

Lesson 7 – Joshua 20-22

Text: Joshua 20-22

Key Passages:

- Joshua 21:43-45 – God gave Israel all of the lands that He had promised to give them.
- Joshua 22:11-12 – When Israel heard what the eastern tribes had done, they prepared for war.

Main Storyline:

After the other tribes had received their land, the Levites were in line to receive their cities. Recall that, though the Levites were not to be given parcels of land, as the other tribes were, they were to receive 48 cities scattered throughout Israel in which to live (see Numbers 35). These cities were divided between the families of Aaron (the priests' families), Kohath, Gershon, and Merari (recall the different duties of these families from Numbers 4).

Six of the Levite cities were designated as cities of refuge, where a person who had accidentally killed someone could run to in order to escape being killed by the dead person's family (specifically, the avenger). The six cities were evenly distributed on the eastern and western sides of the Jordan River (three on each side) with two in the northern areas, two in the central areas, and two in the southern areas. This arrangement allowed all of Israel to have relatively good access to a city of refuge if needed. Following the distribution of the Levite cities, all of Israel had received the land that God had promised to it. There was no promise regarding the land that had not been fulfilled by the Lord.

Finally, with the conquest and division complete, it was time for the soldiers from Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh to return to their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Before sending them off, Joshua encouraged them to continue to obey and love the Lord with all of their hearts and souls. He also encouraged them to share their spoils with their brethren that had remained home. Note that 40,000 soldiers from these tribes had crossed over the Jordan River (Joshua 4:13), but there were perhaps around 60,000 other soldiers (Numbers 26) who had to stay on the eastern side to care for and protect the families who remained there. Both roles were important to the safety and success of Israel.

The men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh departed and went back toward the eastern side of the Jordan River. However, before re-entering their land, they constructed a large altar as a witness and memorial to future generations of the necessity to keep their allegiance with God. Though they had good intentions, eventually the other Israelites heard of what they had done and immediately assumed that they had rebelled against God's commandments. This was of particular concern because they remembered what had happened with Achan (Joshua 7) and how his individual sin affected all of Israel.

The other 9 tribes assembled at Shiloh, preparing for war against the other tribes. However, they sent Phinehas, the high priest's son, and the ten chiefs from each tribe to speak with the other tribes to find out why the altar was built. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh explained that they had good intentions for its construction, and that it was not built out of rebellion, but rather out of fear. After realizing their error, the men returned back to the western side of the Jordan River, bringing back the good news to the other Israelites, who were pleased by the news.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) God keeps the promises He makes to us, no matter how long ago they were made.
- 2.) As long as we are each following the Lord to the best of our abilities, we are each deserving of the rewards that God has promised to us (1 Corinthians 12:12ff).
- 3.) We must not jump to conclusions based on hearsay and gossip; by doing so, we risk putting ourselves and others in difficult situations (Numbers 11:4ff, Proverbs 16:28).
- 4.) We must be zealous about cleansing ourselves and the church of sin (1 Corinthians 5).