

# Joshua 22:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying,  
In time to come your children might speak unto our children,  
saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel?

## Analysis

**And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel? For the LORD hath made Jordan a boundary 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. 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.**

The Transjordan tribes' explanation reveals profound pastoral wisdom and generational concern. Their motive wasn't rebellion but anxiety that physical separation (the Jordan River boundary) might lead future generations to question their covenant membership. The phrase "your children might speak unto our children" shows forward-thinking concern beyond immediate circumstances to lasting spiritual legacy. This demonstrates biblical multigenerational thinking—making decisions based not merely on present convenience but on future spiritual impact (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Psalm 78:1-8).

The anticipated accusation—"What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel?"—

cut to the heart of covenant identity. To be told "ye have no part in the LORD" meant exclusion from God's people, the covenant community, and redemptive promises. The Transjordan tribes understood that geographic distance could become theological distance, that physical separation might produce spiritual alienation across generations. Their concern anticipates the New Testament emphasis on visible church membership and the importance of maintaining tangible connection to the covenant community (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The clarification that the altar was "not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice" but as "witness" (ed, τύ) demonstrates how intentions determine actions' meaning. Identical external forms can represent opposite spiritual realities: one altar (at Shiloh) for actual worship; another altar (by Jordan) as memorial witness. This teaches that external conformity without internal heart-alignment is insufficient, but also that proper intentions must express themselves in forms that avoid confusion. The Transjordan tribes' good intentions nearly caused civil war because their actions appeared to violate covenant stipulations.

## Historical Context

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The Jordan River, while not an impassable barrier, created significant practical separation between Cisjordan and Transjordan populations. Ancient travel was difficult and dangerous; maintaining regular contact across the Jordan would require deliberate effort. The Transjordan tribes' concern that this distance might produce theological drift proved prescient—later history shows Transjordan tribes were first conquered and exiled by foreign powers (1 Chronicles 5:26), partly due to their geographical vulnerability and distance from Jerusalem's temple.

The altar's function as "witness" (ed) connects to ancient Near Eastern practice of erecting memorial stones (massebah) to commemorate significant events or agreements. Jacob erected witness stones at boundaries (Genesis 31:45-52), and Joshua himself set up memorial stones after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:1-9). The Transjordan altar served similar commemorative function—a permanent visible reminder of covenant participation transcending geographical boundaries.

The Transjordan tribes' concern about future exclusion wasn't paranoid—Israel's

history included bitter disputes over who constituted legitimate covenant members (note the later Samaritan schism). The centralization of worship in Jerusalem (under David and Solomon) could easily lead to viewing Transjordan tribes as peripheral or suspect. The altar served as prophetic witness against such future exclusivism, proclaiming that covenant membership transcends geography—a principle fulfilled in the New Testament church where neither Jerusalem nor Gerizim but spirit and truth define true worship (John 4:21-24).

## Related Passages

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**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. What steps are you taking to ensure that your children and grandchildren maintain connection to the covenant community and faith?
2. How can we balance maintaining theological boundaries with avoiding false exclusion of true believers who differ on secondary matters?
3. What "witness" practices or structures can help maintain covenant identity across generational and geographical transitions?

## Interlinear Text

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אַתָּה יְנֻכֶּה וְאַתָּה מִתְּאַגֵּה לְאַיִם  
H853 H6213 And if we have not rather done  
H1697 מִתְּאַגֵּה רְמִזְבֵּחַ מִתְּאַגֵּה  
H1674 it for fear of this thing

לְאַמְרֵת לְאַמְרֵת מִתְּאַמְרֵת לְבָנֵינוּ  
H1121 H559 H4279 H559 unto our children  
H2063 might speak In time to come might speak

וְלִיהְיוּ הַלְּבָנִים מִתְּאַמְרֵת לְבָנֵינוּ  
H3068 H0 H4100 H559 What have ye to do with the LORD  
H1121 unto our children might speak

אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
H3478 H430 of Israel God

## Additional Cross-References

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**Joshua 4:6** (Parallel theme): That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?

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