

THE JOSHUA FIVE

Part 4 • October 18, 2026 | Pastor Jason Smotherman

THE ALMOST CIVIL WAR

JOSHUA 22:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the Land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. ¹¹And the people of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel." ¹²And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.

One of the last conflicts Israel faced in Joshua wasn't with the enemy or with God. It was with each other over what obedience to God's covenant actually looked like. Both sides believed they were defending faithfulness to God, but they interpreted the altar differently. Israel nearly went to war over a misunderstanding that was ultimately resolved through conversation and clarification.

This Altar became known as the Altar of Witness.

One side hears of an altar of imposing size and immediately knew what God said of making worship centered around anything other than Him.

The Confrontation

The eastern tribes denied that the altar represented rebellion, declaring, "The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows" (Joshua 22:22). They explained that it was never intended for sacrifice, but as a memorial for future generations. They feared the Jordan River might eventually become a dividing line, causing their descendants to be told, "You have no part in the LORD" (22:24–25). So they built a replica of the LORD's altar as a visible reminder that they belonged to the same covenant people and worshiped the same God. They called it "Witness" because "it is a witness between us that the LORD is God" (22:34).

Israel nearly went to war with itself over obedience to God and His Word. Both sides believed they were protecting the covenant. ***The conflict wasn't between people who wanted to obey God and people who didn't; it was between people who disagreed about what obedience looked like in that situation.***

The NT believer has a Promise Land, Our Altar is called Witness.

ACTS 1:8 (ESV)

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Under the Old Covenant, the manifest presence of God dwelt in a particular place, the Holy of Holies. Access was restricted, and the veil stood as a boundary. But when Jesus died, the veil was torn from top to bottom. Through Christ, access to God was opened. Under the New Covenant, God's presence is not centered in a building or behind a veil. The believer becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, an altar (Romans 12:1) He dwells in us, and through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, His power comes upon us.

LUKE 24:49 (ESV) (THE PROMISED LAND)

⁴⁹And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

ACTS 2:1-4 (ESV)

¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This promise, like Joshua's and Moses's, promise is contested inheritance. It's not an expectation, it's an invitation.

Two things about the promise land: it is a spiritual promised land and it is within the life of the one that is to possess it

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6-18 (ESV)

⁶who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

¹²Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what

was being brought to an end. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

EPHESIANS 3:16-21 (ESV) (SETS ITS BOUNDARIES)

¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

EPHESIANS 1:17-23 (ESV) (DECLARES IT POWER)

¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

There is a near civil war brewing in the same way in today's promised land.

This conflict isn't between people who want to obey God and people who don't; it is between people who disagree about what obedience looked like in that situation.

If we don't investigate, explain, and clarify our intent of how we are committed to the Lordship of Jesus it creates an atmosphere ripe for "Civil War"

NT believers are in a near Civil War

New Testament believers can find themselves in a near civil war over what faithfulness to God and His Word looks like.

When that happens, it becomes easy to reduce people to caricatures, assuming the worst about their convictions, motives, or expressions simply because they look different from ours.

In Joshua 22, the tribes didn't ignore what concerned them, but neither did they immediately go to war. They investigated, confronted, conversed, and eventually discovered the truth. The altar wasn't compromise at all; it was a witness to their shared covenant with God.

Truth isn't found by compromising what God has said, but neither is it found by assuming everyone who sees something differently has compromised. **Truth is found in truth.**

The Modern Day leaders, are more concerned with protecting their truth, attacking other people's truth, than discovering THE truth of God and His word.

Why is this important? Because when the "tribes" of Jesus stop pursuing truth together, differences can become either a hiding place for real error or a reason to falsely accuse one another of error. Joshua 22 shows us both dangers.

Biblical unity does not require us to compromise truth; it requires us to pursue truth together.

We are living in a culture where there is a maze of disinformation about what Biblical Christianity is and how it is practiced.

Biblical Christianity was never designed to be practiced alone. Believers gathered together for worship, the teaching of Scripture, prayer, communion, fellowship, spiritual gifts, accountability, and mission. We have a personal relationship with Jesus, but we were never given a private Christianity. Following Jesus connects us to His body, the Church.

Biblical Christianity never tells us to make peace with sin or to choose grace over truth. Jesus modeled something better: grace and truth together. Grace without truth can excuse what God calls sin, while truth without grace can become harsh and condemning. We are called to hold firmly to what is true while extending the same grace we have received.

Our journey into the promise Land should be about discovering the favor of God and resting in His promises.

Dig deeper into *The Book of Joshua* with this Bible Study Guide. Also sign up at parkwaycc.com/newsletter. Select **"General (Newsletter + Updates)"** to get notified of additional content.

