

Zebulun Will Live by the Seashore and Become a Haven for Ships

49: 13

DIG: What was puzzling about Jacob's prophecy to Zebulun? The word seashore is plural. What does that point to? Who traveled through the territory of Zebulun? Why will Isaiah's prophecy that Israel will reach all the Gentile nations come through Zebulun and not Judah? How was the tribe of Zebulun a haven for Jesus? How will their boundaries change during the thousand-year messianic Kingdom, and what special ministry will they have?

REFLECT: Has the Lord ever prompted you to do something, or put you in a situation, that didn't make any sense to you - only to end up being a blessing? When? Where? How can you use that experience to help others? Do you need to have the gift of evangelism to evangelize? How are you a conduit through which the God of Israel is made known to others?

Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon (49:13).

After speaking to Judah, Ya'akov turned to Leah's two other sons, who apparently were standing together next to him.⁷⁷⁵ One would expect to read now the blessing upon Dan since he was the fifth son of Jacob (30:6). Yet, the chronology here is not according to birth but according to the birth mother; the first six sons of Jacob's prophecy are children of his first wife Leah (35:23).⁷⁷⁶ Zebulun is mentioned before Issachar (although Issachar is older and should have been mentioned first) because Zebulun's territory fell between Issachar's and Dan's, and for that reason they are referred to in that order.

Ya'akov prophesied to the sixth son of Leah first and said: Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon (49:13). The shortest of all the bedside blessings, this is not a curse leveled at Zebulun because of his vain flirtation with the Phoenicians, but a word of praise and promise addressed to this tribe.⁷⁷⁷ The need for a **near historical** and a **far eschatological** view of this prophecy is vital because initially Zebulun had no border by the seashore.

In the **near historical future** we know that **Zebulun's** borders did *not* extend to the seashore (Joshua 19:10-16). Zebulun was separated from the Mediterranean Sea by the tribe of **Asher** on the west, and from the Sea of Galilee (Kinnereth) by the tribe of Naphtali on the east (Joshua 19:24-31). But **Asher** never fully settled the northern peninsula. They failed to possess the land . . . and did not drive out those living in **Akko** or **Sidon** or **Ahlab** or **Akzib** or **Helbah** or **Aphek** or **Rehob**. The **Asherites** lived among the **Canaanite** inhabitants of the land because they did not drive them out (Judges 1:31-32). Therefore, the tribe of **Zebulun** ended up having an expanded influence in northern **Isra'el**. The word **seashore** is plural, and it became a double fulfillment because **Zebulun** then had access to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

However, the influence of **Zebulun's** trading did extend northward toward the Phoenicians and the city of **Sidon** (Isaiah 23:4; Ezekiel 28:22). They would do business with the Phoenicians, and therefore, would be enriched with trade from **the sea**. In fact, one of the key highways of the ancient world, **the way of the sea**, or the *via maris*, passed right through the territory of **Zebulun**. So the rich crops he and members of his tribe grew in their territory were exported by the Phoenicians.

Not only that, but later Moshe would specifically tell us that **ADONAI** would spread His message through the tribe of **Zebulun**. About **Zebulun** he said: **Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and you Issachar, in your tents. They will summon peoples to the mountain, a specific mountain, the holy mountain of the LORD, Yerushalayim, and there offer the sacrifices of the righteous; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand** (Deuteronomy 33:18-19). The Greek, the Babylonians, and the Romans would all come through the territory of **Zebulun**, and they would be a conduit through which the **God** of **Isra'el** would be made known to them. Both Jew and Gentile coming to **the mountain of the LORD** through the business of **Zebulun**.

*This should be a reminder to us that we should do the same as we carry on our business in this world. Not all have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but we all need to be evangelists. All of us are sent out to be a blessing, a conduit through which **Jesus Christ** would be made known to the Greeks, Babylonians and Romans of our day. No matter what we do in this life, some of the best opportunities to share the Good News come from the most day-to-day, commonplace experiences. **ADONAI** has done some great things in our lives and to want to share that with others is quite natural. **Jesus** said it this way: **In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:16). Just be who you are and let **God** work through you.*

Isaiah also gives us a prophetic promise through **Zebulun**. How unexpected! Why not through Judah? **God** will reach **Isra'el** and all the **Gentile nations**. Speaking of the darkness of his day, the prophet writes: **Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past [God] humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, but in the future He will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan (Isaiah 9:1).** Jacob's prophecy would be fulfilled by a tribe living on the edge of the nations - **Zebulun**. **The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy (Isaiah 9:2-3a).** How would this be accomplished?

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father Prince of Peace**. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of **ADONAI**, the **LORD** of heaven's angelic armies, will accomplish this (**Isaiah 9:6-7**).

We also know that the tribe of **Zebulun** was a haven for **Jesus**. When Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt when **Yeshua** was an infant, **Galilee** was their haven of safety (**Matthew 2:13-23**). Although **Jesus** was of the tribe of Judah, He grew up in Nazareth and lived there about thirty years before He started His ministry, much of which took place in the territory of **Zebulun (Matthew 4:12-17)**. Eleven of the twelve apostles were from **Galilee** (Judas was not). Also, when the Jewish religious leaders were plotting to kill Him, He took refuge in **Galilee (John 7:1 and 9)**.

However, a key part of **Jacob's** blessing referred to the **far eschatological future** during the messianic Kingdom. The borders of the tribes during that time will be different, and the border of **Zebulun** will extend to the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, **Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships** during that time (**Ezekiel 48:26**).

So it appears that in some way **Zebulun** will have a special ministry to the unbelieving **Gentiles** during the messianic Kingdom, and many will be saved. The people and territory of **Zebulun** will become a haven for ships, as **Galilee** was a haven for **Jesus** before the cross.

The Psalmist describes how **God** came to **Israel's** rescue and ours as well. He paints four pictures taken from life, yet intended to represent **Israel's** and our experience. The fourth of these parables speaks about **Israel's** and our smallness when compared to **ADONAI**. **Some went out to the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, His wonderful deeds in the deep; For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to**

the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits end, literally, *all their wisdom was swallowed up* (Psalm 107:23-27). The hurricane shakes us into seeing that in a world of frightening forces, we live by permission and not by good management.⁷⁷⁸ We come to the end of ourselves, or our **wits end**. All of our supposed skill to manage our lives becomes useless. We need to believe that it is **God** who has **His** hands on the helm of our **ship**.

Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper and the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired haven (Psalm 107:28-30). This will be the message of the tribe of Zebulun during the thousand year reign of the Messiah. Their message will point unbelieving Gentiles to Christ, and He will become a haven for those who have come to their wits end, who are weary of trying to steer their own ship.

Let them give thanks to the LORD of His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. He calmed the storm and delivered them from their danger, guiding them safely to their destination. Let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people and praise Him in the council of the elders (Psalm 107:31-32). The tribe of Zebulun will finally live by the seashore, but they will become **fishers of men** (Matthew 4:18-20).

The last of Leah's six sons was next in line. What did God have in store for him?