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Press On

Joshua 22:1-9

1 Joshua summoned the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh **2** and told them, “You have done everything Moses the LORD’s servant commanded you and have obeyed me in everything I commanded you. **3** You have not deserted your brothers even once this whole time but have carried out the requirement of the command of the LORD your God. **4** Now that He has given your brothers rest, just as He promised them, return to your homes in your own land that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you across the Jordan. **5** Only carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you: to love the LORD your God, walk in all His ways, keep His commands, remain faithful to Him, and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.” **6** Joshua blessed them and sent them on their way, and they went to their homes. **7** Moses had given territory to half the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, but Joshua had given territory to the other half, with their brothers, on the west side of the Jordan. When Joshua sent them to their homes and blessed them, **8** he said, “Return to your homes with great wealth: a huge number of cattle, and silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a large quantity of clothing. Share the spoil of your enemies with your brothers.” **9** The Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in the land of Canaan to return to their own land of Gilead, which they took possession of according to the LORD’s command through Moses.

Exploration

Have you ever attended an event that had a significant spiritual impact on your life? Perhaps you grew significantly in your understanding of the gospel and your love for Christ at a camp, a mission trip, or a conference. What happened when you got back to “real life?” Did you maintain the passion that you had during that event in the weeks that followed? Did you follow through on the commitments you made? This is more or less the story we find in Joshua 22, only on a much larger scale.

The people of Israel had essentially accomplished the mission God had given Joshua of taking the promised land. In a sense, Joshua 22 recounts Israel returning back to real life after having witnessed God miraculously and mightily fight for them as they sought to fulfill their mission of gaining the promised land. As life returned to normal for the various tribes of Israel in the promised land, Joshua challenged them to persevere in loving and serving God with all their hearts and minds. How we live in the days and weeks that follow significant events says a great deal about us. As students come back from “mountain top” experiences, their faith in and passion for God will be challenged—they need the simple reminder to press on—to continue loving and serving the Lord no matter what.

CONTEXT (JOSH. 13:1–22:24)

The Book of Joshua can be divided into two sections. Chapters 1–12 record the conquest of the promised land. Some Bible scholars categorize Joshua’s victories as the Central Campaign (Jericho and Ai, chaps. 6–8), the Southern Campaign (the cities in the Jerusalem area but not Jerusalem, chap. 10), and the Northern Campaign (the city of Hazor and regions east of the Jordan River, chaps. 11–12). Joshua 11:23 summarizes the first 12 chapters with “So Joshua took the entire land, in keeping with all that the LORD had told Moses.” Joshua chapters 13–24 record the division of the promised land among the tribes. Joshua 11:23 transitions between the conquest and the division: “Joshua then gave it [the land] as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotment.”

Beginning with Joshua 13:8, the writer recorded the division of the land among the twelve tribes: Reuben (13:15), Gad (13:24), East Manasseh (13:29), Judah (15:1), Ephraim (16:5), West Manasseh (17:1), Benjamin (18:11), Simeon (19:1), Zebulun (19:10), Issachar (19:17), Asher (19:24), Naphtali (19:32), and Dan (19:40). Joshua 19:51 summarizes chapters 13–24: “So they finished dividing up the land.” In chapter 22, Joshua released the “fighting men” (see 1:14) of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh in order for them to rejoin their wives and children east of the Jordan River.

Compare the list of the tribes in the previous paragraph with the sons of Israel (Jacob) in Genesis 35:23. One immediately notices the names Levi and Joseph missing from tribal allotment. Because the Levites served as priests, the Lord gave them no land (Josh. 13:14; 14:3; also see Deut. 18:1–2 and 10:9, where the Lord served as the inheritance of the Levites). Two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, filled the two vacancies. In reference to tribal allotment, what many refer to as the sons of Israel (Jacob) are actually sons (10) and grandsons (2) of Israel.

Conversation

Open this time by discussing the following quick response questions that are also included in students' Personal Study Guides.

› **What is the most difficult challenge you have ever faced? How did you handle this challenge? What was the result?**

› **How did you feel when the challenge was over and you went back to everyday life?**

In competitions, we love the challenge of taking on a team that is more skilled and higher ranked because defeating a team like that would make us feel accomplished. There is a thrill that comes with boldly taking on difficult challenges, particularly ones where the odds seem stacked against us. We love stories like David and Goliath, Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt, and Joshua's conquest of the promised land because they all represent major challenges. The bigger the challenge, the sweeter the victory.

However, life is not always full of big challenges and we certainly are not always victorious. In fact, in this session we will look at a time in the lives of God's people when they were no longer facing such challenges. They had essentially accomplished the mission God had given them to take the promised land, and as a result, they were about to enter into a rather uninteresting time in their life as a nation. If we are honest, such times are often as challenging, if not more than times we were facing impossible odds and imposing obstacles. Students will explore a story where God's people found themselves facing a seemingly uninteresting and unimpressive challenge, the challenge of loving and seeking God on a daily basis in the land God had given them. If students are honest, most of what they do day in and day out is not impressive or particularly challenging, but that doesn't mean it is not important. How we respond when we find ourselves on the other side of big wins says a lot about us. In these instances, we need to be reminded to persevere in loving and serving God.

JOSHUA 22:1-3

As Israel was dividing up the promised land, Joshua specifically addressed two and a half tribes that were known as the "Eastern Tribes": the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh. These tribes had requested to be settled in the land to the East of the Jordan River providing that the adult men in these tribes participate in the conquest of Canaan (Num. 32:20-22). Apparently they were faithful in joining Joshua and the rest of Israel in fulfilling this mission as Joshua commends them and blesses them with the land they requested.

› **How does Joshua describe the people of these tribes (vv. 2-3)? How were they able to obey?**

Conversation

› **Joshua commends them not only for obedience to God, but also for obeying him. What can we learn from their example in terms of submitting to the authorities in our lives?**

Moses, “the servant of the Lord,” had delivered God’s commands to the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh and they had been faithful. Joshua further points out that they were also faithful to all that he had commanded them as the leader who took over in Moses’ place. While God does not speak to pastors and student pastors today the same way that He did to Moses and Joshua, the Bible is clear that all people in authority over us have ultimately received their authority from God (Rom. 13:1-7). While these two and a half tribes were certainly not perfect in their obedience to God, they were faithful. The overall testimony of their lives was one of persistent obedience to Moses and Joshua, and therefore to God. Stress to students that their submission to the authorities in their lives is ultimately a reflection of their faith and submission to God. The only instance in which we should disobey the authorities in our lives is if they command us to disobey God (1 Pet. 2:17).

JOSHUA 22:4-6

› **What did God give to these tribes on account of their faithfulness to His covenant? What is significant about this promise (see Gen. 12:1-3)?**

The Israelites had been nomads for some time now. In Joshua 22, we see that God followed through with His promise. God had not only promised that Abraham’s descendants would be a great nation, but also that He would give them a land of their own. He was true to His Word and the people of Israel were nomads no more—they had been graciously given a home, a place to call their own. This is a small reflection of the perfect land that God placed Adam and Eve in at the dawn of creation and it looks forward to the better land that God is preparing for all who have trusted in His Son (John 14:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:13).

› **God not only provided these tribes with the land they had requested, but also with rest (v. 4). What is significant about this promise (see Ex. 20:8-11)?**

› **How does the rest God provided relate to the rest Christ promises (Heb. 4:9-11)?**

On the surface, God’s gift of rest to the Israelites seems like a response to the long and difficult mission of occupying the promised land. Emphasize to students, however, that the rest God gave to the Israelites in these verses was the fulfillment of a promise that God made to Abraham long ago to give him a land and make him into a great nation. Once again, we see that our God is faithful to His promises.

Leader Prep

God also promised the Hebrews security from enemies (Deut. 12:10). The writer of Joshua wrote that none of the Hebrew enemies could stand against them (21:44). In fact, “None of the good promises the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed” (Josh. 21:45). None of the promises that Jesus makes to Christians will fail either.

JOSHUA 22:4-8

With the conquest of the promise land essentially complete, Joshua sent the men from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh home to their allotted territories east of the Jordan. No doubt the two and one-half tribes rejoiced when Joshua released them from military service. One can imagine these soldiers as they began their journey, home, knowing their wives and children were waiting for their return.

We wonder what the men thought as they began their journey home. Did they have a sense of gravity when considering their ongoing responsibility? As Christians, we have ongoing responsibilities. Jesus demands that we be forever faithful in our Christian responsibilities. Let the prayer of every believer be that the Lord might help us be forever responsible in our love, worship, work, and witness for Him.

Prior to their release, Joshua gave one final charge to the soldiers of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. Joshua charged them to be responsible to carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the Lord's servant gave you. This phrase contains two commands in the Hebrew: keep and do. Regarding the commandments and instruction of the Lord, Joshua issued a succinct, unambiguous command: "keep them!" and "do them!" Joshua's release from military responsibilities did not release them from their responsibility to the Lord.

Joshua provided clarification to his commands when he instructed them to love the Lord, to walk in His ways, be faithful to Him, and serve Him. The word translated *walk* can also be translated “live.” Joshua instructed these men to live according to the ways of the Lord. The verb rendered *remain faithful* literally means to “cleave” or “keep close.” In the Book of Genesis, the same verb is used in instructing the man to leave his father and his mother and “cleave” to his wife (Gen. 2:24). The noun that relates to this verb can be translated “slave.”

Joshua blessed the soldiers from Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh and sent them on their way. They returned to their homes as Joshua had commanded them (see v. 4).



Joshua's challenge to cling to God and commit to living in obedience to Him is similar to the apostle Paul insisting he was a slave of Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). Joshua left no room for irresponsibility; he instructed these men to serve the Lord with all their heart and all their soul, underscoring the need for the Israelites to be "all in" in terms of their commitment to the Lord.

[illegible]

Conversation

› **What three commands did Joshua give the Israelites in verse 5? Why did God's people need to be reminded of these commands?**

While Israel was entering into a period of much needed rest after a prolonged military campaign in Canaan, that did not mean they could check out and put their spiritual lives on auto-pilot. In fact, in this chapter we see the very tribes Joshua commends for their faithfulness to God being questioned and falsely accused of idolatry by the other tribes for Israel (Josh. 22:13-20). When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied by referencing Deuteronomy 6:4-9, claiming that the greatest command is to love God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37). Joshua 22:5 is essentially a condensed version of these verses whose teaching God intended to guide, shape, and direct the lives of His people. There is never a time when we don't need to be reminded to love God with all our hearts, obey all His commands, and walk in all His ways. It is no accident that this command comes after Joshua points out that God had been faithful to His promise to give His people a land of their own. When we understand how God has been faithful to His promises, then we can obediently engage the mission He has given us with confidence.

JOSHUA 22:7-9

› **Who did Joshua single out in these verses? What did he command them to do?**

› **How do you see God's provision for His people on display here? How might knowing that God will provide for us help us to obey Him?**

After commending the Eastern tribes and challenging them to continue loving and obeying God as they began life in the promised land, Joshua singles out the half-tribe of Manasseh. This tribe could easily have been overlooked given its decision to split off from the rest of Manasseh and settle east of the Jordan in Bashan, but Joshua instead commands them to take riches home with them to their new land, seeing to it that they were well cared for. Yet again, we see God's faithfulness and compassion on display in the lives of His people. Challenge students to take some time to consider the many ways God has provided and continues to provide for them. Help them make the connection between God's provision in our lives and the mission He has given us. God faithfully provides for us so that we are well-equipped and can faithfully engage in the mission He has given us.

GO DEEPER OPTION: Read Matthew 6:25-34 and 7:7-11. Guide students to take note of how God's character and provision give us confidence to live on mission for Him.

Leader Prep

These men, in all probability, could not remember a time when they had had a permanent home. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, every male 20 years old and older had died during the wilderness wanderings (Num. 14:29-30). These soldiers had been children and teenagers (less than 20 years old) when Joshua sent the spies to scout the promised land. They had grown up in the wilderness. They had little, if any, concept of a permanent home.

Verse 6 comprises a brief summary of what follows. Verses 7-8 provide further details regarding Joshua's blessing.

Verse 7 clarifies that the large tribe of Manasseh received an allotment of land on both sides of the Jordan River. When Moses allotted territory to the nine and one-half tribes on the west side of the Jordan River, he gave land to half the tribe of Manasseh (along with Reuben and Gad) in the territory of Bashan. Bashan was located almost directly east of the Sea of Galilee, with Gad located to the south of Bashan (now the half tribe of Manasseh), and Reuben located to the south of Gad.

Evidently, the initial prohibition against taking material things from conquered land had been lifted (Deut. 20:16-18). Perhaps initially, the Lord didn't want the Hebrews to be motivated by the possibility of material gain. Joshua sent the soldiers from Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh home with great wealth. The writer further defined this wealth as a huge number of cattle, and silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a large quantity of clothing.

Joshua previously had warned the Hebrews not to keep goods from Jericho (Josh. 6:19). Achan and his family died for disobeying this command at Ai (7:24-25). With this prohibition, Joshua's military would not have anticipated receiving anything materially. What a welcomed blessing for Joshua's army to be sent home with wealth in tow. Joshua gave one final command. He instructed them to share the spoils with their relatives.

Prior to crossing the Jordan River (to the east side), the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built a "large, impressive altar" (22:10). The nine and one-half tribes on the west side of the Jordan River interpreted this altar as a competitor to the true altar of Lord God. They assembled to wage war against the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The soldiers from the two and one-half tribes explained their altar. They didn't build it as a place of sacrifice. Instead, they built the altar as a memorial, signifying unity between the tribes on the west side of the Jordan with the tribes on the east side.



When God blesses us, it is important that we faithfully exercise our stewardship to bless others. We are to remember that everything we have is a gift from God (1 Cor. 4:7). The Lord wants us to use what He gives us as a channel of blessing to others as well.

Application

CENTRAL TRUTH

Following Christ requires us to press on in life, loving and serving Him with all that we are, regardless of the circumstances.

➤ **ITEM 4 (LEADER PACK)** Display the **Judges of Israel** pack item if you have purchased the leader pack. While this map shows the locations of the various judges of Israel who came after Joshua, it also shows the allotment of land that was given to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Point out where the three eastern tribes were located.

NOW WHAT?

› **Is it easier or more difficult for you to seek and obey God when life is “normal”? Why?**

Remind students that when life began returning to normal for God’s people in the promised land, God spoke to His people through Joshua and reminded them to remain faithful to Him. When things seem normal or routine is often when we are most susceptible to slipping up spiritually. Guide students to recognize that there never comes a point, this side of eternity, when we graduate spiritually. We always need to be reminded, challenged, and encouraged to love God supremely and grow in obedience to Him.

› **Look again at Joshua 22:5. Do these commands sound too challenging? Where can you find the strength you need to obey?**

› **In what areas of your life is it most difficult for you to obey God? What is one measure you will take this week to obey God in that area?**

› **How has God faithfully provided for you and your family? How might a greater awareness of this lead to greater faithfulness as you live on mission for Him?**

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section in their Personal Study Guides and to take the truths of this section and apply them to their lives.

› **Dwell:** Sometimes we neglect opportunities to live on mission for Christ because we wrongly assume we are ill-equipped for mission. We think that someone else is surely more equipped to share Christ with a lost friend or show mercy to someone in need. In such instances, we need to recount the many ways God has blessed and provided for us. Journal a list of God's provision in your life, of the ways God has provided for you both physically and spiritually. Then pray, asking God to help you rest in His provision and trust in His strength as you seek to live for His kingdom and glory.

› **Memorize:** Joshua 22:5

› **Pray:** Thank God for His faithfulness in your life and in the life of your family. Pray that He would help you to live with a deeper and more present awareness of His faithfulness and provision. Ask Him to help you press on in love and obedience to Him no matter what circumstances you find yourself in. Pray that the focus and purpose of your life would be centered on loving Him supremely and living on mission for Him.

KEEP ON DIGGING

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and journal a list of the blessings God promises to those who obey Him. While not all of these blessings will be experienced in this life, God promises tremendous blessings to those who commit their lives to faithfully obeying Him. The emphasis of Deuteronomy 28 is not on us earning blessings through obedience. None of the blessings we receive from God are deserved. Instead, these blessings highlight God's goodness toward His children, and the reality that He will not overlook any act of obedience that is done in faith.



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session with a study in Galatians, see lifeway.com/ETBWIN17JJR. For **free** training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.