

Joshua 19:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And their border went up toward the sea, and Maralah, and reached to Dabbasheth, and reached to the river that is before Jokneam;

Analysis

And their border went up toward the sea, and Maralah, and reached to Dabbasheth, and reached to the river that is before Jokneam.

The detailed boundary description—**went up toward the sea** (ve-alah gevulam la-yamah, וַעֲלָה גְבוּלָם לַיָּמָה)—traces Zebulun's western border climbing from the interior toward the Mediterranean. The verb alah (עָלָה, "went up") indicates ascending terrain, as the land rises from eastern valleys toward western hills. Though Zebulun's boundary approached the sea, it didn't reach it, being bordered by Asher who controlled the actual coastline.

The place names—**Maralah** and **Dabbasheth**—are identified with sites in the Jezreel Valley region. Dabbasheth (דַּבָּשֶׁת) possibly derives from devash (דֶּבֶשׁ, "honey"), suggesting a fertile, productive area. The boundary's extension to **the river that is before Jokneam** (likely the Kishon River) demonstrates God's precision in defining territorial borders. Every stream, hill, and landmark served to delineate where one tribe's inheritance ended and another's began.

These geographical details, though seemingly mundane, establish the historical and legal foundation for Israel's land tenure. In ancient Near Eastern culture, boundary disputes caused frequent conflicts. God's detailed definition of tribal territories prevented internal strife and provided clear legal documentation. Moreover, these physical boundaries embodied theological truth—God assigns

each believer specific spheres of service and influence (2 Corinthians 10:13-16), and faithfulness in our assigned territory matters more than envying others' assignments.

Historical Context

The region described—western lower Galilee and the Jezreel Valley—was among Canaan's most fertile areas. The Jezreel Valley (called "the valley of Megiddo" in Zechariah 12:11) served as the breadbasket of northern Israel, producing grain, olives, and grapes. Its strategic location also made it a military corridor—armies from Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon marched through this valley, and major battles occurred here (Judges 4-5; 2 Kings 23:29).

Jokneam, mentioned as a boundary marker, was a Canaanite city conquered by Joshua (Joshua 12:22) and later assigned to the Levites (Joshua 21:34). Archaeological excavations at Tell Qeimun (identified as Jokneam) reveal occupation from the Bronze Age through the Persian period, confirming the site's long-term importance. The city guarded the pass through the Carmel mountain range, controlling access between the coastal plain and the Jezreel Valley.

Zebulun's inheritance in this productive, strategic region reflects God's generosity to all tribes, not just Judah or Ephraim. Though Zebulun played a less prominent role in biblical narratives than some tribes, they received prime agricultural land. This distribution demonstrates covenant equality—all twelve tribes were heirs of Abraham's promises, each receiving inheritance appropriate to their size and calling. The land's later role in Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:12-16) vindicates God's ancient planning.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do the detailed boundary descriptions in Joshua encourage us to trust God's careful attention to the details of our lives and callings?
2. What does Zebulun's inheritance of fertile, strategic land teach about God's equitable treatment of all His covenant people, not just the most prominent?
3. How can understanding your 'assigned territory' (sphere of influence and responsibility) help you avoid both overreaching ambition and underestimating your calling?

Interlinear Text

וַעֲלֶה	גְּבוּלָם	לִי מָה	וּמַרְעֵלָה	וּפָגַע		
went up	And their border	toward the sea	and Maralah	and reached		
H5927	H1366	H3220	H4831	H6293		
בְּדָבְשֶׁת	וּפָגַע	אֶל	הַנָּחַל	אֲשֶׁר	עַל	כִּנֹּי
to Dabbasheth	and reached	H413	to the river	H834	H5921	that is before
H1708	H6293		H5158			H6440
יְקִנְעָם:						
Jokneam						
H3362						

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 12:22 (Parallel theme): The king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of Carmel, one;