

# Joshua 22:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

## Analysis

**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.**

The word "heard say" (shama leimor, לְאִמּר שָׁמָע) introduces secondhand report, not eyewitness testimony—this becomes crucial to the conflict. The verb "behold" (hinneh, הִנֵּה) expresses surprise or alarm. The phrase "built an altar" (banu mizbeach, בָּנו מִזְבֵּחַ) triggers immediate crisis because Deuteronomy 12:4-14 explicitly forbade multiple altars—Israel must worship only at the place God chose (the tabernacle, then Jerusalem). An unauthorized altar suggested covenant rebellion and idolatry.

The location "over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan" is geographically ambiguous. Does it mean facing Canaan from the eastern side, or on the western Canaanite side facing eastward? This ambiguity fuels suspicion. "At the passage" (el gelilot haYarden, אֶל-גָּלִילוֹת הַיַּרְדֵּן) suggests near a ford or crossing point—a highly visible location, which seems odd for secret idolatry but makes sense for a memorial (as 22:26-28 will explain).

## Historical Context

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The centralization of worship was fundamental to Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 12:1-14). Unlike pagan nations with shrines at every high place, Israel's single sanctuary prevented syncretism and maintained pure worship. Unauthorized altars had resulted in divine judgment before—Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16), the golden calf (Exodus 32), and Baal-Peor (Numbers 25). The western tribes' alarm was theologically justified—the entire community could suffer for one group's sin (Joshua 7:1-26, Achan's theft). The Jordan River crossing points were limited to specific fords, especially during non-flood seasons. A large altar at a major crossing would be impossible to miss—its visibility suggests the eastern tribes intended it as a witness (22:27-28), though the western tribes initially interpreted it as apostasy. The historical parallel to Jeroboam's later golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-30) shows this fear wasn't paranoid—rival altars did eventually lead to Israel's division and idolatry.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. How quickly do you jump to worst-case interpretations when observing others' actions without understanding their motives or asking directly?
2. What theological principles are worth defending zealously, even at risk of conflict, versus matters where misunderstanding should prompt conversation first?
3. How can you balance doctrinal vigilance with charitable assumption toward fellow believers whose practices differ from yours?

## Interlinear Text

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בָּנִי הָנָפָה לְאַמְּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
And the children of Israel say have built

בָּנִי תִּשְׁמַע  
heard And the children of Israel say have built

H8085 H1121 H3478 H559 H2009 H1129

שְׁבָט יִחְצַי גַּד בָּנִי רְאוּבֵן  
And the children of Reuben And the children of Gad and the half tribe

בָּנִי  
And the children of Reuben of Gad and the half tribe

H1121 H7205 H1121 H1410 H2677 H7626

אֶל כְּתָעֵל אֶצְזָבֵל מִלְּמַנְשֵׁה ה  
over against the land of Canaan

אֶל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ אֶת בְּמִזְבֵּחַ הַמְּנַשֵּׁה  
of Manasseh an altar over against the land of Canaan

H4519 H853 H4196 H413 H4136 H776 H3667 H413

יִשְׂרָאֵל: בָּנִי עַבְרֵן אֶל בְּרֵד גְּלִילּוֹת  
And the children of Israel in the borders of Jordan at the passage

בָּנִי  
in the borders of Jordan at the passage

H1121 H3478 H413 H5676 H1552 H3383

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