

Joshua 19b Zebulun

08/02/98 7:28 AM

Birth

Gen 30:20, Leah's sixth son, and tenth overall. Only Joseph and Benjamin come later.

Name is same as verb in "now will my husband dwell with me." The noun appears five times in the OT:

- 1x of God's heavenly habitation (Isa 63:15)
- 1x of the habitation of the sun and moon (Hab 3:11)
- 2x of God's dwelling in the temple (1 Kings 8:13; 2 Chr 6:2)
- 1x of what the wicked cannot expect (Ps 49:14).

Thus always in sense of an exalted, glorious habitation. "Now will my husband feel that my tent is his royal habitation." Zebulun is "the palace," "the throne room." As we shall see, this may have some prophetic significance.

Region

Joshua's allocation is land-locked. In fact, this is the only complete boundary that we have. But prophecies and Isa 9:1 link it to the sea.

Blessing of Jacob, Gen 49:13

"At the haven" can also mean "toward the shore." Even within the borders defined in Joshua, Zebulun overlooks the routes along the Kishon out to the Mediterranean, and contains an important overland route to Tiberias. Thus we expect to find them involved in commerce, a hypothesis that is confirmed by Moses' blessing.

Blessing of Moses

So far, we have been following Jacob's blessings on his sons. Four hundred years later, in Deut 33, Moses gives another set of blessings, this time on the tribes that stem from them. His blessing on Zebulun extends that of Jacob.

Deut 33:18,19, "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. 19 They shall call the peoples [Heb] unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck [of] the abundance of the seas, and [of] treasures hid in the sand."

Note the Heb. plural "peoples." Cf. Cody, VT 14 (1964) 1-6: "while 'am throughout the Old Testament refers to a people or nation in its aspect of centripetal unity and cohesiveness, *gôy* is linked inseparably with territory and government and what we would today call foreign relations."

Thus the reference here is to summoning other peoples than Israel to "the mountain," Mount Zion, where they will join with Israel in offering "sacrifices of righteousness." Isa 2:2,3.

Anticipates a missionary role for these two tribes, related to their trade. They are situated across the main EW corridor in northern Israel, so would be in contact with many different nations.

But there are disadvantages as well as advantages to being on a main trade route. Such routes were the most convenient access for invaders, and 2 Kings 15:29 shows that this was the area first hit by Tiglath-Pileser during the Assyrian invasion. Yet God compensates them for this.

Isaiah's Prophecy, Isa 9:1-2

"Galilee of the Gentiles" emphasizes the heavy mixture of nations that takes place in this region, due to commerce and war.

AV "more grievously afflict" = "make heavy," a common idiom for "honor." As they were the first to feel God's chastening hand through the Assyrians, so they will be the first to hear the gospel of the Messiah. Matt 4:13-16 brings out the fulfillment of this prophecy.

In spite of Joshua's borders, which put Capernaum squarely within Naphthali, Matt 4:13 associates it with Zebulun as well. Josephus, Antiquities V.84 (V.i.22) makes Zebulun lower Galilee and Naphthali upper Galilee, giving Zebulun access to the Sea of Galilee and possibly including Capernaum. For more detailed definition of lower Galilee, see Jewish War III.38 (III.iii.1).

Two points to glean from this:

- Jacob's prophecy about the sea apparently refers to the tribal region as it was reckoned in the time of our Lord, which was clearly its high point. This was also the period when Zebulun was truly "the throneroom," the "exalted habitation" of God in the person of the LJC.
- The heavy traffic makes this region an ideal one from which to exercise the missionary work anticipated in Moses' blessing in Deut 33, and our Lord certainly set the pattern for that. Cf. Mark 3:7,8.

People

General Character

A welcome contrast to Benjamin and Simeon. Upright, courageous.

With Naphthali, supported Barak's defense against Sisera (Judg 4:6, 10; 5:18). This heroism is probably why they are named in the royal procession in Psa 68:27.

Part of Gideon's army, with Manasseh, Asher, and Naphthali (Judg 6:35).

When the tribes come to David in Hebron in 2 Chron 12:23 to make him king, Zebulun is described in v.33, "Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: [they were] not of double heart." Well disciplined, courageous. "Double heart," cf. v.38, and contrast Psa 12:2, deceptiveness.

After the fall of the north to Assyria, Hezekiah invited the northern remnant to a passover (2 Chr 30:1-12). Though he was generally scorned, some of Zebulun (and Asher and Manasseh) did respond, v.11.

Noteworthy Individuals

Though Judaeen by tribe, the Lord Jesus was raised in this territory. Nazareth is smack in the middle of it. As its ranks furnished many loyal troops earlier in the nation's history, so many of the Lord's followers would have been from this area.

Judg 12:11-12, Elon, one of the three minor judges mentioned between Jephthah and Samson.

Jonah, of Gath-Hepher (2 Kings 14:25), which is in Zebulun (19:13).

- A type of the LJC with respect to resurrection, Matt 12:40.
- Anticipates him in another regard: unlike most of the prophets, his audience was not Israel but a gentile nation, Nineveh! Compare the Lord's outreach to the Sidonians in Mark 7:24-30, and his great commission to his followers to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Application

When God places you at the crossroads, he expects you to speak to those who pass by. Like Jonah, we may be resistant, but we do so to our own hurt and the Lord's dishonor. Let us resolve to use our strategic position in this international town to "call the peoples to the mountain."

467, "Go ye into all the world"