

Lessons from Joshua 22.

THE BACKGROUND.

I want us to sit in as spectators on the fast-moving events of Joshua 22.

You will not need me to tell you much by way of background.

On the whole, things had gone very well. Israel's Holy War (better, 'the war of the Lord'¹), which had lasted about seven years,² was now more or less over.

Israel had successfully invaded the land of Canaan and had broken the backbone of the heathen nations that dwelt there.³

The Canaanite forces were now significantly weakened, scattered and dispirited. And all that was left for Israel was a mopping-up operation, or so it should have been.⁴

The two-and-a-half tribes had earlier settled on the east of Jordan with Moses's express permission.⁵ We read, therefore, of 'the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan'.⁶ This particular territory had once belonged to two pagan kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and a rather large gentleman from Bashan who had been graced by his parents with the enchanting name of 'Og'.⁷ Both kings had been roundly defeated – and the land they had ruled now belonged to the two-and-a-half tribes.

The two-and-a-half tribes had agreed with Moses that they would go 'armed for war, before the Lord (in effect, before the children of Israel) to battle', an expression occurring, in one form or another, seven times in Numbers 32.

According to Joshua chapter 1, three days before Israel crossed the Jordan to confront the Canaanite nations, Joshua had, therefore, drafted in the two-and-a-half tribes on a temporary basis for the duration of the Canaan campaign. He held them to their earlier promise, declaring, 'you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valour, and help them'.⁸ This met with their ready response, 'All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go'.⁹ And they were as good as their word; they did just that, not only fighting under the national banner, but leading the way both across the Jordan and into the plain of Jericho.¹⁰

And now that the war was virtually over, the two-and-a-half tribes (i) were given an honourable discharge, (ii) were authorised to return to their homes and families, (iii) were solemnly counselled to remain faithful to God's law, (iv) were blessed, and (v) were sent on their way.¹¹

Our story begins properly after the two-and-a-half tribes had left the rest of the nation at Shiloh,¹² and had reached their own territory on the other side of the Jordan.¹³

THE BIBLE PASSAGE.

So let us read the *inspired* account of what happened then.¹⁴

And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of grand appearance.

And the children of Israel heard it said, 'Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar in front of the land of Canaan, near the region of the Jordan, near the region of the children of Israel'. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to make war against them.

Then the children of Israel sent to the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh ... Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, of each father's house a chief, out of all the tribes of Israel ...

And they came to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and spoke with them, saying, 'Thus says the whole assembly of the

Lord, What is this trespass which you have trespassed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord, in that you have built yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord?

'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us? ... that you must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be that, if you rebel against the Lord today, then tomorrow He will be angry with the whole assembly of Israel.

'Howbeit, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the land of the Lord's possession, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. But do not rebel against the Lord or rebel against us, by building for yourselves an altar besides the altar of the Lord our God.

'Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the devoted thing, and wrath fell upon all the assembly of Israel? And he did not perish alone because of his iniquity'.

Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the thousands in Israel, 'The Lord, the God of gods! The Lord, the God of gods! He knows; and Israel itself shall know!

'If it was in rebellion or in trespass against the Lord (save us not this day!) that we have built an altar to turn away from following the Lord, or if it is to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings or peace offerings on it, let the Lord Himself require it.

'But we have done it from fear that in time to come your children may say to our children, What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no portion in the Lord ...

'Therefore, we said, "Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us ... so that your children may not say to our children in time to come, 'You have no portion in the Lord'". And we said, "If this should be said to us or to our future generations, we will say, 'Behold, the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but as a witness between us and you'".

'Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn away this day from following the Lord by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the Lord our God that is before His tabernacle!

And when Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the assembly ... heard the words which the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes.

And Phinehas ... said to the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh, 'This day we know that the Lord is among us, because you have not committed this trespass against the Lord. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord'.

And Phinehas ... and the chiefs, returned ... out of the land of Gilead, to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them.

And the report was good in the eyes of the children of Israel. And the children of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them, to destroy ('to devastate') the land where the children of Reuben and the children of Gad dwelt.

THE GRAND REPLICAR ALTAR.

Clearly, some keen-sighted individual in Israel observed that, having reached their own territory on the other side of the Jordan, the two-and-a-half tribes immediately set about erecting an altar. And some altar it was! ... 'an altar of grand appearance'; literally, 'an altar great to sight'.¹⁵

The man who spotted the conspicuous altar was horrified and raced off to Shiloh to spread the disturbing news. But then he didn't know what lay behind the action of the two-and-a-half

tribes; he didn't know their purpose and intention when they built the altar. But we do, because we have the benefit of having read verses 21 to 29.

Planning and preparing for the future.

After they had left the nine-and-a-half tribes at Shiloh, the two-and-a-half tribes had been forced to do some very hard thinking. Because of the geographical layout of the area, it had been far from easy getting home, The Jordan river ran through a deep valley about 1,300 feet *below* sea level, and, on each side, mountain plateaux rose over 2,000 feet *above* sea level. This 3,500 feet gorge formed a daunting natural 'boundary', as the two-and-a-half tribes describe it.¹⁶

As they made their way home, the two-and-a-half tribes had become increasingly concerned that a future generation¹⁷ of the nine-and-a-half tribes, encouraged by this natural 'boundary', would disown any link and association with their own descendants.¹⁸ The very thought had made them shudder, and they had concluded that their children would need some very convincing argument if they were to satisfy the descendants of the nine-and-a-half tribes that they did, in truth, serve one and the same God and that they formed part of the same nation.

But with what persuasive evidence could the present-day members of the two-and-a-half tribes possibly provide their children? And then someone had a brainwave! They would build an altar! But not just any altar ... not an altar built to their own design or specification. Certainly not!

They would build their altar according to the 'pattern' of the Lord's altar at Shiloh.¹⁹ It would be a replica, a facsimile, an exact 'copy'²⁰ of that altar.

The idea was nothing short of brilliant, because the altar at the tabernacle at Shiloh was the very centre and focus for the life of Israel. All males in Israel were required to visit God's dwelling place three times every year.²¹ Everyone was familiar, therefore, with 'the pattern of the altar'.

And the idea of building monuments as a reminder of some great event or of something else was well understood. This would be monument number six in the book.²² As in the case of the first (the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan near Gilgal),²³ this altar would be for the benefit and education of their children. As that stone memorial silently witnessed to their children concerning their miraculous entrance into Canaan, so this altar memorial should silently witness to their children that, though they dwelt the other side of the Jordan, they were indeed part and parcel of the nation.²⁴

There was no question of the altar's ever being used for sacrifice or offering, such as were the altars linked to the golden calves set up some 470 years later by King Jeroboam of Israel at Bethel and Dan.²⁵ Perish the thought! Nothing could have been further from their minds. Their altar would never feel the heat of a flame or bear the weight of a sacrificial victim.

Indeed, as our chapter makes clear, they were absolutely horrified at the very idea, as witness their repeated and emphatic denials when they insist four times over that the altar was not for burnt offering or sacrifice.²⁶ Far from being a *rival* altar to that located at the tabernacle, it would function only as a *memorial* altar, serving as a symbol of the unity of the nation and acting, metaphorically speaking, as a bridge over the Jordan.²⁷

The altar would, therefore, (i) be built in a conspicuous place where it would be clearly visible to the tribes on the other side of the Jordan,²⁸ and (ii) be built on a larger scale than the altar at Shiloh²⁹ – albeit according to the same 'pattern'.³⁰

And so, if in future some bright spark from the other side of Jordan should say to their children, 'You have nothing to do with us', their children had only to respond, 'Come and have a look at this altar then. From where do you think our fathers got this design?'

But it was not only a *brilliant* idea, it was also a highly *commendable* idea: because it was the very first thing which the two-and-a-half tribes set about doing on their return home, and, as such, demonstrated their very real concern both for the future of God's work and for the spiritual well-being of generations to come.

Priorities.

Their first priority wasn't (i) to erect some great monument to commemorate their own recent exploits in the forefront of the many battles in Canaan.³¹ And what tales they must have had to tell!

Nor was their first priority (ii) to enjoy their possessions.³² Joshua had earlier promised that, when the Lord had given 'rest' to all the tribes of Israel following the Canaan campaign, the two-and-a-half tribes could 'return' to their possession and 'enjoy it'.³³ And now the Lord *had* given 'rest' to the whole of Israel (a point made three times from chapter 11 to chapter 22³⁴) and so the two-and-a-half tribes were *entitled*, not only to 'return' to their inheritance, but also to 'enjoy' it.

Nor was their first priority (iii) to share their spoil with those who had remained at home, even though Joshua had explicitly spoken to the 'half tribe of Manasseh' concerning their plunder in terms of very large quantities of cattle, and of silver, gold, bronze, iron and 'very much clothing', and had reminded them to divide this rich booty with their brethren.³⁵

Nor was their first priority (iv) to celebrate their return to their families with a time of comfort and ease. We should remember that they had been away from home for seven years. What welcome-home parties awaited them! 'The love of ... children not greeted for years ... was yearning within them for satisfaction. Still, they stayed to build this immense altar. The very love of their children's spiritual welfare bade them stay ... Thus, longing for their children all the while, they tarried on the way to care for their children's religious welfare'.³⁶

The two-and-a-half tribes had been the first tribes to have their inheritance allotted to them, but they were the last to enjoy it. They had once promised Moses, 'We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance'.³⁷ And they were men of their word.

But, now that they had finally made it home, top of the list (their very first priority) was to build this altar. Full marks to them.

The blunder.

But then came their mistake, and, sadly, it was a *colossal* mistake. *They didn't tell anyone else what they had in mind.*

Yes, they were able to report later that at the time they had 'said'.³⁸ But this, we note, was only among themselves. They didn't breathe a word to Joshua, to Phinehas, or to anyone else from the nine-and-a-half tribes about what they were proposing to do, or the reason for it.

Why, we may well wonder, was this?

Was it too much effort to go back and fore across the Jordan? I think not.

I suggest it more likely that they found the issue too embarrassing for them to raise with their brethren. For, however well presented, their concern about the future could easily have been interpreted as calling in question the spirituality of the nine-and-a-half tribes, either (i) in terms of the adequacy of the education which they would give to their children about the identity of the two-and-a-half tribes, or (ii) in terms of their children's understanding and grasp of what they were taught.

I can see that it could have been a delicate matter to raise.

But their failure to come out into the open and to discuss it with others was highly dangerous and it proved almost totally disastrous. They were resolved to take an action, which, if they cared to think about it, was (to say the least) open to easy misunderstanding.

PREPARATION FOR WAR.

Commendable zeal.

Well, the man who first spied the altar scurried off to Shiloh, where the news was received with great consternation! In next to no time, the nine-and-a-half tribes had not only held an emergency pow-wow but were (literally) 'up in arms' about it; 'the whole assembly of the children of Israel gathered together ... to make war against them'.³⁹

In one way, this was highly commendable zeal for God's honour and for the purity of His worship, coming as it did from the descendants of a people who had once worshipped the molten calf.⁴⁰ Israel had come a long way since then. They didn't ignore the problem as of no importance or attempt to sweep it under the carpet; they were ready to address it and to tackle it head on.

The nine-and-a-half tribes cared sufficiently about the future of the testimony and the purity of God's service that they were willing, if necessary, to risk their lives in battle – and that after only recently concluding the seven-year Canaan campaign.

One jump too far.

The problem was that, without realising it, they had *jumped to an unwarranted conclusion*.

But then, to the nine-and-a-half tribes everything seemed so cut and dried. After all (in their eyes), what could an altar be for if not for sacrifice and worship? Obviously, the two-and-a-half tribes weren't planning to invite them to a barbeque!

From their words, 'if the land of your possession is unclean',⁴¹ it seems that the nine-and-a-half tribes surmised that the two-and-a-half tribes had come to view their inheritance as somehow defiled,⁴² and had planned, therefore, to cleanse and to sanctify it by means of sacrifices offered on the offending altar.

But that would be, in effect, rebellion and 'trespass' against the Lord. And it would be that, not only because the nation had been directed by God to destroy all foreign altars,⁴³ but also because it would be a clear violation of the Lord's commandment that, when He gave them 'rest' from all their enemies 'round about',⁴⁴ all offering and all sacrifice were to be centralised in the one and only acceptable place, in the place which the Lord God chose.⁴⁵

And now that the Lord had indeed 'given rest' to all twelve tribes,⁴⁶ it followed that the nation was forbidden to offer sacrifices other than at the central sanctuary, namely, at that time, at the tabernacle located at Shiloh.⁴⁷

Therefore, it seemed clear to the nine-and-a-half tribes that either (i) the two-and-a-half tribes had forsaken the Lord for another god or for other gods, or (ii) they were introducing division and schism into the worship and service of the one true God. Either way, to set up a rival worship centre to that at Shiloh was an act of blatant apostasy. We could say that the nine-and-a-half tribes knew their scriptures and they were determined to be loyal to the word of God as they had it.

But, without realising it, the nine-and-a-half tribes were reading an awful lot into the little that they knew.

A better way.

Spiritual wisdom would have dictated a very different procedure.

Step 1.

The first step should have been to establish the facts. First, check out the rumour. For the Spirit of God emphasises that at the outset everything was based on mere hearsay; they 'heard it said'.⁴⁸ True, in this instance, the rumour happened to be true. But then it might easily not have been. And, sadly, in more recent times, many a brother or a sister's reputation has since been smeared and tarnished by false or exaggerated reports.

Step 2.

The second step should have been to pray.

According to verse 12, the assembly of Israel met at Shiloh, where 'the tabernacle of meeting' was situated.⁴⁹ And verse 13 stresses that Phinehas was the son of Eleazar. That is, Phinehas was the son of the then High Priest, Eleazar, who possessed the breastplate, together with its Urim and Thummim,⁵⁰ by which he was able to discern the will of God for the people. Indeed, according to Numbers 27, Moses had said of Joshua: 'he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord'.⁵¹

You would have thought, therefore, that the nine-and-a-half tribes would have availed themselves of the golden opportunity that this facility offered them.

Surely, they should have learned their lesson from the bruising which they had received back in chapter 9 in connection with the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were Canaanites who had successfully fooled Joshua and Israel with their dry and mouldy bread, their rent wine bottles, and their old garments and shoes.⁵² Appearances had not been what they seemed and Israel had burnt their fingers badly. And this, we are told plainly, was because 'they did not ask counsel from the Lord'.⁵³

Because Israel did not first enquire of God in chapter 9, they had spared those whom they ought not to have spared. Now, in chapter 22, because they do not first enquire of God, they come perilously close to annihilating those whom they ought not to have annihilated!

Steps 3 and 4.

The third step should have been to seek an explanation, and then (but only then) for the nine-and-a-half tribes to take the fourth step, that of deciding on an appropriate course of action and discipline.

I have read that 'Cotton Mather [a New England Puritan minister] used to say that there was a gentleman mentioned in Acts 19, to whom he was often and greatly indebted--viz., the town clerk of Ephesus, whose counsel was, "Do nothing rashly". And on any proposal of consequence he would say, "Let us consult a little with the town clerk of Ephesus"'.⁵⁴ Good counsel, indeed, 'You ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly'.⁵⁵

These were the four steps which spiritual wisdom would have followed. But, oh no, not the nine-and-a-half tribes!

To them, everything was so straightforward and plain.⁵⁶ Their very knee-jerk reaction was to issue a call to arms.⁵⁷ And, in next to no time, the combined forces of the nine-and-a-half tribes were poised to attack and to destroy the two-and-a-half tribes, and, according to verse 33, to 'devastate' their land.

I find it remarkable that, taking account of all the destruction which takes place in the earlier chapters of Joshua, the word for 'devastation'⁵⁸ occurs only here in the entire book. This particular word 'describes an action of almost unimaginable horror – complete, violent annihilation or decimation at the hands of other humans (Judg. 6. 5; Isa. 14. 20; Ezek. 30. 11)'.⁵⁹

You can almost hear the war cry of the nine-and-a-half tribes: 'If they are going to worship and sacrifice like Canaanites, they can jolly well perish like Canaanites!'

You would have thought that the nine-and-a-half tribes:

- (i) would have recalled their brethren's past companionship and fellowship;
- (ii) would have taken account of the way in which all twelve tribes had stood shoulder to shoulder against a common foe until only a short time before; and
- (iii) would have reminded themselves that, for seven long years, the two-and-a-half tribes had kept all the commandments of Moses, of Joshua, and of the Lord Himself.⁶⁰

When the Allies liberated Paris in 1944, church bells (silent throughout the four-years of German occupation) rang out joyously across the city.⁶¹ But no bells rang out from one church, Saint-Philippe du Roule.

The Parish Priest, Jean Muller, was inundated with calls from his parishioners, wanting to know why, contrary to an official radio announcement that church bells should be rung, *their* bells were silent.

In church on the following Sunday, Muller thanked all who had called him. He then added, 'I should like to remind you of something you all forgot in your excitement that day. There are *no bells in the belfry of Saint-Philippe*'.⁶²

I guess that, given that it had been four years since any church bells had been heard in Paris, it is excusable that many of the parishioners had forgotten that there weren't any bells in their church.

But the nine-and-a-half tribes had no such excuse. And the way in which the two-and-a-half tribes had *recently* risked their lives in God's service should have alerted the nine-and-a-half tribes to the fact that there was probably more to this than met the eye.

And, pursuing the topic of eyesight, surely, the very size of the altar should have alerted the nine-and-a-half tribes to the fact that it was highly unlikely that the altar was ever intended for use as an altar for sacrifices. Apart from any other considerations, why should a people which numbered fewer than they require an altar far bigger than theirs?

Given both the altar's size and the altar's location, it should have been obvious to the nine-and-a-half tribes that the two-and-a-half tribes clearly wanted the altar to be seen from their side of Jordan. Unless, therefore, the two-and-a-half tribes were being deliberately provocative (which hardly made any sense after seven years of hard fighting!), the large dimensions and the near location of the altar cried out for explanation and should have caused the nine-and-a-half tribes to pause and ponder.⁶³

Frankly, it was frightening just how fast the perilous situation outlined in verse 4 developed. One moment, the two-and-a-half tribes returned home, showered with compliments and praise;⁶⁴ the next moment, they faced the threat of annihilation courtesy of Israel's formidable war machine.

THE DELEGATION.

Thankfully, the resolve of the nine-and-a-half tribes to wipe out their brethren was followed by a moment's calm reflection. Deuteronomy 13 envisaged a not-dissimilar situation (albeit that of a city): 'if you hear ... that worthless men have ... drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' ... then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain', then you hit them and you hit them very hard!⁶⁵

The first step, therefore, should have been to conduct a careful investigation to establish if the reported story was true.

It is a great pity that the nine-and-a-half tribes had not launched an investigation sooner than they did. They would have saved themselves a lot of trouble and embarrassment. But better late than never!

The composition of the delegation.

And I note that they stood united in their proposed disciplinary action. Each tribe was represented by a man who commanded respect and in whom they had confidence.⁶⁶ These were men who were able, therefore, to speak for 'the whole assembly of the Lord'.⁶⁷ And I note also that the 'ten chiefs' included a chief from the half tribe of Manasseh in the west! The nine-and-a-half tribes were not going to let family ties and connections influence or interfere with their judgement.

The delegation was led by 'Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest'.⁶⁸ Given that the issue at stake concerned the use of an altar, the priestly office of Phinehas made him a natural choice to head the delegation. 'If the situation demands a ruling on altars or a bold, daring initiative, Phinehas is certainly the right man for the job'.⁶⁹

Sadly, the delegation weren't going to find out whether their suspicions were correct. They were not going to seek explanations.

The mind-set of the delegation.

They took it for granted that they were in the right. They were going to sort their brethren out ... to persuade them to mend their ways, or else! Although we do need to give them the credit at least for trying (albeit at the last moment) to conquer their brethren by '*words*' rather than by '*swords*'.

But, speaking of 'words', we can hardly miss the 'charming' way (!) in which the men on the delegation expressed themselves, making no attempt to mask their smug and arrogant attitude.⁷⁰ Their opening words, 'What is this trespass ...?' set the tone for all that followed. These were strong words indeed.

And, in the space of just four verses, the delegation managed to accuse their brethren of 'trespass' (of 'treachery', of 'breaking faith') once;⁷¹ of 'turning away from following the Lord' twice; and of 'rebellion' (of 'breach of promise') no less than four times.⁷²

The 'iniquity' of 'Peor'.

With reference to the words of the delegation in verse 16, one expositor commented, 'It was not enough for Phinehas to begin his address with such hard words; in his vehemence, he gives no room for any answer till he has compared these brave men, so lately sent away with words of high praise from Joshua, to the vilest of the sinners known in the history of the people. They are put side by side with the transgressors of Peor ...'.⁷³

The delegation charges them, then, with wickedness to be classed with 'Peor', with, that is, the Ba'al worship and its associated orgies instigated some time before 'through the counsel of Balaam'.⁷⁴

It is not surprising that the delegation should hark back to this particular shameful incident and that for four main reasons.

(i) Firstly, that, although Peor had been located in the land of Moab, it was now in the possession of the two-and-a-half tribes.

(ii) Secondly, it had been Phinehas, the head of the delegation, who had then distinguished himself as the great 'Defender of the Faith', whose holy zeal⁷⁵ had saved the whole nation from God's judgement.⁷⁶ It was not surprising therefore that Phinehas, as the spokesman, should refer back to that occasion. And I can't help wondering whether the good man now carried a spear with him, ready to deal with the ringleader swiftly if he could identify him, just as he had with the ringleader⁷⁷ at Peor.⁷⁸

(iii) Thirdly, the Ba'al-Peor incident was relatively recent, having taken place at the end of the wilderness wandering, just prior to the seven-year Canaan campaign. It was, therefore, still very much alive in the memory of Israel.

(iv) And fourthly, the Ba'al-Peor incident was not only the last spiritual departure before Israel entered the land; it was also one of the vilest and most heinous incidents ever to stain their history ... meriting mention almost a millennium and a half later by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10: 'neither let us indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did'.⁷⁹

The 'trespass' of 'Achan'.

Separately, on the basis of their experience with Achan at the beginning of the conquest of Canaan,⁸⁰ the nine-and-a-half tribes were terrified that there would be an action replay of the catastrophe which followed his sin ... and that the whole twelve-tribe nation would suffer as a result of the sin of the two-and-a-half tribes. As the delegation pointed out ominously in verse 20, Achan did 'not perish alone because of his iniquity'.⁸¹

In the words of one expanded paraphrase, the delegation was saying, in effect, '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?'⁸²

The delegation spoke, therefore, in terms of the two-and-a-half tribes rebelling 'against *us*' as well as 'against *the Lord*'.⁸³

The charges levelled.

As we noted above, the visiting VIPs accused their brethren (i) of trespass, (ii) of turning away from the Lord, and (iii) of rebellion ... of just about every sin in the book. Frankly, such words were hardly calculated to endear the nine-and-a-half tribes⁸⁴ to the two-and-a-half tribes, nor to pave the way for any speedy reconciliation.

The one redeeming feature.

And yet there was *one* redeeming feature in their message. This was heralded by the 'Howbeit' (the 'Notwithstanding', KJV) of verse 19. For, in spite of the atrocious sin which they

then believed their brethren had committed, the nine-and-a-half tribes made what amounted to an extremely generous and self-denying offer.

The delegation told the two-and-a-half tribes that they were welcome to come back across the Jordan and to settle there. The nine-and-a-half tribes were willing, that is, to squeeze up to make room for the two-and-a-half tribes, thereby accepting a reduction in territory ('possession') for each of themselves.⁸⁵

And this most generous offer came, we note, in chapter 22. That is, it follows in the wake of nine chapters (from chapter 13 to chapter 21) which are devoted to the account of how the land had recently been carved up and apportioned between them.⁸⁶

And we know that dividing of the land among the tribes had not proved at all easy. For example, the tribes of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) had complained that they had not been given enough territory, because they ('a great people', as they saw themselves) had been given only one lot and portion as their inheritance.⁸⁷

Not that that cut any ice with Joshua, even though he himself was from the tribe of Ephraim.⁸⁸ 'If you are a great people', he had responded in so many words, 'then (i) go up to the forested hill-country and clear ground there' – where the Rephaim ('the giants'⁸⁹) dwelt! – and, (ii) in the valley, drive out the Canaanites – iron chariots and all!⁹⁰ Putting it bluntly, he had told them to stop moaning and get on with it.

Yet the delegation affirmed that the nine-and-a-half tribes now stood ready (i) to rip up all their maps and plans if that should prove necessary, (ii) to go back to the drawing board, and (iii) to start all over again. They were prepared to fall over backwards, as it were, to avoid any trouble and conflict with their brethren and for the sake of the unity of the people of God were prepared to forfeit some of their own possessions.

ALL IS EXPLAINED.

By the time we reach the reference to the trespass of Achan in verse 20, the situation was highly explosive.

Remember, please, that it had all been one huge misunderstanding!

Let us try to imagine that we had stood in the sandals of the two-and-a-half tribes that day. A group of our brethren, for whom we have previously done a great deal and have made many sacrifices (indeed for whom we have even risked our lives!), have suddenly stormed in, and, without so much as a 'by-your-leave', have charged us with a whole catalogue of serious offences of which we were entirely innocent. How, I wonder, would we have reacted?

'A soft answer'.⁹¹

Well, how did the two-and-a-half tribes react?

It was desperately important that they kept calm. One unwise – just one hasty – word could easily have sparked off an intertribal war which would have made the battle with the tribe of Benjamin at the end of the book of Judges⁹² seem like a vicarage tea party in comparison.

It is nothing short of thrilling to note the calm and composed way in which the two-and-a-half tribes responded to the massive broadside which had been fired at them. They made no attempt to interrupt their brethren's lecture, even though that lecture was no less painfully repetitive than it was uncalled for.

When many of us would have been sorely tempted to file a lawsuit for slander, the two-and-a-half tribes listened patiently. And, when they were finally permitted to speak, they didn't take their brethren to task for their total lack of confidence in them, and they didn't tell them to mind their own business and to make tracks back across the Jordan.⁹³ There was not one word of bitterness or of recrimination.

And yet they were clearly deeply wounded by the accusations levelled at them, as is evident from the repeated calling on God as their witness.⁹⁴ Indeed, such a forceful way of 'calling on God as their witness' by using three of the most common names for God in the Old Testament (El, Elohim, and Jehovah) is without parallel.⁹⁵

It has been said that 'No words can suffice to express the horror and detestation of the two and a half tribes at the sin of which they have been supposed guilty. Nor does our version at all approach the majesty of the original form of oath ... no translation can do justice to the vigour of the original. The three names of God, El, Elohim, and Jehovah, are each ... repeated in their order'.⁹⁶

And in the space of just two sentences, the two-and-a-half tribes rebut all three serious charges levelled against them.⁹⁷

The irony of it.

They point out that their only motive and intention had been to avoid, indeed, to guard against, the very division they were now accused of causing! 'The very thing you assumed and alleged that we were doing', they say in effect, 'is the very thing that we were trying to avoid!' As the Greek Old Testament expresses it, 'But we have done this as a precaution against this very thing'.⁹⁸

Ironically, 'in their effort to promote unity, they had almost occasioned a fatal schism'.⁹⁹

Clearly, all twelve tribes were in agreement in fearing division among the people of God.¹⁰⁰ And the two-and-a-half tribes rest their case with an expression of horror ('Far be it from us') at the very thought of rebellion against the Lord.¹⁰¹

'Suddenly, the (nine-and-a-half tribes) find the tables turned on them; the would-be accusers now find themselves the accused'.¹⁰²

A CLOSE SHAVE: WAR AVERTED.

In the event, as a result mainly of the courteous attitude and detailed explanation by the two-and-a-half tribes, everything was sorted out amicably and peacefully.

Initially, the delegation,¹⁰³ and, subsequently, the whole nine-and-a-half tribes,¹⁰⁴ were fully satisfied that everything was alright after all: 'it was good in their eyes'. And so the chapter ends with Israel's *God* blessed, and Israel's *swords* sheathed.

A disastrous feud had been averted. Israel had pulled back from the brink of disaster, but, believe me, it had been a *very* close shave!

THE LESSONS FOR US.¹⁰⁵

So much for the history. But you and I have it on the very highest authority that 'these things happened to them by way of example; and they are written for our instruction'.¹⁰⁶

I hardly need say that, since the days of Joshua, an alarming amount of trouble, division and misery has been caused (i) by 'misunderstandings',¹⁰⁷ (ii) by the failure to consider others and to consult with them, and (iii) by jumping to hasty conclusions.

Would to God that all such differences and misunderstandings in *our* day might end as happily as did those in the days of Joshua.

In conclusion, let me collect some of the *key* lessons (both of praise and of blame) which we need to take away with us from our study.

1. The initial actions:

(i) of the two-and-a-half tribes.

- Their concern lay with the spiritual well-being of future generations, with the desire to see them fear and serve the Lord.
- Their desire was to maintain and preserve the unity of God's people.
- Their first priority was spiritual, not building any memorial for themselves or seeking the comfort and enjoyment of their homes. The Lord came first.

(ii) of the nine-and-a-half tribes.

- They showed great concern for the purity of the worship of the people of God. These men knew their scriptures and were determined to be loyal to the word of God.
- They refused to ignore an obvious problem; they were determined to deal with the matter.
- They were united in their planned discipline and were not willing to let family ties influence their actions.
- They were willing to suffer considerable personal loss, foregoing their own possessions if necessary, to further the interests of the people of God.

2. The faults:

(i) of the two-and-a-half tribes.

- Their lack of communication, including their failure to keep others informed when a decision was taken to embark on something entirely new.¹⁰⁸

(ii) of the nine-and-a-half tribes.

- They were ready to act on mere hearsay.
- They were quick in jumping to conclusions.
- They took no account of the past loyalty and faithful service of their brethren. Seemingly, the fact that they had stood shoulder to shoulder against a common foe for many years now counted for nothing!¹⁰⁹
- They spoke in a harsh and smug manner; there was no trace of the 'spirit of meekness' (Gal. 6. 1).

3. The actions taken to redeem the situation:

(i) by the two and a half tribes.

- Their exercise of self-control, not losing their temper or reacting in anger.
- Their willingness to hear out what the other party had to say, and then patiently to explain their motives for doing what they had done.

(ii) by the nine-and-a-half tribes.

- Their willingness to admit their mistake, not attempting to justify either themselves or their actions.

Happily, the conclusion of the episode reflected credit on both sides.

The last word.

The last word comes from the apostle Paul:

**'With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering,
bearing with one another in love,
earnestly striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit'.¹¹⁰**

Notes

¹ Num. 21.14.

² Caleb was forty years old at Kadesh Barnea and eighty-five years old when the conquest ended, Josh. 14. 10. In other words, there were forty-five years between Numbers 13 and Joshua 14. Thirty-eight of those forty-five years were spent before Israel entered Canaan, Deut. 2. 14 with Num. 21. 12. This left seven years for the Canaan Campaign.

³ 'We should note the function of chapters 22-24 ... Observe that each of these last three chapters begins when Joshua summons (Hebrew, *qarà*) Israel or some significant segment of it (22. 1; 23. 2; 24. 1). Thus, the book closes with three assemblies of the people of God. Remember that all this immediately follows the heavy theological text, 21. 43-45, which emphatically underscores Yahweh's fidelity to his promise. By contrast, chapters 22-24 are preoccupied with the theme of Israel's fidelity to Yahweh (22. 5, 16, 18, 19, 25, 29, 31; 23. 6, 8, 11; 24. 14-15, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24). Hence the last three chapters constitute the writer's major application: Israel must respond in kind to Yahweh's unwavering faithfulness', Dale Ralph Davis, '*Joshua*' (Focus Commentary), page 165.

⁴ Pockets of resistance still remained and it was the responsibility of each tribe to drive them out.

⁵ Moses' agreement with the two-and-a-half tribes' request to stay east of the Jordan was a concession which God Himself confirmed and which indicated that the two-and-a-half tribes would remain part of Israel when they stayed there. If they carried out their part of the contract, the land of Jazer and Gilead should be their 'possession before the Lord', Num. 32. 22; cf. Josh. 1. 15; 13. 8; 14. 3.

See the detailed comments by A. W. Pink, '*Gleanings in Joshua*', chapter 20, 'Pledges Honoured'.

⁶ Josh. 22. 4.

⁷ Num. 32. 33; Neh. 9. 22; Psa. 135. 11-12. See R. F. Youngblood, '*Giants, Heroes, Mighty Men*' (New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: NIDOTTE), volume 4, page 677.

⁸ Josh. 1. 14.

⁹ Josh. 1. 16. Indeed, 'their wholehearted devotion to the cause of God and His people increased, for a comparison of Joshua 1. 16, with Numbers 32. 31, reveals that the promise which they made unto Joshua went beyond that which they had pledged unto Moses', A. W. Pink, *ibid.*.

¹⁰ Josh. 4. 12-13.

¹¹ Josh. 22. 1-6. Although Joshua released the two-and-a-half tribes from military obligations, he imposed spiritual obligations on them.

¹² Josh. 22. 9. It is about 20 miles (as the crow flies) from Shiloh to the River Jordan via Gilgal.

¹³ For my part, I am satisfied that the impressive altar was built on *the east* side of the river Jordan; that is, in the territory belonging to the two-and-a-half tribes.

The seven major factors which weigh with me are:

(i) If the altar had been built on the west side of the Jordan, the first thing to go through the mind of Phinehas and the minds of the nine-and-a-half tribes would surely have been, 'Why would the two-and-a-half tribes build an altar on which to offer sacrifices on this (our) side of the Jordan? If the natural border of the Jordan (or any other factor) prevents them from taking part in worship on this side of the Jordan, it makes no sense for them to construct a second altar on this side'. (Obviously, at the beginning, the nine-and-a-half tribes assumed that the altar was for sacrifice, because they subsequently heaved a sigh of relief when they discovered that it wasn't!)

(ii) The two-and-a-half tribes imagined descendants of the nine-and-a-half tribes pointing to the Jordan as a boundary between them, v. 25. Surely, only a facsimile altar erected on their own side of that boundary made any sense if they intended to overcome that obstacle.

(iii) The two-and-a-half tribes had no right to build on any other ground than their own.

(iv) The altar was built large so that those on the other side (the west side) of the Jordan could see it.

(v) The implied suggestion by the delegation that the two-and-a-half tribes had erected the altar because they had felt that 'the land of their possession' needed cleansing, v. 19, makes sense only if the altar was located in that land.

(vi) This was the clear understanding of the translators of the Greek Old Testament. Note their rendering of verse 11: 'Behold, (they) have built an altar at the borders of the land of Canaan at ... Jordan, *on the opposite side* to the children of Israel'.

The Hebrew text of verse 11 can be translated, 'in front of' (*Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* {no. 1160}, and *Keil and Delitzsch*) or 'on the front of' (*Brown Driver Briggs Lexicon* {no. 4136}) 'the land of Canaan, near the borders ("the region") of the children of Israel'.

(vii) This was the clear understanding of Josephus, the Jewish historian: 'Now *when* the tribe of Reuben, and that of Gad, and the Manassites *were passed over the river*, they built an altar on the banks of Jordan as a monument to posterity, and a sign of their relation to those that should inhabit on the other side. But *when those on the other side* heard that those who had been dismissed had built an altar ...', Flavius Josephus, '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book 5, Chapter 1, Paragraph 26.

This view is shared by many commentators. For example, (a) 'The altar was built on their side [that of the two-and-a-half tribes], or those in the land of Canaan would have known of the building of it, and have seen them at it, and not come at the knowledge of it by hearsay only ... "Built an altar over against the land of Canaan" ... clearly shows it was on the other side of Jordan', John Gill, '*Exposition of the Bible*', (b) 'The altar was east of the Jordan, facing the land', John Bright, '*Interpreter's Bible*'. See also the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, and Elie Assis, '*For it shall be a witness between us: a literary reading of Joshua 22*', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 18 (2004), pages 216–17.

¹⁴ Josh. 22. 9-34.

¹⁵ Josh. 22. 10 and J. J. Lias, '*Joshua*' (The Pulpit Bible), page 316.

¹⁶ Josh. 22. 25. See W. G. Blaikie, '*Joshua*' (The Expositor's Bible), page 371. This is a section of 'the Rift Valley that stretches from the Sea of Galilee down to the southern tip of the Dead Sea', Carl Rasmussen, '*Arabah*', NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pages 406-407.

¹⁷ 'In time to come', Josh. 22. 24, 27-28; literally, 'tomorrow' ('*יאמר*').

¹⁸ Josh. 22. 24-25. That is, that the River Jordan would come to represent not only a *physical* separation between them, but a *spiritual* separation as well. However, the subsequent history of some at least of the descendants of the two-and-a-half tribes (1 Chron. 5. 23-26) suggests that those in Joshua's day had far more cause to be apprehensive about the later behaviour of *their own* children than they ever did about the imagined attitude and action of the children of the nine-and-a-half tribes!

¹⁹ Josh. 22. 28. For a detailed description of the bronze sacrificial altar see Exod. 27. 1-8; 37. 1-8. 'In its general shape this altar [that of Joshua 22] must have conformed to the type of the tabernacle altar. It was probably not made of the same materials, for the word "build" is continually used in connection with it, and this word would scarcely be appropriate for working metal', W. Shaw Caldecott, *'International Standard Bible Encyclopedia'* (1915), article 'Altar: The Altar of Josh. 22'.

'The altar ... is a replica of the true altar of worship for all of Israel, which itself is built according to the divine pattern (Exod. 27. 1-8)', Richard Hess, *'Joshua'* (Tyndale Commentary), on Josh. 22. 27-29. The Hebrew word used in Josh. 22. 28 ('תבנית') is the same as that used of the tabernacle and its furniture in Exod. 25. 9 and 40.

²⁰ The translation given by *Keil and Delitzsch* at Josh. 22. 28.

²¹ Exod. 23. 17; 34. 23; Deut. 16. 16.

²² Seven monuments in the Book of Joshua:

- (i) Joshua 4. 20: Gilgal (twelve stones).
- (ii) Joshua 7. 26: over Achan.
- (iii) Joshua 8. 28–29: over the king of Ai.
- (iv) Joshua 8. 30–32: Joshua engraves a copy of the law.
- (v) Joshua 10. 27: over Amorite kings at Gibeon.
- (vi) Joshua 22. 34: in the land of Gilead.
- (vii) Joshua 24. 26–27: covenant renewal at Shechem.

²³ Josh. 4. 6-7, 19-24.

²⁴ 'Apparently the design of an altar indicated what deity was worshipped at that altar. Many years later, in order to worship the god of the Syrians, King Ahaz had to have an altar constructed in Jerusalem patterned after the altar in Damascus (2 Kings 16. 10-16; 2 Chronicles 28. 22-25)', D. H. Madvig, *'Joshua'* (The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 1992), on Josh. 22. 8-9.

²⁵ 1 Kings 12. 28, 29.

²⁶ Joshua 22. 23, 26, 28, and 29. The three offerings mentioned by the two-and-a-half tribes were 'the first three sacrifices mentioned in the list of Leviticus 1-7 (cf. 1. 3; 2. 1; 3. 1) ... By mentioning these, the Transjordanians deny that they intended to use the altar for sacrifice', Richard Hess, *op. cit.*, on Josh. 22. 23-26.

²⁷ Note the concern of the two-and-a-half tribes about the way in which future generations of the nine-and-a-half tribes might the river Jordan as a God-given 'boundary' between them.

²⁸ Josh. 22. 10-11.

²⁹ Josh. 22. 10; 'one which caught the eye on account of its size', Keil and Delitzsch on Josh. 22. 9-12.

³⁰ 'We will say, "Behold, the pattern of the altar of the Lord"', Josh. 22. 28.

³¹ Josh. 1. 14; 4. 12-13.

³² They had previously built sheepfolds and fortified towns to shelter their children from the inhabitants of the land, Numb. 32. 16, 17, 24.

³³ Josh. 1. 15.

³⁴ Josh. 11. 23; 21. 44; 22. 4.

³⁵ Josh. 22. 8. Moses had established the precedent years before: 'The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief of the fathers of the congregation: And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation"', Num. 31. 25-27. Centuries later, David acted on the very same principle: 'As his part is that goes down to the battle, so shall his part be that carries by the stuff: they shall part alike', 1 Sam. 30. 24.

³⁶ F. G. Marchant, *'Joshua'* (The Preacher's Commentary), page 314.

³⁷ Num. 32. 18.

³⁸ Josh. 22. 24, 26, 28.

³⁹ Josh. 22. 12. 'As if the nine-and-a-half tribes said, 'they fought well for us; we will try how they can fight for themselves', Joseph Hall, '*Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments*', page 104. The western tribes gathered at Shiloh, partly (i) because this was where the main body of Israel was gathered, Josh. 22. 9; cf. 18. 8-9, and (ii) because 'Shiloh was the mustering place; for it seemed as if an offence had been perpetrated against that holy shrine', F B Meyer, '*Joshua and the Land of Promise*', page 191.

⁴⁰ Exod. 32. 4-8.

⁴¹ Josh. 22. 19.

⁴² Perhaps because it boasted no tabernacle and altar.

⁴³ To cleanse the whole of their inheritance from all forms of pagan worship; Deut. 12. 1-3.

⁴⁴ Deut. 12. 9-10.

⁴⁵ Lev. 17. 1-9; Deut. 12. 1-28; cf. Exod. 20. 24; Deut. 27. 1-2, 5. 'There is ... very good reason for supposing that when the author of Deuteronomy spoke of 'the place which the Lord your God shall choose' he intended to refer to the central sanctuary of all Israel', G. J. Wenham, '*Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary*', Tyndale Bulletin 22 (1971), page 112. For an alternative interpretation of the words of Moses, see P. C. Craigie, '*Deuteronomy*' (NICOT), on Deut. 12. 5-7, and M. H. Woudstra, '*Joshua*' (NICOT), on Josh. 22. 8.

⁴⁶ Josh. 21. 43-44.

⁴⁷ Josh. 18. 1; 19. 51; 22. 9.

⁴⁸ Josh. 22. 11.

⁴⁹ Josh. 18. 1.

⁵⁰ Lev. 8. 8.

⁵¹ Num. 27. 19.

⁵² Josh. 9. 3-14.

⁵³ Josh. 9. 14.

⁵⁴ Source: 'The conduct of the town clerk as an example', accessed at <https://biblehub.com/sermons/acts/19-37.htm>.

⁵⁵ Acts 19. 36.

⁵⁶ In effect, they considered their brethren to be 'guilty until proven innocent'.

⁵⁷ Josh. 22. 12.

⁵⁸ The word 'לשחת'.

⁵⁹ R. L. Hubbard, Jr., '*Joshua*' (NIV Application Commentary), 'No Problem', 22. 32-34. With reference to verse 33, Mr Hubbard adds, 'The writer probably invokes a word so evocative of terror, horror, and despair to highlight the holocaust the tribes have just avoided'.

⁶⁰ Josh. 22. 2-3. 'Specifically, they did not abandon their brothers, although the hardships implicit in the conquest narrative (chapters. 1–12) gave them many reasons to bail out (v. 3). The treks into the mountains from Israel's home base at Gilgal to battle sites inland were long and arduous. Injury or death in battle—and for land not their own—stalked them constantly. An additional likely hardship was the long separation from their wives and children left at home east of the Jordan. So also was the sheer length of the endeavour ("a long time now" [v. 3]). Through it all, Joshua notes, they have remained loyal to their brothers. The prophet Obadiah would later critique Esau (Edom) for leaving Jacob (Judah, Jerusalem) to be sacked by invaders (Obad. 10–11), but Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh have loyally stuck it out to the end. Most importantly, Joshua affirms that, ultimately, their service was not to fellow Israelites but to Yahweh Himself. "The Lord your God" had assigned them their mission, so their faithful execution of it lived out their faithfulness to God', R. L. Hubbard, Jr., *'ibid.*, 'Troops, Dismissed!', 22. 1-8.

⁶¹ 'The fourteen-ton bell of the South Tower of the Cathedral of Notre Dame rang out joyously, it was followed by the bells of Sacre Coeur, then by the tiny Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre and the oldest Church in Paris, Saint-Germain-des-Pres. All the Church bells of Paris were ringing, all except one, the Church of Saint-Philippe du Roule just off the Champs-Elysees', Jim Lysaght, *'Liberation of Paris 1944 – The Bells Ring Out'*, accessed at ... <https://avondhupress.ie/liberation-of-paris-1944-the-bells-ring-out/>.

⁶² Larry Collins and Dominique Lapiere, *'Is Paris Burning?'* page 258. See also the link in note 61 above.

⁶³ Max Lucado illustrated well the need 'to understand the cause of' a 'person's behaviour' if that behaviour is ever to be handled properly. He wrote, 'There was once a person in our world who brought Denalyn [his wife] and me a lot of stress. She would call in the middle of the night. She was demanding and ruthless. She screamed at us in public. When she wanted something, she wanted it immediately, and she wanted it exclusively from us. But we never asked her to leave us alone. We never told her to bug someone else. We never tried to get even. 'After all, she was only a few months old. It was easy for us to forgive our infant daughter's behaviour because we knew she didn't know better ... the way to handle a person's behaviour is to understand the cause of it'. Max Lucado, *'When Your World Turns Against You'*, accessed at <https://www.faithgateway.com/when-your-world-turns-against-you/#.YB0DZrD7Rpg>.

⁶⁴ Josh. 22. 2-6.

⁶⁵ Josh. 13. 12-16.

⁶⁶ Josh. 22. 14.

⁶⁷ Josh. 22. 16.

⁶⁸ Josh. 22. 13.

⁶⁹ R. L. Hubbard, Jr., *op. cit.*, 'A delegation to Transjordan'.

⁷⁰ Joshua 22. 16-19.

⁷¹ The Hebrew word indicates 'breach of trust', 'faithlessness'. The word occurs twice in verse 16, which can, therefore, be rendered, 'What is this *trespass* which you have *trespassed* against the God of Israel?' or 'What is this *treacherous act* by which you have *acted treacherously* against the God of Israel?'

⁷² Josh. 22. 16-20.

⁷³ F. G. Marchant, *op. cit.*, page 317.

⁷⁴ Num. 25. 1-18, 31. 16. The two-and-a-half tribe were accused by Phinehas of a sin akin to that at Peor, when Israel incurred God's 'anger'. This may have rung a bell with the two-and-a-half tribes in that this was not the first time that they had been accused of following a past precedent which resulted in God's judgement on the nation. They had earlier been accused by Moses of wanting to do that which would have discouraged the people, just as had the ten unbelieving spies on a previous occasion, when the Lord's 'anger' had been directed against Israel, Num. 32. 6-15.

- ⁷⁵ Num. 25. 11 KJV: 'Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel'.
'While we admire zeal, it becomes necessary, notwithstanding, that we differentiate between spiritual and carnal zeal. Phinehas drew a javelin, and was approved of God; Peter drew a sword and in the flesh sought to defend his Master, and suffered the Lord's rebuke (John 18. 10-11)', A. W. Pink, *op. cit.*, 'A New Priest'.
- ⁷⁶ See note 74 above. Phinehas was the man of whom the Lord Himself said that he 'turned back my wrath from the children Israel, because he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so I did not consume the children of Israel ...', Num. 25. 11. With those words, 'jealous with my jealousy', we can compare Paul's statement to the Corinthians, 'Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly ... For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ', 2 Cor. 11. 2.
- ⁷⁷ Zimri.
- ⁷⁸ Num. 25. 7-9. 'Phinehas was a man who knew how to use a javelin', C A Coates, 'Outline of Joshua', page 92. He was perfectly suited to the task.
- ⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 10. 8. When 23,000 died in one day, and 24,000 died in total, Num. 25. 9.
- ⁸⁰ 'This delegation mentioned one account of sin which had occurred on the eastern side of the Jordan, i.e., the Ba'al of Peor, and another account which happened on the western side of the Jordan, i.e., Achan and the defeat at Ai', Bob Utley, 'The Study Bible Commentary', on Josh. 22. 18.
- ⁸¹ Because, immediately, he brought death to his whole family, and, subsequently, his sin led to the death of thirty-six warriors of Israel, Josh. 7. 5, 24-25.
- ⁸² Keil and Delitzsch on Josh. 22. 20.
- ⁸³ Josh. 22. 19.
- ⁸⁴ Spoken of by the delegation as 'the whole assembly ('congregation', KJV) of the Lord', Josh. 22. 16.
- ⁸⁵ Josh. 22. 19. 'It shews that the western tribes were unselfish, and, indeed, very generous—ready both to undertake the wearisome task of a fresh division of the land, and to suffer, for the sake of their brethren and God's truth, that their own inheritances should be very materially diminished', F. G. Marchant, *op. cit.*, page 317.
- ⁸⁶ The previous chapters of the book record, not a case of 'divide and conquer' but a case of 'conquer and divide'!
- ⁸⁷ Josh. 17. 14, 16.
- ⁸⁸ 1 Chron. 7. 20, 27.
- ⁸⁹ Deut. 2. 11, 20; Josh. 12. 4.
- ⁹⁰ Josh. 17. 15, 17-18.
- ⁹¹ 'A soft answer turns away wrath', Prov. 15. 1.
- ⁹² Judges 20.
- ⁹³ There was no trace of any 'Who made you rulers and judges over us?' attitude; see Acts 7. 27.
- ⁹⁴ Josh. 22. 22. The repetition of God's names underscores the solemnity of their oath.
- ⁹⁵ The only other place where the three names, El, Elohim, and Jehovah, are brought together is Psalm 50. 1, where they are not repeated.
- ⁹⁶ J. J. Lias, *op. cit.*, page 319.

⁹⁷ Josh. 22. 22-23. The three charges (which run through Josh. 22. 16-22) were those of (i) 'rebellion', (ii) 'trespass', and, (iii) 'turning away from following the Lord'.

⁹⁸ 'Ἄλλ' ἔνεκεν εὐλαβείας ρήματος ἐποιήσαμεν τοῦτο', Josh. 22. 24a.

⁹⁹ W. G. Blaikie, *op. cit.*, page 375.

¹⁰⁰ How long the altar remained is unknown, but in little more than four centuries, its witness was forgotten, 1 Chron. 5. 25-26 (the word 'למזבח' in verse 25 is the same as that in Josh. 22. 16, 31).

¹⁰¹ Josh. 22. 29. 'Far be it from us' is an emphatic exclamation (cf. 24. 16; Gen. 44. 7; I Sam. 2. 30; 14. 45; 20. 2, 9; 22. 15).

¹⁰² R. L. Hubbard, Jr., *op.cit.*, 'Resolution'.

¹⁰³ Josh. 22. 30-31. 'You have delivered the children of Israel', verse 31: 'He that prevents an approaching disease or mischief, doth as truly *deliver* a man from it, as he that cures or removes it after it hath been inflicted', John Wesley, '*Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*'. Did Phinehas have in mind, I wonder, that which God had once said of him: 'Phinehas ... has turned my wrath away from the children of Israel ... so that I consumed not the children of Israel'? Num. 25. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Josh. 22. 33.

¹⁰⁵ The approach taken in this document shows that I do not share the opinion of the commentator who wrote, 'we must beware of moralizing the text into anything ... such as the peril of rumour, the tragedy of misunderstanding, or the need to talk out problems reasonably', Dale Ralph Davis, *op.cit.* page 167.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor. 10. 11.

¹⁰⁷ 'Nor was opposition from the enemies of Methodism among its greatest troubles ... although they increased in number daily, yet ... bickerings and *misunderstandings* began to threaten their very existence', C. H. Seymour, '*The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon*', volume 1, page 35. Not that Methodism has exclusive rights to that claim!

¹⁰⁸ Do we ever stop to ask ourselves, 'If we do this or that, what are others likely to make of it?' We should be careful to avoid even the appearance of evil. The two-and-a-half tribes were acting in a way which exposed their conduct to suspicion.

¹⁰⁹ If we ever come across a case where someone does something of which we disapprove, but which we know to be entirely out of character, we should hold fire on forming any quick judgement. There may well be factors in play of which we know nothing.

¹¹⁰ Eph. 4. 2-3. In context, the apostle was exhorting the saints at Ephesus to preserve the unity which had already been formed by the Holy Spirit, 'in whom' both Jews and Gentiles enjoy common access to the Father (Eph. 2. 18), and 'in whom' they are being built together for a dwelling-place for God (Eph. 2. 22). The Spirit's work had made them one.

But it was the business of the saints to keep and to preserve that unity in practice. And the means of maintaining that unity is, Paul says, 'the bond (that which holds things together) of peace'. The 'bond', that is, consists of the peace of which Paul had spoken previously; namely, the peace made by the Lord Jesus between believing Jews and believing Gentiles (Eph. 2. 13-17).

The practical point for you and me to register is that, if the *greatest* dividing factor between Christians (the great Jew/Gentile divide) has been removed (and it has), then there is no excuse for our allowing lesser issues – such as the colour of a person's skin or somebody's social or educational background – to mar and to disrupt our fellowship and unity as Christians.