

# GALILEE OF THE GENTILES?

By: William Finck

This phrase “Galilee of the Gentiles” appears at Matt. 4:15, and is a quote of Isa. 9:1 (where the A.V. has “Galilee of the Nations”). Matt. 4:14 infers that Isaiah’s prophecy would be fulfilled when Yahshua left Nazareth (Matt. 4:13) for “Galilee of the Gentiles.” But was that alone the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy? And Matt. 4:16, which quotes Psalm 23:4? Certainly **NOT!** Rather it was only the commencement of the fulfillment of the prophecy, which would take quite some time to fulfill.

Matthew next describes the calling of the apostles by Yahshua (4:18 ff.), 11 of which were of the tribe of Benjamin. Discussion of the twelfth, Judas Ish Kerioth, is beyond the scope of our purpose here. Many of Benjamin and Levi settled in Galilee after the return from Babylon, which is evident from the Scriptures. Saul of Tarsus, called much later, was also of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1). When the ancient Kingdom of Israel was divided after Solomon’s death, Benjamin was left with the Tribe of Judah for this very purpose (1 Kings 11:9-13, 36). The apostles of this tribe were fulfilling their duties as the light-bearers to Israel.

Galilee did not originally belong to Benjamin, however. When the land was divided originally, towns in the territory of Naphtali were said to be in “Galilee”, i.e. Josh. 20:7. Would Isaiah say that the region of Galilee in Palestine was of (belonging to) “gentiles”, or even non-Israel “nations”, knowing that the land belonged to Israel? Such is highly unlikely. Reading Isaiah 9:1, however, there is still much more to “Galilee of the Nations” than this.

How could Zebulun and Naphtali be afflicted by “... way of the sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Nations”? That truly does not describe the sea of Galilee at all, and there is no discussion in the Old Testament describing any shipping traffic by Zebulun or Naphtali in that small sea. Even in the time of Christ, the sea of Galilee was plied by little more than small fishing craft. So what else may this statement mean?

The word “beyond” in Isaiah 9:1, the Hebrew *‘eber* (Strong’s #5676), may also mean “opposite”, among other things. It is the word from which the names Eber and Hebrew are derived. In the A.V. the word is represented by a wide range of meanings, “from, over, passage, quarter, other side, this side, straight”, etc. according to Strong’s, and many of them quite proper in the contexts in which the word appears. The word is, for instance, “over” in the phrase “over against” at Exod. 25:37, which the Thomas Nelson *King James Study Bible* I have footnotes “in front of”, and is “this side” at Num. 22:1; 32:19 and 32. So use of the word at Isa. 9:1 does not necessitate that the “sea” or the “way of the sea” referred to there is east of the Jordan River, or is the sea of Galilee, which is actually the source of the river and not “beyond” it at all.

The word “Galilee” (Strong’s #1551) is derived from the Hebrew word *geliylah* (#1552) which means “a circuit or region.” In Hebrew the proper noun and the noun which it is derived from are spelled with the same characters, but with slightly different vowel points. In the Palaeo-Hebrew of Isaiah’s time, without vowels or modern Hebrew

vowel points, and in all upper-case letters as was the custom, these two words are indistinguishable. It is evident that they could easily be confused.

The “sea of Galilee” was never called such in the Old Testament Kingdom period. The name “Galilee” appears only at Josh. 20:7; 21:32; 1 Kings 9:11; 2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chron. 6:76 and Isa. 9:1. “Galilee” was instead only the name of an undefined region in northern Israel, at least part of which lied in the land of Naphtali. The “sea of Galilee” is always called the “sea of Chinnereth” (or Chinneroth, Strong’s #3672), mentioned at Num. 34:11; Deut. 3:17; Josh. 11:2; 12:3; 13:27 and 19:35. Additionally, it is quite clear from Scripture that half of the coastline of the Sea of Galilee was adjoined by land belonging to the Tribe of Naphtali, with the balance adjoined by the lands of the Geshurites and Maachathites (Deut. 3:14; Joshua 13:7-13). Geshur was considered a part of the land of Aram, or Syria. The Aramaeans were Semites and related to the Israelites. The Maachathites were apparently also related to the Israelites (Gen. 22:24) though they remained a distinct kingdom (1 Chron. 19:6-7).

Genesis 49:13 states that Zebulun would dwell among ships bordering Sidon, “... at the haven of the sea; and he *shall be* for a haven of ships; and his border *shall be* unto Zidon.” Zebulun’s inherited land was neither near Sidon, nor was it near any sea (Josh. 19:10-16)! Yet it should surely be manifest by this point, that “Galilee of the Gentiles” need not indicate the “Sea of Galilee” at all. In fact, “Galilee of the Gentiles”, or even “Galilee of the Nations”, makes no sense at all.

However, if one is knowledgeable concerning Israel’s early migrations into Europe, then reading Isaiah 9:1 “... and afterward did more grievously afflict them by the way of the sea opposite Jordan, in the region of the Nations” makes perfectly good sense! And where did the lightbearers of Benjamin go after the Passion, upon leaving Palestine? To the people who walked in darkness – in Europe and Asia Minor.

Most so-called “scholars”, and especially the “Jews”, would have us believe that the sea-faring Phoenicians of Tyre, Sidon and elsewhere were a people distinct from the Israelites, and were Canaanites at that. If that were so, then when the Phoenicians settled what are today Spain and Portugal, they should have called the place “Sidonia” or “Canaania” and not Iberia (Eber-land, i.e. “Hebrew-land”). An examination of Scripture, and especially the *Septuagint*, reveals that the people whom the Greeks called “Phoenicians” (and the word does not appear at all until it appears in Homer, who was probably a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah) were certainly Israelites. Yet even the *Septuagint* in its translation sometimes confused Canaanites with the “Phoenicians”, somewhat true in 280 B.C. when the edition was translated. For long after all of the Israelites who were deported by the Assyrians were gone, the Greeks continued to call the land “Phoenicia”, and the Canaanites who remained to inhabit it, along with whatever remnant of Israelites remained, they continued to call “Phoenicians.”

Joshua 11:8 in the A.V. states: “And Yahweh delivered them [the Canaanite army] into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left none remaining.” At Joshua 13:6 we read: “All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim *and* all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee.” The name “Sidon”, or “Zidon” at times,

described both a city on the coast of Palestine, and the region around it. It also described the Canaanite descendants of Sidon (Gen. 10:15) who inhabited it.

Later we find that although the Israelites surely did inhabit this region, they failed to drive off all the Canaanite and other tribes: “Now these *are* the nations which Yahweh left, to prove Israel by them, *even as many of Israel* as had not known all the wars of Canaan ... *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath.” (Jdgs. 3:1-3). The region and city of Sidon became a part of the territory of the tribe of Asher, as described at Joshua 19:24-31, and we are informed also at Jdgs. 1:31 that Canaanites continued to dwell in the city. But Tyre, which quickly became the prominent “Phoenician” city, was also in the territory of Asher – or at least the mainland city was, since there is not yet mention of the island off the coast – and note that there is no mention anywhere of Canaanites remaining in Tyre.

The *Septuagint* (*LXX*) says at Joshua 19:28-29, of Asher’s inheritance: “And Elbon, and Raah, and Ememaon, and Canthan to great Sidon. And the borders shall turn back to Rama, and to the fountain of Masphassat, and the Tyrians ...”. But a little further on, describing Naphtali’s inheritance at 19:35: “And the walled cities of the Tyrians, Tyre, and Omathadaketh, and Kenereth ...”, quite different than the version found in the A.V. Although not within Naphtali’s territory, did Naphtali inherit Tyre, on the coast of the territory of Asher? Or did this refer to the island off the coast? Such can not be told with the data I have presently. Reading the accounts given at 1 Kings 9:11-13 and 2 Chron. 8:2, it is evident that Naphtali did not inhabit all of the territory in Galilee which they inherited, for Solomon had to repopulate many of those cities in his time.

That Asher inhabited the coasts of the Mediterranean, and not the “Canaanites”, can be discerned in the A.V. at Judges 5:17: “Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches”, where “breaches” is the Hebrew *miphrats* (#4464) and may be translated “havens” or “inlets”, the word meaning “a *break* (in the shore), i.e. a *haven*” (Strong’s). In the Egyptian records of the 18th dynasty, which predates the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Tyre is called “T’aru the haven”, and it is said of the island off the coast “water is carried to it in barks, it is richer in fish than in sands” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edition, p 817).

And so the Israelite presence in Tyre and Sidon, at about the same time that the so-called “Phoenicians” began their rise to supremacy over the seas, is absolutely undeniable. At 2 Sam. 24:2-7, for instance, King David sends Joab to number the tribes of Israel. Tyre and Sidon were among the places to which Joab journeyed. Elsewhere on the seacoast, Elijah visited the widow of Zarephath, and neither was that noble woman a Canaanite.

Amos 3:11, part of a prophecy against Israel, where the A.V. states “An adversary there shall be even round about the land ...” the *LXX* has “O Tyre, thy land shall be made desolate round about thee ...”. Micah 7:12, in another prophecy directed at Israel, reads in the *LXX* “And thy cities shall be leveled, and parted among the Assyrians; and thy strong cities shall be parted from Tyre to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.” And so the prophets also testify that the Israelites inhabited Tyre, yet these citations are wanting in the A.V.

It is only well after the deportations of the Israelites that translators of the Scriptures for the Septuagint had in diverse places associated Phoenicians with “Canaanites”, yet the Israelites were long removed from the land. [Previous sentence corrected May 6th, 2011.] The inhabitants of the island city of Tyre, however, never were deported by the Assyrians or the Babylonians, although the mainland portion of Tyre was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26). After the beginning of the Persian period, the Tyrians were subject to Persia and had spread themselves back to the mainland. The island city was destroyed for good by Alexander the Great circa 330 B.C. Yet it is evident that many of the Israelites did remain in the area and maintained their identity for quite some time, as we have Anna the prophetess, of the Tribe of Asher, in Jerusalem during the birth of Christ (Luke 2:36).

Much more can be said, drawn not only from Scripture but from history and archaeology, to demonstrate that the Israelites were one and the same with the Phoenicians of history, who were the people who settled not only much of the North African coasts and Spain, but also the British Isles, the northern coasts of Europe, the coasts of Anatolia (Turkey today), and also made up much of the original “Greek” and “Roman” populations, all of these having their roots in both Israelite, other Semite, and the Japhethite tribes of Genesis 10. Yet hopefully enough has been said to illuminate the true meaning of the expression “Galilee of the Gentiles”, actually “the region of the Nations”, found at Isaiah 9:1 and Matt. 4:15.

Note: Two other places contain the phrase “Galilee of the Nations”, in English versions. Joel 3:4 in the *LXX* (the A.V. has here “all the coasts of Palestine”) and 1 Macc. 5:15 in both the *LXX* and the A.V. Apocryphae. However in the *LXX* Greek in both places the phrase reads Γαλιλαίας ἀλλοφύλων (Galilaias allophulôn) or literally “Galilee of the other tribes”, “the region of the other tribes”, the *LXX* translators long ago making the same error of “Galilee” for “galilee” which I hope to have illustrated above. Now, in context, these verses may also be better understood.