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Joshua 22

"Settled On The Other Side"

May 31, 2017

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight, shall we, to Joshua 22.

We're getting near the end of our studies through the book of Joshua. We will finish in about four weeks' time. Next communion, on June 28th, Don Stewart and I are going to be here just to do Bible question night. So he's going to join me. You don't have to send them in or write them out early, but bring some questions that you have about the Bible, things that maybe you're wondering about that we'll tackle, and it'll be our evening of just question-and-answer, talking together before we have communion. And then we will start, Lord be willing - in July, the book of Judges.

We told you, I think, that the book is only twenty-five years long - this book is. And it focuses primarily on the arrival of the children of Israel to possess the land that God had been promising them for hundreds and hundreds of years. It is a book about occupation. It is a model of walking by faith, of obedience, of God's power in our lives over the enemy that will keep us from His best. For seven and a half years Joshua, after he took over from Moses, led the nation collectively to fight to take the land from the Canaanites. And God was with them. Aside from a couple of losses because of disobedience, thirty-one large cities with their kings and their armies fell during those seven and a half years. By the time those seven and a half years were done, any big threat in the land - to the occupation by the children of Israel - was gone. And Joshua was too old now, in his 90's, to fight anymore. He was actually 93, and the LORD said, "You're old, and we've got to come up with another plan." And so, though he would live to be 110, the LORD, at that time, said to Joshua, "Let's break up the land, give it to the tribes as I have allotted them that privilege. And let them move into the land, and let them be responsible individually now," not collectively, for removing whatever was left of the Canaanite religion and peoples because God sent them in as a judge.

The failure of the people, especially the tribes over the next twenty years, to do that is really the reason why we have the book of Judges. It really describes both the failure and the consequence of trying to do things without the LORD and not really obeying Him.

But that really isn't the subject tonight of our study. In fact, as we come to this chapter, the kings are beaten, the land's been allotted. Seventeen and a half years are still to come, if you will. The land has been given to the tribes. They have occupied their land. There are forty-eight cities that the Levites have gotten. Six of those forty-eight are refuge cities that we looked at last time. The only thing that is left to do of all of that mechanics (of all that we have studied in this book) is to send home the armies of the two and a half tribes who, when they first got to the land, asked Moses if they could have that land on the east side of the Jordan. They were cattle herders, if you will. They liked the grazing land. They asked. Moses asked the LORD. The LORD said, "Fine. If that's where they want to stay, give it to them." But Moses said to them, "You can have it provided that you come into the land with your brethren, fight alongside of them for as long as it takes. You can leave your families here, your cattle here, but you come with us. And you don't go home until the land has been possessed." So, that happened now. This was that monumental day (and we talked about it before) where the children of Israel had been promised for generations; the first group had not gone in to possess it, the second generation was there. And this was a big deal - they were moving in.

I was thinking about that. The other day, my wife and I were talking. The first house we bought was very small, very run down. It was a fixer upper. But the cool thing was it was ours. And I don't know if you remember - those of you that have a house or that you've bought a home - how you felt the first time. We didn't have enough money for a down payment. My first wife died of leukemia. When my wife and I got married - after the insurance quit paying - we were a million and a half dollars in debt. Now the Lord worked it out, and God graciously got us off the hook. And I'll tell you how He did it. He had all three of the doctors we owed (at some point in that first year) write us a letter that said, "Your debt is forgiven." We didn't have to pay. But we were broke. So we had a friend help us buy our first house; he gave us the down payment. And I remember sitting at home, and it was the start that we needed. We could have never done it without his help. But I like the term "home owner." It was pretty cool. "This is our house!" It was run down; it needed a lot of work. But it was ours.

Well Israel had become "home owners." This was their land - for the first time in as long as they could remember; in fact, for the first time ever. Right? They'd always been on the move. But no longer. And God had given it to them freely. They'd have to occupy it by faith. They'd have to fight battles - led of the Spirit,

enabled by His power. But it was their land. So the only thing left, and we find it in this chapter, is for those two and a half tribes that had been faithfully with them for seven and a half years to go home. And so we run into this two and a half tribes saying "Shalom" or "Goodbye" to the rest of their brethren whom they had been fighting alongside; and in chapter 4:13, we are told that the army of these two and a half tribes - there were forty thousand of them. This was not a small group that was leaving to cross the Jordan - forty thousand of them. They had come alongside, they had fought as they had promised. They wanted to go and stay on the other side. "Moses, we love you, but we love this place, and there's no place like it" is what they said. And the LORD said, "You can have it, but you've got to fight," and they did, and they'd been very faithful to do so. So they agreed, and for seven and a half years they fought faithfully. Imagine this - seven and a half years they were not with their wives, not with their children, not with their possessions, not able to build, really, anyplace, and they were anxious to get home.

So, in chapter 22 Joshua calls these two and a half tribes together - Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh - and he thanks them (in the first nine verses or so) for their faithfulness. In fact, if you could have someone the caliber of Joshua commending your walk with God, I think you'd feel pretty good about yourself. These are nice things to hear about how you have done. And they are now going to be given permission to go home. I think it's important that you see, and we talked about it a little bit and we may be able to go over it next time as well a bit, that the two and a half tribes chose, in essence, to stay at a place that was far below what God had chosen for them. We covered it, I think, when the breakup started, if you will; that God had a land for them, that they were willing to settle for a land outside of the boundaries of promise. When the enemies came against Israel, they were always the first that were overrun. When there was separation, they were always isolated by themselves. They weren't part of that group. They really didn't fit in, and it didn't give them much strength. They were able to go by what they saw as opposed to believe what God had promised. It amounts to Lot and Abraham. Lot looked out and picked what he liked and saw. So did they. Abraham looked to the LORD, and he got everything. So it wasn't the best choice, I think, from a biblical standpoint, even though the LORD said, "You can have that if that's what you want," and I don't think the LORD would necessarily not say that to us. But He has a better plan. However, even in verses 5 and 6 when Joshua says to these guys that are leaving, "Hey, make sure you stick close to Jesus" (in our case), but, "You stick close to the LORD, trust in Him," they didn't obey that either. But that's not the focus that we want to look at tonight because the chapter is about something

completely different. I'm sure that these men itched to go home. They wanted to go back to their land. It was a difficult place to be. But I think that there is something about leaving a group - after all these years - that must have been difficult as well, intertwined with purpose. When people are thrown together in a military setting, where life and death affect you both, there is usually a real commonality that is developed that may not even really be developed anywhere else; that battlefield kind of friendship. And no doubt, after seven and a half years, these forty thousand folks had formed a team and camaraderie, and it is difficult for them to leave. And I think, early on here, Joshua's words of blessing and approval would have been received with pride.

Now, the relationship between these forty thousand men and the rest of the nation, as well as who they represented back home, would soon be separated by miles, by geography. There's nothing worse than being separated that far unless you find that separation amongst family and friends. And this is really a chapter about misunderstanding. And so I think that we want to concentrate on the impact of this chapter as we go through. Our text tonight speaks about misunderstanding - how it's caused, how you can avoid it, and how that we might restore from the place where it has brought destruction. Worse than being away from their home, from their wives and from their children - which had been for a prolonged period of time - was being misunderstood by those who you've been living with, in your very home in some cases. And there is this misunderstanding.

Now, before we read the text, the components of misunderstanding - at least in this chapter - were threefold. And they usually are. Number one - it started with an innocent act. These two and a half tribes that were leaving did something that, in an act from their heart, was innocent. Sometimes it starts with innocent words somebody has said, or someone has done something. There's no malice, there's no forethought, there's absolutely no wickedness in their hearts. But someone hears the words or looks at the action and interprets it to mean something else. And people become selective hearers - you know how that works - where they'll only hear what they want to hear, and they'll filter out everything else, and they'll say things like, "Well, what do they mean by that?" And it started with innocence that was misunderstood or misinterpreted. Second of all, an offense was created because of the misunderstanding. So it started innocently enough, but then, because of the misinterpretation of what was seen or what was said, people begin to read into motivation. It happens all the time. They say things like, "I know why they did that. That's just who they are. That's just how they are. That's just the

way it is." And they begin to take an innocent action and now begin to ascribe motive to it, and you end up living your life in a place where you have no business being - questioning someone's heart or their motives or their intention and all. So innocent action - misinterpretation that now takes offense and misinterprets and begins to, if you will, ascribe motivation to the behavior. And then, inevitably, the third step becomes that we feel pressured to make the offense public. We feel, now that there is just cause of us being upset, that we should tell somebody else. The Bible would call that gossip. I think of all of the institutions I've been involved with in my life, the church is the guiltiest. We are the best at hiding our intentions, and we are guilty of gossip, maybe more than anyone else. People that will say to you, "I have a concern - I want to share it with you. Could I just share with you my confidential prayer request? I know you're a man of prayer." And meanwhile they want to dump on you something they heard, something that was said, something that's been misinterpreted, and what started off innocently now has become a great problem.

Well that's what happens here with these two and a half tribes tonight. Because they're going to leave, but before they cross the border into the other side of the Jordan - leave the Land of Promise - they're going to stop, and they're going to build an altar, much like the altar that is built in Shiloh (which happened to be the only altar God allowed). It was the only place you could be worshipping, according to God's word to the people. And yet, on the way out, these guys stop and not build just a small little place; they made it some beautiful kind of expensive, and everything they had, they put into it. Before they went home, they built this monumental altar, and the word gets back to the people in the rest of the group. And it causes some tense moments, and the news spreads quickly, and it isn't long before they're going to war with their brethren who they had been fighting with for seven and a half years, alongside.

We'll start with the blessed send-off, verse 1. "Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, and said to them: 'You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law

which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.' So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half of it Joshua gave a possession among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, and spoke to them, saying, 'Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.' So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses."

So, on their way out, things sounded pretty good. Wonderful testimony to have Joshua say to you, in front of 2½ million people, "You guys have kept your word in every way, you've listened to every command, you've been without your family for the better part of seven and a half years, and you've been as faithful as you could be." And so he blesses them, he releases them to go be with their loved ones; the troops could be dismissed with a word, "Well done." And like I said, how cool it would be for your life to be marked by, as these were, a man such as Joshua - whose integrity and walk before the LORD unquestioned. And he says, "You've done well, you've obeyed, you've been extremely faithful, you've run the race. It is time for you to now go and collect the promise that Moses had made to you."

One of the basic tenets of Christianity is obedience. Right? If you had to list things that were absolutes, obedience to your Master, to the Lord, is one of the tenets of basic Christianity. In fact, if you will not obey Him, then He really isn't your Master at all. And one of the big tests of conversion is what happens after it happens, what follows your conversion. God does not expect you to walk on water, but He does expect you to try, and He expects you to get wet. Right? You've got to take a step. You've got to be upright in His sight. And they had. I mean, these two and a half tribes, to all of their credit - forty thousand men, were complimented. Obedience proves relationship. Does that make sense? Obedience proves relationship. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). So there's the proof of that relationship. If I love Him, I'm going to do what He has said. Obedience does not produce relationship; it proves it. In fact,

relationship, when it is driven by love, will always promote obedience. It isn't hard to convince people to be obedient to the Lord if they are convinced of the Lord's love. It's just hard for them to do and be obedient when they're not. If that's not the motivation, if the relationship is not the motivation, then doing the right thing can be hard. "I gotta go to church, I gotta read my Bible, I gotta pray. I can't believe it. Give me a break!" Until you love the Lord. And, "If you love Me, then you'll keep My commandments." But then it's easy, it's not grievous, it's not burdensome.

And notice in verse 5 that Joshua charges them with, really, the secret of life. Love God, walk in His ways, keep His ways, hold fast or cleave to Him, serve Him completely with all that you have - from your heart and from your soul. If you do that, it'll be well with you. I mean, it's great counsel all stuck into one verse, isn't it? That's a beautiful direction. Six little phrases to hone in on obedience. James, in the New Testament, said we should "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" because then we "deceive ourselves" (James 1:22). Look, you could have been here as long as Shannon's been here (Shannon gave her testimony before tonight's Bible study started) or as long as some of the others have been here - years - and your head can be filled with Bible information, but if you're not doing it at all, then you're just fooling yourself. You're in church again, but your life hasn't been touched at all; and that's where the deception comes in, when we think that hearing it is enough. It is not enough. And James goes so far to illustrate it. We've been having James on the radio these last couple of weeks. But James goes so far as to say that if you are a hearer but not a doer - and then he compares someone to looking in the mirror and then forgetting what they saw. And in truth he says the mirror tells you the truth. It's the Word of God that tells you the truth. Now you have to respond to it, be a doer. And James says a guy that gets up in the morning and looks in the mirror, and he sees his hair standing on end, he hasn't shaved, and he's standing in his boxer shorts, and he walks out the door to go to work, "Hey, where're your pants, man?" "I don't know." "Didn't you look in the mirror?" "Oh, yeah. I forgot." That's kind of like the hearer and not the doer. Right? He's in church, he's hearing it all the time. He knows nothing, though, because he's not doing anything with what he's hearing. So Joshua gives very wise counsel to these forty thousand men. He gives them six things to do. And it literally boils down to be willing to obey the LORD. Because to be fooled, like James said, that would be embarrassing.

So Joshua tells them that they're about to be separated. "Go with this." And I've always found that that is true. There is such a great protection to be in the church, in the body, don't you think? There's something good about making yourself accountable to others. Oh, it isn't always easy, but it's good. Because once you separate from the group, you are in much greater danger of stumbling than when you're plugged in to the church. And these guys were about to be moved out. In fact, they were going to move to where there was a group of people living - family - that had no testimony at all of the power of God the last seven and a half years. They were going to leave that all behind and go off on their own. And that puts you in a more "temptable" position. I don't even know if that's a word. But I'm sure that you've found that in your own life. If you stay plugged in, you do better. You get isolated, it isn't long before you just kind of - everything begins to get kind of loose, and you don't really do what you used to. But if you've got people around you going, "Hey, are you going to church? Yeah, I'll see you at church. Hey, I'm at church. Did you read the?" You might get tired of them, but it helps you.

I was talking to one of the kid's parents that they're getting out of 8th grade, and they're going to go to high school. And the parent said to me, "I'm very worried that my kids will fall in with the wrong crowd when they get into high school. And so I've been encouraging them to stand on their values, and remember what they've been taught at home and not to compromise just to make friends and all." And that's pretty much the case spiritually with the believer as well.

If you're isolated, you're not going to do very well. And these guys were leaving. They were going hundreds of miles away - separated by land, even just land masses that would not allow them to traverse back and forth quickly. So, forty thousand people leaving, isolated, crossing the Jordan and beyond. Now, if you've ever been to Israel, the Jordan River Valley is really a Rift Valley. Everything's below sea level. But there are gorges that separate Israel from the land of Jordan, even today, that are five to fifteen miles long; and sometimes the walls on the sides of these gorges are 2,000' high. When you go on flood season, you don't get across. Even today, they bombed (when there was fighting) bridges so that people just can't cross. So this was more than just leaving the city, this was leaving the country. This was separating yourself from a long way away, and so Joshua said, "Look, you've got to serve the LORD with all that you've got. You can serve Him out of love because love will keep you there." The love relationship will do that. I always think about Jacob going to work and getting Leah, the (let's just say) not-better-looking sister. And he said, "I had to work for seven years for her." But he

liked Rachel, the good looking one, and he said, "I'd like Rachel to be my wife." And you remember Laban said, "Well, that'll be seven years' worth of work," and he did the work; and the Scriptures (Genesis 29) record him saying that seven years to work for Rachel sounded like a day to him because he loved her so much. It was just like a day gone by. For Leah it was seven years, but for Rachel it was just a couple of days! Because he loved her. So Joshua blesses these servants by saying, "You have been faithful to the LORD, you have loved the LORD, you've put your life on the line, you've been faithful to His Word, you've trusted Him through all these battles. Now don't forget that when you leave here. Stay in that position that you find yourself in, and then you can depart in peace." And when they left, notice, he gives them the spoils of war - their reward for their service, if you will. "Here's some for you, those of you that are staying in the land - the half the tribe. And here's some for the rest of you that are leaving. Take this home. Give this to your kids and to your wives who've watched the cattle and the children who've watched over your households and have suffered seven and a half years without you. Here's your pay," if you will. And he sends them off with their pay.

When David comes around later (in 1 Samuel 30), they are in a battle, and there is fighting going on. And you might remember there's a story there where some of the folks who were just tired in battle, and they couldn't go any further, so David leaves them to kind of watch the stuff while the others went to battle. And when they came back, they had spoil with them, and the men who had fought said to David, "We're not sharing with those guys. They quit." And David said, "No, no, no, no. Whoever goes to the battle will be like those who stay back behind the stuff. We need everybody." And he made an administrative kind of law out of this idea of everybody plays a part, everybody has a role; and he paid them in the same way that he paid those who had gone on to the frontlines as those who had stayed kind of on the back, in the rear, if you like.

So he sent them off. Everybody's applauding. "We're going to miss you. We love you. Thanks for fighting. You're my buddy." They're sharing email addresses as they left. Everything sounded good. They were loaded down with stuff, and off they went.

Verse 10, "And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan - a great, impressive altar. Now the children of Israel heard someone say, 'Behold, the children of Reuben, the children

of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan - on the children of Israel's side.' And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them."

All right. Misunderstanding 101. The altar that they built was impressive. It was big, it was miles away. They built it, as we will learn, as a memorial. They wanted to go home, say to their children, "Now we live hundreds of miles away from the place of worship, but this is a representation of the place that we worship when we go to meet with the LORD. And we want you to know, as you're growing up, that your dad and your grandpa and your brother spent years over here fighting to help the children of Israel capture the land. And now we're on this side because this was our grazing area. But we didn't want to lose the connection, so we built an altar;" not for sacrifice, which would have been idolatry and blasphemy (the LORD said only one place). But the minute understanding was word got back that forty thousand men out in the wilderness were building their own kind of temple, and by the time the word got through the camp (the 2½ million people or so), everyone was ready to go to war against their brethren. But it wasn't right. They didn't build that kind of an altar.

Now back in Deuteronomy 12, the LORD had said, "When you cross over the Jordan into the land which God will give you to inherit, and you get rest from all the enemies of the land, you shall build an altar in the place that I will put My name." And the LORD put His name at Shiloh, and He said, "You should offer all of your burnt offerings and sacrifices there. Your tithes should go there. Your choice offerings should go there. You should rejoice with your people. This is where we're holding all of the big holidays and feast days. It's going to be around, if you will, the temple of the LORD. You're the only people on the face of the planet that serve one God. You're going to worship Him three times a year together, in one place, at one altar, at the times that I insist upon." So the worship was really narrow in that regard. You couldn't really go outside of it.

And the nine and a half tribes had been there, for years now, worshipping, and they'd been doing it well. And now they believed that the two and a half tribes that had just left (and were now on their way home) were building a temple that would compete with theirs, and they saw it as apostasy. And it was a capital offense, and it would have been the proper thing to do, I guess, if it had been so. It just wasn't so. You have to applaud their heart to defend the name of God.

They are doing really good right at this point. You have to learn from the fact that they made lots of presumptions.

Notice verse 11, and maybe you should take that one to heart. It says, "Now the children of the LORD heard someone say." Have you ever had that? Who exactly is "someone"? I would like to meet "someone." This guy's a problem, this "someone," isn't he? And you have to believe that every time the story was told amongst 2½ million people You ever play that game, telephone, where you tell somebody something, and by the time it gets to the end of the circle, the whole thing is changed? Imagine with 2½ million people playing that game. Everybody's reaching for a weapon. "Let's go to fight! Let's kill 'em! I can't believe they left to do this." Our tongue causes more damage than anything else. In fact, I think on the radio today we had a study about your tongue. We had more people call from the radio today than we've had in a long time because I think that's very convicting, isn't it? Your tongue is so little, and it can start forest fires (James 3:5). I don't know if you've ever looked at a snail, but a snail has microscopic teeth on its tongue. Did you know that? Don't let 'em run on your arm. They have about thirty thousand teeth on their tongue. They can saw through a branch five times their size if you just leave 'em alone. They're good at ee-ee-ee-ee-ee (Pastor Jack makes a sawing sound) - just their tongue. And that's James' point - small member, big damage, potential capability, it destroys people and relationships. Out of your mouth blessing comes and cursing (James 3:10). There's duplicity. "Someone said. Someone said." "Yeah, I heard a guy say that they're out there making a" "Who said?" "I forget. Some guy. I forget who." That's the way gossip goes. "Someone said." No one really wants to own up to it. Well, the Bible said, the LORD said (Leviticus 19:16), " 'You shall not go around as a talebearer. Don't stand against your neighbor: I am the LORD.' " Well, that's what they were doing. They were running around like talebearers.

Let me give you some advice about how to handle gossip. If you want, I printed them on a paper. You can put them in your pocket. This is mine. Here're things that you can say to someone who wants to bring you some gossip. It'll help clear this up. Ready? Number one - Why are you telling me this? It usually ends the discussion. Why are you telling me this? I want you to tell me why I need to know this from you. Second of all - Where did you get your information? Disclose your source. That usually ends the discussion as well. I've gotten rid of a lot of people this way. It's been really helpful. Number three - Have you gone personally to this individual to talk to them about your concerns? Look, the difference between news

and gossip is one of them has you lower your voice; the other one has you raising your voice. If there's good news, man, you talk loud. If you're gossiping, you talk quietly. The test for spirituality is not making somebody else's failures known, it's resorting to a spirit of meekness and having people be strengthened. So, the third one is - Have you gone personally to the individual to voice to them your concerns? Number four, ask them this - Have you checked out all the facts? Do you know that to be so? Are you sure? Not, "Someone told me." Verse 11 kills this whole thing, doesn't it? And number five, here's the clincher, just say this - Can I quote you on that? I'd like to tell them you're my source. Thank you for bringing me the information. I'd like to put your name to it. Why are you telling me this? Where did you get your information? Have you personally gone to voice your concern to the individual? Have you checked out the facts? And may I quote you? That'll solve most of the gossip problems in the church, anyway. And if you'll do that - okay, you'll be left out of the loop, but you don't want to be in that loop anyway. And eventually maybe the loop will go away.

Well, verse 11, because someone told somebody something, somewhere, they're ready to go to battle. Now, verse 13 tells us, "Then the children of Israel sent Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead," (so they'd already gone home, if you will) "and with him ten rulers, one ruler each from the chief house of every tribe of Israel; and each one was the head of the house of his father among the divisions of Israel. Then they came to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them." So, initially, cooler heads prevailed. They decided to send a delegation - ten guys plus Phinehas, Eleazar's son - to find out what was going on. So they catch up with them in the land that they're now living in on the other side of the Jordan, went right by that altar, if you will. And verse 16 they speak to them, saying, "'Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD:' " (so they're speaking now for everyone, and they begin to speak to them words of shock and fear and rebuke) "' "What treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the LORD? Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed till this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD, but that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? And it shall be, if you rebel today against the LORD, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, then cross over to

the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the LORD, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity." ' "

So here's the contingency that goes and confronts these guys, and they said to them, "Look, this is treachery." That's the word that they used, right? "This is treachery." And they remind them (in verse 17) of the sin at Peor. Now you've got to go back to Numbers 25 to read that, but let me just summarize it for you. The problem at Peor was that, remember when Balaam came in and he was hired to curse the children of Israel? And he really couldn't get a curse out of his mouth - God watched over him, he finally said to the king that hired him, "I'll tell you what. I can't curse them because God won't let me. But if you let them and encourage them to do things that God will hate, God will deal with them Himself." And so he talked them into having the young people go and meet the young people from the tribes and introduce idolatry, and, in response, the LORD would judge the people. And so he had them become unequally yoked in their relationship, and people began to die. And you might remember (in Numbers 25) it was this fellow, Phinehas, who stopped the plague with a javelin. He stuck it right through a guy and a girl in a tent. You remember that? He made a name for himself. But he was certainly a man of resolve. But he says to them, as he's the spokesman, "Hey, remember what happened last time? And we compromised, and you remember the plague?" And he even mentions here that the plague wasn't completely gone, that they were still suffering the consequences (verse 17) - although we really don't know in what manner they were suffering. But his point is (in verse 18), "If you sin today, tomorrow we'll all suffer. God deals with us collectively. We're a team, we're a country, we're a unit. We can't have you out here running wild, and then we all have to pay." He says to them (in verse 19), "If you find this land to be unclean, come home. We'll share our land with you. But just come home. You can't go this route, defying the LORD by building another place of worship." And then he brings up Achan. "You remember what happened to Achan. It was seven and a half years earlier. He died. But so did his whole family. And boy, all of us suffered as a result of it, those who were suffering in the battle, who were killed." Their concern was pretty well-founded. It was a good argument. It was cool to see that they cared about what the nation was doing. You don't find that a lot amongst the children of Israel in the Old Testament - as far as wanting to do the right thing. But here's the problem - they presumed that they knew the hearts and the intents

of the hearts of this departing tribe. And even though they had served faithfully (verses 1-9) for seven and a half years, one behavior on their part colored their whole opinion of them and brought them with a committee to give them this lecture.

Well here's their response, in verse 21, "Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh answered and said to the heads of the divisions of Israel: 'The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know - if it is in rebellion, or if in treachery against the LORD, do not save us this day. If we have built ourselves an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer on it burnt offerings or grain offerings, or if to offer peace offerings on it, let the LORD Himself require an account.' " In other words, "God knows our heart. If that's the purpose we did this, then He should destroy us, and we would welcome His judgment." Verse 24, " 'But in fact we have done it for fear, for a reason, saying, "In time to come your descendants may speak to our descendants, saying, 'What have you to do with the LORD God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us, you children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no part in the LORD.' So your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the LORD." Therefore we said, 'Let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, but that it may be a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, "You have no part in the LORD." Therefore we said that it will be, when they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say, "Here is the replica of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, though not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between you and us." Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn from following the LORD this day, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for grain offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the LORD our God which is before His tabernacle.' " So, "Here's why we built the altar. We just want to continue unity between us and you for future generations. We want to have a replica of the altar - not so that we would offer sacrifices but that we would just identify. So our kids would know that we are a part of this country even though we live outside its borders; that we fought for it and died for it and gave our labors, for years, to this country; that the God that you serve is the God that we serve." And so they explained themselves.

Verse 30, "Now when Phinehas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh, 'This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.' And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the rulers, returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them. So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God; they spoke no more of going against them in battle, to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar, *Witness*, 'For it is a witness between us that the LORD is God.' " So, they cleared it up. They didn't go to war.

I will say, to put a period at the end of the chapter, they settled on the wrong side, and because of that, there was some misunderstanding; not that we shouldn't learn those lessons. But the best witness is to be as close to the Lord's presence as possible, not as far away as possible, maintaining some kind of external tie, if you will, where you have to explain it, living on the extreme edges rather than close to the Lord. And I think that, maybe, is one of the problems as well.

"Assumption" (here's a good quote) "is the lowest form of communication. Assumption is the lowest form of communication." How could they have done something differently? I think they could have given some advance notice. "Here's what we plan to do" because I suspect they'd planned to do that all along. Getting the whole story will help. And, notice, "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). So, we have an opportunity, as Christians, to live on a higher level than the world does. No assumptions, no gossip, no participation in all of that stuff; rather the grace and the love of God that believes all things, and we try to make peace. Isn't that better? If we can do that, if the enemy allows or wills.....if we participate, we'll be down in the gutter with the world. You know? Or we can live the way God intends. But here's a pretty good example with these guys leaving, and I think they're in the wrong place, and I know that drove some of it, but the problem was kind of on either side this time. Misunderstanding comes when you live in verse 11 with, "Someone said." Well, if you're in ministry like I am full-time and on the radio all over the country, "Someone said" is a daily occurrence. I can

let it bother me, or I can just go, "Well, the Lord knows," and I usually just go, "Well, the Lord knows," which is good enough for you. As long as He's happy, I'll be happy. If He's not happy, keeping you happy won't do me a bit of good. Right? So God help us. May we live that place of grace.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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