

Joshua Chapter 22 – John Karmelich

1. This is one of those lessons that it is best to start with my title: "The danger of internal conflicts". (Yes, I will explain what that means. ☺) The Israelites up to this point have trusted in God to the point where all their enemies have now been defeated. Yet in this chapter, we read of a new internal battle. So why is this problem here and what does that have to do with me?
 - a) To explain, first let me point out we are now near the end of the book of Joshua. All of the "battle chapters" are done and all of the "dividing up the land" chapters are done. So why isn't the book of Joshua over at this point? Why are we still here? ☺ What is there still left to discuss in Joshua? Good questions!
 - b) Let me explain it this way: The book of Joshua's main topic is about living the rich full life of trusting God of all that He desires of us. I've driven that point home through all of the lessons in Joshua. The point here is even after we have done all that God has asked us to do there are usually new problems that arise in our life.
 - c) Even if we are trusting God to the point where we have no major "external battles" to face at the moment, there is the danger and problems of "internal conflicts".
 - d) Let's face it our spiritual enemies don't just "give up" if we stick close to God and overcome the major obstacles in our lives. If we trust in God enough to overcome those issues we have to face in life, the demonic forces we battle will usually "next" try to attack us with "internal division" (or strife). The goal of demonic forces is to make us ineffective witnesses for Christ. If we are "internally divided", then those demons have won this battle. Dealing with that issue is the underlying problem of this lesson.
 - i) On that happy note, ☺ we can get back to the Israelites.
2. Let me explain this issue of "internal conflicts" by getting back to the Israelites: Those Israelites that were going to live east of the Jordan River build a big altar west of that river before they cross it. The purpose of the altar is essentially for the Israelites living east of the river to remember God.
 - a) The problem is that the rest of the Israelites think that those who are going to live east of the river are going to violate God's laws by making sacrifices at this altar. God commanded the Israelites to make sacrifices at His Tabernacle and nowhere else.
 - b) The main point of this chapter is the Israelites who built this statue now have to deal with false accusations by other Israelites. By the end of the chapter, the accusations were dropped and all of the Israelites are happy again.
 - c) This leads back to the question of, "Why have a whole chapter dedicated to this issues?" The answer is to help us understand how to deal with "internal conflicts". It can apply to how we function as a church, society or even a household.
 - i) Let's face it, when we as a "group" are not facing outside threats to our lives, we often look "internally" at each other. It is human nature to think one is better than someone else or think that they (and not us) are somehow violating "the rules" and have to be judged.
 - d) The specific case here is nine and one half tribes of Israel (or at least their representatives) were accusing the other two and one half tribes of committing idolatry. The nine and one half tribes heard of this "memorial statue or altar" that the two and one have tribes built and said in effect, "You are not supposing to be doing that".
 - i) The point is these two and one half tribes now have to face the judgment and false accusations by the rest of the Israelites for building this thing in the first place.
 - e) The underlying lesson for you and me gets back to the issue of how we should properly deal with false accusations and internal conflicts in our lives.

3. There is another key point I need to discuss before we start the text. That is, understanding the commandment (one of "The 10") about not bearing false witness against your neighbor. (Reference: Exodus 20:16 or Deuteronomy 5:20.)
 - a) It is interesting that this phrase "false witness" is only used once in the New Testament. It was when Jesus was on trial the night before his crucifixion. One of the charges levied against Jesus was that "He (Jesus) stated that He would tear down this temple and rebuild it in three days." The point is Jesus did make that statement but He was referring to His physical body being raised from the dead. (Source Matthew 26:61).
 - b) The "false witness" aspect begins with the idea that Jesus was accurately quoted. Jesus' accusers committed a "false witness" by implying that Jesus was going to physically destroy the Jewish Temple structure that existed at that time.
 - i) My point here is that a "false witness" can say the right words (he quoted Jesus accurately) but still be a "false witness" if the words imply the wrong intent. It is a false witness in that Jesus' accusers were accusing Him of wanting to tear down the Temple structure in Jerusalem.
 - c) This leads us back to this lesson. The two and one half tribes who live east of the Jordan River were accused of building this altar with the intent of worshiping there. The "accusers" correctly stated that the "accused" built this thing. The false witness aspect was that the accusers implied the wrong intent with the construction of the altar.
 - d) My point here is that we can violate that commandment to not bear false witness not only by lying, but also by telling the truth with the wrong implications behind the words said.
4. Let me finish the introduction with something else I figured out about the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - a) One thing that always puzzled me is why did God create "12 tribes"? Yes there were 12 sons of Jacob, so therefore, I understand that 12 tribes are formed based on 12 sons.
 - i) What I am getting at is why did God allow "two and one half tribes" to live east of the Jordan River and nine and one half tribes to live in Israel proper? God could have worked it out so all "12" lived in Israel "proper" or say, "three or four" were to live outside of Israel proper. I see a lesson in this specific division of numbers.
 - ii) If you recall from the last lesson, God picked "exactly" six cities to be of refuge and the tribe of Levite was to inherit exactly 48 cities. Those are both "odd" numbers and I talked about the significance of those numbers.
 - iii) Along the same lines of thinking, I have a theory (it is just that) on the significance of why two and one half tribes lived east of the Jordan and why nine and one half tribes lived in the land of Israel (proper) and what that means.
 - iv) For those who hate bible numerology, I will make this quick! ☺
 - b) The number "three" in the bible is associated with "completeness from human standards". For example, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. In the Genesis "creation" story, there is only one day of that story where God said, "it is good" twice and that was on the third day. In the book of Joshua, the Israelites had to wait for exactly three days before crossing the Jordan. My simple point is "three" represents the completion of something positive in our lives. (References: Luke 24:21,25; Genesis 1:10,12; Joshua 3:2).
 - i) Here were "less than three" tribes living outside of the Promised Land. I believe that is a "clue" that living outside of the Promised Land is symbolic of living "outside" the life God has called us, of living the life of completely trusting God.
 - c) That leads us to the number "ten". In the bible, the number "10" is associated with human perfection (as in ten fingers and toes). The nine and one half tribes living in the land represent being "less than perfect" of what God desires. An underlying point of the whole Old Testament is although the Israelites lived in the land they never lived as "perfectly" as God desired. Even though they lived in the land, they were not perfect in their "worship".

- d) My point is simply that the number of tribes (living both in the land of Israel and living just outside of Israel) is "symbolic" of the shortcomings that God desired for their lives both as individuals and as collective groups.
 - i) Which, surprisingly, leads me back to the issue of bearing "false witness".
 - ii) The nine and one half tribes were guilty of being a false witness as we described.
 - iii) The two and one half tribes are symbolic of those who are living outside of God's will. It was "legal" to build this statue, but it is not what God desired of them.
 - iv) My point is the tribes who built this statue also have to also admit some wrong doing as well as their accusers. I'll cover these issues in the lesson.
 - v) As for now, I really need to get to Verse 1. ☺
- 5. Chapter 22, Verse 1: Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh ² and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded.
 - a) For a whole bunch of chapters now, we have been witnessing one big meeting between the leaders of Israel and all of the twelve tribes. The main purpose of this big meeting was to divide up the land of Israel by tribe. Those chapters had a lot more to it, but the main issue was to divide up the land of Israel by tribe.
 - b) My point here is that this meeting is now ending and it is time for everyone to go home. The focus now is on the two and one half tribes that settle east of the Jordan River.
 - i) Remember that those two and one half tribes got their inheritance (allotted land portion) even before all of the battles happened in the land of Israel. The men of those two and one half tribes agreed to go fight on behalf of their fellow Israelites.
 - ii) The first half of the book of Joshua was mostly about all of Israel, including these two and one half tribes, defeating in battle those who lived in this land.
 - iii) The second half of the book of Joshua (so far) was mostly about the land of Israel "proper" being distributed to the other nine and one half tribes.
 - iv) The point here is that the battles with the local inhabitants of the land of Israel are now over. There is still more conquering to be done on a tribe-by-tribe basis, but it is time for every tribe to go live in their allotted territory.
 - v) That also means it is time for the men of these two and one half tribes to go cross over the Jordan River. It is time for them to go back to their wives and children and go live lives without "united warfare".
 - c) OK John, so the war is over and the Israelites are all going home. Why should I care about any of this ancient history? Another great question. ☺
 - i) An underlying point is that even after the "big mission" has been completed, life will still go on. There are always going to be new issues in life to deal with once the significant major issue(s) have been resolved. That is a point of this chapter.
 - ii) Yes we are going to read of a new issue for the Israelites to deal with as we have mentioned in the introduction. Think about how our lives "works": Do we ever have complete peace in this lifetime with nothing to worry about or nothing to do? I've yet to meet a living grown-up believer who has that situation.
 - d) Before we get to all of that, we have Joshua commending these two and half tribes for doing their part in the battle and doing all that God has commanded of them.
 - i) The men of these two and one half tribes now have done all that Joshua has asked them to do. Now they are free to go home and enjoy their lives. As we will discover, the words "Happily ever after" only works in fairly tales. ☺ In real life, there are always going to be new issues to deal with once we have accomplished the main goal God wants us to do.
 - e) We'll get to the "false witness problem" in a matter of verses. Meanwhile, Joshua is still complimenting these two and one half tribes for their good work.

6. Verse 3: For a long time now--to this very day--you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. ⁴ Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. ⁵ But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."
- a) I have to admit that as I read these verses, I can't help but think about the "benediction" part of a typical modern, Christian church service.
 - i) The way most Christian churches end their weekly service is with the church leader giving some sort of benediction to the congregation.
 - ii) Most churches will wrap up the weekly service with singing by the choir and/or the congregation. The way everybody knows the church service is over is when the church leader then gets up in front of the congregation and gives some sort of blessing on everybody. It may be a reminder of some key point of the sermon or it may be a prayer that everyone go out and have a blessed week.
 - iii) My point is most people reading this bible study can relate to that type of "final benediction" by the pastor or priest (or even guest speaker).
 - b) This leads us back to these verses in Joshua. Let's face it, all of the battles are done. All of the land distribution acts are completed. It is time for everyone to go home. Therefore, Joshua, as the God-appointed leader of the Israelites, blesses everyone there and says in effect, "We are all done. Thank you for your help. Now it is time for everyone to go home". In other words, we are close to the end of the book of Joshua.
 - c) Joshua tells the two and one half tribes in effect, "You have done all that I and God have asked you to do. Now you may return to the other side of the Jordan River. All I (Joshua) ask you to do is to remember to obey God and keep His commandments when you go back across the Jordan River.
 - i) Remember that these two and one half tribes desire to live "outside" of Israel proper. They are not "missionaries" in the Levitical sense as discussed in the last lesson, but represent those "willing to settle for less" and live "outside" of the desired boundaries that God desires for our lives.
 - d) Before I move on, I want you to notice the last verse of this "blessing/commandment".
 - i) It first says, "Keep the commandment and the law that Moses". That means to obey God's laws as taught in the first five bible books.
 - ii) Next it says to love the LORD your God. That is a "command" as opposed to a feeling. The point is we are to love God whether or not we "feel" like it.
 - iii) Next it says to "Walk in all his ways and obey His commands". My point is first comes the willingness to love God and then it "follows" to obey His commands.
 - iv) The final part is to "serve Him with all your heart and all your soul". The point is we don't worship God in a "half-hearted" way. We give it all we have.
 - v) Now John, doesn't the New Testament teach that Christians are not under the law? Yes it does. (See Galatians 5:18.) The principals giving in these verses still have applications for the Christian believer. God calls Christians to make the decision to follow (love) Him and "give it all we have".
 - a) Further, we are called to a life of obedience and to do God's desires for our lives. God never says to Christians in effect, "You are now saved. You are now free to ignore Me!" If anything it is just the opposite: To be saved means to live for God and seek Him as to how He wants us to live.
 - vi) I mention all of this, as the "internal division" between the Israelites (coming up in this chapter) could have been avoided if they all kept their focus on God and not looked and said in effect, "Look what you guys have done with this altar."

7. Verse 6: Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes.⁷ (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan with their brothers.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them,⁸ saying, "Return to your homes with your great wealth--with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing--and divide with your brothers the plunder from your enemies."
- a) I said a page back that Joshua was giving a "go away now blessing" to these two and one half tribes and Verse 6 verifies that fact.
 - b) The main point of these verses is that the men who were returning home got to leave with great wealth. The Israelites in these battles were allowed to keep the things found in these battles, including livestock, metal items and clothing. In other words, when the Israelites defeated the people who lived in this land, they got to keep their stuff.
 - c) The point for you and me? The life God calls us to is not an "empty" life. God never promises that following Him will bring us material riches in this lifetime, but I have yet to meet a devout Christian who doesn't have a "rich full life" by following God.
8. Verse 9: So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the LORD through Moses.¹⁰ When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan.¹¹ And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side,¹² the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.
- a) Now we come to the "heart" of the chapter. These two and one half tribes start their journey back to their home east of the Jordan River. Right before they start the great river crossing process (imagine getting all the animals and "stuff" across a river), this group stops to build a big altar west of the river. The altar would be visible east of the river.
 - b) Verse 12 is where the plot thickens. The "whole assembly of Israel", (i.e., Israelites from the other nine and one half tribes) got together with the intent of attacking the two and one half tribes that are about to start living east of that river.
 - i) First of all, after all the years of fighting enemies, you would think the Israelites would hate the thought of fighting. Therefore, to the nine and one half tribes, the altar that was built by the "2.5 tribes" (get used to that abbreviation) was serious enough that the rest of the tribes were now threatening to kill them.
 - ii) The fear of the other "9.5 tribes" (my other new abbreviation) is that God would punish all the tribes for disobedience. (The emphasis is on the word "all".)
 - iii) Notice that the "9.5 tribes" gathered for battle based on what they heard, and not what they have seen. In other words, the "9.5 tribes" have only heard of this altar, but have not actually seen it. One of the dangers of life is when we start making accusations and "get ready for battle" based on evidence we have not seen.
 - c) I want you to keep in mind that from this point to the end of the book, there is no mention of Joshua himself. I suspect he wanted nothing to do with this false accusation. Maybe he just wanted the Israelites to work it out by themselves, but that seems unlikely.
 - i) What I suspect Joshua did is stay out of it, because he knew that internal conflicts were unpleasing to God. If I know Joshua, maybe he stayed at home and prayed for a peaceful resolution for all of this. The truth is we don't know what happened to Joshua at this point. I'm just speculating why he is not mentioned.
 - d) A quick bit of bible trivia: The Israelites gathered at "Shiloh". This is in the land of Israel and it was where the Tabernacle was located. The Tabernacle stayed at this location for at least the next four hundred years until David moved it to Jerusalem. The point is all of the Israelites gathered at the place that was the center of worship for them.

9. Verse 13: So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead--to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. ¹⁴ With him they sent ten of the chief men, one for each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.
- a) The text mentions Phinehas. He was e next in line to be the "High Priest". The point is this "top assistant priest" was sent along with a representative from each tribe. One was for every tribe (including the half tribe) that was living in "Israel proper".
 - i) Let me go on to describe the accusations and then I'll discuss the meaning.
10. Verse 15: When they went to Gilead--to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh--they said to them: ¹⁶ "The whole assembly of the LORD says: `How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now?"
- a) OK, here comes the accusation: The "2.5 tribes" were guilty of building an altar, but their only intent was to have it as a marker to look toward the land of Israel.
 - i) The other 9.5 tribes were accusing the 2.5 tribes of rebellion against God.
 - b) Understand that there was nothing "legally wrong" with building this altar as a visual sign. The question is whether or not they should have built it in the first place.
 - c) This leads us back to the issue of "false accusations". Here the "2.5 tribes" had to face false accusations about the altar and its purpose. Remember that the other "9.5 tribes" were angry enough that they were assembled for war.
 - d) A point to remember is that when we are wrongly accused of something, we often have to defend ourselves even when we have done nothing wrong. Many a person have had to spend a lot of time (and money) defending themselves against a false charge in life.
 - i) God never promises that we can avoid false accusations. If anything we have to face those false accusations (and false implications) and deal with the issues before they grow any worse.
 - ii) The "2.5 tribes" probably didn't want to sit around and argue about this thing. They probably just wanted to finish it and then go home to their families.
11. Verse 17: Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the LORD! ¹⁸ And are you now turning away from the LORD?
- a) Meanwhile, the representatives of the 9.5 tribes brought up a past incident to support their charge of rebellion against God. Back when the Israelites were wandering in the desert, there was an incident where some Israelites rebelled against Moses' command and a plague fell on the Israelites. (See Numbers 25:1-2.) That incident called "Peor" is mentioned here. Peor is the name of a foreign god that was worshipped where this took place. A point is many Israelites were killed due to the rebellion of specific Israelites.
 - b) The Israelites of these 9.5 tribes were afraid for their own lives. They are afraid that the 2.5 tribes are now turning away from God and toward idolatry. The representatives of the 9.5 tribes are reminding the 2.5 tribes of a past rebellion incident.
 - c) Before I move on, I want to notice the danger of this false accusation:
 - i) Notice we get no question asked by the "9.5 tribes" as why the "2.5 tribes" built this thing. The representatives of the 9.5 tribes just start in with the accusations without bothering to ask the 2.5 tribes why they built this thing in the first place.
 - ii) My point is, if the accusers had simply bothered to ask "what is the truth" before starting on the speech about past incidents of rebellion, much of this arguing could have been avoided in the first place.
 - iii) That point of "just ask why" sounds so simple, but you would be surprised how many arguments in life blow up out of proportion simply because people are too angry to actually sit down and try to discover what is the truth.
 - iv) I suspect the other 9.5 tribes worked themselves up to the point where they had to let out some "steam" before they could even bother to try to learn the truth.

- d) There's another point about "arguing and judgment" that would help here:
 - i) If we are being accused of something, sometimes we need to "hear out" the other party, just so we could speak. Let me put this another way: "People often are not willing to listen until after they have spoken their mind". Therefore, it is often best to let our accusers speak their minds before responding to their accusations.
12. Verse 18 (cont.): " `If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel.
- a) Now we get to the "heart" of the issue: The 9.5 tribes were worried that if the other 2.5 tribes rebelled, God would punish everybody. In other words, "We wouldn't care what you did unless of course, we could suffer the consequences of those actions."
 - b) Usually you can tell when the "other side" is about to finish their arguments when it gets to the issue of how it affects them personally. Again, it is often best to let the accuser state their accusations, even if they are false, just because they will usually not even listen to reason until after they have spoken their peace.
 - i) One of the greatest lessons I have ever learned in life was about "repeating back what somebody said". There is a great human need to be heard. If we repeat back the key points of what someone said, they are then more open to listen to what we have to say, because they feel like they've been heard. My point is one can defuse many arguments by repeating back what the other person just said.
 - ii) A fairly famous American marital counselor calls this the "Jack in the Box" method. That's because when you go through the drive through there, the employees at Jack in the box repeat back the order. This is "repeating" back"
13. Verse 19: If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the LORD's land, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the LORD our God.²⁰ When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.' "
- a) Again, the main fear of the 9.5 tribes is that whatever the 2.5 tribes did wrong, would cause punishment for all of the Israelites. The 9.5 tribes were even willing to offer the other 2.5 tribes part of their inherited land if they would just "avoid this rebellion".
 - b) The representatives of the 9.5 tribes brought up another story that happened earlier in the book of Joshua. If you recall, when the Israelites destroyed Jericho, there was a man named Achan who took stuff from that city when God said not too. The point is all of Israel suffered for the rebellion of that one man. (Reference Joshua Chapter 7).
 - i) The underlying point here is the "concern" of the nine and one half tribes was legitimate in that if there is some sort of rebellion, it could affect all of them.
 - ii) Therefore, even if the two and one half tribes did not have any sinful intent in building this statute, the other tribes had a legitimate reason for concern and a legitimate fear to bring this accusation against the other two tribes.
 - c) Remember that my theme of this lesson is about dealing with "internal conflicts" and how to properly handle them. My point here is if we are the accused, we should hear out the charges even if we know we are innocent of those charges. Just hearing out the accusation and then explaining "our side" of the story can often defuse situations.
14. Verse 21: Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel:²² "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day.²³ If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account.
- a) Just to give you a "head's up", I believe that both sides of this issue have problems and both sides acted wrongly. Just as the accusers were making false accusations against the accused, I also believe the "accused" have issues themselves that need to be resolved.

- b) Let me first give the "essential argument" for building this thing: "We (the 2.5 tribes) built it only as a reminder that God dwells in the land and it is a symbol for us to look at."
 - i) These 2.5 tribes are saying that it is not an altar for sacrifice. We the 2.5 tribes understand that we have to come to "Shiloh" to perform sacrificial rituals. We only built this as a visual reminder of where God is located, "in the land".
- c) Whenever one is suspicious of another's arguments, the first thing to "watch out for" is when that person or group incites the name of God over and above their own names in the situation.
 - i) If one looks at Verses 21 through 23, the name of God and "The Lord" is used over and over again in these three verses. (By the way, when the word "LORD" is all in capitals, it just means that is the most holy name of God, or "Jehovah".)
 - ii) OK John, what is the big deal about the 2.5 tribes incited God's name over and over again in order to defend the fact that this statue is not idolatry?
 - a) The first "clue" that there is a problem in a debate is when somebody incites God's name to say they are not doing anything wrong.
 - b) It's like when someone says, "I swear on a stack of bibles I didn't do anything wrong". If you didn't do anything wrong, why don't you just say so and not invoke God's word on that issue?
 - iii) It comes back to the idea that God wants us to have a deep, rich relationship with Him that comes from drawing close to Him. These 2.5 tribes were willing to settle for "something less" and wanted to live outside of the land of Israel.
 - a) Yet before they leave, they build a big statue/altar to God. What gives?
 - iv) In a lot of ways, the "big statue" is typical of those who want to compromise with God. The 2.5 tribes were not willing to live "close to Him", but they are willing to build a big statue (i.e., put on a big display) of how much they care about God even though again, they are not willing to be that close to Him.
- d) Let me put it this way: There are lots of people who claim they are devout Christians, but they never do what it takes to draw close to Him. They don't pray regularly and don't read their bible regularly. They never really commit their lives to following Jesus. However, such people are willing to come to church and make sure everyone sees them going in and out of church. They in a sense think, "OK, I don't have to worry about this God stuff for another week as I have done my duty and gone to church."
 - i) Pastors often call such people "pew potatoes". The general idea is that they come to church and take up space in church, but that's about it. They don't make much of a commitment to God over and above coming to church.
 - ii) One of the great lessons to learn in life is we can't fix a person who is not willing to change. You or I can lecture them all day to change, but it doesn't help at all. True change has to come from "within" and not by lecturing people to change.
 - iii) That in a typological sense (i.e., a "word picture") is what the two and one half tribes are all about. They are willing to "put on a good face" and build a nice statue to God, but when it comes to obedience and doing what God wants for their lives, such people really don't want to get that close to Him.
 - iv) The two and one half tribes may have been correct in that they just wanted to build a monument to remember God. The underlying problem is much bigger. They are willing to settle for less than what God wanted for them (live in the Promised Land) and they build a big statue to "remember God" (but that's about it) as they live outside of what God wants for them.
- e) Meanwhile, I last left the 2.5 tribes boasting about how wonderful God is and how they only built this altar to remember Him. The bragging continues in Verse 24:

15. Verse 24: "No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?'²⁵ The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you--you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the LORD.' So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the LORD.
- a) The members of these two and one half tribes understood that the Jordan River was a natural boundary between the 9.5 tribes and themselves (the 2.5 tribes). The members of the 2.5 tribes figured this altar would remind the 9.5 tribes to consider the 2.5 tribes.
 - i) The 2.5 tribes feared that the descendants of the 9.5 tribes would forget the descendants of the two and one tribes. Therefore, the 2.5 tribes built this thing to help the 9.5 tribes to not forget about the other 2.5 tribes living across the river.
 - b) The 2.5 tribes are making their own "false accusation" that the 9.5 tribes might forget about them because of where they live. The 2.5 tribes claim they built this thing to help the 9.5 tribes remember them.
 - i) From the standpoint of the nine and one half tribes, was it necessary to have a monument for them to remember the other two and one half tribes? No.
 - ii) Both sides are using this "big statue" to argue against each other.
 - iii) What we have is an "argument growing out of control" based on a thing that never should have been built in the first place.
16. Verse 26: "That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar--but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.'²⁷ On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no share in the LORD.'
- a) The 2.5 tribes state in effect that the only purpose of this big altar is to have a visual reminder that the two and one half tribes are in effect, "Jewish".
 - b) The fear is that because of the Jordan River, the 9.5 tribes will stop caring about the 2.5 tribes and the 2.5 tribes will stop going across the river to worship. Therefore, the 2.5 tribes thought the solution to the "fear of separation" was to build this thing.
17. Verse 28: "And we said, 'If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD's altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'²⁹ "Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle."
- a) Verse 28 says that the "statue" that the 2.5 tribes have built is a replica of the Lord's altar. That means it somehow looked like the sacrificial altar being used by the Jewish people.
 - b) What came to mind was the "bronze snake statue" story. In the book of Numbers 21:6-9, (I've been quoting Numbers a lot lately ☺) is the story of snakes that were biting the Israelites. Moses was commanded to make a bronze snake statue. When the snakes bit the Israelites, they were to look to that snake statue for healing. It is a strange story and a visual reminder that we are to look to God when we have problems. My point is centuries later, that bronze snake statue was still around and people were "bowing down to it" as opposed to God Himself. (See 2nd Kings 18:4.)
 - i) The point is the danger of this "replica altar" is that even if the intentions are good, future generations may end up using this altar as a place of worship.
 - ii) If we do something God doesn't command us to do, even if we do it with the best of intentions, the 9.5 tribes are right in that this altar could be used for the wrong purposes in future generations.
 - c) This leads me back to the text. It would not be necessary for the 2.5 tribes to have to defend themselves if they were simply willing to do exactly what God had commanded.
 - i) The Israelites got in this conflict because 2.5 tribes want to go "around the rules" and "add" to them this particular statue.

18. Verse 30: When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community--the heads of the clans of the Israelites--heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. ³¹ And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD is with us, because you have not acted unfaithfully toward the LORD in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the LORD's hand."
- a) When the leaders of the 9.5 tribes heard the explanation of the altar and that it was only built as a "witness", they accepted the explanation and essentially, this debate is over.
 - b) The 9.5 tribes now believe the 2.5 tribes acted "faithfully" with this thing. Whether or not the 2.5 tribes should have built it, is another matter. The point for now is that the conflict is over and the 9.5 tribes accepted that the 2.5 tribes have not gone into idolatry.
19. Verse 32: Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. ³³ They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived. ³⁴ And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God.
- a) In these final three verses, the representatives of the 9.5 tribes went back home being satisfied with the explanation of why it was built. The last verse (Verse 34) has the 2.5 tribes giving the statue a name, which is, "A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God."
 - b) Now that this is over, let me ask the question again: Was it right for the two and one half tribes to build this thing? Probably not in the sense that it is not what God desired for their lives. The interesting thing is there is no mention of this statue again in the bible. Whatever happened to this altar, it never became a significant factor. Therefore we can judge the "correctness" of this statue by its historical significance: None.
 - c) Maybe this statue did help the 2.5 tribes to look toward God for a generation or so. The point is if God wanted these 2.5 tribes to build something like this, He would have said so. Going "over and above" what God wants us to do is usually a sign of "Wanting to please God by our own efforts". God doesn't want that. God wants obedience to what He calls us to do. Going over and above that is trying to make God happy with our efforts, which He never is.
 - d) In other words, God wants us to be obedient to Him, but not to do things that He does not ask us to do. Does this mean for example, building big, fancy church buildings are wrong? It can be, if the purpose of the physical building is to show how "great we are". The answer to our "works" usually depends upon intent. I do know that the bible teaches that our "works" does not impress God. He wants us to focus on obedience as opposed to doing things to try to impress Him. (See Ephesians 2:9).
 - e) In summary, this is a confusing chapter in that it is about the "effort" to do things over and above what God requires us to do, and the consequences of that effort.
20. Let me end with this question. Here we are, a few chapters away from finishing up the book of Joshua. All of the "fighting chapters" are done with and all of the "dividing the land" chapters are done with. Why dedicate a whole chapter (this lesson) to the issue of in-house fighting and in particular the issue of being a "false witness"? Why is this so important to be included here?
- a) I think the answer is "that is the way life is". When we are not dealing with problems on the "outside", we are dealing with problems on the "inside". As I stated earlier in the lesson, this life has no "happily ever after" endings where all of our problems go away.
 - b) It is "human nature" to not be happy with the things of this world. Therefore, if there is nothing to complain about when it comes to "outside influences", somebody is going to find something to complain about when it comes to "inside" influences.
 - i) In this particular case, it is, "our brothers are building a statue that they shouldn't build". That caused a riff between different Israeli tribes. The good news is that it ended peacefully.

- c) This reminds me of a cute old Jewish joke. It goes that "If you leave the Jewish people alone, they wouldn't kill each other, but they probably would debate each other to death". That joke is based on the idea that "Jewish education" is often based on debating issues.
 - i) Going back to our story, here are the Israelites, done with fighting their enemies, so they are now debating each other over this statue.
 - d) The point for you and me is again, if there is no major outside threat (issues) for our life at the moment, you can expect some sort of "internal trouble" to brew. Satan loves nothing more than Christians being ineffective witnesses for God. There is no greater way to do that than having us fighting or arguing with each other over some issue.
 - i) Was this statue a big deal? Yes it is in the sense that it was not what God wanted the Israelites to be focusing upon. Did it really cause division? Yes it did. The point is if "everyone" just focused on what God wants us to focus on (Him), this wouldn't be an issue in the first place.
 - e) This leads to the issue of how do we have peace in our home, or say, our church? The answer is to get everyone to focus on Him and not things that someone else has (or doesn't have) that we want.
 - i) What if the family member or church member doesn't want to cooperate or focus on God? Well then, conflict resolution is then necessary as it was in this chapter. Further, we as Christians have to be willing to let go of "our rights" if it means having peace in our own Christian community. That was Paul's main point in 1st Corinthians Chapter 9.
 - ii) I have learned that in order to have peace in say, my home, two of the greatest words in the English language are "I'm sorry". Ask yourself in heated moments, "Would you rather be right or have peace?" Being willing to admit fault and say "I'm sorry" does a lot to help resolve such issues that break up. It is usually better to admit our part in the argument and let God deal with the heart of the other person. It reminds me of one of my favorite jokes, "Submission is learning to duck so God could get a good swing at the other person".
 - f) OK John, what am I to take from this lesson? Probably the idea that in life, "People are never satisfied in the sense they want things to be different." The 9.5 tribes didn't want this altar being built by the 2.5 tribes. Both sides are doing less than what God desired for their lives. Sometimes internal conflicts have to be resolved and hopefully we can do it peacefully and with both parties willing to admit fault. The "good news" of this chapter is the conflict was resolved peacefully.
 - i) There is nothing God wants more among believers then for us to get along and work to lift each other up as opposed to putting each other down.
 - g) Why is this chapter here near the end of Joshua? I think it is to teach us conflict resolution and to know that "conflict" issues will always be around whether we want to accept it or not. It is to teach us to be willing to say, "I'm sorry" and do what it takes to live peacefully with those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ.
21. On that unusual point, let's pray: Father, we too often get our focus off of You and on our problems. Help us to remember that You are the "solution" to our problems and not getting what the "other person" has. Help us to resolve conflicts peacefully and be willing to give up our rights as to live peacefully with those around us. Help us to be a good witness for You and to do that not by putting others down, but by living for You and letting You take care of conflicting issues between those we are close with. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.