

Deuteronomy 33:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out;
and, Issachar, in thy tents.

Analysis

And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. Moses pairs Zebulun and Issachar, sons of Leah (Genesis 30:18-20), whose territories were adjacent in lower Galilee. The blessing assigns complementary roles: Zebulun's **going out** (betse'thekha, בִּתְסֵתְּכָה) contrasts with Issachar's **tents** (be'ohalekha, בְּעוֹהֲלֶכָה). The imperative semach (רָגַץ, "rejoice") begins the blessing—joy in divinely appointed vocations.

The phrase suggests vocational distinction: Zebulun engaged in external commerce, travel, or military expeditions, while Issachar pursued settled, domestic occupations. Jacob's earlier blessing provides context: "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships" (Genesis 49:13); "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: And he saw that rest was good... and bowed his shoulder to bear" (Genesis 49:14-15). Zebulun thus represents active, entrepreneurial engagement with the world; Issachar represents industrious, stable agricultural labor.

The call to "rejoice" in distinct callings teaches contentment with providential assignment. Not all are called to the same work—some go out, others stay in tents. Both vocations receive equal blessing when pursued in covenant obedience. This anticipates Paul's teaching on diverse spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and vocations serving the body's common good. The danger lies in despising one's calling or envying another's—both tribes should "rejoice" in God-given roles.

Historical Context

Zebulun's territory included the western portion of lower Galilee with access to Mediterranean trade routes and proximity to Phoenician ports. Though not directly coastal, Zebulun's location facilitated commerce with maritime traders. The tribe's "going out" thus involved commercial enterprise, interaction with Gentile traders, and possibly seafaring ventures in partnership with Phoenician neighbors.

Issachar's territory, the fertile Jezreel Valley, was prime agricultural land—the breadbasket of northern Israel. This tribe's "tents" represented settled agricultural life, cultivating the rich valley soil. Judges 5:15 suggests Issachar supported Deborah's campaign, showing their strength despite agricultural focus. 1 Chronicles 12:32 notes "men of Issachar... had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do"—wisdom developed through observing seasonal rhythms and natural patterns.

Both tribes played crucial roles in Jesus's ministry—Galilee (including both territories) was the primary location of His teaching and miracles. The "going out" and "tents" found ultimate expression in apostolic mission: disciples sent out to the world (Matthew 28:19) while maintaining churches as settled communities of worship and instruction. The complementary callings persist in the church—some called to missionary "going out," others to faithful "tent" ministry in local contexts.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse address modern anxiety about vocational significance and comparative value of different callings?
2. What enables believers to 'rejoice' in unglamorous or hidden vocations when others receive public recognition?

3. How can we discern whether our calling is to 'go out' (pioneering, traveling, engaging externally) or 'tents' (stable, local, internal development)?
4. In what ways do Zebulun and Issachar's complementary roles illustrate the church's need for diverse gifts and callings?
5. How should understanding vocation as divine appointment affect our satisfaction and diligence in daily work?

Interlinear Text

וְזִבְלֹן	אָמַר	שִׂמְחָה	וְזִבְלֹן	בְּצֵאתְךָ	וְיִשָּׁשָׁכָר
And of Zebulun	he said	Rejoice	And of Zebulun	in thy going out	and Issachar
H2074	H559	H8055	H2074	H3318	H3485
בְּאֶהְלִיךָ:					
in thy tents					
H168					

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