

# Joshua 21:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And unto the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with her suburbs, and Kartah with her suburbs,

## Analysis

**And unto the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with her suburbs, and Kartah with her suburbs,**

The Merarites, descendants of Levi's youngest son Merari, receive the final Levitical allocation. The phrase "the rest of the Levites" (leviyim hannotarim, פָּלִימַנְתָּרִים) identifies them as the remaining Levitical family after Kohathites and Gershonites were provided for. The Hebrew notarim ("remaining") doesn't imply inferiority but simply indicates sequential allocation—Kohathites first (priestly priority), Gershonites second, Merarites third. Each family received appropriate provision according to its needs and calling.

Zebulun's contribution begins with Jokneam (יָקְנֵעַם), meaning "the people are gathered" or "possessed by the people." The city guarded the Carmel ridge's southern approach, controlling access to the Jezreel Valley. Tel Yokneam preserves the ancient site, with archaeological evidence of Israelite occupation following Late Bronze Age destruction. Kartah (קַרְתָּה, "city") is a generic name suggesting the settlement's primary identification was simply as an urban center. The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 6:77 omits Kartah, listing only Jokneam and Rimmon—possibly indicating textual variation or that some cities were later abandoned or renamed.

The Merarites' original wilderness responsibility was transporting the tabernacle's structural framework—boards, bars, pillars, and sockets (Numbers 3:36-37; 4:31-32). This heavy construction work required physical strength and careful organization. Their allocation in the Promised Land maintained their supporting role, providing cities from which they continued serving Israel's worship infrastructure.

## Historical Context

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Zebulun occupied territory in Lower Galilee between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean coast. Jacob's blessing prophesied that "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea" (Genesis 49:13), though Zebulun's actual territory touched the sea only at its southwestern corner, if at all. The tribe became known for courage in battle—Deborah praised them for risking their lives (Judges 5:18), and many Zebulunites joined David at Hebron (1 Chronicles 12:33).

Jokneam's strategic position made it militarily significant. The city controlled trade routes through the Jezreel Valley and approaches to Mount Carmel—where Elijah later confronted Baal prophets (1 Kings 18). Levitical presence at this junction positioned covenant teachers where commercial and cultural exchange created both opportunity and temptation. The challenge was maintaining covenant distinctiveness while engaging necessary economic activity.

Zebulun's limited mention in biblical history suggests a faithful if unremarkable tribal existence—fulfilling covenant obligations without dramatic apostasy or extraordinary revival. Such steady faithfulness, though less celebrated than dramatic exploits, forms the backbone of God's purposes across generations.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. How does the Merarites' heavy structural work illustrate the importance of unglamorous but essential service in God's kingdom?
2. What does Zebulun's quiet faithfulness teach about the value of steady obedience over dramatic but inconsistent spirituality?
3. In what behind-the-scenes ways might God be calling you to support the church's worship and mission?

## Interlinear Text

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וְلִמְשָׁפֵחַ וְתַ	בָּנִי	מִרְאֵי	פְּלִוִי מ	הַבּוֹתְרִים
And unto the families	of the children	of Merari	of the Levites	the rest
H4940	H1121	H4847	H3881	H3498
מִאֵת מִצְבֵּה הַ	זְבוּלָן	אֶת יְקֻנֵּם	אֶת יְקֻנֵּם	מִגְּרָשָׁה:
H853	out of the tribe	of Zebulun	Jokneam	with her suburbs
H4294		H2074	H3362	H4054
אֶת קְרַת הַ	מִגְּרָשָׁה:			
and Kartah	with her suburbs			
H853	H853	H4054		

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Chronicles 6:77** (Parallel theme): Unto the rest of the children of Merari were given out of the tribe of Zebulun, Rimmon with her suburbs, Tabor with her suburbs: