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Naphtali is a Doe Set Free that bears Beautiful Words

49: 21

Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful words 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 maidservants. **Naphtali** was **her** second and last child with **Ya'akov** (**to see link click Hj - Rachel's Servant Bilhah Bore Jacob a Son and Rachel named Him Dan**). 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 (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 Isra'el, 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 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. It would come from **Galilee**, not Salt Lake City or Vatican City.⁷⁹¹

Rabbi Sha'ul tells us that it was through **the Meshiach** that **the veil** was lifted. **What is more, their minds were stone like; for to this day the same veil remains over them when they read the TaNaKh; it has not been unveiled, because only 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** 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 to **His** truth and 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 (Ezeki'el 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**.