

11. A misunderstanding from being out of God's will

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Being misunderstood is a difficult thing to handle, especially when we had all the good intention. People would accuse us for something we have no intention to do.

But being misunderstood because we are out of God's will is pretty much our fault and had it coming to our ways. When we find out that we are out of God's will, with good intentions or not, the best thing we need to do is get back into His will at any cost. But many people would rather stick with their choice over God's and eventually they would face the consequences of their choice.

Tonight, we are going to witness how the army of Israelites are dismissed as they see the rest in the land. But the two and a half tribes which chose to stay in the eastern region of the Jordan River get misunderstood in spite of their good intention.

A. THE SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 21

We will start with chapter 21 summary.

As we noted before, the tribe of Levi didn't have territory assigned to it but was scattered throughout the land. There were 48 levitical cities, six of which were also cities of refuge. Each of the tribes contributed four cities, except Judah and Simeon, who together contributed nine, and Naphtali, who contributed three.

Since the common people didn't own copies of the Scriptures, it was important that the Levites identify with the people and explain the Law to them. These levitical cities were so located that nobody was too far away from a man who could help them understand and apply the Law of Moses.

Joshua 21:43-45 So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. 44 The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45 Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

God kept His promises with this Israel people. At the close of his life Joshua would remind the people of this again in chapter 23. Solomon also reminded his people of it when he dedicated the temple in 1 Kings 8.

As the people of God, we, too, can claim these assurances by faith. God's covenant with us is not going to fail. God's power and wisdom can give us victory over every foe. Moreover God's promises can be trusted, no matter what the circumstances may be.

The covenant of God, the power of God and the promises of God – these are the spiritual resources we can depend on as we claim our inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

B. AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE

Joshua 22:1-8 Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, 2 and said to them: "You have kept all that Moses the ser-

vant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. 3 You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. 4 And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 (1) But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, (2) to love the Lord your God, (3) to walk in all His ways, (4) to keep His commandments, (5) to hold fast to Him, and (6) to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." 6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. 7 Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half of it Joshua gave a possession among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, 8 and spoke to them, saying, "Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren."

The soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh must have been especially excited when the Jewish conquest of Canaan ended. For over seven years they had been away from their families on the other side of the Jordan, and now the victorious soldiers were free to go home.

These tribes had been loyal to Moses, to Joshua, and to their brothers from the other tribes throughout the entire campaign.

Colossians 3:23-24 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

The concept of 'rest' is important in the Book of Joshua and means much more than simply the end of the war. The word carries with it the meaning of both victory and security, and it involved Israel having their "resting place" in the land. God promised to give His people rest, and He kept His promise.

When we trust Christ as Savior, we enter into His rest because we're no longer at war with God. When we yield ourselves completely to Him and claim our inheritance by faith, we enter into a deeper rest and enjoy our spiritual riches in Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like for these soldiers to return home after being away for so many years? Think of the excitement they would experience, the joys they would find, the treasures they would share with their families and loved ones. That's just a small picture of what happens when the born-again Christians enter into the rest God gives to those who will yield their all to Him and trust His Word.

Like any good leader, Joshua was more concerned about the spiritual walk of his people than anything else. The army had experienced victory in Canaan because Joshua loved the Lord and obeyed His Word, and that would be the "open secret" of Israel's continued peace and prosperity.

The motive for our obedience has to be love for the Lord our God. If we loved Him, then we would delight in walking in all His ways and obeying all His commandments. Jesus said this was the first and greatest commandment. In other words, to disobey it would mean to commit the greatest sin.

C. AN HONEST CONCERN

Joshua 22:9-10 So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses. 10 And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan--a great, impressive altar.

Before these two and a half tribes crossed Jordan River, they thought about the seven long years. Even though they are heading back home, somehow they began to feel isolated from the nation of Israel.

When we read Numbers 32, we can discover that there is no record that Moses consulted the Lord about allowing these tribes to stay on the east side of Jordan River. The thing Moses was most concerned about was that the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh do their share in fighting the enemy and conquering the Promised Land. Moses' first response should have been turning to God for His guidance.

There's no question that Canaan was God's appointed land for His people. Anything short of Canaan wasn't what He wanted for them. The two and a half tribes made their decision, not on the basis of spiritual values, but on the basis of material gain. Because the land east of the Jordan was ideal for raising cattle. I'm reminded of the decision Lot made when he pitched his tent toward Sodom. In both instances, they walked by sight and not by faith.

By choosing to stay in the eastern region, they become a distance away from the Tabernacle and closer to the enemy. They became what I call "borderline believers." The two and a half tribes portray believers who have experienced the blessings and battles of Canaan – their inheritance in Christ – but prefer to live on the border, outside God's appointed place of blessing.

How did they decide to solve the problem which they themselves had created? By building a large altar of stones by Jordan River, on the Canaan side, as a reminder to everybody that the two and a half tribes also belonged to the nation of Israel.

It's unfortunate when believers have to resort to artificial means to let people know they're God's people. How much better it would be if our Spirit-led conduct and speech made the unbelievers sit up and take notice. Why not wholeheartedly submerge ourselves in His presence instead of half-in and half-out?

D. A WILLINGNESS TO DO WHATEVER TO FOLLOW THE LORD

Joshua 22:11-29 Now the children of Israel heard someone say, "Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan--on the children of Israel's side." 12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them. 13 Then the children of Israel sent Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, 14 and with him ten rulers, one ruler each from the chief house of every tribe of Israel; and each one was the head of the house of his father among the divi-

sions of Israel. 15 Then they came to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying, 16 "Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord: 'What treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the Lord? 17 Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, 18 but that you must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it shall be, if you rebel today against the Lord, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. 19 Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, then cross over to the land of the possession of the Lord, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the Lord, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the Lord our God. 20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.' "

21 Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh answered and said to the heads of the divisions of Israel: 22 "The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know-- if it is in rebellion, or if in treachery against the Lord, do not save us this day. 23 If we have built ourselves an altar to turn from following the Lord, or if to offer on it burnt offerings or grain offerings, or if to offer peace offerings on it, let the Lord Himself require an account. 24 But in fact we have done it for fear, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your descendants may speak to our descendants, saying, "What have you to do with the Lord God of Israel? 25 For the Lord has made the Jordan a border between you and us, you children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no part in the Lord.'" So your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the Lord.' 26 Therefore we said, 'Let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, 27 but that it may be a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, "You have no part in the Lord.'" 28 Therefore we said that it will be, when they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say, 'Here is the replica of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, though not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between you and us.' 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn from following the Lord this day, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for grain offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the Lord our God which is before His tabernacle."

Their readiness to fight against their own people shows great courage to confront on behalf of God's truth and holiness. This was a healthy "body," able to purge itself of poisons.

But wisely, they waited while an official delegation investigated what was going on.
Proverbs 18:13 He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.

God had instructed the Jews to destroy the altars of the heathen nations in Canaan and not to build altars of their own. These two and a half tribes should not have built an altar even though they meant it well.

In v19, the rest of the tribes gave them a great chance to get back into the will of God. But the stubborn two and a half tribes chose to stay where they are for the sake of financial gain instead of obeying the Lord.

This was an invitation made at great cost. It would have meant a much smaller area of land for the western tribes. But it didn't matter, because they were willing to sacrifice to see their brothers free from this sin. Too many of us lack this willingness. We tell people to stop sinning, but are not willing to help them if it costs us something.

How many marriages, how many families and how many friendship came to screeching halt because of misunderstanding? To prevent any problems in misunderstanding, we need to do everything according to the Lord's way.

If we are the ones who misunderstood someone, before we accuse that person of wrong doing, we must ask that person in love about his or her true intention and motive and do a complete fact finding. We also must have a willingness to be quick to forgive and slow to anger.

When we are misunderstood, we should put ourselves in the shoes of the other person and try to see what they see. If we saw what they saw, we might respond in the same way.

Just because we have to apologize our wrong action, with a good intention, that doesn't mean we become dumb or lesser people. Actually, it take a better person to apologize even if you know what you did was done in a good intention.

Let's not give any opportunity to satan to cause dissensions among the family of God because of our pride and misunderstanding.

Somewhere near this "witness altar" were the twelve stones that the men had carried from the midst of the Jordan River. It reminded the Jews that they had crossed the river and buried their past forever. Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had crossed the river and gone back again. Their "altar" contradicted the altar that Joshua had erected to the glory of God.

E. A HAPPY ENDING?

Joshua 22:30-34 Now when Phinehas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. 31 Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh, "This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord." 32 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the rulers, returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them. 33 So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God; they spoke no more of going against them in battle, to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. 34 The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar, Witness, "For it is a witness between us that the Lord is God."

Phinehas was pleased, the delegation was pleased, and the Children of Israel across the Jordan were pleased. But was the Lord pleased? "Peace at any price" isn't God's will for His people.

The stones may have been a witness, but the people certainly were not. Surrounded by heathen nations and separated from their brothers and sisters across the river, these tribes quickly fell into idolatry and were eventually taken by Assyria.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) God's promises can be trusted, no matter what the circumstances may be.

2) The motive for our obedience has to be love for the Lord our God.

If we loved Him, then we would delight in walking in all His ways and obeying all His commandments.

3) When we find out that we are out of God's will, with good intentions or not, the best thing we need to do is get back into His will at any cost.

4) We should respond to misunderstandings according to these principles:

- Respond with a concern for God's holiness.
- Respond with the courage to confront in love.
- Respond with an attempt to reconcile before you fight.
- Determine that you are willing to sacrifice to help them; don't confront unless you are willing to help.
- Determine that you will see the situation from the perspective of the other person.
- Determine that you will believe the best of one another.