

Joshua 22:1-34

Nothing unites people like a common cause. It is also true that nothing can divide people like natural barriers. Israel had been united in their campaign against the Canaanites, but now they would be physically divided by the Jordan River. Yet even though Israel was divided by a natural, geographical marker, the people believed in and lived under the same covenant promises and were fundamentally one.

Summary

In Joshua 22:1–34, the eastern tribes build an altar on their way home, not as an alternative place of worship, but as a witness that pointed to the one true altar, and was a reminder that all Israel found their unity in the one place of sacrifice, showing that all the Lord's people find their true and lasting unity, as brothers and sisters, in the one place of sacrifice, the cross of our Lord Jesus.

1. Expressed Unity vv. 1-9

After summoning the transjordanian tribes together, Joshua addressed them and commended their faithful obedience to both Moses and himself (**Josh 22:1-3**). Obedience to God requires that we submit to those whom he has placed in authority over us: in the home (**Eph. 5:22-6:4**), in civil society (**Rom. 13:1-7**) and in the church (**Heb. 13:17**).

Joshua then moved on from the eastern tribes' past obedience to their future in the land across the Jordan (**Josh 22:4**). They must remember, however, that they have a continuing obligation to obey the Lord through careful obedience to God's Word (**Josh 22:5**). Scripture requires this kind of diligent attention from all believers so that we might know what it is that God requires of us (**Psa. 119:33-34**).

What does this kind of diligent obedience look like in practical terms?

Joshua answered that question with five actions: (1) to love the Lord your God (2) to walk in all his ways, (3) to keep his commandments, (4) to cling to him (5) to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul (**Josh 22:5**)

At the conclusion of his address, Joshua blessed the tribes, sent them away (**Josh 22:6**), instructing them to take the spoils of war that they had obtained and divide them with their brothers (**Josh 22:7-8**).

The expressions of unity that we find here are all very practical, tangible demonstrations rooted in a personal relationship with the Lord himself.

First, obedience begins in the heart, and love is its motivator.

Secondly, the tribes were also to walk in all of God's ways.

Thirdly, when you walk this path, you keep his commandments and obey him.

Fourthly, To cling to the Lord is a personal commitment of oneself to hold to Him no matter what may attempt to drive us away.

Fifthly, we are called to serve.

This is the way unity works. It begins with love to God, and then to neighbor.

2. Threatened Unity vv. 10-20

On their way home the eastern tribes built a large altar on the western bank of the river before they crossed the Jordan and it immediately became a perceived threat to unity (**Josh 22:10-12**).

In response to the news of this innovative altar, the western tribes sent a delegation of their leaders to confront the eastern tribes about their apparent disloyalty to the Lord (**Josh 22:13-15**).

As soon as the delegation arrived, they initiated their confrontation (**Josh 22:16**).

To commit a breach of faith or to be in rebellion against the Lord is to turn away from the Lord and repudiate him as your hope (apostasy).

Having raised their multifaceted question, the delegation prosecuted its inquisition further with a forceful rhetorical question concerning the devastating effects of the 'sin at Peor' that continued to trouble Israel to that very day (**Josh 22:17**).

If the eastern tribes played the rebel today, then tomorrow God would be angry with the entire nation (**Josh 22:18**).

Just as you can never sin for the moment without any consequences, so too you can never sin alone without affecting others.

God's tabernacle was in the West, and the ten western tribes were willing to give up part of their possessions in order to keep the eastern tribes from sinning (**Josh 22:19**).

It was better for Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh to give up their broad and fertile grazing lands than to turn against the Lord.

Their spiritual well-being was more important than their financial prosperity.

Note again the emphasis on the unity of God's people. If the eastern tribes rebel, it will make their brothers in the West rebels as well (**cf Achan's sin 22:20**).

Believers find their unity in the one place of sacrifice, a hill called Calvary.

By living and dying for his people, Jesus unites all of them through his perfect life, atoning work and glorious resurrection.

True Christian unity is rooted in the gospel because the finished work of Christ is the basis and criteria for all Christian fellowship.

When we look at other Christians, we love them and embrace them, not because they wear our distinctive labels or share our special interests or rally behind our hobby-horse causes, but because they were bought with the same price.

The gospel, who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for our salvation, provides the foundation for us to embrace our fellow believers in Him.