

Study Guide



Joshua 22– May 21, 2017 The Alter of Witness

Welcome (40 Minutes)

Be intentional to have authentic relationships...

Worship (5 Minutes)

As the group transitions from of a time of fellowship to a time of intentional study of the word, it is important to facilitate that transition with a time of worship. This can look like praying together, singing songs together, or rejoicing in what the Lord has done throughout the week.

Word (45 Minutes)

As we walk through Joshua we are going to see how Joshua relates to our everyday battle of faithfulness. **Our aim and our prayer for this study is to gain the wisdom we need for the battle of faithfulness.** During our time in Joshua we will be adapting our study guide from [Crossway's book, Knowing the Bible: Joshua, A 12-Week Study](#) by Trent Hunter. We recommend you purchase this book and use it in your Community Groups and for personal study as we go through Joshua. We have copies of the book available in our bookstore.

For further study on this weeks study please check out the following pages...

Walk Prayer & Missions

South Sudan & NOLA Baptist— For further information visit norrisferrychurch.org or contact Jared Clary (clary@norrisferrychurch.org)

Please see the list of local ministries under the "Walk" section below.

Calendar

May 26th-31st— [Student Life Camp](#)
May 29th-July 2nd— [Camp in the City](#)
June 10th— [Serve Shreveport](#)
June 11th— [Master Plan Meeting](#)
July 11th-16th— [Fort Worth Mission Trip](#)

Welcome (40 Minutes)

As you fellowship with one another, please be intentional about sharing what the Lord is doing in your lives. Get to know one another and encourage one another. Are your conversations pointing one another toward Christ?

Worship (5 Minutes)

If you are looking for a song to sing this week, here are the lyrics to "[King of My Heart](#)":

Let the King of my heart
Be the mountain where I run
The fountain I drink from
Oh-oh, He is my song
Let the King of my heart
Be the shadow where I hide
The ransom for my life
Oh-oh, He is my song

You are good, good, oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-ohh

Let the King of my heart
Be the wind inside my sails
The anchor in the waves
Oh-oh, He is my song
Let the King of my heart
Be the fire inside my veins
The echo of my days
Ohh! He is my song

You are good, good, oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-oh-ohh
You are good, good, oh-ohh

You're never gonna let
Never gonna let me down
You're never gonna let
Never gonna let me down
You're never gonna let
Never gonna let me down
You're never gonna let
Never gonna let me down (2x)

When the night is holding onto me
God is holding on
When the night is holding onto me
God is holding on

Commentary

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 (1:12-18) 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 eastern tribes depart from Shiloh (vs. 9) and build a giant altar. When the western tribes hear of the altar they assemble at Shiloh (vs. 12-20) and decide to send a delegation under the direction of Phinehas to inquire into the matter before they engage in war. In verses 16-20 they express their concern to the eastern tribes. But why all the fuss over building an altar? In Deuteronomy 12, Israel is commanded to offer their sacrifices only at "the place that the Lord your God will choose" out of all Israel's tribes. This place stands opposed to all the places where the Canaanites had customarily conducted their sacrifices to their gods. The restriction of sacrifice to one sanctuary was preventive theology, intended to preserve the purity of worship. **Basically, one altar, one faith, one people.** If there were allowed worship wherever people wanted to, it would soon take on Canaanite belief, practices, and gods. It would kill the faithfulness to the Lord and the unity of Israel. So, to the western tribes, this altar suggested man-chosen worship and sacrifice.

In the western tribes express of concern, they stress that any unfaithfulness by the two-and-a-half tribes would place all Israel under the Lord's anger. If the eastern tribes rebel today, the Lord's wrath will strike "all the congregation of Israel tomorrow (vs. 18). They refer to Achan in chapter 7. That was only one man's act but he didn't suffer alone. **One man's act of unfaithfulness placed the whole congregation under divine wrath.** So, it makes sense the western tribes are aroused by this altar. They know that sin permitted brings judgement on all, that unfaithfulness tolerated will infect more.

However, the eastern tribes go on oath that they had no unfaithful intention in their altar building, "let both the Lord and Israel take vengeance if they did" (vs. 21-23). The eastern tribe built the altar looking into the future. They, out of a Godly anxiety, were afraid that in a generation or so the descendants of the western tribes would treat their descendants with disdain, view the Jordan River as a Berlin Wall, and consider the eastern tribes as no part of the Lord's people. For here is a proper anxiety, to care about whether one's seed will be faithful to God and to take all necessary measures to insure that it might be so. Israel teaches us again to communicate the faith to our children in diligent, interesting, and persistent teaching.

Finally, the whole matter comes to a satisfying resolution (vs. 30-34). This altar is "a witness between us that the Lord is God" (vs. 34). Phinehas speaks for the tribal committee, "Today we know that the Lord is among us because you have delivered the sons of Israel from the Lord's hand" (vs. 31). The sons of Israel are satisfied. In fact, they bless God because their attack and destroy mission was not necessary (vs. 33). **So they praise God for causing his peace to rule among his people.**

In Old Testament faith the crucial confession is, "the Lord is God" (Deut. 4:32-40), just as "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3) stands at the center of the New Testament faith. **From the flow of the story we know that they mean to say, "The Lord is our God as well as yours, and therefore we are one people." Joshua 22 declares that it is truth that unifies the people of God, apart from truth there can be no unity. So God's people here declare their witness to his truth.**

Discussion

1. Read verses 1-6. Here we see that Joshua releases the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to go back to their own land on the other (eastern) side of the Jordan River. All of this time they had been fighting next to the other 10 tribes as they fought for the land on the western side of the Jordan—in the area where the current nation of Israel is located. In verse 5 Joshua urges them to be careful to observe the Law and commandments when they go back to their own land east of the Jordan. In the last part of verse 5 what does it mean to observe the Law and commandments? What verbs does Joshua use to describe how they should live their lives? Is this a description of dry obedience to laws or is it a description of a living, active relationship with God?
2. When you read verses 10-12 you see that a serious controversy and potential conflict arose because the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built a large altar in Canaan before they crossed the Jordan to enter their own lands in Gilead. What was the first impulse of the 10 tribes of Canaan concerning this altar that the other 2 ½ tribes had built next to the Jordan River? Please read Deuteronomy 12:1-14 to understand what was the perceived problem with the building of this altar. Also read Joshua 22:29 to confirm the nature of this perceived problem. Why were the 10 tribes so upset about this altar?
3. Looking at verses 13-20, in what ways did the western 10 tribes demonstrate wisdom in this confrontation? In what ways did they demonstrate grace?
4. Why were the western tribes so concerned about what the eastern tribes had done (vs. 18 & 20)? If the eastern tribes were rebelling against God, wouldn't they bear the consequences themselves?
5. Looking at verses 21-29 what was the explanation that the 2 ½ eastern tribes gave for building the altar? What was the intended purpose of the altar?

6. What future potential problems were the eastern tribes trying to avoid by building this altar?

7. Looking at verses 30-31, what was the reaction of Phinehas and the leaders of the 10 tribes to the explanation from the 2 ½ eastern tribes?

8. Looking at verses 32-34, what was the reaction of the people of the 10 tribes when they heard the explanation?

Application

1. What good principles to avoid conflict and create unity do you see in this story?

2. What parts of the description of observing the commandments of God in verse 5 are most meaningful to you? Which parts do you have a longing to be more a part of your life?

3. After reading the whole story, what do you think about the decision of the eastern tribes to build this altar?

Walk (30 minutes)

After enjoying fellowship, worship, and time in God's word together, it is now time to pray together as a group and encourage one another in the faith. It is very easy for this portion of the group time to be consumed by the other portions. However, this segment of the group time is crucially important. It answers the question, how do we apply what we are learning in Joshua to our lives today?

Many groups have found that it is helpful to sometimes break up into a men's group and a women's group for the purpose of being able to be more transparent and honest as we encourage one another and keep one another accountable. I encourage you to try this in your groups.

In addition to praying for, and encouraging, one another, this portion of the group time should also be used for planning how your group can participate in God's work outside the walls of our church – "neighbors and nations." Discuss with your group some ideas on how you can be intentional with building relationships with your neighbors and co-workers. What can your Community Group do to impact the area around you?

Here is a list of local ministries Norris Ferry is actively involved in:

Hub/purchased
Young life
Heart of hope
First priority
Ark-la-Tex crisis pregnancy center
Community renewal
Grief counseling
Celebrate recovery
Samaritan counseling
Last call ministries
Golden age ministries
Rescue mission
Luke's lighthouse
FCA

May the Lord bless and encourage you as you are in your groups this week! Know that we are praying for you on a weekly basis and that we are here to help you in any way that we can!