

Joshua 22:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest,

Analysis

And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest. This verse introduces the diplomatic delegation sent to investigate a potential crisis. The phrase "children of Israel" refers to the nine and a half tribes west of the Jordan, while Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had settled east of the Jordan (Numbers 32).

The choice of Phinehas as leader is significant. As "son of Eleazar the priest," he carried both spiritual authority and a proven track record of zeal for God's holiness (Numbers 25:7-13). His earlier action stopping a plague by executing idolaters established him as uncompromising regarding covenant purity. Sending him signals the seriousness of the suspected transgression.

The context reveals that the eastern tribes had built an altar (v. 10), alarming the western tribes who feared idolatry and covenant violation that would bring God's judgment on all Israel. Rather than immediately declaring war, Israel sent representatives to investigate and confront—modeling Matthew 18's pattern of addressing sin. The passage emphasizes unity in the body: one tribe's sin affects all. This anticipates the church, where members bear responsibility for one another's faithfulness (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Historical Context

This event occurred shortly after Joshua's conquest of Canaan (circa 1400 BC), as tribes were settling their allotted territories. The eastern tribes (Reuben, Gad, half-Manasseh) had requested land east of the Jordan for their livestock (Numbers 32) but promised to help conquer western Canaan before returning home. They had now fulfilled that promise (Joshua 22:1-6).

The altar they built at the Jordan (v. 10) was misunderstood as a rival to the tabernacle at Shiloh, violating Deuteronomy 12's command for centralized worship. Israel's concern was legitimate—remembering the Achan incident (Joshua 7), they knew one person's sin brought judgment on all. The near civil war that almost erupted demonstrates both Israel's zeal for covenant purity and the danger of acting on assumptions without investigation.

Phinehas' leadership prevented bloodshed. The delegation discovered the altar was memorial, not for sacrifice (v. 26-27)—a witness to future generations that eastern tribes shared in Israel's covenant despite geographical separation. Archaeological evidence shows tribal boundaries were important in ancient Israel, and this altar served to affirm unity across the Jordan divide. The incident teaches the importance of communication and clarification before conflict.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can we balance zeal for truth with careful investigation before making accusations?

2. What role does godly leadership (like Phinehas) play in preventing unnecessary division?
3. How should we respond when fellow believers' actions appear to compromise biblical truth?
4. What memorials or practices help maintain unity among geographically or culturally separated believers?
5. How does this passage inform church discipline and restoration processes today?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּשְׁלַח וְאֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְאֶת בְּנֵי

sent And the children of Israel And the children of Reuben

H7971 H1121 H3478 H413 H1121 H7205 H413

וְאֶת בְּנֵי גָּד וְאֶת בְּנֵי מֹנְשֵׁה וְאֶת בְּנֵי שְׁבָט

And the children of Gad and to the half tribe of Manasseh

H1121 H1410 H413 H2677 H7626 H4519 H413

וְאֶת בְּנֵי פִּינְהָס וְאֶת בְּנֵי אֶלְעָזָר וְאֶת בְּנֵי כֹּהֵן: וְאֶת בְּנֵי

into the land of Gilead Phinehas And the children of Eleazar the priest

H776 H1568 H853 H6372 H1121 H499 H3548

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 25:7 (Parallel theme): And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;

Exodus 6:25 (Parallel theme): And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife; and she bare him Phinehas: these are the heads of the fathers of the Levites according to their families.

Judges 20:28 (Parallel theme): And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

