



The Sermon

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Genesis 49:13-21

"Jacob, Prophecy, and Israel"

February 5, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Well, today we're in Genesis chapter 49, so please take your Bible and turn with me to Genesis chapter 49, and today we're going to be looking at verses 13-21. And the title of this message is "Jacob, Prophecy, and Israel." That's how we want to begin, as always, by reading the passage. Last Lord's Day we looked at verses 1-12; and we're just preaching our way through this book verse by verse.

And so today we now pick it up in the middle of the chapter at verse 13, which reads, "Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; and he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall be toward Sidon. Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor. Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward. For Your salvation I wait, O Lord. As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid at their heels. As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties. Naphtali is a doe let loose, he gives beautiful words."

I'll stop the reading of the Word of God there. What on earth is God saying in this passage? You truly need me, OK. You need me. So let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, we are so grateful for Your Word. It is Your Word that opens up Your mind to us, and we are able to know the truth, because it's recorded in Your Word. As we live in this world it is filled with lies and falsehoods and errors, and so when we come to church, this is the one time during the week where we hear the pure truth of Your Word as it's being preached to us. And so I pray that You would open our ears to hear, open our eyes to see, open our hearts to believe and to receive. Take this passage of scripture and minister it to our hearts as obscure sounding as it may at this moment. There's much for us to learn, but even more for us to live from this text. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses we see the patriarch Jacob literally on his deathbed, and he gathers his twelve sons around him, and this will be the last time he will speak to them, at least the last time as it is recorded in Scripture. And as they are peering over his deathbed, he's propped up in bed, he looks into their faces, and at the same time looks into their future. A spirit of prophecy rests upon him, and God enables Jacob to look into the future and to prophesy what will take place. As he does, he looks into the future five hundred years, he looks into the future almost a thousand years, and he makes known the future to the sons of Jacob.

This prophecy is very important. Each of these of what I just read is a prophecy of the future, and it's very important, because one of the strongest reasons why we believe that the Bible is the Word of God is fulfilled prophecy. There are some ten strong reasons why we believe the Bible is what it claims to be. But one undisputed pillar that upholds our confidence in the Word of God is fulfilled prophecy. Only God knows the future. You don't know five seconds from now what will happen, but God knows the future all the way into eternity future, and the reason God knows the future is because God has already foreordained the future. He has pre-scripted all that will come to pass.

And so prophecy many times is recorded in Scripture. In fact, 27 percent of the Bible was prophetic at the time it was written. Over one-fourth of the Bible at the time it was written looked into the future, and it had not yet

occurred. And what is also amazing is there are hundreds of prophecies that have already been fulfilled. Every prophecy that has already been fulfilled is like a nail driven into a board that solidifies and anchors our confidence that the Bible is the pure, unadulterated, unvarnished truth of the living God.

I want to give you just one example. I thought by way of introduction what's an example I could just toss out on fulfilled prophecy already, and I immediately thought of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there were over one hundred prophecies that were fulfilled at His first coming. So if I went down that path, I'd be starting a new series. So I reeled myself back and I thought, "OK, I'll give you just this one example of fulfilled prophecy." It's found at the end of Isaiah chapter 44 in verse 28, in which God is the speaker. And God says, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'" It continues into the next chapter of Isaiah chapter 45 and God continues to call out Cyrus by name.

Now here's what's interesting. Cyrus hasn't even been born yet. Cyrus will not be born until another hundred years, and he will not assume the throne for almost a hundred and fifty years to become King of Persia. Yet God has called him out by name a century before he even steps onto the stage of human history. How about that?

Well, let me ask you this question. Do you think you could name the President of the United States a hundred years from today? We don't even know who the President is going to be next time, much less a hundred years from now. And yet here it is in the Bible, each one of these is a verification and an authentication that God is the God of all truth, and His word is the truth, and God speaks only that which is true.

And so as we come to these verses today, which admittedly are obscure, I had two thoughts as I was preparing this. Number one, I've never preached these verses before. I've preached for half a century. I have never preached these verses in Genesis chapter 49, and especially in the middle of the chapter. The second thought I had was, "I'll never preach these verses again

the rest of my life." So I'm all in today. I mean, this is it, and I'll go to heaven in a cloud of glory, because I'll never be preaching verse by verse again through the book of Genesis, Lord willing. So, what does this say? What does this mean? What does it have for us? I'm going to let it all out, OK. So, here we go.

We pick this up at verse 13. And just to remind you, the first part of this chapter, Jacob gives the prophecy to the first four sons: to Reuben, to Simeon, to Levi, and to Judah. So now as we come to verse 13, he continues to go through his sons, the next six sons, I just read them for you: Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali. Sounds like a homeschool convention, doesn't it? OK. So let's walk through this. We homeschooled our kids for a few years. That was just a joke.

All right, I want you to note first, "the prophecy about Zebulun," verse 13. Let's learn what we need to learn here: "Zebulun" - and with this Jacob with his dying voice calls out Zebulun. He, no doubt, leans a little closer to his dying father to hear what he has to say (Zebulun is the sixth and the last son of Jacob and Leah, the tenth son that was born overall), and he says - "will dwell at the seashore."

This is the prophecy. This is where he's going to live. "This is where your descendants almost five hundred years from now when you come into the Promised Land after four hundred years in Egyptian bondage," that still awaits with Moses, and then another forty years of going into the wilderness in circles, and then coming into the Promised Land, and then dividing up the land, God now, almost five hundred years in advance through Jacob, says, "I'm going to tell you what your zip code is going to be. I'm going to tell you exactly where you're going to live." This is how in control God is of human history and how in control He is of your life and my life, even down to where we live.

"Zebulun will dwell at the seashore." Seashore here refers to the Mediterranean Sea, which is to the west. And literally translated, it should read, "will dwell toward the seashore," because Zebulun does not have a

land apportioned to it that is on the coastline. Actually, Zebulun is ten miles inland in between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea, it's right there in the middle. But it will be a very prosperous place, because as ships come into the seaport that's just ten miles away, there's a trade route that goes right through this land. And so there will be businessmen, there will be international trade, there will be exporting and importing, and Zebulun here is in a very prime location and will have a very prosperous future.

And here's what's even more amazing, as I think about it. The way they divided up the land – you know how they divided up the land? It wasn't like the Oklahoma Land Rush where everybody gets in a Sooner Schooner and just heads out and first come, first serve, marks out the land. They actually cast lots, they rolled the dice. In Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, its every turning up is from the Lord." God is micromanaging the planet; you need to know that. And so even for this land appointment to come now to Zebulun is all according to the all-wise, inscrutable, sovereign plan of God. God has foreseen it because God has foreordained it.

And then he says in the middle of verse 13, "and shall be a haven for ships." That is to say she will be close to an international seaport in which ships will come and bring their commodities and be sold in the region; and then Zebulun will also be able to export its product. And so there will be much wealth in this area. And he says, "and his flank shall be toward Sidon." And the flank here refers to Zebulun's descendants, and Sidon refers to another seaport, a Phoenician seaport. It was a wicked city. It was the home of Jezebel, by the way.

But here's the point. The prophecy, this prophecy, states that Zebulun's descendants almost five hundred years from now are going to be so located, "They're going to be in this pinpoint place on the map, this is exactly where they're going to be, and I'm going to bless them, because I'm going to put them at the intersection of commerce and business and trade." It's the goodness of God. They did not live where they lived randomly, they were pinpointed there by the invisible hand of God.

Now what is the relevance of this for you and me? All Scripture is practical and relevant. And the answer to that is you too have been placed in a highly advantageous place. Whether you live in an affluent area, whether you live in a far less affluent area, it really doesn't matter for any of us here today, you have been highly blessed by God to live where you live. You live in the United States of America. With all of our faults, with all of our weaknesses, you are in a garden spot on the map. You are where there is gospel preaching. You are where there are solid churches. You are where there is religious freedom. And within the United States, you live in Dallas, Texas; you don't live in California. You live in the United States.

You live in Dallas, Texas, where you can attend this church. What a blessing to your spiritual life. You live where there is opportunity for employment. You live where there is health care. You live where you are surrounded by other believers who are an encouragement to your spiritual life. You don't live in no man's land. You don't live in some God-forsaken part of the planet - and there are plenty of those places. God has sovereignly and strategically positioned you right here where you now live. You are so blessed by God. And whatever else is going on in your life that may be of discouragement, just remember where it is that God has airdropped you and rooted and grounded you, right here in the fertile soil where there is gospel preaching and where there is religious freedom. You are a very blessed person this morning, just like Zebulun was. Let's continue.

In verse 14 we see "the prophecy about Issachar." And so in verse 14, Jacob says, "Issachar." He hears his name called out in front of his other eleven brothers. And no doubt, Issachar leans a little closer to his dying father to hear the words that will come from him regarding the future, he wants to know. And so Issachar, who's the fifth son of Jacob and Leah, the ninth son of Jacob, he hears this: "Issachar is a strong donkey." Now that's actually a good thing. To us that sounds like, "Wow, that's like not a good thing." But this is good, because there are three animals that are mentioned in these verses that I just read, and there are positive virtues from each one of these animals that are attached to these different tribes that uniquely describe them, what you will become like.

And a strong donkey is hard-working, is industrious, carries a heavy load, carries more than his share of the load. And this is a prophecy looking into the future in the time of the Judges, when the tribe of Issachar will fight nobly with Deborah and Barak, and they will fight against the Canaanites. They were all in, when there would be other tribes that would be slow to come to the battle. No, Issachar is out on the front lines, they're all in. In fact, they would have a large number of fighting men. We learn from Numbers 26 that they would have 64,300 soldiers in their marching army. And in 1 Chronicles 7 we learn they have 87,000. That's a huge number for this small little nation.

And they were mighty in battle, until what we read in the next line, "lying down." It's a picture of inactivity. It's a picture of lounging and idleness and laziness. They're no longer a hard-working, strong donkey; now they're shirking their responsibilities, and now they're sitting it out. They're no longer on the front lines, they're now a spectator. They're no longer an active participant in the affairs of the nation. You know what they've done? They have gone into early retirement, and their mindset is like, "Well, we've already put our time in, it's time for the young people now to step in and carry the load. We've done our part, we're now ready to rest," and they did. And you see it right there in your Bible, "lying down between the sheepfolds." They just checked it in. They started strong, but they ended so weak.

And verse 15 gives more of the explanation why. I want you to see this, verse 15: "When he" - referring to Issachar's descendants, generations later - "saw that a resting place was good" - they sat down on the bench, they're no longer out on the field playing the game. It was good. It's a place for easy living. They just wanted a good life - "and the land was pleasant," - you see that? That means sweet and beautiful and lovely. In a sense, God's blessing became a curse. God's blessing of putting them in a very fertile place now becomes, really, their curse, because they become so attached to the affluence around them that they lose their edge to serve God.

And so we read at the end of verse 15, "he" - referring to Issachar's descendants - "bowed his shoulder to bear burdens." And so the strong

donkey now kneels and subjects its neck to allow a foreign oppressor to put a yoke around its neck and to control now Issachar. And this strong donkey gave up and gave in and submitted to its enemies, and would be carted off in the Assyrian captivity.

And at the end of verse 15, you can see it right there, it says, "and became a slave of forced labor." They lost all right of self-government. They were overtaken by foreign enemies because they didn't have a belly to fight anymore. They didn't have the will to work and to fight and to hold on to what was theirs, and they thought they could just cruise into glory and just sail into the distant horizon.

And I want you to know that is dangerous, and that is devastating. And I want you to know that hard work in the will of God must never cease. I don't know how old you are, I don't know how long you've been a Christian, I don't know what you've done to serve the Lord in the past, but I want to tell you, as long as you are on planet earth, as long as you are breathing, there is a work for you to do to serve God. Not a one of us here today can be just a spectator of the kingdom of God, we have got to have our shoulder to the plow and be in the field and serving the Lord; and as long as there is one unconverted person on planet earth, there is work to be done for the kingdom of God.

And that's what Issachar lost sight of, and they thought they could just cruise in. They needed to have read Philippians - that wouldn't be written for a long time - where Paul says, "forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the mark of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." You may retire from the factory, but you'll never retire from God's work; and as long as you are living, there is a part for you to play in serving God, and not a one of us can say, "Well, I'm just retiring now from God's work." God didn't tell you that, somehow that got into your head. And that's what was the downfall of Issachar, and they were carted off to Assyria to become slaves.



Look at verse 16, "the prophecy about Dan." In verse 16, "Dan." And no doubt, Dan draws near to his father to hear what his father will say about the future of his descendants (Dan, the seventh name on this list, the first son born by Jacob and his concubine Bilhah): "Dan shall judge his people." the name Dan actually means judge in Hebrew, so there's a play on words here going on: Judge shall judge his people. He will sit in a prominent place. He will be in a position of delegated responsibility and authority, and he will sit in judgment over the affairs of the nation. And he will be given a chief location on the Mediterranean Sea just south of Manasseh. "He shall judge his people." He will not judge the Egyptians and the Canaanites and the Babylonians, but he will judge his people. The people of God is one of the tribes of Israel.

Verse 17, "Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path." Now as soon as we see snake, serpent, we immediately think of Genesis 3 and this in a negative connotation, but it's to be actually taken in a positive connotation, that one of the virtues of a snake is it's very small, but it can inflict enormous damage. It can be out of the way on the side out of the spotlight, but when it's coiled and when it strikes, it can bring down a vast majority. And that is what the tribe of Dan will be like.

They're pictured here by the side of a road as horses are galloping by, and he says here, "that bites the horse's heels." So Dan will be, as it were, on the side of the road. These horses, no doubt, carrying soldiers are galloping into the Promised Land to wage war against Israel, and Dan will be there and be so strategic and will be standing coiled up by the side and will strike at the hooves of the horse. And we read at the end of 17, "so that his rider falls backwards." It will be as if a cannon was shot and knock the rider off. This little snake will be able to do that. And that is the strategic place that the tribe of Dan would have in future centuries with the nation Israel; so small, yet so prolific.

But notice verse 18. This is the only time in this whole chapter that we read something like this. It's Jacob's prayer to God for Dan: "For your salvation I wait, O Lord," that Dan is singled out as needing salvation. That means Dan is perishing, Dan is in trouble. And there's different ways to take this. The

salvation could be a salvation or deliverance from military battle. It could be a salvation from financial trouble. But I think the larger context of the rest of the Old Testament would indicate it is a spiritual salvation, that Dan will need to be brought back to God, because Dan has departed from God. And when we read the rest of the Bible, five hundred years later, Judges 18:30, Dan was the first tribe to set up false idols, Dan was the first tribe to enter into false religion among the tribes of Israel, and Dan was so strategic that it influenced the other tribes, and it led to the Assyrians coming down and taking the northern kingdom up to force them to be their slaves.

Now when you go to the end of the Bible, when you go to the book of Revelation, in Revelation chapter 7, there is a list of the 144,000 converted Jews during the time of the tribulation, and there are 12 tribes with 12,000 people converted within these 12 tribes (12 times 12,000 is 144,000), and all the tribes are listed there except Dan, and it appears that Dan has apostasized, that Dan has forsaken the faith, and Dan is now blotted out, and Dan is now cut out, and Dan is no longer in the economy of God numbered among the tribes. Dan is what we call an apostate. An apostate is someone who begins with a profession of faith in Christ, but over time their true nature and true identity comes out, and though they have professed to know Christ, they do not possess Christ, they do not know Christ, and given enough time, they fall away from the faith.

Now you and I both know that no true believer can lose their salvation. So it's not that they were once saved and then they lost their salvation; that's totally impossible. But what it does mean is that Dan is the example of those, or even around us, who profess to know Christ, but when the trials and tribulations of life come, when the lures of the world come, they forsake their profession and they go back to the world. Second Peter 2 says they're like a dog going back to its vomit, like a pig going back to wallow in the mud. They had a bogus faith to begin with.

And one of the doctrines that is taught throughout the Bible is the perseverance of the saints, which is that once a person is born again, once a person has made a true, firm commitment of their life to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ takes over that life. Jesus Christ now dominates this life. Jesus Christ

is now Lord over this life, and this person cannot fall away. Listen to Jesus' own words in John 8:31, "If you continue in My word, you are truly disciples of Mine - meaning you are a genuine believer, you are truly disciples of Mine, if you continue in My word." And if you do not continue in the word of God, it is an indication that you're like Dan, that you start out talking the game, but you never walk it, and you fall away from it. You are a counterfeit Christian, you are a dubious disciple, you are a bogus believer.

In the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 3:6, listen to this text: "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are," - and so it's pictured here, the body of Christ, pictured as a spiritual house, and Christ as the Son of God is over the church, He's the head of the church - "whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."

You see, the true believer will persevere all the way to the end to be steadfast and to be faithful to the Lord. Now it doesn't mean that we don't waver. It doesn't mean that there aren't times that we hesitate. Doesn't mean that there are not times that we succumb to a temptation. But what it does mean is that if you're a genuine Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ, you will hold firm your confidence to the end, to the end of your life.

Hebrews 3:12, "Take care, brethren," - and the word "brethren" here does not refer to true believers, it refers to Jewish brethren; that's why the book of Hebrews is called Hebrews, it's addressed to Hebrews. "So take care, brethren - you unconverted Jewish people who have not yet come all the way to faith in Jesus Christ - take care that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." That's what the word "apostate" means, you fall away from the living God. And the reason you do is not because of intellectual problems, it is because you have an evil, unbelieving heart. It's not a head issue, it's a heart issue.

And all the way to the end of the book of Revelation, in Revelation 13:10, which is right in the middle of the great tribulation that will come here to

the earth, it's the same chapter that talks about the beast that comes out of the sea, the Antichrist, it speaks of the false prophet that will seduce the world to follow the Antichrist, that one man will have total control over the economy of the whole world and will have, really, it in the palm of his hand. How will the believers hang in there? There will be people come to faith during the tribulation, and they will face persecution and martyrdom, but they will persevere through that. And in Revelation 13:10 we read, "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints." Perseverance and faith are synonymous. All true faith is a persevering faith. And in Revelation 14:12, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." All true faith is an obedient faith.

So, that's the prophecy concerning Dan. And they started out looking good, but they eventually folded their tent, and it gave evidence that they were not true believers. And I wonder if there are those in your family who are like this. I wonder if there are those in your circle of relationships and people you know who are like this. You need to bring the gospel to them, you need to witness to them, because it's not that they're saved and have just fallen off. No, they were never saved to begin with, because they need a genuine new birth from above.

Well, this leads us to verse 19, continue to walk with me through this, "the prophecy about Gad." So, verse 19, "As for Gad." Now Gad is the seventh son of Jacob, he's the first son of Jacob and Zilpah. "As for Gad, raiders shall raid him." When he says raiders here, he's talking about, really, foreign aggressors invading their land.

Now Gad settled on the east side of the Jordan River. I don't know the last time you looked at the maps in the in the back of the Bible, but on the east side of the Jordan River that connects the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea there is land that was held by the Ammonites and the Moabites, who were enemies of God. And so after forty years in the wilderness, they come to the Promised Land, and as they pass through this area they see that it's very grassy, and they have cattle, and there's pasture land, and this is very advantageous. And so two of the tribes (Reuben and Gad) and half of

another tribe (Manasseh), they say, "We would like to have this land here east of the Jordan River because it looks so inviting, it looks so prosperous."

Well the problem is that's where the Moabites are and that's where the Ammonites, are and they are exposed on that side of the Jordan River; they're safer on the other side of the Jordan River by the Mediterranean Sea. And so, it says here, "As for Gad, raiders shall raid him," – well, of course they did, it was a marauding band of divisions of armies, and they came against Gad strong – "but he will raid at their heels." That means he will fight back and he'll put them into flight and he will nip at their heels.

Now here was the problem with Gad, and it's a problem that you and I have. Gad sized everything up by how it looks to the eye. Looked at the situation not with spiritual eyes with an eternal perspective, but with physical eyes, and saw, "Oh, this looks so inviting and this looks so good." That's exactly what Eve did in the garden of Eden. She saw that the forbidden fruit looked good to her eye, and she was drawn into that. That's exactly what's happening with Gad here. And so this land is known as Gilead. We used to think a hymn "There's a Balm in Gilead." Well, Gilead is the land that's on the east side the Jordan River, and it just looks more suitable for livestock to the naked eye. But here's where they failed: they did not consult God, they did not trust God; and they paid for it with a hard life.

Now I want to put us into the sandals of Gad. What do we learn from this? What is the relevance of this for my spiritual life? And the answer is this: do not make choices in your life based only on outward appearance. You need to consult wisdom, because sometimes gold ends up being fool's gold. Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your steps."

So, young men here today, single young men, in choosing a wife, do not choose only by outward appearance. Young women, as you would come to be married or decide on a spouse, do not choose only by the appearance of

his job or of his career, because you may be buying fool's gold. Businessmen, as you make decisions, do not be like Gad and just do the arithmetic on this and size everything up and, "This office space looks better, and this looks better over here, and this budget here." You need to consult wisdom. And that's what Gad failed to do; and it would be disastrous for you.

Now, verse 20, "the prophecy about Asher." And so Jacob continues to go son by son by son as they're gathered around his bedside, and now he addresses Asher, who was his eighth son, the second son born of Zilpah: "As for Asher, his food shall be rich." Wow, this is a prophecy of prosperity. "His food shall be rich," it shall be rich. This land he will be given, it will be rich in productivity, it will be rich in produce, it will be rich in prosperity, because he is going to be given the land on the Mediterranean Sea, with all the seaports, direct access to foreign markets, fertile soil, abundant rainfall that comes from the evaporation and the hydration system dropping water from the Mediterranean Sea onto this fertile soil. It's agriculturally rich.

They profited from sea trade from its harbors, so much so, at the end of verse 20, "and he" - the future descendants of Asher - "will yield royal dainties." "Royal" here is a Hebrew word that means kingly, it's used in Psalm 93:1, "The Lord Reigns": *melek*. "Dainties" refer to delightful food. And they are living in such an agriculturally rich place, as well as other foods coming in from other ports, that when they eat, they eat a meal fit for a king. It's fit for a king's banquet.

And the tribe of Asher enjoyed more abundance than any of the other tribes; and yet there is a danger with this prosperity, and the danger is: the more of the world you have, you are susceptible to becoming worldly. And they became lethargic, and they became complacent. And in the day of battle against the Canaanites in Judges chapter 5, concerning the descendants of Asher. listen to Judges 5:17, "Asher sat at the seashore, and remained by its landings." They're just going to sit this out. They are so happy with having the world's goods and the world's luxuries that they, really, have become

lazy. They have lost their will to fight, they have lost their will to work; they are too comfortable enjoying the good life.

And there's a warning for us. No matter where you are in this economic strata, you're living in a hotspot here in Dallas, Texas. And we need to be on guard, because prosperity can produce passivity, and luxuries can breed laziness, and worldliness can become weakness, and affluence can breed apathy, and success can produce selfishness and softness. And that's exactly what happened with Asher. They became stuffed with these royal dainties and stuffed with the things of the world, that they just didn't want to leave and go do the work and fight the battles, and they became so susceptible to the enemy; just like you and I can be susceptible to the enemy, who prowls about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Idleness is the devil's workshop.

This is exactly what happened to the church at Laodicea. You remember the church at Laodicea in the book of Revelation. Revelation 3:15 Jesus audits the spiritual life of the church in Laodicea and He says, "I know your deeds, that you're neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot." You know what that means? You're right here in the middle, you're just in the compromise position, and you've become lukewarm. You're not hot, you're not cold; what are you? You're just room temperature, and you have blended in with the world around you. You've lost your distinctiveness. You're no longer different from the world, you've become just like the world. And so in verse 16 it says, "Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." And literally out of the Greek, I somewhat hesitate to say this, Jesus says, "I vomit you out. You just make Me sick, that you can't get hot or cold. You just want to be like the world around you."

So how do they get to that position? Verse 17. Revelation 3:17, hear the word of the Lord: "Because you say," - here's the problem - 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing. I can just buy whatever I need. I don't need to pray about it, I don't need to work for it, I can just go buy it. You do not know,' - and listen to what Jesus says to the church at Laodicea; He would say the same to the tribes of Asher -

"you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." That's quite a report card to be handed. The Lord gave them so much, and they did so little with it. That's the tribe of Asher. May that not be true of me, may that not be true of you. May you not settle into a complacency, as God has so richly blessed you.

Now there's one more son, one last son I want us to see, it's in verse 21, "the prophecy about Naphtali." Naphtali. And no doubt, Naphtali has been somewhat on pins and needles: "What will the prophecy be for me?" And he's the last of two sons of Jacob and Bilhah, and his land will border west, on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, a very favorable place. It's on the Sea of Galilee on the west side. "Naphtali is a doe let loose," - What does that mean? Well, she'll be like a doe in future generations. She'll be quick and speedy, very agile, very graceful, swift in military operations - "He gives beautiful words."

Now there's an initial fulfillment of this with Barak in Judges chapter 5, the song of Deborah, and that's one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible, and it'll come spewing out of Barak, along with Deborah. But the greater fulfillment of this - and I conclude with this - is on centuries into the future, not with a descendant of Naphtali, but with one who will set up his base of ministry operation in Naphtali. In fact, he will first preach in the land of Naphtali, and he will call for fishermen to come be His disciples (Andrew and Peter and James and John), and He will preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and He will go from city to city and from town to town and be like a traveling evangelist, and He will preach the word of God in the land of Naphtali.

And in Isaiah chapter 9, beginning in verse 1, it says, "But there will be no more gloom for her, for she was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun" - listen to this - "and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later He will make her glorious, by the way of the sea." - referring to the Sea of Galilee - "The people" - referring to the people of Naphtali - "the people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. You shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence. For a child will be born



to us and a son will be given to us; and the government will rest upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Eternal Father. And there will be no end to the increase of His government or of His peace. The Zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish it."

It looks ultimately to the land of Naphtali where the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will come preaching the good news. Never, never more beautiful, wonderful words ever to be spoken on planet earth than what came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. They even said of Him, "Never did a man speak like this." He spoke the very words that the Father had given to Him. And it is these very words that you and I have heard, the most glorious message, the most glorious words you will ever hear spoken: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."

You will never hear anything more glorious than that, that this Son of God has come into the world as the Light of the world, to expel the darkness of sin, and that if we will come to the Light and believe upon the Light, we will be eternally rescued from the wrath of God to come, that Christ will take away all of our sins. He will pardon us, He will clothe us with His perfect righteousness. He will come to live within us. He will walk every step of life's journey with us and go before us to prepare the way. And one day when we come to the end of our life, He will take us home to the Father; and He will lose not a one of His sheep.

And that message began and Naphtali, and that message continues to be heralded down through the centuries wherever the gospel is spoken. These beautiful words that have come from the land of Naphtali, they have now come to you. And the greatest blessing in all of life is to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. There is no greater blessing than this. And so if you've never come to the place of commitment of your life to Jesus Christ, who went to the cross, who was lifted up to die, who suffered in our place, who bore our sins, who shed His blood to make the only atonement for our sins, I point you to Christ.

Look to Christ. Trust in Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Step out of the world, step out of the crowd, become a follower of Jesus Christ. Take up your cross, follow after Christ. It is the greatest life that anyone could ever possibly live. You will have joy unspeakable, it'll be full of glory. And then one day when you arrive in heaven, you will explode in gladness and happiness and joy to be in the very presence of God.

Those are the most beautiful words that you will ever hear, and they came from the land of Naphtali. May you receive them into your heart by faith. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, how we rise up to bless You, that You are the God of history, that You are the God who controls the nations and future generations, and how You have pre-scripted for each of these twelve sons their future generations, where they would live, how they would live; and it all came to pass perfectly, as You said it would. And so, Father, now may we put our trust in faith in You this day, knowing that everything that You have spoken to us in Your word is true. Bless everyone here today in Christ's name. Amen.

Would you stand for the closing benediction; and then you're dismissed. It's from Ephesians 3:20, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.