

p 75 **WEEK 10: AN ALTAR OF REMEMBRANCE, AN UNFORGETTABLE
ALTERCATION**

Joshua 22:1–34

The Place of the Passage

Joshua 22 is the beginning of the end. The conquest is over and the land has been divided among the tribes. Chapters 22; 23, and 24 each begin with a parting speech from Joshua. He speaks to the eastern tribes, to Israel's leadership, and finally to all of Israel. Here in chapter 22, Joshua speaks to the tribes who came over the Jordan with the rest of Israel but whose inheritance had already been won east of the Jordan. The time has come for them to return home. When they do, the story takes an unexpected turn to one of the most intense moments in the book. The outcome is equally as unexpected and makes for a stronger and more unified nation.

The Big Picture

After Joshua sends Israel's eastern tribes home with a parting speech, a surprising turn of events leads to a more cohesive nation.

p 76 Reflection and Discussion

Read Joshua 22:1–34, then interact with this section of Scripture using the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 426–428; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Joshua's Parting Speech to the Eastern Tribes (22:1–6)

In Joshua's words to the eastern tribes are a commendation for careful obedience (22:2–3) and a command for faithfulness to Moses' law (v. 5). We may be tempted to think of commands as rigid and unhappy things, but here in verses 5–6 we get a positive, relational picture of obedience. Paying attention to verbs, write a list of what God requires of his people.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–3 for background to Joshua's exhortation. What rewards did Moses promise for this kind of obedience?

According to Deuteronomy 6:4–9, what else were the Israelites supposed to do with God's commands?

p 77 2. A Suspicious Altar and a Declaration of War (22:7–20)

This section develops a conflict revolving around an “altar of imposing size” (Josh. 22:10). Three passages will provide the needed context. Read Deuteronomy 6:10–19; 12:1–14; and Numbers 25:1–9 for background. What was the perceived problem with this altar? To help focus your answer, look ahead to Joshua 22:29.

What does the response of the western tribes indicate about their spiritual condition?

In what way did the western tribes demonstrate wisdom in this confrontation? In what way did they demonstrate grace?

3. A Unifying Exchange and Proof of the Lord’s Presence (22:21–34)

In verses 21–23 the eastern tribes express an important point of agreement. What is it?

p 78 Read Deuteronomy 6:10–25 for background into the intentions of the eastern tribes. No doubt they remembered the reading of the law at the altar on Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:30–35). It was a commitment to this law of Moses that led them to build this copy of the altar as a witness to their unity as a nation. Thus this imposing altar was actually a sign of the same spiritual sobriety shared by the tribes west of the Jordan. A very bad ending is averted and replaced with an extraordinary ending. List here each indication of a positive outcome.

Why do you suppose the Lord allowed this conflict in Israel’s life? What is an implication of the exclusivity of God’s tabernacle (22:29) for Christians today?

Read Hebrews 9:1–14 and compare the two tents contrasted there. Then, reflecting on the exclusivity of Christ and his cross for salvation, rewrite Joshua 22:29 as your own commitment to the Lord.

Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

p 79 Gospel Glimpses

CLING TO THE LORD. The description of what it means to obey Moses’ law is remarkable, especially Joshua’s command to “cling to him” (Josh. 22:5; see also 23:8). This corrects any notion that God’s commands are dry or impersonal and gets to the heart of what God really wants from

us. Such obedience is incompatible with clinging to this world, so the Lord will warn Israel about clinging to other gods in the next chapter (23:12). In Jesus Christ we see the embodiment of what it means to cling to the Lord, and through Jesus we are compelled to cling to Yahweh for life. Like a child clings to his father for protection, provision, and love, so we cling to our Lord for the same.

ONE PEOPLE FOR GOD. Nothing more tragic could be imagined for the eastern tribes than for their children to be separated from Israel west of the river. As God is one, so are his people. So it is for God's new covenant people, the church, in an even deeper way. Not all in Israel truly belonged to God, because not all believed as Abraham did (Rom. 2:28–29). In the new covenant community, however, everyone knows the Lord (Jer. 31:34). This new people is Christ's new humanity, the eschatological fulfillment of God's promise that Abraham's offspring would bless the nations (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:8; Eph. 2:11–21).

Whole-Bible Connections

THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE LAW OF CHRIST. For Israel, keeping the Book of Moses was a matter of life and death, blessing and curse. Is it for us? Yes and no. God does require the fulfillment of all his commands. But because of Jesus' obedience and curse-bearing sacrifice (Gal. 3:10–14), the law is no longer a barrier between God and us. Through his new covenant work, Jesus fulfilled the law so that it is now obsolete (Matt. 5:17; Heb. 8:13). But this doesn't mean that the law is not instructive for us, for many of its commands are tied to the nature of God, human beings, and creation. Murder and adultery, for example, are still wrong. But since Christians today live by the "law of Christ," such things as anger and lust are also wrong, since they violate the law of love that unites all of God's commands (Rom. 13:9–10; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Indeed, the life of a Christian is loftier than anything required by Moses' law, but so is the power that believers receive from the Holy Spirit.

REAL POSSIBILITY OF APOSTASY. It is possible for someone to say he belongs to God and be lying or self-deceived. That is what appears to be the case in Joshua 22. The western tribes' response confronts the seriousness of abandoning the Lord. Wisely, they listened to the eastern tribes before executing [p 80](#) them. New Testament Christians don't swing swords, but that doesn't mean apostasy is less serious. It is actually more serious. To those who call Jesus "Lord" but are deceived, Jesus will say, "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt. 7:21–23). Of two who abandoned the faith, Paul said, "I have handed [them] over to Satan" (1 Tim. 1:20). This responsibility belongs to the entire new covenant community. After a patient and increasingly public restorative process of pleading, without repentance, Jesus says, "Let [the unrepentant person] be to you as a Gentile" (Matt. 18:17). This verdict is more severe than any physical judgment, for as Jesus warns, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

Theological Soundings

FUTURE-ORIENTED FAITH. The eastern tribes were looking to the future when they built their own copy of the altar. This future orientation is natural to every believer in every place in

God's salvation story. After the fall into sin, Adam named his wife Eve, which means "mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and the rest of the Old Testament faithful "died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar" (Heb. 11:13). So today, as Peter says, "According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). This helps us understand that faith is not just mental assent but a forward-looking anticipation.

ONE ALTAR FOR ONE WAY TO GOD. God requires us to come to him on his terms. The eastern and western tribes both recognized this in the exclusivity of the tabernacle for approaching God. Just as the tabernacle was Israel's one way of relating to God, now Christ has made complete access to God possible through the one altar at Calvary. This is what the book of Hebrews tells us. Israel's tabernacle provided imperfect access to God through imperfect sacrifices and an imperfect priesthood. Jesus enters once with his own blood and secures for us an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:1–14). Jesus is the only way to God because his cross is the only possible way for sinners to stand before God and not die.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 22:1–34 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

p 81 1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Joshua 22:1–34

p 82 As You Finish This Unit ...

Pray for the unity of God's one people around God's one altar for salvation, Calvary. Pray as well for a sobriety about sin born of a conviction that God's Word is true, we are great sinners, and there is only one way to be right with him.