.

²⁴ “The truth is, we have built this altar because we fear that in the future your descendants will say to ours, ‘What right do you have to worship the LORD, the God of Israel? ²⁵ The LORD has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and you people of Reuben and Gad. You have no claim to the LORD.’ So your descendants may prevent our descendants from worshiping the LORD.

²⁶ “So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, ²⁷ but as a memorial. It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings. Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no claim to the LORD.’

²⁸ “If they say this, our descendants can reply, ‘Look at this copy of the LORD’s altar that our ancestors made. It is not for burnt offerings or sacrifices; it is a reminder of the relationship both of us have with the LORD.’ ²⁹ Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. Only the altar of the LORD our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose.”

³⁰ When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of Israel—heard this from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were satisfied. ³¹ Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, replied to them, “Today we know the LORD is among us because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD as we thought. Instead, you have rescued Israel from being destroyed by the hand of the LORD.”

³² Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the other leaders left the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and returned to the land of Canaan to tell the Israelites what had happened. ³³ And all the Israelites were satisfied and praised God and spoke no more of war against Reuben and Gad.

³⁴ The people of Reuben and Gad named the altar “Witness,”^[c] for they said, “It is a witness between us and them that the LORD is our God, too.”

As the soldiers were on their way home to their new surroundings, they came to the region of the river Jordan, but they were still in the land of Canaan.

In v. 10 it tells us that they built an impressive altar. They built the altar as a witness for the future. They feared because they were going to live on the other side of the Jordan that in future the rest of Israel would disown them.

It wasn't an altar on which they would offer any sacrifices, but an altar that would stand as a witness to their unity with the tribes, west of the Jordan.

This was a mistake; they had not had any instructions from God to do this.

Their intentions were honorable but they were greatly misunderstood.

Somehow word got back to the rest of the Israelites that they had built an altar to a foreign God. Therefore a great army was raised up to go to war against this tribe for their immediate disobedience to God's word.

(Read Leviticus 17: v. 8-9)

⁸ "Also you shall say to them: 'Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, ⁹ and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from among his people.'

Fortunately the Israelites didn't immediately go to war, but send a delegation to investigate the matter.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest was dispatched with 10 representatives to discover the truth of the matter. Phinehas was a good choice to discover the truth. He was well respected by the rest of the tribes. The reason that he was well respected was because of an incident that is recorded in Numbers chapter 25:v. 1-9 (read it)

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove,^[a] and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. ² They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor." ⁶ And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷ Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; ⁸ and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. ⁹ And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

After a thorough investigation it was found that although God had not instructed them to build this Altar, it was done in good faith with the best of intentions.

They had not built an Altar for sacrifices but an Altar for future generations, as a witness to the fact that they were part of Israel. It was built to be a Memorial Altar, not one to be used for sacrifices.

The explanation fully satisfied Phinehas and his delegation. Civil war had been avoided and the fellowship between them was restored.

It was a happy ending to a difficult problem.

What can we learn from this dangerous misunderstanding?

Misunderstandings happen every day around the world in Christian Churches.

They can even result in Church splits and damage to Christian workers. The truth doesn't always come out and many innocent people can be hurt and lives damaged.

What can we do here at OIC to avoid misunderstanding?

Well the answer is always in the text. So let us see what we can learn from this situation.

Communication – If only the 2 and a half tribes had explained to the other tribes exactly what they were planning to do and why they felt the need to build this altar then it could have avoided a confrontation. They could have discussed the matter in an orderly way.

So the first way to avoid misunderstandings is to make sure that you communicate well to other people who may be affected by your decisions.

It is always good to write things down. Sometimes we forget what we say and sometimes when we write things down they always look right and we need to make changes.

The second thing we learn from this passage is not to entertain hearsay, especially when it is of an important nature.

What is hearsay? Hearsay is when a person says something but they do not have firsthand knowledge of that situation. Somebody else has told them. In v.11 we have "Hearsay". It says "hear someone say". The person who started the story probably thought that is what the tribes were doing, but they hadn't asked them directly.

It is very wrong to start a rumor, and also wrong to continue one.

The next thing we learn is that we need to fully investigate all allegations of wrong doing carefully and full of grace.

If Phinehas and his delegation had not fully investigated the situation and let the army act on hearsay then there would have been a Civil War.

However they sent their best man, trusted by everybody, to fully investigate the situation.

It is always best to let your best people attempt to reconcile people when there has been a misunderstanding. If you don't you may end up with a bigger problem.

At Osaka International Church we have people from many different countries, backgrounds and cultures. Let us protect our Church by not promoting rumors or hearsay. Also if we have a problem with any particular person then we need to follow Biblical principles and go directly to that person to sort the matter out.

(Matthew 18: v. 15-18)

¹⁵ "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

¹⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Let us pray.