

Joshua 22:10-13, 24-29

*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, an altar that was great to behold. And the other sons of Israel heard it said, “Look, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar at the edge of the land of Canaan, in the region west of the Jordan, on the side belonging to the sons of Israel.” When the sons of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.*

*24 But in truth we have done this out of concern, for a reason, saying, ‘In time to come your sons (descendants) may say to our sons, “What claim do you have to the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord has made the Jordan a border between us and you, you sons of Reuben and sons of Gad; you have no part in the Lord.” So your sons (descendants) may cause our sons to stop fearing the Lord.’*

*26 “So we said, ‘Let us prepare and build an altar, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you and between the 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, so that your sons (descendants) will not say to our sons in time to come, “You have no part in the Lord.”’ So we said, ‘If your descendants should say this to us or to our descendants in time to come, then we can reply, “See the copy of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice, but rather it is a witness between us and you.”’ 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away from following the LORD this day, by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering or for sacrifice, besides the altar of the LORD our God which is before His tabernacle in Shiloh.”*

Disobedient church members make FAKE ALTARS that are usually bigger than the real thing!

Pharisee hands can do great things in the name of the Lord – even when the heart is disobedient. So much so, you can convince your fellow brothers you are OK!

The people gather to fight the disobedience – Joshua doesn’t gather them.

We can’t worship God anyway we please, or...

justify a manner of worship just because we like it. Our worship must be pleasing to God

John 4:24: *“We must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.”*

Isaiah 29:3: *“Because this nation approaches Me only with their words And honors Me only with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me is a tradition, learned by rote, without any regard for its meaning.”*

1 Samuel 16:6-7: So it happened, when they had come, he looked at Eliab, the eldest son, and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

The tribes who settled east of Jordan did so because this land was more pleasing to their flesh than the land on the west side of the river. They went across the river with their army and helped the rest of Israel obtain their possession in Canaan, the understood Promised Land, but they did not want to live there. I believe that many Christians today want to see the will of God come to pass in the earth but they do not want to *live* in the center of God’s will. They do not want to sacrifice comfort or pleasure to see the will of God accomplished. I believe this is a dangerous place to live.

In today's scripture we see that Reuben, Gad and Manasseh explained the construction of the replica altar to the rest of Israel by saying they just wanted it to be an altar of remembrance. They were afraid that the rest of Israel would forget that they were part of the covenant people. There is no rebuke in this chapter. Their explanation is accepted and they are allowed to keep this altar. However, I believe that what happens to them is a warning to those of us who would rather live on the fringes of the will of God than make the full commitment to be in the center of God's will.

What role did the 2 ½ tribes play in the subsequent history of Israel? I have tried to find them in the scriptural account and I cannot. They are mentioned in Judges and there are some individuals with those names mentioned in the Old Testament, but I see no mighty deeds by Reuben, Gad or Manasseh. I have found no mighty warriors or prophets from these tribes. There is no mention of great events happening in their territory. It is possible that I may have missed something, but I think it is safe to say that they were not major players in what happens in Israel.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh simply fade out of the record. They became a non-factor in the destiny of Israel. I do not want that to be what my legacy becomes. I want the devil to know I was here and breathe a sigh of relief when I leave. When I stand before the Lord, I want to hear "Well done." not, "What did you do again?" When we choose to live on the fringes of the will of God, we become a non-factor in the Kingdom. We may live comfortable lives or we may not, but we will not fulfill the destiny God has for us in the earth.

What was the problem with their choice to stay on the east side of Jordan? They pointed it out themselves in the 25<sup>th</sup> verse. They say God made the Jordan a border between them and the rest of Israel. In actuality, they are the ones who made the border, not God. The result was the same. There was a division between them, the rest of the people of God and the perfect will of God. This border created some weaknesses that the enemy eventually exploited.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh gradually lost their identity with the rest of Israel. They were still covenant people, but the separation caused them to develop a somewhat different lifestyle than those in Canaan. I cannot give chapter and verse to support this conclusion, but I can point to human nature. It is always the case that when part of a group are separated from the whole, they will develop differently than the whole. I believe this must have been the case with Reuben, Gad and Manasseh or they would not have faded from the record.