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Lessons from Jacob's Blessing of Naphtali

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Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words (Genesis 49:21).

Verse 21—*Naphtali is a doe let loose*—Naphtali would be a free mountain people. The imagery of Naphtali as a hind *let loose* conveys swiftness and agility, especially in battle. Consider David's acknowledgement of God's help during his flight from Saul. *He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places* (Psalms 18:33). David had apparently observed the hind as she fled from hunters in the desolate and savage wilderness where David also was fleeing from his hunter, Saul.

He gives beautiful words—But the specific point of this oracle is that Naphtali would be a messenger with a message of good news and victory. The second clause reveals what the message is—words of beauty—***he gives beautiful words***. In this case, it means simply that he gives the words of the message. If *beautiful* is retained as the reading, then it suggests the messages conveyed were often good news.



A Review of the History of the Tribe of Naphtali

- Jacob's prophetic blessing was that Naphtali would be characterized by the speed and agility of a doe. This primarily refers to the swiftness characteristic of the tribe of Naphtali. Those *beautiful words* of this tribe have been associated with the "Song of Deborah and Barak" recorded in Judges 5:1, *then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day*.
- Barak was from the tribe of Naphtali. *Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali* (Judges 4:6). His Naphtalite-like leadership with swiftness and agility would serve well in the battles to come. However, during the battle against Jabin's Canaanite forces, it is interesting to note that Barak only agreed to go to battle if Deborah accompanied him to fight against King Jabin's army. Deborah consents, but she prophesies that the honor for the victory would go to a woman and not to Barak (Judges 4:9).
- The great battle between the Israelite and Canaanite forces described in Judges 4 prompted the tribes to send volunteers. While such tribes as Reuben, Dan, and Asher refused to send their contingents, tribes such as Naphtali were swift to rush their troops to battle. *Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him* (Judges 4:10).
- Naphtali also responded to Gideon's call to repel the Midianites, Amalekites, and others from the East out of their encampment in the Jezreel Valley (Judges 6:35). Along with the tribes of Asher and Manasseh, Naphtali followed Gideon into battle and chased the Midianites to Zererah and Abel Meholah (Judges 7:23).
- When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, Matthew 4:13-15 states *and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali*. He called His disciples from within the very region of the tribe of Naphtali. *Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:18-19). Hence, His first disciples were from the region allotted to this ancient tribe. Those early disciples carried the *beautiful words* of the gospel swiftly as *hinds let loose*.



An Application—Be ready to take a stand for righteousness. Distinguish yourself as a champion for the heart of the God of the Bible. Be swift to pursue the righteous life based on an accurate understanding of the biblical authors' meaning and intention. Jesus calls us to follow Him. Be a Naphtalite and volunteer with a sincere heart and robust attitude to please God. Like the Naphtalites, *conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel* (Philippians 1:27).