

Joshua 19:32-39 Naphtali

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Overview

Birth: Gen 30:7,8, second of Rachel's children through Bilhah. "My wrestlings"

Blessing of Judah: Gen 49:21. Two characteristics:

- "Naphtali [is] a hind let loose," suggesting military prowess (2 Sam 22:33,34)
- "he giveth goodly words," poetic capabilities.

Both are demonstrated in the dominant OT story about Naphtali, in Judg 4-5; in addition, the second is reflected perhaps in the artistic skills of Hiram the brass-worker for Solomon's temple, whose mother was of Naphtali (1 Kings 7:13,14).

Blessing of Moses: Deut 33:23, "And of Naphtali he said, 'O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west [sea] and the south.'"

Territory

Border

Begins in the hills NE of Tabor

First segment works E, along Har Yavneel, then out the wadi.

Second starts from the starting point (v.34 "turneth" indicates 180 degree turn) and heads NW, across Beth Nethopha valley, then due north bordering Asher, and then finally eastward to the cities of Jair (Jos 13:30), who traced part of his descent to Judah (1 Chr 2:3, 4, 5, 21, 22), so that this is "little Judah" in the north.

Cities

Kedesh (and perhaps Zaanannim): settlement of Hobab the Kenite, Judg 4:11. (*A problematic name: there are at least 2 Kedesh's in Naphtali, this one SW of the lake, another N of Hazor. In addition, there is one in Issachar, 1 Chron 6:72, which is "Kishion" in Joshua's list of levitical cities.*)

Chinnereth: name of the sea of Galilee. Naphtali bordered it on the west and north.

Hazor:

- Josh 11:1, King Jabin, center of northern coalition vs. Israel
- 11:13, the only one of the (northern) cities to be burned.
- Judg 4:2, under another Jabin, became an opponent to Israel in the time of Deborah
- 1 Kings 9:15, one of four cities selected by Solomon for fortification:
 - Jerusalem (the capital)
 - Hazor (northern pass guarding the rift valley access)

- Megiddo (pass through the Carmel range)
- Gezer: a high site in the plain, overlooking several important NS and EW roads, including the route from Joppa to Jerusalem

Isaiah's Prophecy, Isa 9:1-2 (cf. Zebulon)

“Galilee of the Gentiles” emphasizes the heavy mixture of nations that takes place in this region, due to commerce and war.

AV “more grievously afflict” = “make heavy,” a common idiom for “honor.” As they were the first to feel God’s chastening hand through the Assyrians, so they will be the first to hear the gospel of the Messiah. Matt 4:13-16 brings out the fulfillment of this prophecy. In particular, Capernaum lies in Naphthali.

Illustrations:

- Ca. 895 B.C., 1 Kings 15:20, Benhadad of Damascus, hired by Asa, ravaged this area as a way to get Baasha of Issachar (15:27) off Asa’s back.
- 733 B.C., 2 Kings 15:29, TPIII conquered this region, leaving Hoshea as vassal king over Ephraim and Manasseh until he sought aid from Egypt. Pleading with Shalmaneser V (son of TPIII) in 724, he was taken prisoner and Samaria besieged until it fell in 722, ending the northern kingdom.

The War of Deborah and Barak, Judg 4-5

Synopsis

Judg 4:6, Barak came from Kedesh-Naphtali

Judg 4:11, Heber the Kenite from the same area.

Naphtali celebrated with Zebulon in the song of Deborah and Barak, Judg 5:18, fulfilling Jacob’s prophecy of Naphtali’s poetic capabilities.

1-3, The Oppressor

1, based on Israel’s sin, as throughout Judges.

2, Jabin, same as the name of the king leading the northern coalition in Josh 11:1. May be a hereditary title, “He discerns,” cf. “Pharaoh” for the Egyptians or “Abimelech” (Gen 20:2; 26:1; Ps 34:title cf. 1 Sam 21:11) for the Philistines.

Application: Just as Israel’s adversaries reappear from generation to generation, so we must never become complacent that our adversary is silent.

“Harosheth of the Gentiles”: “wooded hills of the Gentiles,” a generic description of Galilee.

3, 900 chariots, especially effective in the valleys and plains.

4-11, Israel's Heroes Prepared

4-5, Deborah

In Benjamin, the central part of the country. Should not cause us a problem that there are prophetesses as well as prophets, not only in the OT but also (Acts 21:9) in the NT.

- Exod 15:20, Miriam, the sister of Moses
- 2 Kings 22:14, Huldah in the time of Josiah
- Lk 2:36, Anna in the temple
- Acts 21:9, Philip's daughters
- Neh 6:14, Noadiah, allied with Tobiah and Sanballat, Nehemiah's adversaries

NT does not forbid a woman to prophesy, but says she must be covered (1 Cor 11), excludes this in the meetings when the saints come together for worship (1 Cor 15), and forbids her to teach or usurp authority over a man (1 Tim 2:12).

Not wrong for Deborah to pass on to Barak the message the Lord has given her; he should have taken it on, but he is the one who forces her to lead!

6-10, Barak

6, his home is in Kedesh Naphtali, probably the southern Kedesh, overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

6-7, the Lord's command and promise. *Application:* His commands come with his sovereign provision for the work to be done.

8-10, Barak's hesitancy. Compare also Moses in Exod 4:10-14. Both refused to follow the Lord's command, through false modesty of two sorts.

- Moses: recognition of one's own weakness. Yes, we should recognize it, but as a reason to trust in the Lord, not to refuse to obey.
- Barak: recognition of the gifts of others. Yes, we should be grateful for those God has placed among us, but not to the degree that we refuse to let him work through us. Perhaps an early form of deference to the clergy, due to the fact that she is recognized as the judge at that time.

11, Heber the Kenite

His camp is in the Jabneel valley just to the west of Kedesh Naphtali.

1:16, the Kenites as a whole associated with Israel, since Num 10:29 (allied in marriage with Moses), and with Judah in particular. He had progressed farther north.

4:17, at peace not only with the Israelites, but also with Jabin.

12-24, the Battle

The poem in ch. 5 gives a hint as to how the defeat was accomplished: 5:4-5, 20-22, a sudden thunderstorm may have softened the ground and bogged down the chariots. In the rout, the enemy flees in two directions.

16, Barak follows the fleeing chariots, therefore along the plain.

17, Sisera makes his way on foot toward the Jabneel valley, trying to regain the route north to Hazor, and seeks out the encampment of Heber the Kenite, because he recognized it as a friend.

18-21, There Jael slays him.

- A gruesome story, and somewhat puzzling—she violates the most sacred of oriental customs, the obligation of hospitality. You are obliged to put up even your mortal enemy for three days.
- Her clan has made ties both with Jabin and with Israel; that is what puts her in this bind. Because of their treaty with Jabin, she must receive him. Because of her ties to Israel, she must stop him.
- When push comes to shove, she prefers the right side, but we can only guess the tremendous psychological pressure she felt as she violated deeply held obligations.
- *Application:* The world tempts us into thinking that we can straddle the fence as Heber and his family did. She fell of the fence in the right direction, but others fall the wrong way. “Friendship with the world is enmity with God,” James 4:4. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon,” Matt. 6:24. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” 2 Cor 6:14.

22, Barak, having routed the chariots, returns to search for Sisera, and finds him slain.