

Jos223 – Hearsay, Assumption & War – Joshua 22
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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Hearsay, Assumption and War.” This is a unique and practical and if you’ll receive it, a very powerful message. We’re turning to Joshua Chapter 22.

War? What kind of war are we talking about? Remember the physical war in Joshua is a *type* (picture) of the war we face to take possession of the Promised Life today. And so the kind of war that we see today in Joshua 22 is a picture of “civil” war.

I think “civil” war (in quotes) is a perfect “play on words” for the wars we face *within the body of Christ*. You know, brother attacking brother. Sister attacking sister. Those in the church attacking the leaders. The Leaders attacking those in the church.

You know – it’s all very ... “civil” because we all go about attacking each other so civilly and very often those attacks start with *hearsay and assumption*. Today we’re talking about HOW (within the CHURCH) hearsay and assumption can so easily lead to war, which can very easily end in *spiritual* death.

Let’s pray. *Lord, Jesus, give us the intensity of this subject. Allow us to see where we’re at on either side of a civil war – where we have been or where we may be potentially moving towards right now. Interrupt us, Lord. Interrupt our thoughts. Take hold of our hearts and our minds and through this incredible illustration in your Word, convict us and exhort us and transform us by your power and for your glory and in your name, Jesus, amen.*

Today we’re going to see God’s people gear up to attack one another suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere. God’s people, who have been serving together and fight the real battle together for over seven years suddenly are going to turn on their own and prepare to go to war – all because of hearsay and assumption.

I have lived through this exact story far too many times and I know many of you have as well. And I have been guilty of being on both sides of this type of “war between believers” and being on either side – the end result is pain and stress and anguish in our lives. Often, the most we get out of it is a thank you note from hell – thank us for doing their work for them in the church.

But also, God in his grace has used those wars to mold me and shape me, to heal me and to prepare me, and I pray he would do the same thing for you for his glory and for the good of the body of Christ.

In Joshua 22, we meet up again with the two and a half tribes who chose their inheritance on the wrong side of the Jordan River – the east side. They begged Moses to allow them to live just on the “wrong side” of the Jordan, and Moses finally agreed, on one condition. The soldiers had to join the remainder of Israel in taking full possession of the Promised Land.

If you will fight with us and stand shoulder to shoulder with us, until the entire land is ours... then you can go back to the land you chose on the other side. And these soldiers did exactly that. They did fight alongside their brothers all the way until Israel had subdued the land. And today, those soldiers from those two and a half tribes finally get to return home to their families on the other side of the Jordan.

The last two verses of Joshua 21 say *The Lord had helped Israel conquer ALL of their enemies and HE had given Israel REST on every side.* And the soldiers from these two and a half tribes had been a crucial part of all that happening.

We pick it up in Joshua 22:1-4.

Joshua 22:1–4 (NLT)

1 Then Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. (the 2 ½ tribes)

2 He told them, “You have done as Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, and you have obeyed every order I have given you.”

3 During all this time you have not deserted the other tribes. You have been careful to obey the commands of the Lord your God right up to the present day.”

4 And now the Lord your God has given the other tribes rest, as he promised them. So go back home to the land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you as your possession on the east side of the Jordan River.”

What a great commendation to the soldiers of these two and a half tribes. They sacrificed their own lives, they were separated from their families and their homes and they had fought together for the good of their brothers. And so Joshua commends them for a job well done and then he also exhorts them as they leave to return to their home on the other side of the river.

Joshua 22:5 (NLT)

5 But be very careful to obey all the commands and the instructions that Moses gave to you. Love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul.”

What an incredibly powerful verse to send someone out with. We should be hearing this verse at every “sending” moment.

The first time I taught Joshua my oldest daughter was sixteen. Now she is thirty-one, almost double in age. And I read in my own notes from then how I prayed I would pass this verse along to all my kids, when they left home. And I can tell you for sure – all three of our children left home with a very strong commitment to each of these exhortations and THAT is the greatest blessing in Pam and I’s life.

Verse 5 is a keeper verse – what a great “sending out verse.”

And so we read in Joshua 22:6,

Joshua 22:6 (NLT)

6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went home.

Then in verses 7-8 is the description of all the wealth these soldiers left with for all their labor.

And then Joshua 22:9

Joshua 22:9 (NLT)

9 So the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the rest of Israel at Shiloh in the land of Canaan. They started the journey back to their own land of Gilead, (the other side of the Jordan) the territory that belonged to them according to the Lord’s command through Moses.

It’s quite a trek from Shiloh to Jordan. And as these soldiers walked, I think they began feeling further and further away from their spiritual family. And as they got further and further away from Shiloh and the Tribes of Israel and they start worrying just a little bit.

Joshua 22:10 (NLT)

10 But while they were still in Canaan, and when they came to a place called Geliloth near the Jordan River, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh stopped to build a large and imposing altar.

It seems as they came to the edge of the Jordan River they’re feeling more and more separated from the other tribes. And so someone comes up with an idea.

“I know. Let’s build something to remind us – and them - that we are still part of Israel, let’s build something that will connect us.”

And someone says, ***“Yeah, how ‘bout if we build a massive replica of the ALTAR that’s in the tabernacle to remind everybody that we’re still part of Israel and that we still worship the same God?”***

And **everyone** says – ***“Yeah, that sounds like a great idea.”***

However, if you were to study God’s requirements for the only altar that was to be in Israel, you would quickly find out this was not a good idea.

There was to be ONLY ONE Altar in Israel

ONLY ONE Place to Worship

ONLY ONE Way to Worship

ONLY ONE Tribe (Levites) who oversaw the WORSHIP

If any tribe were to build a second altar especially on the fringes of the Promised Land, it might be assumed that tribe was falling away from the true worship of God and maybe planning to worship the pagan idols of the world around them – on that altar.

But was that the motivation of these soldiers? NO WAY. The motive of their hearts was *good*. Their choice of monuments was *bad*. Building a replica of the only holy altar might cause the rest of God’s people to come to a rushed and incorrect assumption – especially if some hearsay was mixed in.

The motive of these two and a half tribes was good. They just wanted a visible reminder that they were still part of the People of God that they still worshipped the same God of Israel. And they would have assumed the rest of the church would understand their good motives and their good intentions.

However...

By the time this news got back to Shiloh that these tribes were building another altar. It might have gotten blown out of proportion just a little bit and you can tell that by the response we are about to see from the rest of the church.

Oh... did I say “church”?

Because I meant for you to be clearly thinking of the church and how often this happens today in the church and between fellow believers.

So, here’s what happens next.

Joshua 22:11–12 (NLT)

11 The rest of Israel heard that the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar at Geliloth at the edge of the land of Canaan, on the west side of the Jordan River.

12 So the whole community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and prepared to go to war against them.

Wait just a minute...

Five verses ago these two and a half tribes were being commended and congratulated. The trumpeters were blowing and the flags were waving and hugs and high-fives all around. Now the same people who were praising the two and a half tribes five verses ago are now sharpening their swords to take their heads off.

How in the world does a relationship go from so good to so bad, so fast? The answer may be in the first words of verse 11.

11 The rest of Israel heard. . .

Joshua 22:11 (NLT)

11 The rest of Israel heard that the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar . . .

The match that lit the fire, the blasting cap that set off the dynamite are the words “***The rest of Israel HEARD. . .***” and immediately they’re ready to kill their own.

Is that not a tragic and accurate picture of what happens so often in the Church? Many of us have experienced being on one side of something like this or the other, and either side (or both sides) can have good intentions but still the swords are being sharpened and some heads are going to roll and there very likely will be some spiritual death.

What we must be committed to seeing both in our text today and in our conflicts in church is... motive. What is the motive behind the action? God looks at the heart. We spent an entire message on that last week. In contrast, we generally go to war based on hearsay and assumptions, which is the very opposite of godly even if we are attacking in the name of God.

The motive (the heart) of the two and a half tribes building the replica of the altar was good. They wanted to maintain a connection between them and the rest of the family of God. But the motive of the other tribes was also basically good. Their motive was to keep the worship of God pure and right and that motive is good. So they both had basically good motives, but heads were still about to roll.

And that is a perfect picture of what happens very often in the church today. Often, both side of a church conflict have basically good motives, but they're still about to start "spiritually killing" one another.

But now, but by the grace of God... just before the swords came out God whispered a little of his own wisdom into somebody's ear. And so we read in Joshua 22:13-14,

Joshua 22:13–14 (NLT)

13 First, however, (before the swords come out) they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to talk with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

14 In this delegation were ten leaders of Israel, one from each of the ten tribes, and each the head of his family within the clans of Israel.

So, God whispers in someone's ear, "***You know, before you start taking HEADS OFF why don't you actually GO talk to them first?***"

This Phinehas was Aaron's grandson and a very wise man. And Phinehas leads this group out to have a little "chat" with the two and a half tribes while everyone else stays home sharpening their swords.

Joshua 22:15–16 (NLT)

15 When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh,

16 "The whole community of the Lord demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel (that is a false assumption). How could you turn away from the Lord(another false assumption) and build an altar for yourselves in rebellion against him? (3rdfalse assumption)

There are so many incorrect assumptions here; it looks like a script for a CNN interview of President Trump. Nothing these leader are accusing the two and a half tribes of is anywhere near true or accurate, which is often the case in many conflicts between believer's in the Body of Christ.

They didn't come in swinging *physical swords*, but they came in swinging *verbal swords*. A little hearsay, a little assumption and full-scale war is about to break out. I've seen this happen so often in the church, I genuinely have some PTSD from it, and although the physical swords are still put away (for the moment) the verbal swords are still flying.

As they continue in Joshua 22:17-18,

Joshua 22:17–18 (NLT)

17 Was our sin at Peor not enough? To this day we are not fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire community of the Lord.

18 And yet today you are turning away from following the Lord (false assumption). If you rebel against the Lord today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

They're referring to an event in Numbers Chapter 25 at Peor when God struck down 24,000 in the camp of Israel because they had begun to worship the pagan god Baal as part of their sexual relations with the women of Moab. It was this same Phinehas, Aaron's grandson who put an end to that judgment from God. So here, the accusers assume these two and a half tribes are headed down that same path. It just doesn't happen to be true at all.

And they are not done yet. They continue in Joshua 22:19.

Joshua 22:19 (NLT)

19 "If you need the altar because the land you possess is defiled, then join us in the Lord's land, (on the 'right side' of the Jordan) where the Tabernacle of the Lord is situated, and share our land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar other than the one true altar of the Lord our God

Why in the world have they not asked these tribes what it is that they're doing and why? Why haven't they made any attempt to determine the motive behind what they're doing? Because they don't need to, they had already heard enough through the grapevine. The gossip machine has already brought them the truth and they've already made their decision. Why cloud it all up with the truth?

And they are still not finished. They have one more job left.

Joshua 22:20 (NLT)

20 Didn't divine anger fall on the entire community of Israel when Achan, a member of the clan of Zerah, sinned by stealing the things set apart for the Lord? He was not the only one who died because of his sin."

This job is referring to Joshua Chapter 7, the sin that brought defeat at Ai, and they're reminding the two and a half tribes that Achan's entire family was killed as judgment for his sin – and they are implying this is the same situation.

But is it... really?

The accusers don't even know, do they, because they won't shut up long enough to listen? But then a wonderful thing happens – the accusers pause to take a breath and finally leave an opening for the two and a half tribes to respond.

And look at this incredible response.

Joshua 22:21–22 (NLT)

21 Then the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the clans of Israel:

22 “The Lord, the Mighty One, is God! The Lord, the Mighty One, is God! He knows the truth, and may Israel know it, too! We have not built the altar in treacherous rebellion against the Lord. If we have done so, do not spare our lives this day.

What a great response from the two and a half tribes. Instead of returning the attack on the attackers (which our flesh would be inclined to do), they invoke three names of God in succession and then repeat the names of God. (They might be trying to get a point across.

The three name of God at the beginning of verse 22 are:

#1) YAHWEH – The Covenant Name of God

The personal name of God because they HAD a personal covenant with their God.

#2) EL – It means “Mighty God” – or “The One True God”

and I think about now – the two and a half tribes are looking for the One True TRUTH to come out

#3) ELOHIM – Which is the Plural Intensive of EL
and which - Greatly AMPLIFIES the use of EL

YAHWEH . . . EL . . . ELOHIM – the personal covenant making God, - the one true God
- that mighty God . . .

They're saying God knows the truth and may God make Israel know it as well!

Man, oh man, is that powerful. I assure you, at this point, the accusers are beginning to slowly slip their swords back into their sheaths as the accused tribes continue their response. Their response is long but critical, so please stay with me.

Joshua 22:23–29 (NLT)

23 If we have built an altar for ourselves to turn away from the Lord or to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings, may the Lord himself punish us.

24 “The truth is, (in case you're interested) we have built this altar because we fear that

in the future your descendants will say to ours, ‘What right do you have to worship the Lord, the God of Israel?’

25 The Lord has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and you people of Reuben and Gad. You have no claim to the Lord.’ So your descendants may prevent our descendants from worshipping the Lord.

26 “So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, 27but as a memorial. It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the Lord at his sanctuary(the correct place) with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings. Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no claim to the Lord.’

28 “If they say this, our descendants can reply, ‘Look at this copy of the Lord’s altar that our ancestors made. It is not for burnt offerings or sacrifices; it is a reminder of the relationship both of us have with the Lord.’

29Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. Only the altar of the Lord our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose.”

Oh, well then... umm... why didn't you say so?

Because you were too busy tearing my head off with your false accusations and your assumptions!

Guys, listen to me please. When the motive of everyone's heart finally comes out, often nobody has to die after all! These tribes were not rebelling, in fact the very opposite was true. The motive of their hearts was to prevent their future generations from rebelling. The truth just happened to be exactly opposite of what the accusers assumed.

Now, was building a replica of the altar a good idea? Definitely not, but no one needed to die over it.

And so, with the truth of everyone's motives made clear, guess what happened? Peace prevailed!

Joshua 22:30–31 (NLT)

30 When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of Israel—heard this from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were satisfied.

31 Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, replied to them, “Today we know the Lord is among us because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord as we thought. Instead, you have rescued Israel from being destroyed by the hand of the Lord.”

And so, as it turns out, both sides were trying to follow the Lord and both sides made mistakes, and thankfully the hearsay and the assumptions did not lead to war (just barely) and these two groups from the same church don't end up killing each other after all.

And so we close with lessons that can be easily and clearly learned from Joshua Chapter 22.

NUMBER ONE: It is dangerously wrong to prepare to go to WAR – Based on HEARSAY and ASSUMPTIONS.

Do not judge that person's motives until you truly know their motives, until you genuinely look them in the eye and get a good handle on why they're doing what they're doing.

NUMBER TWO: It's good to be on ALERT for compromise slipping into the church – But don't KILL people – until you know their MOTIVES (their heart)

NUMBER THREE: When genuine and honest MOTIVES are shared – IN LOVE - the conflict MAY end right there – With NO spiritual bloodshed.

You cannot be a Christian for very LONG without experiencing the potential for CONFLICT – either with another person or with the leaders of your church. When you do, please leave your sword at home and go find out that person's true motive for what you've heard they've done or for what you've assumed they've done.

Don't let hearsay and assumptions lead to war. Nobody has to spiritually die today! At least not at your hands.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, please refine us. Mold and shape us, transform us. Take the dross off the top as you keep us on the fire. Purify our lives that we would bring you glory, that we would not be on hell's payroll, that we would not be attacking fellow believers. That we would refuse to listen to hearsay, that we would reject assumptions, and that we would seek out the true motives of a person's heart and act on those and those alone. Give us wisdom, God. Give us your wisdom. Crucify our flesh. Allow us to walk in the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Remind us of this when we soon are in this situation. Remind us by your Spirit, in your name Jesus, and for your glory, amen.*