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Lessons from Jacob's Blessing of Zebulun

By Jerry Collins



Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; And he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall be toward Sidon (Genesis 49:13).

Verse 13—*Zebulun will dwell at the seashore*—The descendants of Zebulun would live near the seas, a reference to their tribal allotment between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

- *And he shall be a haven for ships*—Zebulun's tribe would be known as maritime traders and dwell close to the commercial shoreline. The tribe would become enriched with seaborne trade passing through and in their region.

PT—Located in the western end of the valley of Jezreel, the tribe of Zebulun was traversed by one of the great trade routes of antiquity, the *Via Maris* (the way of the sea). This caravan route reached from Damascus in the northeast to Egypt in the southwest. Thus, lying between two seas and also on a major trade route, Zebulun was heavily involved in commercial ventures. Moses' later blessing on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33 reflects this characteristic. Among other things, he said, "*for they will draw out the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand*" (Deuteronomy 33:19).

- *and his flank shall be toward Sidon*—Sidon was a significant northern Canaanite city in the land, later called Phoenicia. According to the tribal allotments, Zebulun's territory was separated from Sidon by the tribe of Asher. Asher's territory *turned eastward toward Beth Dagon, touched Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtah El to the north* (Joshua 19:27). Asher, however, was never able to dislodge the Canaanites who dwelt in that coastal region north of Mount Carmel and Haifa Bay. It is possible that, according to this prophecy, the tribe of Zebulun in later days began to filter onto this coastal area bordering Phoenicia, thus fulfilling the prophecy that Sidon should be on Zebulun's flank. Moses' blessing included "*Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going forth, and, Issachar, in your tents*" (Deuteronomy 33:18), meaning in all that you do.



A Review of the History of the Tribe of Zebulun in Battle in Judges 5

It seems that Zebulun was a committed tribe to whatever tasks it was assigned. That even included jeopardizing their lives if necessary.

Verse 14—*And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office*—This came from the "Song of Deborah and Barak." This song was composed to memorialize God's deliverance of the Israelites from the army of Jabin, king of Hazer, whose commanding officer was Sisera. The battle, recorded in Judges 4, took place in the valley of Jezreel—in Zebulun's territory. *Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him* (Judges 4:9-10). Evidently each tribe had the opportunity to send a contingent of volunteers to the conflict. Zebulun was one of the tribes commended in the song for their willingness to volunteer for the battle. The *staff of office* referred to official leaders of the tribe who made special contributions to the campaign.

Verse 18—*Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death*—The conduct of the tribe during the struggle with Sisera, when they fought with desperate valor side by side with their brethren of Naphtali, was such as to draw the special praise of Deborah, who singles them out from all the other tribes. Deborah commended them for their bravery, willing to give their lives in battle.

- *...on the high places of the field*—This testimony of the Zebulunites' bravery and willingness to risk their own lives unto the death in *the high places of the field* serves as a stirring example of commitment to victory at all costs. The Canaanites were a determined enemy which required full resolve to meet in battle.

PT—This bravery and willingness to risk their own lives for God's cause reminds us of the need to serve as faithful soldiers in the work of God. The Jerusalem church recognized such bravery and zeal with their word of commendation for Paul and Barnabas, *having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 15:25-26).

An Application—We could probably argue that it is not possible to remove every last Canaanite, yet that is exactly what was needed, and leaving any of them would be Zebulun's downfall. Zebulun was one of a number of tribes which did not drive out the Canaanites, but only made them tributary. *Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor* (Judges 1:30). The solution for us today, is to be committed to a lifestyle of spiritual warfare. There is always sin in our lives left unconquered. So the spiritual life is a constant spiritual warfare.

* Learn more by checking out our study of the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" at relationalconcepts.org *

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