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The Tribe of Naphtali
26: 48-50

The tribe of Naphtali DIG: What does the Second Census tell us about Naphtali's historical roots? Why did the tribe of Naphtali decline so greatly from the First Census? Why would the wilderness generation want to know they had common historical roots from their parents, but a completely separate identity.

REFLECT: What meaningful tribe are you a member of? How does being a part of that group help to support you and make you grow spiritually? How does being a part of that group enable you to help others? What can you do to make sure that the positive parts of your past are accentuated in your relationship with God?

The just, the upright, the joyful, the contented and the victorious live by their faith.



1. The First Census in the past found **the tribe** of **Naphtali** being **numbered at 53,400** (**to see link click Ak – Numbering the Tribes**). The banner of **the tribe of Naphtali** is the image of **a** female **deer**. This is in reference to the

blessing of **Naphtali** by **Jacob**. **Naphtali** was **Ya'akov's** sixth **son** borne to **him** by Rachel's maidservant **Bilhah** (see **Genesis Hj – Rachel's Servant Bilhah Bore Jacob a So and Rachel named Him Dan**). **Naphtali** was **her** second and last **son** with **Ya'akov**. When **Naphtali** was born, Rachael said**: I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won. So she named him Naphtali (30:8),** which means *I have been entangled in a desperate struggle*. **Ya'akov** blessed **him,** saying: **Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful words (Genesis 49:21).** Short but profound. Only six words in Hebrew. The image presented is of one who springs forth with great speed and provides good news.

Jacob used a metaphor to describe **Naphtali** and said that in the **near historical future he** would be productive, **full of blessings**, and produce many descendants. Like **a doe, Naphtali** pictures strength, surefootedness, beauty and speed. **His** descendants would be like **warriors, fleet afoot, with swift hands,** and **his** was one of the few areas of the Promise Land that showed no signs of Canaanite occupation. **The rabbis teach that this verse is an allusion to the battle against Jabin and Sisera of the Canaanites, when the men of Naphtali were swift to answer the call of Deborah the judge (Judges 4:1-24). The rabbis also teach that the phrase bears beautiful words, alludes to the song of triumph sung by Deborah and [General] Barak after the victory against the Canaanites. When they returned from the battle, they brought with them beautiful words (Judges 5:1-31).** But as believers, these **beautiful words**, or *imrei shefer*, are the good news of the Gospel. **Naphtali** would somehow not only bring a beautiful message to those around him, but ultimately, to all the nations of the world.



2. The Second Census in the present: The descendants of Naphtali, by their four clans were: of Jahzeel, the Jahtze'clan; through Guni, the Gunite clan; through Jezer, the Jezerite clan; and through Shillem, the Shillemite clan. These are the clans of Naphtali; those numbered were 45,400 (26:48-50), suffering a moderate loss of 8,000 from **the First Census** (see **Ai – The First Census: The Old Generation of Rebellion**), or fifteen percent. **For Naphtali Moses** said: **O Naphtali, satisfied with favor and full of the blessing of ADONAI, possesses the sea and the south.** This **tribe** was promised expansion to **the south**, where **the Sea of Galilee** is located, and to the west, toward **the Mediterranean Sea**. In **Joshua 19:32-39**, we learn that

Napthali's land was in northern **Isra'el**, bordering **Asher's** territory, and the Sea of **Galilee** touched **the southern** portion of **its** territory. **Barak** came from this **tribe**, and soldiers from **Naphtali** assisted **him, Deborah (Judges 5:18)** and **Gideon (Judges 7:23)**.[609] Later, **Moses** blessed the tribe saying: **Naphtali is abounding with the favor of ADONAI and is full of His blessing; he will inherit southward to the lake (Deuteronomy 33:23).**

One of **the blessings** enjoyed by this **tribe** was that **the Master** spent much of **His** ministry in **their** territory and in neighboring **Zebulun (Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:12-17)**. Yet, it was viewed by the Jews in Judea as a place of dishonor, full of **Gentile** pagans **(John 1:46** and **7:52)**. But much earlier **Isaiah** had prophesied that **Naphtali** would be honored: **In the past He humbled . . . the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Cj – He Will Honor Galilee of the Gentiles**). This **honor** came with the coming of **Yeshua Messiah**. All **Yeshua's** talmidim but Judas, who betrayed **Him**, came from **Galilee**, and much of **the Lord's** ministry took place there. Therefore, **on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2)**.

When Yeshua heard that John [the Baptist] had been put in prison, He withdrew to Galilee Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. From that time on Jesus began to preach: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matthew 4:12-17). You can only imagine how the first century Jewish readers would have felt after reading this. **The rabbis had taught them that when the Messiah came, He would come from the north. They** thought **He** would come from **Galilee of the Gentiles**. From **a people** who had historically lived **in darkness**, would come **the great light**. From **Naphtali**, the very place where the prophets said the Good News must come from, **Galilee,** not Salt Lake or Vatican City[610]

Paul tells us that it was through **the Meshiach** that **the veil** was lifted. **What is more, their minds were stonelike; for to this day the same veil remains over them when they read the TaNaKh; it has not been unveiled, because by the Messiah is the veil taken away. Yes, till today, whenever Moshe is**

read, a veil lies over their heart. "But," says the Torah, "whenever someone turns to ADONAI, the veil is taken away." Now, "ADONAI" in this text means the Spirit. And where the Spirit of ADONAI is, there is freedom. So all of us, with faces unveiled, see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord; and we are being changed into His very image, from one degree of glory to the next, by ADONAI the Spirit (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Aw – Veiling and Unveiling**)**.**

Then Paul mixed in a second metaphor: hardness of **minds** and **hearts**, with the first of impaired vision and understanding in **Second Corinthians 4:3-6. Their minds**, or the minds of the unsaved Jewish people, **were made** hard and unreceptive to the word of **God** (see **Romans 11:7**), **for to this day**, Paul's day, but still true today, **the same veil remains over them**, so that **when they read the TaNaKh they** do not see that it points toward **the Meshiach**. And **the veil lies over their heart**, singular, referring to the community as a whole, which resists being open. His truth exerts social pressure against examining **the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11).** Even though throughout history individual **Jews** have been open to the Good News and received it.

This is spiritual warfare pure and simple that enslaves Jewish people from seeing that **the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah (Romans 10:4). Yeshua Himself** made the same point to the religious leaders of **His** day when **He** said: **You keep on examining the TaNaKh because you think that in it you have eternal life, and it keeps bearing witness to Me! Yet you don't want to come to Me in order to have life . . . But don't think that I will be your accuser before the Father. Do you know who will accuse you? Moshe, the very one you have counted on! For it you really believed Moshe [that is, the Torah] you would believe Me, because it was about Me that he wrote But if you don't believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say (John 5:39-40** and **45-47).**[611] So, **Yeshua** lifted **the veil** for them to *make things clear*, but because of **their** pride and arrogance – **they** would have none of it. The question that everyone eventually has to answer is this: When **the veil** is lifted – who's under there? Is it Joseph Smith? Is it the pope? Is it Buddha? Is it Mary Baker Eddy? Is it Muhammad? For those who love **the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, it is **Meshiach** ben-David.

ELOHIM Adonai gives triumph over circumstances to those who **trust Him**. As **Job** said: **Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job 13:15). God** is bigger

than all of our problems. The way to get out from under the load is to get right under **ADONAI**. To be under **the LORD** is to be over the circumstances. This is a lesson worth learning, especially when the world seems like a cesspool of quicksand. The prophet **Habakkuk**, for example, was about *to go under* when **he** started **his** book. Destruction, violence, strife, conflict, injustice, and wickedness were all he could see. But **he** cried out to **God** and **his** cry did not go unnoticed. **The LORD** not only answered **his** complaint but also provided the confidence needed to lift **him** from the quagmire. **Habakkuk** started in the pits, but ended on the mountaintop. **His** journey was not an easy one, but it was certainly worth it.

The prophet's complaints were swallowed up by confidence. At the end, **he** would say: **ELOHIM Adonai is my strength. He makes me swift and sure-footed as a dear and enables me to stride over my high places (Habakkuk 3:19 CJB). His** fear turned to faith and **he** was transformed from a sour, jittery prophet weighed down with burdens to a secure, joyous preacher buoyed up with blessing. We should take note of that. The just, the upright, the joyful, the contented and the victorious live by their faith.[612]

3. The Messianic Kingdom in the future: The lists of names and numbers are the material and tangible signs of **God's** blessing, **God's** faithfulness to past promises, and the surety of **God's** future promise keeping (see **Ae – Stars of Heaven, Grains of Sand, and the Promises of God**). In the **far eschatological future Naphtali** will be included in the **144,000** during the Great Tribulation (see **Revelation Cr – Then I Heard the Number of Those Who Were Sealed, 144,000 from all the Tribes of Isra'el**). **They will have one portion** of land during the Messianic Kingdom which **will border the territory of Asher from east to west (Ezeki'el 48:3)**, and **Naphtali** is mentioned in the Messianic prophecy of **Isaiah 9:1** and **Matthew 4:13-16**. During the Eternal State (see **Revelation Fq – The Eternal State**), **Naphtali's** name will also be etched into one of **the** great **pearls** that will serve as **gates** to the **New Jerusalem** (see **Revelation Fu – A Great High Wall with Twelve Gates**).

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise you for your wonderful Good News of salvation. **Naphtali** had the wonderful privilege of being where much of **Yeshua's** ministry took place so **they** had the privilege of seeing first hand many of **His** astounding miracles and of hearing **His** wonderful words of wisdom. Yet, while seeing and hearing the truth is very important, **hearing** alone is not enough to make someone **Your** child. **But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. (James 1:22).***

*Praise you so much that **whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (Second Corinthians 3:16).** How very wonderful **You** are, for in **Your** great graciousness **You** bestow **Your** love and **Messiah's righteousness** on all who look to **You** for salvation. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21).** We have heard and seen **Your** mighty miracles and love from reading in **Your** Word. We delight to move beyond mere head knowledge, and into a heart love that surrenders are all to **You**. It is a joy to follow and serve **You** with all we have, our Wonderful **Savior** and **Lord**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and in the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*