

## **Prevention of Civil War in Joshua 22: Guidelines for African Ethnic Groups**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Have you ever jumped to a conclusion before hearing both sides of a story? Have you ever failed to give someone the benefit of the doubt, even though they had never wronged you? "There Are Two Sides to Every Story." Joshua 22 shows that civil wars can be avoided if proper measures are taken. The Cisjordanian tribes resorted to dialogue to prevent what could have been a bloody civil war. Their willingness to move along the path of patience brought about peace and joy. African ethnic groups can prevent civil wars if they learn the lesson of managing allegations the proper way through representation, dialogue and trust.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

Africa has experienced civil wars and continues to experience them. Unfortunately, to stop them, we have spent resources that otherwise could have been used to improve the lives of the people. There is less talk about the prevention of future civil wars. The aim of this article is to show that civil wars can be prevented if careful steps are taken. The article uses Josh 22:9-34 to investigate the process by which a potential civil war was averted to show that Africa can prevent civil war on the continent in a similar way.

The purpose of choosing this ancient text is twofold. First, the text deals with ethnic groups that misunderstood the attitude of the other, which generated an attempt to fight against brother ethnic groups. Robert Boling rightly refers to this chapter as "How to Avoid Civil War"<sup>1</sup> and so does John Hamlin calling it "A Peacemaking Society."<sup>2</sup> Ethnicity is central to Africans and many of the civil wars on the continent are fought along ethnic lines. Secondly, Africans cherish the Bible as God's word, not only for Israel but also for them. For this reason, the Bible is the best book to use in appealing to Africans about any aspect of their beliefs and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Boling, *Joshua* (AB 6; New York: Doubleday, 1982), 501.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua*. (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 157.

## B BASIC COMPOSITIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

Before any attempt to analyse the text under consideration, there are two issues that need clarity: (1) whether Josh 22:9-34 describes actual events, and (2) the literary function of Josh 22:9-34 in its present location.

A scholar such as Donald Schley argues that there is no actual traditional basis for the events described in Josh 22:9-34. For him archaic features have been employed in the composition of a late text, in order to give the appearance of an early provenance.<sup>3</sup> He bases his argument on the fact that the passage deals not only with the two-and-a-half tribes, but also with only the Reubenites and Gadites (vv. 25, 31, 32, 33, 34). He asserts that the association with the Reubenites and Gadites alone with the Transjordan is contrary to the later formation of both Dtr and P, according to whom the strata adhered to the division of the people of Israel into the nine-and-a-half tribes in Palestine, and the two and-a-half tribes in Transjordan.<sup>4</sup> For him, this later formulation is present in vv. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 21.<sup>5</sup> But as Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch show, it is possible that the half-tribe of Manasseh is omitted in vv. 33 and 34 for the sake of brevity<sup>6</sup> and therefore does not imply that an older tradition has been preserved within the context of a later narrative text, as Schley would want us to believe.

Another important issue is the place and function of Joshua 22 within the flow of the entire storyline found within the Primary History (Genesis-Kings). On the surface it would appear the story has no clear parallel in the Primary History.<sup>7</sup> But there are evidences of the passage's link with the Primary History.

First, as Lyle Eslinger shows, the whole Book of Joshua forms a mirror image to the exodus story; both share a structure of moving out of Egypt and into Canaan.<sup>8</sup> I admit that the thrust of the book of Joshua generally may mirror that of the Exodus story in general, but ch. 22 specifically does not. However, the chapter might be considered as a prelude to the intertribal strife of Judges,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Donald G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (JSOTSup 63; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>4</sup> Schley, *Shiloh*, 122.

<sup>5</sup> Schley, *Shiloh*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel* (trans. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 222.

<sup>7</sup> As Blenkinsopp notes, the story of the conquest would be incomplete without some attention given to the promise of land in the Pentateuch and the attainment of land in the Former Prophets. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Lyle Eslinger, *Into the Hands of the Living God* (JSOTSup 86; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1997), 247.

except that the stories of the Judges move from cooperation toward increasing conflict, whereas Joshua 22 moves in the opposite direction, from conflict to resolution.

Secondly, there is a more convincing structural parallel between Joshua 22 and Numbers 32. Somehow, Joshua 22 serves as the conclusion to Numbers 32 in which Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh receive land in Transjordan, but only after they fulfill a pledge to help in the conquest of the Cisjordan. The altar has one parallel: just as Moses required the tribes of Transjordan to cross into Cisjordan for military service (Numbers 32), Phineas would require them to cross into Cisjordan for religious service (Joshua 22).<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, the literary function of Joshua 22 is an example of "substantively rational legal exegesis" and more specifically, an "analogical exegesis of concrete cases."<sup>11</sup> The Cisjordanian group invokes two examples, Achan and Baal-peor (vv. 13–20), in which cultic treachery (מעל) conveys the potential of bringing divine wrath upon the entire Israelite community. The Transjordanian group refutes the accusation successfully, avoiding potential conflict. I admit that this line of thinking does not direct itself to the matter of the altar directly; however, the inner-biblical exegesis remains quite instructive. An element within the story (the word מעל) finds links to other texts in a way that gives some clarity to the story's function. Although there are only a few links between the altar of Joshua 22 and other texts, they clarify the altar's function and thus, provide more clarity to the whole story.

Finally, the figure and role of Phineas in the Hexateuch (Exod 6:16-25; Num 25:6-13, and Num 31:1-12) and some incidents (at Baal Peor and Ai) in the Hexateuch that are referred to in Josh 22:9-34 demonstrate the passage's link with the Hexateuch. As Schley posits, the passage serves as the final cultic injunction to the Israelites settling in Palestine. The erection of the wilderness cultus and the distribution of the tribal inheritances do not end the priestly narrative. Rather, Joshua 22 provides the final priestly word on the crucial theme of the legitimate YHWH cultus, which occupies the tent shrine and its altar established at Shiloh, in Palestine. P's account of the origins of Israel ends with the establishment of legitimate institutions of the worship of YHWH at Shiloh, and with the definition of the sole legitimate place of sacrifice in the Promised Land as the altar before YHWH's tabernacle at Shiloh. The exclusive legitimacy of the wilderness cult in Shiloh carried divine sanction, and any breach threatened the entire Israelite community. In effect, Joshua 22 plays an important role in the priestly tradition of the Hexateuch.

<sup>10</sup> David Jobling, *Structural Analysis and the Hebrew Bible* (vol. 2 of *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*; JSOTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 98-9.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 244-50.

As a result, this essay is based on the understanding that Josh 22:9-34 describes an actual traditional event in the history of ancient Israel. Thus it rejects the notion that Josh 22:9-34 is a literary construct. In addition, the essay is based on the idea that Josh 22:9-34 has links with the Primary History of the Hebrew Bible and that it conceives of a single legitimate place of sacrifice for the Israelites in the Promised Land.<sup>12</sup> With these in mind, we now turn to a brief exegesis of the text.

## C BRIEF EXEGESIS OF JOSHUA 22:9-34

### 1 Building of an Altar (vv. 9-12)

As Trent Butler notes, v. 9 repeats the departure note of v. 6b, but now includes Manasseh. The narrative begins by distinguishing between the Transjordan tribes and the sons of Israel as well as between the land of Canaan and the land of Gilead.<sup>13</sup> In v. 9 the MT reads *bene Reuben* and *bene Gad*.<sup>14</sup> However, in vv. 1-8 the gentile forms "Reubenites" and "Gadites" are used. Robert Boling thinks this shows that from v. 9 we have moved onto literary terrain that is distinct from vv. 1-8.<sup>15</sup> He suggests that the use of the gentile forms in vv. 1-8 could be that these verses were the hand of a redactor.<sup>16</sup> This argument is weak in that authors may use synonymous expressions.<sup>17</sup>

Shiloh has been the assumed setting for everything since Josh 18:1. It was an out-of-the-way rallying point. It became the Yahwistic rallying point that is idealized in 18:1 and depicted in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, during the period after Abimelech's destruction of Shechem (mid-twelfth century). The phrase "which is in the land of Canaan" is a distinct way of locating the venerable place of the Tent and, presumably, the Ark of the Covenant. A variation of the formula occurs in 21:2, "Shiloh in the land of Canaan." The full form of the formula appears in Judg 21:12. The definition appended to Shiloh, "in the land of Canaan," highlights the parallel phrase "in the land of Gilead," by which we are to understand the whole of the country east of the Jordan (cf.

<sup>12</sup> Schley, *Shiloh*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 245.

<sup>14</sup> The LXX draws a parallelism by adding "sons" to Manasseh also, instead of "tribe."

<sup>15</sup> Boling, *Joshua*, 511.

<sup>16</sup> Boling, *Joshua*, 508.

<sup>17</sup> However, Jerome F. D. Creach, *Joshua* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2003), 109 posits that the linguistic shift has an impact on the final narrative. He explains that the fact that the title given to the nation as a whole reads as "sons of Israel," suggests that the "sons of Reuben," "sons of Gad," and "sons of Manasseh" represent some cultic and political entity that is separate from the rest of the nation. He adds that the titles seem to suggest a split that is not evident elsewhere.

e.g., Num 32:29; Deut 34:1; Judg 5:17).<sup>18</sup>

Verse 10 says that on arrival at the border of Canaan, the Transjordan tribes built a large conspicuous altar (מזבח) in the district of the Jordan, in the land of Canaan, that is, in Transjordan: "a great altar to see," one that caught the eye on account of its size, since it was to serve as a memorial (v. 24). Johannes Wijngaards posits that the altar here refers to the twelve stones "in the middle of the Jordan" (Josh 4:9).<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to construe this altar to be the twelve stones in the middle of Jordan, because as Boling notes, the cultic disunity represented here, with the river as divider, is irreconcilable with the picture of cultic unity at the dividing of Jordan in chs. 3–4.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars are divided over the location of the altar, because the MT does not mention its location. Alberto Soggin argues that גלילוח was an unknown place name.<sup>21</sup> The word Geliloth may refer to a place name or may be the plural of גלילה (region, area, district). Soggin's interpretation takes seriously the extant text, but unfortunately, it does not take seriously enough the importance of the location of the altar. For him, it is a place known to the writer but now lost. For his part, Norman Snaith, for textual and inter-textual reasons, locates the altar at Gilgal.<sup>22</sup> Textually, he argues that גלילוח should be amended to לגלג

<sup>18</sup> According to Magnus Ottosson, "Tradition History, with Emphasis on the Composition of the Book of Joshua," in *The Productions of Time: Tradition History in Old Testament Scholarship* (ed. Knud Jeppesen and Benedikt Otzen; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1984), 96, 99, the concept of "Canaan" in the Book of Joshua plays a subordinate role. While he admits that certain events do occur on the western side of the Jordan it should be observed that the term "Canaan" properly appears in 14:1. The expression which is otherwise associated with the land of Canaan is "the land which Yahweh swore to give to their fathers" (occurring four times: 1:6; 5:6, 21:43, 44). The expression recurs in the Deuteronomistic summary in Josh 21:43-45, which refers to Canaan (cf. 22:4). But in Joshua, Canaan only comprises part of the Deuteronomistic conception of the land, since the eastern tribes of Gad and Reuben, plus the half-tribe of Manasseh also belong to the total of Israel. Ottosson further reiterates that the eastern tribes regularly reappear as necessary components of the Deuteronomistic view of land (see Josh 12:1-6; 13:7-33; 20:8; 21:36-38; 22:1-5) and asserts that by means of a simple geographical scheme based on the four points of the compass the area is represented which comprised the historical extent of the Davidic empire as it is depicted in 2 Samuel 24. So that while Joshua 24 accounts for the north-south axis, Joshua 22 describes the east-west axis. Thus compositionally Joshua 24 and 22 are showpiece chapters which bring about the reunification of the Davidic empire at all points of the compass.

<sup>19</sup> Johannes N. M. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomistic Schools* (OtSt 16; Leiden: Brill, 1969).

<sup>20</sup> Boling, *Joshua*, 511.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Alberto Soggin, *Joshua* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972), 211.

<sup>22</sup> Norman H. Snaith, "The Altar at Gilgal: Joshua XXII 23-29," *VT* 28 (1978): 330-335.

in agreement with Syriac versions. For him the story offers Gilgal as a legitimate place of worship for the Transjordanian tribes, just like Bethel was to be for the Northern tribes. Inter-textually, Snaith argues that the altar had to be located in Cisjordan since YHWH could only be worshipped properly in Canaan. He buttresses his point by citing the case of Naaman (2 Kings 5) who carried soil from Canaan to Syria to enable him worship YHWH. The problem with Snaith's view is that while an altar at Gilgal may have existed at some point in history, the extant story allows no sacrifice - and therefore no actual worship - at the altar. Rather, a non-sacrificial altar has been successfully woven into the fabric of the extant text, a fact which Snaith completely overlooked. The story as it stands denies the right of the Transjordanian group to worship at their home-made altar and supports sacrifice at the Tabernacle's altar at Shiloh alone. Thus, it implies a location for the altar in Transjordan.

While scholars are divided on whether the altar was located in Transjordan or Cisjordan, they agree that it was located close to the Jordan River. But as Gordon McConville and Stephen Williams show, "exactly where the altar was placed in relation to the river is tantalizingly difficult to determine."<sup>23</sup> The phrase "in the land of Canaan" (vv. 10, 11) seems to assure that the altar is in Cisjordan. But, the phrase *אל-מול* (v. 11) leaves some doubt. If *אל-מול* is rendered "in front of" or "opposite to," which is its usual sense, the altar should be located in the Transjordan (cf. Exod 26:28; Deut 30:13 and 1 Sam 26:13).<sup>24</sup> Phineas' question in v. 19 as to the cultic purity of Transjordan supports this view. The question makes the best sense only if the altar is located in the Transjordan, on unclean land. Otherwise, why would Phineas suggest they cross over the Jordan and worship God at the Tabernacle?

Although the exact location of the altar is uncertain, its border (*גבול*) location, as indicated in v. 25, is significant. The Jordan served as a border between the Cisjordanians and the Transjordanians, which was a great concern for the Transjordanian tribes, who feared future marginalisation.<sup>25</sup> The altar's border location becomes clear when one surveys the Hebrew Bible for typical

<sup>23</sup> James G. McConville and Stephen N. Williams, *Joshua* (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 84.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, *Joshua*, 246, translates the last phrase of v. 11 "on the Israelite side," but notes that the text may be translated alternatively to mean "across from the Israelite." Lewis D. Hawk, *Joshua* (BerOl; Colledgeville: Liturgical, 2000), 237, comments: "With every clarifying note, the location of the altar becomes increasingly obscure!" He adds that the confusion extends to the question what "the Israelite side" actually is (pp. 237-38), which for McConville and Williams (*Joshua*, 85) accentuates the point at stake: What are the true boundaries of Israel and who really belongs?

<sup>25</sup> See Lori Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (JSOTSup 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 167 and Lori Rowlett, "Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginality in the Book of Judges," *JSOT* 55 (1992): 15-23.

structures that are placed at borders. The description of the altar literally is "large for seeing." Thus, it could not be overlooked or easily forgotten, an ironic touch, in view of the ambiguity regarding the location.

Verses 11–12 describe the reaction of the Cisjordanian tribes when they heard about the building of the altar. In v. 11, the term *sons of Israel* refers strictly to the west-bank tribes.<sup>26</sup> The same term was used of those who composed the militia arrayed against one of the tribes in Judges 20. The phrase *the entire congregation* [עדה]<sup>27</sup> of the sons of Israel assembled in v. 12 repeats verbatim a phrase used in 18:1, but the situation is inverted. In 18:1 the assembly was for the purpose of peacefully taking fiefs in YHWH's land, but in 22:12 it was for the purpose of civil war, as in Judg 20:1, where the same vocabulary is used. The Cisjordanian tribes decided *to go to war* against their Transjordanian brethren. The congregation supposed that the altar had been built as a place for sacrifice, and therefore regarded it as a wicked violation of the commandment of God about a single sacrificial altar (Lev 17:8-9; Deut 12:4), which they ought to punish according to the law in Deut 13:13. This zeal was perfectly justifiable, and even praiseworthy, as the altar, even if not erected as a place for sacrifice, might easily be abused for that purpose and become an occasion of sin for the whole nation. In any case, the two and a half tribes ought not to have erected such a building without the consent of Joshua or of the high priest.

The decision to go to war suggests they ignored YHWH's role as the chief commander; it was premature. But their action corresponds to the presumptuous action of the militia against the Benjamites in Judges 20, where the organising key to the story seems to be fight first and inquire of YHWH later.

<sup>26</sup> McConville and Williams (*Joshua*, 85) draws attention to the fact that "the people of Israel" sets up stark oppositions: the people of Israel, defined as "the congregation" and thus the very definition of united Israel, ranged against the Transjordan outsiders; the symbolic unifying centre of Shiloh against the altar at the Jordan, a challenge that goes to the heart of Israel's identity and loyalty to YHWH; and the "land of Canaan" against "the land of Gilead" (cf. vv. 13, 15).

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and Social Structure of Pre-monarchic Israel," *JQR* 69 (1978): 66-76, shows that עדה "can only be conceived as an *ad hoc* emergency body called together by the tribal chieftains whenever a national trans-tribal issue arose" and that "once the monarchy was firmly established, there was no further use for the עדה, and it disappeared." Butler (*Joshua*, 203) adds that the congregation may be composed of the entire nation with women and children, of adult males or of national representatives.

## **2 Delegation to Investigate (vv. 13–20)**

### **2a Composition of the Delegation (vv. 13–14; cf. Deut 13:12-18)**

Before waging civil war, the Cisjordanian tribes sent a delegation to those in Transjordan to get to the bottom of the explosive situation as Deut 13:14 stipulates; the delegation was to find out the reason and purpose for building the altar. The delegation was composed of the priest Phineas, son of Eleazer, and rulers of the Cisjordanian tribes. Eleazer was head of the Bethel priesthood early in the pre-monarchic period. He commissioned Joshua (Num 27:21). Phineas, the leader of the delegation, was the one who won a "perpetual priesthood" because of his zeal to honour YHWH concerning the crisis about the god of Pe'or. YHWH made a covenant of peace with Phineas for his action (Num 25:6–18). He is not to be confused with the son of Eli (see 1 Sam 1:3; 2:34; 4:4, 11, 17) who served at Shiloh. Phineas ben Eleazer was a predecessor of the ranking priest at Bethel whom the sons of Israel would consult in the warfare against Benjamin (Judg 20:27-29) to receive a reliable oracle. So when the congregation gathered at Shiloh they appointed as their negotiator the chief Aaronite priest of Bethel who would save the larger league. It is important to note that the mention of this Phineas in Num 25:6-13 and 31:1-12, as Schley notes,<sup>28</sup> has important implications for understanding his role here. Phineas appears in this pericope in much the same role as he does in the two passages in Numbers: he is a priest, son of Eleazar, and as such ministers before the tent shrine (Josh 22:19, 29) in connection with an incident which at least threatens holy war. Thus, Phineas the son of Eleazar in the present passage is the same traditional figure as he is in the book of Numbers. Both Num 25:6-13 and Josh 22:9-34, seem to reflect a cycle of independent traditions focusing upon Phineas, the son of Eleazar, which dealt with his exploits in preserving the purity of the YHWH cultus.

The other delegates with Phineas are described as chiefs of ancestral houses, the houses of their fathers in village-units of Israel. An ancestral house literally means "household of a father." The unit is based on patriarchal rule, all the offspring – including the adults – being subjects to the father's authority, and all together forming a compact social unit. Upon his death, "the father's house" disintegrates. The role of these chiefs can be seen in 17:4 where they hear the petition of the daughters of Zelophehad alongside Eleazar the priest and Joshua and provide a solution.

### **2b The Delegates at Work (vv. 15-20)**

In these verses Phineas functions in a role analogous to the Judges and the prophets. Like the Judges, his role can be compared particularly with Jephthah's negotiations with the king of the Ammonites in Judg 11:12–28. He func-

<sup>28</sup> Schley, *Shiloh*, 123.



tions like the prophets in the era of the monarchy. The prophet was an ambassador, a representative of the court of YHWH, delivering the communiqué that brings the sovereign's indictment for breach of treaty. In Joshua 22, Phineas goes into the breach to confront the rebellious ones and bring about peaceful settlement.

Assuming at the outset that the altar was intended to serve as a second place of sacrifice in opposition to the command of God, the delegates, with Phineas no doubt as their speaker, began by reproaching them for falling away from the LORD.<sup>29</sup> "What faithlessness is this (מעל: see at Lev 5:15) that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following Yahweh, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel (מרד) this day against Yahweh?" Note that מרד (to rebel) is stronger than מעל. As Creach notes, the offense of the Transjordan tribes had religious as well as political connotations. The construction of the altar in a place other than at the central sanctuary was a breach of purity, and could also be a declaration of independence, as Jeroboam's construction of the altars at Bethel and Dan indicates (1 Kgs 12:25-33). Both possible implications are expressed in v. 19: Phineas orders the Transjordan tribes not to rebel against the LORD (a break in religious purity) and not to rebel "against us" (a sign of political confrontation).<sup>30</sup>

The delegation from the western tribes warned the eastern tribes not to change the pattern of worship that YHWH had ordained. To show the greatness of a sin of apostasy against YHWH, the speaker reminded them of two previous acts of sin on the part of the nation that had brought severe judgments upon the congregation.<sup>31</sup> "Have we not had enough of the sin at Pe'or from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD?"

That plague, in which 24,000 Israelites died, was stopped through the zeal of Phineas for the honour of the YHWH (Num 25:4-9, 11). The guilt connected with the worship of Peor had thereby been avenged upon the congregation, and the congregation itself had been saved from any further punishment in consequence of the sin. When Phineas, therefore, affirmed that the congregation had not yet been cleansed from the crime, he did not mean that they were still bearing or suffering from the punishment of that crime, but that they were not yet cleansed from that sin, inasmuch as many of them were still attached to

<sup>29</sup> As Joseph Blenkinsopp shows, P's main concern in connection with the land is not so much its conquest as the establishment of a legitimate cult in it. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 287.

<sup>30</sup> Creach, *Joshua*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> As Creach shows, these two stories show that the sin of one Israelite brings guilt upon the whole nation, and Phineas fears the same result in this instance (*Joshua*, 111).

idolatry in their hearts, even if they had hitherto desisted from it outwardly from fear of the infliction of fresh judgment.

The speaker finally reminded them of the sin of Achan, how that had brought the wrath of God upon the whole congregation (Joshua 7); and moreover, Achan was not the only man who had perished on account of the sin, but thirty-six men had fallen on account of it at the first attack upon Ai (Josh 7:5). The allusion to this fact is to be understood as an argument *a minori ad majus*. Thus, if Achan did not perish alone when he committed sacrilege, when YHWH was angry with the entire congregation, what do the Israelites think will be the consequence if they, so great in number, commit so grievous a sin against YHWH? Note that in the phrase, "the treachery which you have committed" (v. 16), the MT uses the verb **מעל** and its cognate noun, as in the Achan story (7:1).

### 3 Response of the Eastern Tribes to the Allegation (vv. 21–29)

In utter amazement at the suspicion expressed by the Cisjordanian delegates, the Transjordanian tribes affirm with a solemn oath that it never entered their minds to build their altar as a place of sacrifice, to fall away from YHWH. The combination of the three divine names of the God of Israel: **אל** "El,"<sup>32</sup> the strong one; **אלהים** "Elohim," the Supreme Being to be feared; and **יהוה** "YHWH," the truly existing One, the covenant God (v. 22), serves to strengthen the invocation of God,<sup>33</sup> as in Ps 50:1; and this is strengthened still further by the repetition of these three names. God knows, and let Israel also know what they intended and what they have done. The **אם** that follows is the usual particle used in an oath. "If it is in rebellion, or if in treachery against YHWH, do not save us this day" (v. 22b). An appeal is addressed immediately to God in the heat of the statement and is introduced in the midst of the asseveration, which was meant to remove all doubt as to the truth of their declaration. The words that follow in v. 23 "that we have built ..." continue the oath: "If we have done this, to build us an altar, to turn away from the LORD, or to offer thereon burnt-offering, meat-offering, or peace-offering, may YHWH himself require it (**דרש**, as in Deut 18:19). Another earnest parenthetical adjuration, as the substance of the oath, appears in v. 24: "But truly (**ואם לא**, with an affirmative signification) from anxiety, for a reason (lit. on account of a thing) have we done this, thinking (**לאמר**, since we thought) in time to come your sons might say to our sons, 'What have you to do with Yahweh, the God of Israel?'" Thus the Transjordanian tribes say they are concerned about the

<sup>32</sup> **אל** is frequently compounded, especially in Genesis, with epithets, in forms such as El Shaddai, and falls between a proper name for God (as in Canaan, where the High God was El) and a generic, "god."

<sup>33</sup> McConville and Williams, *Joshua*, 86 assert that the series of names, proclaimed here by the Transjordanians, is a strong statement that YHWH is indeed the only true God and even takes the form of an act of worship. It is therefore a powerful rebuttal of the accusation of Phineas.

anticipated attitudes of the children of the Cisjordanian tribes and their own children's future as the people of YHWH.<sup>34</sup>

In vv. 24–27, the Transjordanian tribes made known their intention of building the altar. It was not for *מעל* "treachery."<sup>35</sup> The altar was not meant to be used for sacrifice as the Cisjordanian tribes thought.<sup>36</sup> Rather, the altar was to be a lasting memorial to their own children, so that they would not forget their ties to those Cisjordanian tribes. They offer a passionate defense of their faith in YHWH, their love and respect for their brethren. They are afraid that as time lapses, the future generations, separated by the Jordan River, will forget their long-standing ties.<sup>37</sup> This altar was intended to be a *witness* (*עד*) that these people possessed a covenant with YHWH. This would not only serve as a reminder to their own children but would serve as a warning to all the surrounding nations that these two and a half tribes living east of the Jordan are YHWH's people, every bit as much as those living in Canaan.

Here the altar is called a "witness"; thus, a place of watching rather than action. But in the Hebrew Bible an altar involved sacrifice regardless of who built it or to which deity the altar was dedicated.<sup>38</sup> For this reason the Cisjordanian tribes assumed that the Transjordanian tribes erected the "altar" for sacrificial purpose. Evidently, in other texts, parties erected stones or pillars to serve as witnesses between them, which were not meant for sacrifice (Gen 31:44-48; Josh 4:1-24; 24:27). In these instances, a "witness" was needed to settle a dispute or seal a relationship. But these structures were not called "altars." Therefore if the Transjordanian tribes had erected any structure other than an "altar"

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, *Joshua*, 252.

<sup>35</sup> *מעל* "treachery" or breach of faith, is used in Josh 22:10 for Achan's sin and elsewhere for the apostasy of King Saul (1 Chr 10:13). Nelson, *Joshua*, 244, 246, translated it as "sacrilege," citing Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 345-56.

<sup>36</sup> The conceptual background to this is the premise that there would only be one true place of worship for Israel after the occupation of the land and only one place of legitimate sacrifice. The base text for this conception is Deuteronomy 12, which, especially in v. 5, is most naturally taken to prescribe this exclusive right for the central sanctuary. In the logic of Joshua, Shiloh is the first place that answers to the criteria of that command, marked as such by the presence of the tabernacle. This lies behind the Transjordanians' protest in v. 23. They then offer a positive defense that they were fully Israelite by the decree of Yahweh, confirmed by Moses.

<sup>37</sup> In time, the Jordan could assert itself as the great symbol of division and the Transjordanians thus appealed effectively to a theme of memory and perpetuation, resonating with a concern of Deuteronomy that the faith should be diligently passed from generation to generation (Deut 6:1-9).

<sup>38</sup> Sacrifice at altars is first mentioned in Gen 8:20. Sometimes altars were used to invoke the deity (Gen 12:7-8; 13:4, 18 and 26:25). See Saul Olyan, "Why an Altar of Unfinished Stone?" *ZAW* 108 (1996): 161-71. Also see Deut 27:5-6 and Josh 8:30-31.

the ensuing dispute may have never happened. Actually, in the Hebrew Bible this is the only instance in which an "altar" does not function as an altar.

In vv. 28–29 the altar is described as a "pattern" of the central altar at the Tabernacle. This is clear from v. 11, where the Cisjordanian tribes announce that their Transjordanian brothers have built a pattern of "the altar" (הַמִּזְבֵּחַ). The definite article shows that a particular altar was in view. The word תְּבִינָה (pattern) is quite rare in the Hebrew Bible; it occurs only eighteen times. Generally, the word describes the form of something that reminds the viewer of something else and which can be easily understood. In a negative context, it describes idols that are fashioned in a form that the worshippers can recognise and understand (see e.g., Deut 4:16–18, Isa 44:13, Ezek 8:3, 10:8 and Ps 106:20). The word is used to describe the altar that Ahaz fashioned similar to that of the Assyrian (or Syrian) he saw in Damascus (2 Kgs 16:10).<sup>39</sup> Surprisingly, this word is not used in the descriptions of Jeroboam's sanctuaries (1 Kgs 12:28–33), even though he meant to imitate the cult of Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup>

The word תְּבִינָה occurs in two positive contexts that relate to the building of legitimate cultic structures. The first is God's instruction to Moses to build the tabernacle and its fixtures according to the pattern (תְּבִינָה) shown to him (Exod 25:40). The second is David's transfer of plans (תְּבִינָה) for the Temple of Solomon (1 Chr 28:10–12, 18–19). These examples put the altar in Josh 22 in proper perspective. They show that תְּבִינָה occurs in cases in which a cultic item or structure is described and built with great attention to detail. In the Hebrew Bible "pattern" conveys the idea of physical properties that make an object clearly identifiable and connotes the concept of a comprehensive and detailed plan rather than a general description.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in addition to the declaration of the Transjordanian tribes in v. 28, the idea of "pattern" clearly shows that the altar was a duplicate of the one at the Tabernacle.

#### 4 Results of the Arbitration (vv. 30–34)

Phineas and his delegation were satisfied with the explanation given by the Transjordanian tribes. With this Phineas, as the head of the team, gave his rul-

<sup>39</sup> See John McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians 732-709 BC* (SBT Series 2; London: SCM Press, 1973), 60–62.

<sup>40</sup> See Elie Borowski, "Cherubim: God's Throne?" *BAR* 21 (1995): 36–41. Borowski argues that Jeroboam's golden calves were equivalents of Solomon's cherubim, so that an exact replication of Solomon's temple was never the intention. Also see Gary Knoppers, "Rehoboam in Chronicles: Victim or Villain?" *JBL* 109 (1980): 440. The Books of Kings never legitimate Jeroboam or his kingdom once he institutes his new cult. In relation to this article, the cult which Jeroboam promotes, has no visual affinity with that of Jerusalem. This is not the only reason it is viewed as illegitimate, but it is interesting that the text never equates the two cults in a visual sense.

<sup>41</sup> תְּבִינָה means a detailed plan.

ing - the other party did not act treacherously in the matter and so have rescued the entire Israelite nation from God's wrath and judgment. Phineas and his team then went back to report their findings to the Cisjordanian tribes. The allegation was not true. They were glad to hear the report and praised God. This ended their plan to go to war – a potential civil war has been averted through delegation, consultation and investigation.

## **D GUIDELINES FOR AFRICAN ETHNIC GROUPS**

The story of Joshua 22 serves an important lesson for African countries and their ethnic groups. It shows how a potential civil war can be averted to save lives and properties and forge unity among ethnic groups. The following are some of the lessons from Joshua 22.

### **1 Understanding Allegations**

Uninvestigated allegations can lead to civil wars. To avoid conflict we need to understand what an allegation is. Allegation is "an assertion, especially an unproved one; an accusation."<sup>42</sup> It is to declare something to be the case, especially without proof. When the Cisjordanian tribes heard the news, their first reaction was to go to war. But on second thought, they treated the news as an allegation that necessitates investigation. African ethnic groups should learn to take hearsay as allegation. Jumping to uninvestigated conclusions leads to unwarranted war.

### **2 The Use of Delegation**

To find the truth of an allegation, a delegation is needed. A delegate is an elected or appointed group of people who serve as representatives with the task of finding the truth or falsity of an allegation. In our context, these people serve to mediate between factions. In Joshua 22, the task of the delegation was to inquire into the truth of what they heard, and the reason for it. A proper delegation is important if Africans want to avoid civil conflicts. First, a delegation should be representative. Various clans or ethnic groups should be represented when investigations are conducted. This enables individual groups to gain first-hand information so that they can properly evaluate the allegations before them.

Secondly, much consideration should be given to the identity of the mediators if they are to make any impact. In Joshua 22, the delegation was made up of people of authority among the tribes. They were rulers of various family units. More importantly, the delegation was led by Phineas, the son of Eleazer, the priest. He was a man zealous for the LORD, and his glory (see

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<sup>42</sup> Henry W. Fowler and Francis G. Fowler, eds., "Allegation," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 33.

Num 25:7), and so qualified to deal with this matter. He would be faithful, bold, and zealous, as well as capable of giving advice and counsel to both parties, as needed. He led the group, because he held authority. He was the leading priest over the entire nation, including the two and one-half tribes on the east side of the Jordan. He not only had the authority, he also had the heart of a wise shepherd. He wanted to correct the erring, to protect the nation, and to drive out the dangerous. Israel reacts according to God's character. Their assembling for war demonstrated God's holiness, but their personal confrontation demonstrated God's love.

### **3 Dialogue: the Means of Conflict Prevention**

Most conflicts arise and escalate because of the unwillingness to engage into dialogue. Africans must resort to dialogue to avert conflicts. The western tribes resorted to dialogue based on communality. They saw the eastern tribes as brothers whose actions would affect them. Similarly, the western tribes saw that their action against the eastern tribes will affect them. They were even willing to compromise for the sake of peace; they were willing to share their land with their eastern brothers rather than allow a schism to take place. Thus, they showed great concern for the honour and glory of God, his worship, their love for their brethren, and affectionate regard for their brothers' spiritual welfare above their own private, personal, and temporal good. Often, warring factions are not ready to make sacrifices for the sake of peace. Selfish ambitions and hunger for domination prevent dialogue and conflict.

## **E CONCLUSION**

Joshua 22 shows that civil wars can be avoided if we take the path of non-violence. To make our way along this path requires both commitment and direction. We need a sense of direction and dedication to follow the path of peace. We must cultivate patience to engage into dialogue. We should respond to misunderstanding in the same manner as the Cisjordanian tribes in accordance with the following principles:

- (i) Respond with a concern for God's holiness;
- (ii) Respond with the courage to confront in love;
- (iii) Respond with an attempt to reconcile before one fights;
- (iv) Determine willingness to sacrifice to help; do not confront unless willing to help;
- (v) Determine readiness to see the situation from the perspective of the other person;
- (vi) Resolve to believe the best of one another.

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