

=THE LIFE OF JOSHUA=

Lesson 9

A Divided Altar

INTRODUCTION: The tribes of Gad and Reuben and one half of the tribe of Manasseh, upon entering the Promised Land, had requested permission to remain outside the Promised Land in a special place where they could take care of their cattle and riches. This had alarmed the leaders of Israel, and they had commanded that these tribes also enter in and fight the battle. They had, however, given special permission for them to return after the land of Canaan had been conquered and have the place where they desired to live outside the land of Canaan, this being on the east side of the Jordan. They did fight with the rest of Israel in conquering the Promised Land, and Joshua kept his promise to them by giving them the land outside Canaan. Then they built an altar. This altar caused some trouble because it appeared that they were in conflict with the altar in Jerusalem. The lesson for today is about the divided altar.

POINT OF CONTACT: Review the life of Joshua and the Israelites step by step through the preceding lessons: the crossing of the Jordan; the winning of the battle of Jericho; the battle of Ai; the cities of refuge; etc.

- I. THE REQUEST. See Numbers 32:1-5. Here we find these tribes requesting special privileges and asking not to enter into the Promised Land but to stay outside.
- II. THE EXHORTATION. Notice Numbers 32:6. Here is a very interesting verse. They were told by God's leader that all were supposed to fight. In other words, not just "some" are supposed to win souls; all are. Not just "some" are supposed to tithe; all are. Not just "some" are supposed to be faithful to church; all are. Not just "some" are supposed to serve God; all are. It is the job of every person to serve the Lord. Now, of course, we do not all have the same type of service. Some preach, some teach, some sing, some are superintendents, some work in the public address room, some are ushers, some work in the nursery, etc., but all are to work, and all are to win souls to Christ!
- III. THE REASON. Read Numbers 32:7. Here is the reason why these tribes were told they could not have special privileges: They would discourage the other brethren. There is no doubt about it—every trait reproduces itself. Discouragement breeds discouragement. Pessimism breeds pessimism. Optimism breeds optimism. Joy breeds joy. Enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm. Hatred breeds hatred. Jealousy breeds jealousy. Envy breeds envy. Not only are we to serve God because of our own selves but because of the influence we have on others.
- IV. THE REWARD. Read carefully Joshua 22:1-6. Years have passed since Numbers 32; and God had promised that if the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half of Manasseh would fight with the rest of the Israelites, they could have the land that they requested on the east side of Jordan. Now the battle is over, and the land is inhabited. God does not forget His promises. This is a wonderful truth. God made the promise a long time ago that He will keep His promises. He does! (Teacher, ask the class to discuss different promises with you. Have them give all the promises of God they can. Remind them that God keeps His promises.)
- V. THE ALTAR. See Joshua 22:10. Here is the story for this week. Here is the main crux of the lesson. These tribes built an altar in their land. Now the altar was in Jerusalem. There was to be no divided altar, but here they are building an altar. This, of course, alarmed the people of God.
- VI. THE WAR. Notice Joshua 22:11, 12. As soon as the Jews heard about this altar, they armed for war. This was a serious matter. We find, however, that they had no reason to do so, as the next point will show.
Just as they were hasty to take arms, we are oftentimes so hasty to criticize. We do not know the motives behind someone's actions. We do not know the heart. So many times we see an action and jump to criticize before we realize why the action took place. (Discuss with the class the importance of not criticizing, the importance of not being hyper-critical in our hearts, etc.)

VII. THE MOTIVES. Notice in Joshua 22:26-28 something interesting. They told the Israelites that they had no intention of offering sacrifices on this altar. It was simply to be a witness to let people know that they were of Israel, not an altar to be in competition with the altar in Jerusalem. It was simply a testimony, a way of letting people know of their stand and whose they were. (Teacher, here we ought to stress to our children that God judges motives. We judge performance; God judges motives. We judge what a person does; God judges why he does it. Not only should we be right in our performance, but we should be right in our hearts. The Psalmist said in Psalms 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight...." God said in Proverbs 23:7a, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." It is not enough to preach a good sermon--the motives must be right. It is not enough to teach a good class--the motives must be right. It is not enough to sing a good solo--the motives must be right. God judges motives. On the outside it looked like these people had done wrong, but they had not. They did not intend to offer sacrifices on their altar. It was only for testimony.

Let us be careful not only about our own motives, but let us be careful not to misjudge the motives of others.

VIII. THE WITNESS. Note Joshua 22:34. They wanted people outside the land to know they were of the land. They were out of the land; yet they acted as if they were of the land. In other words, they were witnessing outside the land. We, too, are away from our land. We are not citizens of this earth; we are citizens of Heaven. Yet we are to act like they act in the land (Heaven).

CONCLUSION: With this lesson we conclude our series, "The Life of Joshua." Review the traits of this great leader. Encourage the children to have Joshua as a hero in their minds. Teach them to "Be strong and of a good courage," Joshua 1:9a.

QUESTIONS:

1. Name the tribes that did not want to enter the Promised Land.
2. Why did the leaders insist that they also fight?
3. What did they do in their land that caused strife with the rest of the Israelites?
4. On which side of the Jordan did they want to live?
5. When the Israelites heard about their altar, what did they do immediately?
6. Is God concerned only about our actions?
7. If not, what else concerns God?
8. Why did they build this altar?