

# The Trans-Jordanic Tribes

by A.B. Simpson

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of unselfish service, putting God first, and seeking to heal and mend relationships, as exemplified by the Reubenites and Gadites' selfless service and devotion to the Lord.*

**Scripture:** Joshua 22, Psalm 133:1, Matthew 5:9, Matthew 20:26-28, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:3-4, James 1:19

**Topics:** "Reconciliation", "Unselfish Service"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the lessons from the Trans-Jordanic tribes, who, despite choosing a portion outside the promised land, exemplified unselfish service by aiding their brethren in battle. Their commitment to God and their willingness to sacrifice for others serve as a model for Christian workers today. Simpson highlights the importance of putting God first, as demonstrated by the tribes' act of building an altar as a witness to their faith. He also addresses the theme of misunderstanding and the need for meekness in resolving conflicts, ultimately leading to reconciliation and unity among believers. The sermon concludes with a call to embody the spirit of peacemaking and service in our lives.

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## Transcript

"Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." (1 Cor. 4: 5.)

Joshua 22: 1-34.

This chapter adds a very striking picture to the incidents which preceded in the conquest of the land of promise and the division of Israel's inheritance. We have already referred to the inheritance of the two and a half tribes on the east side of Jordan, and to the mistake that they made in choosing their portion on the world-side of the land of promise. In this, undoubtedly, they were types of those who make a similar mistake in the present day, in choosing their portion too near the edge of the world. At the same time, there are such beautiful lessons connected with their example, that we can but rejoice at the compensations which the sacred story has placed over against their error. If they did not have the highest inheritance in the land, they had the spirit of the land in themselves, at least, and in the beautiful disposition of which this chapter is such a fine example.

UNSELFISH SERVICE

We see in them an example of the most unselfish service and sacrifice. They had just spent seven years in helping their brethren of the other tribes to pursue their inheritance on the west side of Jordan. Indeed, they had gone before them in the hardest places and the hottest battles, and had been the real pioneers in all these long campaigns.

The command had been, "You shall pass before your brethren, armed, all the mightiest men of valor, and help them until the Lord has given your brethren rest as He has given you, and they also have possessed the land which the Lord your God gives them. Then shall you return unto the land of your possession and enjoy it."

They had faithfully obeyed this command, and kept themselves. They had fought the battles of their brethren and won for them their heritages of blessing. They had marched around Jericho, stormed the heights of Beth-Horon, pursued in the long day at Gibeon, triumphed by the waters of Merom, and been valiant and true until all the thirty-one kings had been subdued, and the whole land had been won for the Lord of Israel.

It was entirely disinterested; not one stroke had they done for themselves. There is no nobler example in all the Book of Joshua than their high and unselfish devotion. This is the noblest quality and the rarest among Christian workers. How pathetically the Apostle Paul exclaims, "I have no man like-minded who will care for your state, for all care for their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's"!

The world instinctively does homage to unselfish love. A little fellow was boasting the other day about his wages. "I get two dollars a week," he said, "and I run errands. My father works in the factory and he gets two dollars a day. My brother works in the office, and he gets five dollars a week, and mother, she gets up in the morning about five o'clock, makes the fire, gets breakfast for father and us, and does the work of the house all day, gets our supper at night, and after we go to bed she does the darning, mends our clothes and fixes up things generally."

"Yes, and what does mother get?" "Oh mother -- well -- why -- she does not get anything. She does all the jobs of the house, but you know there is no money in it."

It was a boy's thoughtless testimony to the noblest heroism of common life. Hundreds of such heroines are suffering and toiling unmarked and unhonored.

But this is true of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many, and of whom it has been said that "when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously." Therefore, "whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant; and whosoever of you will be the chief, shall be servant of all."

## RECOMPENSE

The day of recompense comes at last to the unselfish worker. These brave men at length received their rich reward. The long weary marches were over at last, and as they stood before their Commander, it repaid them for all, to hear Him say, "You have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, and you have obeyed My voice in all that I commanded you. You have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God, and now the Lord your God has given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them. Therefore now return you, and get you into your tents, and unto the land of your possession." And then he added, "Return with much

riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren."

It was reward enough to have the "Well done" of the captain, but there was much more. There was the rich inheritance, the ample spoil, and the glad homecoming to the children, wives and friends so dearly loved. Then as we hear the "Well done" of our faithful Master, we shall not regret one tear or toil, but many would give the whole world for the privilege of going back once more to win the crown by earthly sacrifice and service.

But it is not only at the end of life that this glad recompense awaits the faithful servant, but even here God has His compensations and rewards for the self-denying and the pure-hearted. There is a day of toil and sacrifice, and waiting, and there is a day when the harvest is gathered in, and we bring our sheaves with rejoicing and wonder at the full reversions that have followed the years of tearful sowing, and what seemed hopeless waiting.

But even in the days of recompense we must not forget the old spirit of self-denying love. As they came to their inheritance, they were to divide the spoil with their brethren. There is to be no selfish hoarding. They are still to live the same life of love, even in their inheritance and home.

There are Christian workers who begin in the spirit of self-denial and win their success by sacrifice and noble heroism, and then, later in life, when their work is crowned with success, they fall into the snare of selfishness and ease, and allow the very reward, which God gave them, to benumb their holy energies, and turn aside the edge of their consecration and power. It requires much more grace to know how to abound than to know how to be abased. Even when we reach our millennial glory it is not to be a selfish life. The highest aspiration of a noble spirit is to rise to a higher service in the life beyond, of unceasing ministries. This is the life of God, and it is the only heaven that God can give.

## GOD FIRST

We see in these two tribes and a half, a beautiful example of putting God first before their own inheritance.

When they reached the fords of the Jordan, they paused awhile before turning to their home, and built a great altar there as a tower of witness and an altar of worship. They feared that in coming days their children would forget the service of the true God, and might let their isolation on the further side of Jordan separate them from the common faith. Therefore, to keep in remembrance, and to bind their children to the same faith and worship, they reared this altar of witness. It would have been natural for them to have hastened home. Long years had passed since they had looked in the faces of those they loved. Throbbing hearts were drawing them to their loved ones, but they paused and remembered God first, and set up this memorial that coming generations might remember His name and maintain His honor and worship.

This is, indeed, a bright and beautiful example. This is the true secret of all blessing and happiness. God first, should be the watchword and keynote of every plan and purpose and enterprise, in the consecrated life. Then He will delight in all our service and blessing, and will love to think of us as generously as we have thought of Him.

## MISUNDERSTANDING

And now we see a very beautiful act misunderstood and misjudged.

We read with astonishment that "when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them." They seem at once to have begun to think they knew all about it. It was an act of treason and rebellion, and that it must be promptly and severely put down. Very fortunately, they sent a delegation before proceeding to actual hostilities, to charge them with their crime, and at once began to upbraid them for their trespass.

"Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, What trespass is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the Lord?"

"Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord,

"But that you must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be, seeing you rebel today against the Lord, that tomorrow He will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

"Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord's tabernacle dwells, and take possession among us; but rebel not against the Lord, nor rebel against us, in building for yourselves an altar of the Lord our God.

"Did not Achan, the son of Zerah, commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel, and that man perished not alone in his iniquity?"

This is truly very humbling, and very much like the rest of us. How often we have passed these hasty judgments upon our brethren! How many have been alienated for years by some rash conclusion, and found at last that they had misunderstood the friend and misjudged the act which, if they had only understood, they would have honored its motives and spirit, and recognized it as worthy of all praise.

Therefore, the Master has said:"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come,"and then He will not only look at the act, but "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man praise God." All that can be recognized He will cherish, and all that He can forget, He will love to leave in oblivion.

## MEEKNESS

We see, at the same time, a beautiful example of meekness on the part of the Reubenites and their brethren. They did not fire up and resent the cruel misjudgment. They did not retaliate with vindictive words and bitter strife, but they meekly and gently assured their brethren of their innocency and honest intent, and their loyal devotion to the common faith and the sacred altar of the Lord, in the tabernacle.

How much grace it requires to bear a misunderstanding rightly, and to receive an unkind judgment in holy sweetness! Nothing tests a Christian character more than to have some evil thing said about you. This is the file that soon proves whether we are gold-plated or solid gold. If we could only know the blessings that lie hidden in our wrongs, we would say, like David, when Shimei cursed him, "Let him curse; it may be the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day."

Some people get easily turned aside from the grandeur of their life-work by pursuing their own grievances and enemies, until their life gets turned into one little petty whirl of warfare. It is like a nest of hornets. You may disperse the hornets, but you will probably get terribly stung, and get nothing for your pains, for even

their honey is not worth the search.

Wiser and happier they who, like old Nehemiah, say to all the Sanballats, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you?"

The gentleness and meekness of the Reubenites and their brethren averted a great catastrophe, and turned a curse into a blessing. So, "a soft answer ever turns away wrath," and a spirit of gentleness will avert many a sorrow.

May God give us more of His Spirit, who, when reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously.

#### MISUNDERSTANDING HEALED

We see a very beautiful example of a misunderstanding healed, and a curse turned into a blessing.

Instead of a fratricidal war, there is reconciliation and love, and they joyfully exclaim: "This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because you have not committed this trespass against the Lord." There is no greater evidence of the presence of the Lord in His people than the spirit of love and there is no sweeter testimony to God and His glorious grace than the reconciliation of strife and the healing of mutual wrongs. "Behold, how good a thing it is, and how pleasant, for brethren to dwell together in unity; for there the Lord commands a blessing, even life forevermore."

When the Lord wants to make an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off, this is the way He does it: "Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier, shall come up the myrtle tree." God's sweetest memorial is the transformed thorn, and the thistle blooming with flowers of peace and sweetness, where once grew recriminations and maledictions.

Beloved, God is waiting to make just such memorials in your life, out of the things that are hurting you most today. Take the grievances, the separations, the strained friendships, and the broken ties which have been the sorrow and heartbreak of your life, and let God heal them, and give you grace to make you right with all with whom you may be wrong, and you will wonder at the joy and blessing that will come out of the things that have caused you nothing but regret and pain.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." The everlasting employment of our blessed Redeemer is to reconcile the guilty and the estranged from God, and the highest and most Christlike work that we can do is, to be like Him in this regard.

Shall we go forth to dry the tears of a sorrowing world, to heal the brokenhearted, to bind up the wounds of human lives, and to unite heart to heart, and earth to heaven?

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