**THE MISUNDERSTOOD ALTAR**

*Wandering in the Wilderness*

SS Lesson 30

8/3/2025

Joshua 22

**Lesson Review:** For our twenty-ninth lesson, we looked at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Our first observation was that even after many years, Caleb had not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the promise of God to him. He remembered that Moses, through the Lord’s Word, had promised a special \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for Caleb because of his faith in the Lord. He was also not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to remind Joshua of the promise that God had made. Our second observation was that even after many \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Caleb had not lost any of his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from God. From reading chapter fourteen, it’s clear that Caleb was still very much strong both \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. It’s also clear that Caleb was still very much strong in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Our third observation was that even after many \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Caleb chose the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of Mount \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Caleb chose the very mountain where the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ still lived. Even after all that time had passed, Caleb was eager to fight those giants. He wanted to prove out the faith that he had shown when he made that report for Israel all those years ago. He still believed those giants could be easily defeated. As a result, God gave Caleb the mountain that he wanted. That mountain became one of the most important places in all of Israel. After Caleb’s victory, Hebron became a place of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. It also became a city for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the first \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for King David. For today’s lesson, we are going to be looking at a big misunderstanding that took place among the Israelites over an altar that was built:

1. **THE ALTAR TEACHES US THAT EVEN GOOD ACTIONS CAN BE MISUNDERSTOOD.**
2. **Notice that people often jump to conclusions before asking questions and trying to understand situations.** *Joshua 22:11–12 “And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.” Proverbs 18:13 “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”* When the tribes of Israel heard that an altar had been built near the Jordan, they immediately assumed it was an act of rebellion against God. Without verifying the intent, they prepared to go to war against their own brethren. Their concern for God’s holiness was right, but their reaction was based on assumption rather than confirmation. Even good motives can lead to dangerous decisions if they are not guided by truth. This reminds us that believers must avoid forming judgments without all the facts. Even spiritual concerns must be handled with wisdom and restraint. If we do not learn to examine before reacting, we may hurt those we are called to love.
3. **Notice that there are often times where situations are not exactly as they seem to be.** *Joshua 22:26–27 “Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: But that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD.” John 7:24 "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."* The altar looked like it was meant to replace the altar at the tabernacle, but the builders had no such intention. Instead, they built it as a symbolic witness—a reminder to future generations that they belonged to the same covenant and worshipped the same God. While the appearance seemed suspicious, the motive was entirely honorable and rooted in unity. This teaches us that surface-level observation can be misleading. The spiritual maturity to judge righteously means slowing down, asking questions, and looking deeper than appearances. Before we pass judgment on others, we must consider whether our perspective is complete and grounded in truth. We must understand that appearances can be misleading.
4. **THE ALTAR TEACHES US THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT.**
5. **Notice that wise believers seek truth rather than thriving on accusations or gossip.** *Joshua 22:16 “Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?” Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."* The leaders of Israel, led by Phinehas, approached the eastern tribes directly and asked them about the altar. Their tone was firm, but their approach was right. They sought dialogue before judgment. This was a vital step that prevented unnecessary bloodshed. Their decision to investigate instead of react showed spiritual maturity and respect for their brethren. Godly communication is key to preventing division. We are commanded to go to our brother privately and in humility, not to broadcast assumptions or declare war before we understand the truth. A commitment to biblical resolution can prevent lifelong divisions and painful regret.
6. **Notice that conflict may often be avoided through clear communication.** *Joshua 22:21–22 “Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, 22 The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord, (save us not this day,)” Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."* The eastern tribes replied with sincerity and humility. They acknowledged God as judge and explained that the altar was not for sacrifice but as a testimony of unity. Their gentle and honest response turned away wrath and restored fellowship. By communicating clearly, they removed all doubt and preserved the bond between both sides. This shows the power of clarity and humility in resolving conflict. When explanations are rooted in truth and spoken with respect, misunderstandings can be turned into moments of unity. Peacemaking often begins with a calm voice and a clear explanation of purpose.
7. **THE ALTAR TEACHES US THAT UNITY MUST BE ACTIVELY PURSUED AND PRESERVED.**
8. **Notice that the children of Reuben and Gad were concerned that the Jordan would cause a division between them and the rest of Israel.** *Joshua 22:25 “For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD.”Ephesians 4:3 "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* The eastern tribes feared that future generations would feel disconnected from Israel because of the Jordan River. To prevent this, they built a witness to preserve their shared spiritual identity and keep the next generation tied to the worship of God. Their foresight showed deep spiritual concern for the future. Unity doesn’t happen by accident. It requires effort, foresight, and a willingness to address potential issues before they divide. We must intentionally work to maintain fellowship with other believers even when circumstances might separate us. Strong fellowship must be pursued with purpose, not left to chance.
9. **Notice that shared faith is the object that should bind the children of God.** *Joshua 22:34 “And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar Ed: for it shall be a witness between us that the LORD is God.”Psalm 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* The altar was named “Ed,” meaning “witness,” and was left standing as a testimony that all tribes—whether east or west of the Jordan—were united in worship of the one true God. It was not a monument of division, but a symbol of unity. That altar helped teach future generations the importance of staying connected to their spiritual roots. Shared faith is not just a practice or tradition; it is the very substance of our identity in Christ. What binds us is not our proximity or preferences, but our commitment to the same Lord, the same Spirit, and the same truth. When unity is visibly demonstrated, it leaves a lasting impression on the next generation.
10. **THE ALTAR TEACHES US THAT HUMILITY IS ESSENTIAL IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.**

* **Notice that humble and wise believers are glad when misunderstanding is cleared.** *Joshua 22:30 “And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them.”* The leaders didn’t argue, push back, or insist on being right. When they heard the explanation, they were glad. Their humility allowed them to receive the truth and rejoice in the unity that had been preserved. They chose grace over pride and reconciliation over retaliation. This is a mark of true spiritual wisdom : the ability to accept truth even if it proves our suspicions wrong. When our goal is peace and not pride, God is honored, and fellowship is strengthened. Sometimes, our pride would rather us ruin a relationship than trying to win over a brother or sister in Christ. The hurt pride of being wrong is a hard pill to swallow.