

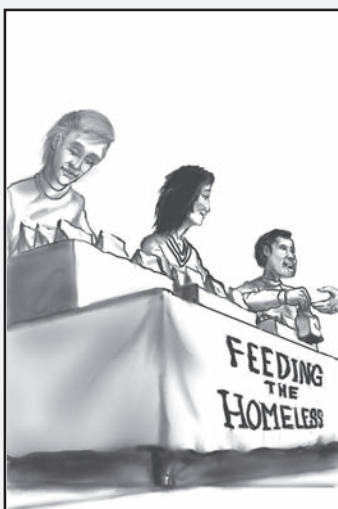
Living in the Land



SABBATH—DECEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joshua 22:1–8; Joshua 22:9–20; Joshua 22:13–15; Joshua 22:21–29; Joshua 22:30–34.

MEMORY VERSE: “A gentle answer will calm [stop] a person’s anger. But an unkind [mean and sharp] answer will cause more anger” (Proverbs 15:1, ICB).



In a church, people with different pasts and ideas come together to work for the Lord.

WHEN WE LIVE IN A COMMUNITY, sometimes we may argue or disagree with each other. A church is a community where this problem can happen. In a church, people with different pasts and ideas come together to work for the Lord. Because we are all different, we may disagree. Some disagreements can cause misunderstandings between members.

This week, we will study Joshua 22. In this chapter, the people have a misunderstanding. In the beginning of the book of Joshua, Joshua commanded some of the family groups of Israel on the east side of the Jordan River to come help the family groups on the west side (Joshua 1:12–18). The family groups from the east side came over to help the other family groups win their land. So, now these family groups from the east side are free to go back home across the river. But before they do, these family groups build an altar on the east side. This altar makes the Israelites who live on the west side of the Jordan River very upset.

Why must we be careful not to think the worst about the behavior of other people? How can we have peace and agreement in the church? How can our remembering the special work God gave us to do as a church help us to stay peaceful and not get upset when bad things happen?

KEEPING PROMISES (Joshua 22:1–8)

Read Joshua 22:1–8. What do these verses tell us about the loyalty of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-family group of Manasseh?

Joshua says that the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-family group of Manasseh kept their promises, just as Moses commanded. These family groups left their wives, children, and homes on the east side of the Jordan River. They fought alongside the rest of the Israelites to help them win their land. The time they spent fighting was about six to seven years (compare with Joshua 11:18; Joshua 14:10; Deuteronomy 2:14). They decided to fight because they were loyal to the promise they made. They didn't let their fear about dying or getting hurt in war get in the way of keeping their promise.

Joshua 22:1–8 shows us that peace and agreement are important for God's people. These verses talk about why God's people must be united as one people. Will the Israelite family groups continue to stay united in the future? Will they continue to worship the Lord as their only God? Or will they let the land that they live in separate them?

Joshua explains that real loyalty comes from serving God, and not people.

The New Testament teaches this same idea about serving God. Paul tells Christians to work as if they were working for God and not just people (read Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). What more important job do we have than working for God? He made everything!

In everyday life, we often have problems that can make us feel hopeless. We may want to give up the fight. Sure, that's the easy thing to do. But we always can pray for God to help us. God can give us His power to do what He asks us to do. If we keep trusting in Jesus, He will give us the strength to continue our work for Him.

Joshua 22:5, 6 says that Joshua asked the family groups who were going back home to remember to stay loyal to the Lord. Then Joshua blessed them. What would happen if we prayed more for each other? How would our prayers change our relationships in the church for the better?



If we keep trusting in Jesus, He will give us the strength to continue our work for Him.

BLAME (Joshua 22:9–20)

Read the story about the three family groups of Israel who go back to their homes on the east side of the Jordan River (Joshua 22:9–20). What do the family groups who live on the west side of the Jordan River accuse the east side family groups of doing? Were the east side family groups correct? Explain your answer.

In Joshua 22:1, the family groups of Israel who live on the east side of the Jordan River are called their usual names: Reubenites and Gadites and the half-family group of Manasseh. But in verses 9–20, different names are used for them. They are named the sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half-family group of Manasseh (Joshua 22:13).

In the story, the people of Israel are the 9 1/2 family groups who live on the west side of the Jordan River. This name doesn't include the three family groups that live on the east side: the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-family group of Manasseh. This separation shows us that a misunderstanding divided the west-side family groups from the east-side family groups. The question from the story is: Can the family groups on the east side of the Jordan River be seen as real Israelites anymore?

What happened that caused this problem? The Israelites on the east side of the Jordan River built an altar at the river. The Bible doesn't say why the Israelites built the altar or what they used it for. Remember what happened in Joshua 3 and 4, when all the Israelites came to the Jordan River to cross over into Canaan. At that time, Joshua commanded the Israelites to carry 12 stones from the river. Then Joshua set up the stones to help the Israelites remember the Lord.

But this new altar worries the Israelites on the west side of the Jordan River. They don't think that the altar is for remembering God. So, they ask what the stones mean. They want to know why the altar was built. (Compare with Joshua 4:6, 22.) Is the altar for burnt offerings to false gods? Or is the altar just to help Israel remember the Lord? Are the family groups from the east side already starting to sin against God?

The family groups who lived on the east side of the Jordan River didn't ask for permission to build the altar. They didn't talk with Joshua or Eleazar or other leaders first. Now they have a misunderstanding that could lead to an awful fight between all the family groups of Israel.



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THE SINS FROM THE PAST (Joshua 22:13–15)

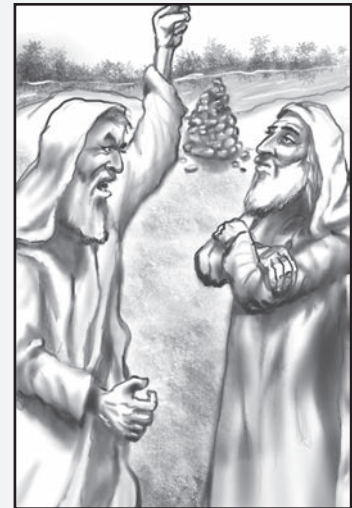
Why do the Israelites on the west side of the River Jordan choose Phinehas as their leader? Read Joshua 22:13–15 again, along with Numbers 25.

The Israelites who live on the west side of the Jordan River want answers. They want to know why the family groups who live on the east side of the Jordan River built an altar at the east side of the river. The Israelites from the west side of the Jordan River are named the sons of Israel two times. They send a group of leaders to talk to the family groups from the east side of the Jordan River. The leader of the group is Phinehas. Phinehas is the son of Eleazar, who is the high priest. The high priest is the top religious leader for Israel. Phinehas will become high priest after Eleazar dies (Joshua 24:33).

Phinehas is already famous in Israel. He put a stop to the evil that Israel did at Baal Peor (Numbers 25): “Phinehas was the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron the priest. Phinehas saw this man bring the woman into camp. So he left the meeting and got his spear. He followed the Israelite into the tent. Then he used the spear to kill the Israelite man and the Midianite woman in her tent. He pushed the spear through both of their bodies. At that time there was a great [terrible] sickness among the Israelites. But when Phinehas killed these two people, the sickness stopped” (Numbers 25:7, 8, ERV).

The rest of the men in the group were leaders of the 9 1/2 family groups of Israel. These 9 1/2 family groups lived on the west side of the Jordan River.

The leaders from the west side meet with the family groups from the east side. The west-side leaders start with these words: “ ‘All the people of the Lord say, “What sin is this that you have done against the God of Israel?” ’ ” (Joshua 22:16, NLV). The word “sin” in this verse is the same Hebrew word that the Bible uses to talk about Achan’s sin (Joshua 7:1). We see this same word many times in the writings of Moses (read Leviticus 5:15; Leviticus 6:2; Numbers 5:6, 12). The stories about Achan and Baal Peor are warnings about what happens when Israel steals from God and fights against Him. The west-side Israelites are afraid that the east-side family groups built the altar to worship false gods. If so, God will punish everyone in all the 12 family groups of Israel.



The leaders from the west side meet with the family groups from the east side.

A GENTLE ANSWER (Joshua 22:21–29)

What can we learn from the answer of the family groups that lived on the east side of the Jordan River? Read Joshua 22:21–29, along with Proverbs 15:1, for the answer.



The east-side family groups built the altar to help them feel included in Israel. . . . When the Israelites from the west side of the Jordan hear this answer, they are filled with joy.

The answer of the family groups from the east side of the Jordan River is very powerful. The family groups from the east side stay quiet and listen to the words said against them. The family groups from the east side are very patient. They wait until the west-side leaders finish talking before they answer. The peaceful spirit of the east-side family groups is surprising. Their gentle spirit shows us the meaning of this verse: “A gentle answer will calm [stop] a person’s anger. But an unkind [mean and sharp] answer will cause more anger” (Proverbs 15:1, ICB).

Then the family groups from the east side answer. They start with many names for Israel’s God in their answer: El, Elohim, Yahweh (Joshua 22:22). These names show the loyalty and faith of the east-side family groups in the God of Israel. Their faith and their gentle words help to stop a civil war in Israel. Why did the east-side family groups build the altar? They were afraid of being separated from the other Israelites on the west side of the Jordan River. So, the east-side family groups built the altar to help them feel included in Israel. They also wanted to show their loyalty to God. What makes the people of Israel united? Is it the land? No, their loyalty to God and obedience to His commandments make them one people.

When the Israelites from the west side of the Jordan hear this answer, they are filled with joy. They are happy that their fears were wrong. They have no reason to feel upset or afraid. The meeting solves the problems and stops civil war from happening. All the family groups continue to be one people in the Lord.

How do you feel when someone accuses you of something you didn’t do? What do you say or do when someone believes the worst about you? To give you hope, please read Psalm 37:3–6, 34, 37.

SOLVING PROBLEMS (Joshua 22:30–34)

Read the story in Joshua 22:30–34. What does this story teach us about how to solve problems? Also, what does this story teach us about keeping peace in the church? (Compare with Psalm 133; John 17:20–23; 1 Peter 3:8, 9.)

Joshua 22 contains important rules for communication. We can use these rules to help us in our everyday relationships in the family, church, and community.

Rule #1. When things go wrong or look wrong, the best thing to do is communicate. Don't hold back your feelings until you are ready to "blow up" with anger at someone. As God's people, we should try to solve our problems. We should not pretend that there is no problem or avoid talking about it. Of course, the family groups from the east side of the Jordan River should have communicated with the other Israelites about their plan to build an altar. Then they could have avoided the misunderstanding.

Rule #2. Don't be too quick to judge. The West Jordan Israelites were quick to believe the false stories. They believed the worst about the East Jordan family groups.

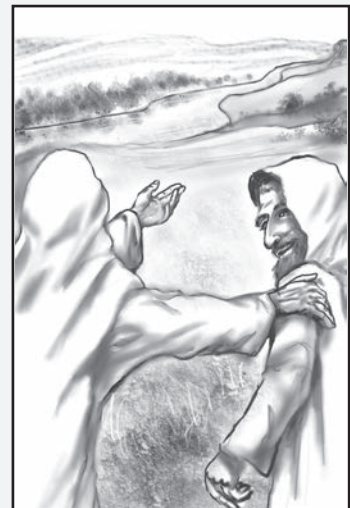
Rule #3. Talk about the problems before you act.

Rule #4. Be willing to give up something for peace and agreement. The west-side Israelites were willing to give up part of their land to help the family groups from the east side of the River Jordan.

Rule #5. When someone blames you for a problem, give a gentle or soft answer. A gentle or kind answer keeps that person from getting angry. If you accuse the person who is blaming you, what happens? You both will never have peace. Try to understand the other person before you talk.

Rule #6. Rejoice and bless God when He causes peace between you and the other person. The west-side Israelites were filled with joy when they learned the real reason that the east-side family groups built the altar. The west-side Israelites weren't filled with pride. They confessed that they were wrong to judge their brothers.

What if the east-side family groups really sinned? Then the Israelites would have punished them as the law of Moses commanded. We can't have peace and agreement if we don't follow God's rules. But punishment should always be our last plan, not our first. First, we should try to be at peace and solve our problems. For sure, our churches would be different if we always remember to follow these rules.



The west-side Israelites were willing to give up part of their land to help the family groups from the east side of the River Jordan.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Division of Canaan,” pages 517–520, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“While we must punish sin, we must not be mean or nasty. We must not judge people because we hear terrible stories about them. . . .

“The Reubenites and their companions showed that they were wise. Their example is worthy of our attention. We should copy their behavior. The Reubenites and their companions wanted to serve God and His religion. The other Israelites believed the worst about them and scolded them with sharp words. But the Reubenites and their companions didn’t get upset. They were kind and patient. They listened to the things their brothers said first. Then the Reubenites and their companions answered. They fully explained their reasons for their actions. Their explanation showed that they were innocent.

“When someone accuses you of something you didn’t do, you can be patient and kind. God knows everything. He knows everything we misunderstand. We can safely leave our problem in His hands. God will show that we are innocent. But we must put our trust in Him. God searched Achan’s heart and judged his guilt. If we are filled with Jesus’ spirit, His love will fill our hearts. His love will make us kind and patient.

“God wants His people to love each other and to agree. Before Jesus died on the cross, He prayed for His followers [John 17:20]. Jesus prayed this prayer for us, too. Jesus wanted His followers to be one with each other as He is one with the Father. When we agree, then other people on earth will know that God sent Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 519, 520, adapted.



“Before Jesus died on the cross, He prayed for His followers.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul commands us to “honor others more than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3, ERV). How can following this advice help us to think the best about our brothers and sisters?
- ② Why do we often get angry about things? How do our past mistakes cause us to get upset about the things that happen now? How can we stop getting upset? Why is it important to hear what other people have to say? How can we learn to listen more in our church? (Compare with James 1:19.)

GOD'S HELPING HANDS

Kim Sun was excited to be sent to a part of the Philippines that was far away from any city. Sun was going to serve as a Bible worker for 10 months.

But Sun wondered what the best way was to serve Jesus during this time. Sun remembered how he argued with his parents about the Bible for five years. He didn't convince them to accept any Bible truth he taught. Now Sun had only 10 months.

As Sun prayed, he thought, "If I try to start with Bible teachings, people may reject the Bible, the same as my parents. Maybe I first need to show everyone Jesus' love."

Sun decided not to tell anyone that he was a Bible worker. He wouldn't try to talk about Bible teachings at first. He would just make friends for three months and help people.

When Sun arrived in the village, he visited each of the 20 to 30 homes there. Sun offered to help his new neighbors.

Sun asked the woman at the first house if she needed help with anything. "Please let me know how I may help you."

The woman was happy to accept Sun's nice offer.

Sun helped 17 people in the neighborhood that first day. The first woman he visited made him lunch and supper as Sun worked.

As Sun walked home, he felt tired. But he thought, "I'm God's helping hands!"

Soon, Sun had a long list of names of people to visit who wanted his help. From Monday to Friday, Sun visited two homes in the morning and two homes in the afternoon.

Sun also was a friend in other ways to the villagers. Sun grew corn and gave it away. When people asked how much money they owed for the corn, Sun said, "Nothing! The corn came from God. God paid the price for you." Sometime later, Sun saw a boy with a deep cut in his leg. Sun put medicine on the cut. The cut healed a few days later. The parents came to Sun and asked, "How can we thank you?"

Sun served the villagers for three months. He didn't tell them he was a Bible worker at that time. Sun wasn't keeping this information secret. Nobody asked him about it. Sun prayed about what to do for his next three months.

Kim Sun is a manager for the 1,000 Missionary Movement, in Silang, Philippines. The headquarters were built with help of the 13th Sabbath Offering from 1996. Read more next week.

INSIDE *Story*



**"God paid the price
for you."**



Kim Sun