

Naphtali is a Doe Set Free that bears Beautiful Words

49: 21

DIG: Who gave birth to Naphtali? Who named him? What does his name mean? Why In what way was Naphtali like a doe set free? What did the rabbis teach that the bears beautiful words alluded to? How can the Hebrew word *shefer* be interpreted? Where does this interpretation come from? What does Isaiah have to say about Naphtali? What did Jesus have to say about him? Who does Rabbi Sha'ul say lifted the veil for the Jewish people? What example does the prophet Habakkuk give us today?

REFLECT: How are you engaged in a desperate struggle like Naphtali? What kind of words do you use for your situation in life right now? What is your attitude during your struggles? Do you maintain a spirit of thanksgiving or do you merely want to curse God and die (Job 2:9)! Do you emphasize your problems or emphasize ADONAI (Psalm 23; Romans 8:31-39)? Have you revealed the Good News to anyone lately?

Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful words (49:21 CJB).

As Jacob next looked up from his deathbed his eyes fell upon Naphtali, the last of the sons of his handmaidens. Naphtali was Ya'akov's sixth son borne to him by Rachel's maidservant Bilhah (see HJ - Rachel's Servant Bilhah Bore Jacob a Son and Rachel named Him Dan). Naphtali was her second and last child with Ya'akov. When Naphtali was born, Rachel 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.*

When Ya'akov blessed his twelve sons, he said: **Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful words (Genesis 49:21 CJB).** Short but profound. Only six words in Hebrew. The image presented is of one who springs forth with great speed and provides good news. Later, Moses blessed the tribe saying: **Naphtali is abounding with the favor of the Lord and is full of his blessing; he will inherit southward to the lake (Deuteronomy 33:23).** In Joshua 19:32-39, we learn that Naphtali's land was in northern Israel, bordering Asher's territory, and the Sea of Galilee touched the southern portion of its territory.

Ya'akov used a metaphor to describe Naphtali and said in the **near historical future** he would be productive 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 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 to all the nations of the world.

The Hebrew word *shefer* can also be interpreted as *to remove the veil*. As in the Jewish wedding. One of the differences between a **Gentile** wedding and a Jewish wedding, is that in the Jewish wedding the couple are commanded to see each other before the ceremony. In **Gentile** weddings this is considered to be bad luck (whatever that means). If you will remember, **Jacob** had a little problem at his wedding (see Hg - **Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel**), and ever since then Jewish guys want to see exactly whom **they** are marrying! So today the groom is actually commanded to unveil the bride in the Jewish wedding ceremony. So this word, *shefer*, is another way of saying *unveil the bride, to make things clear, or to have a revelation*.

In the time of **Messiah**, the land of Naphtali was part of the area of **Galilee**, and 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 **Jesus Christ**. All **Yeshua's** talmidim but Judas, who betrayed Him, came from **Galilee**, and much of **Jesus'** ministry took place there. Therefore, **on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2).**

When **Jesus** 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 like 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. It would come from Galilee, not Salt Lake City or Vatican City.⁷⁹¹

Rabbi Sha'ul tell 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 Old Covenant; it has not been unveiled, because on 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 (Second Corinthians 3:14-18 CJB).

Here Rabbi Sha'ul mixes 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 hared 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 CJB). 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).⁷⁹² So Jesus lifted the veil for them to *make things clear*, but because of their pride and arrogance - they would have none of it.

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 last, he would say: ELOHIM Adonai is my strength. He makes me swift and sure-footed as a deer 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 happy, the contented and the victorious live by their faith.⁷⁹³

In the far eschatological future during the messianic Kingdom, Naphtali will have one portion; it will border the territory of Asher from east to west (Ezekiel 48:3).

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.

Continuing around the circle of his death bead, when Ya'akov turned to his next son, he saw the face of his beloved Joseph, who was the son of his favorite wife Rachel.