

## Gatekeepers: Naphtali

A Teaching by Ron Brown

*“How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Psalm 133:1*

A gatekeeper is a watchman on the wall. When we read Ezekiel 48:30–35, we see that the last four words of verse 35 says, “the Lord is there.” It talks about how all of the tribes were positioned at a particular gate and as they were diligent in their duties, God said, “I will be there in that place of unity,” in that place of fellowship where God comes and commands his blessing.

In regard to our responsibility in the kingdom of God and how God looks at us in our leadership role, we will be rewarded by the Lord for our obedience and our faithfulness, not for our prominence. That’s why each one of the Israelite tribes had their role to play. It wasn’t about which tribe was more prominent but whether each person or each tribe was fulfilling their responsibility. A lot of times when we look at leadership, we look at the importance or the prominence of the role and we make assessments in our human understanding from that place. But from God’s perspective, he looks at us all the same way and looks at whether we are being obedient and faithful as watchmen on the wall. It’s not about our prominence. That’s truly the measure of God’s success for our lives.

God has invested spiritual gifting in the people he has called to leadership in the body of Christ and he expects a return on his investment, so that’s what we will be accountable for when the Lord returns. He’s going to assess or ask us what we have done with our talents, our gifts and our responsibility that he has given to us.

The arrangement of the tribes as shown in Ezekiel is not found anywhere else in the Bible. The tribes are also laid out in the book of Revelation but differently than in Ezekiel. They’re also laid out in other places in the Scripture but this is

an unusual kind of layout or grouping of the tribes in the vision of Ezekiel. Ezekiel has a lot to say about the end times, so I believe there are some things here that have to do with the church age as to why they’re laid out this way in these particular groupings.

We know about the sons of Jacob and how these 12 brothers were supposed to love each other. Psalm 133 says, “How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” That’s where God commands the blessing of his anointing. They were supposed to support each other and so if the tribes on the West gate didn’t do what they were supposed to do, the Israelites could be invaded from that direction. And if the ones on the North didn’t do what they were supposed to do, they could get invaded that way. So everyone had to keep their area of responsibility. But from the very beginning, as we know, the tribes argued and fought with each other.

We don’t have that here at Teen Challenge of Southern California because we’re all laid out together. All of our county territories touch each other. So as I was thinking about the Tri-Counties, Kern County, Orange County, Los Angeles and San Diego, all of our counties touch each other and we have the responsibility as gatekeepers from the way that the Southern California Teen Challenge territory is divided.

But no tribe was supposed to have worse land than the other tribe; everyone was supposed to have land that was fairly comparable. If you look at the measurement of the land in Ezekiel 48:30–35, each had an equal share. No tribe could pretend to be greater than the other. Each of the tribe’s land reached across the whole span of the country from east to west. The tribes were next to each other to foster friendship,



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to enjoy fellowship one with one another, and to support one another. But as we know, the tribes didn't always act that way.

Now in regard to the tribe of Naphtali, I want to talk about what the word "Naphtali" means. First of all, I want to read the blessing that Moses gave and the blessing that Jacob gave. The blessing from Jacob for the tribe of Naphtali can be found in Genesis 49:21. It says "Naphtali is a doe let loose. He gives beautiful words."

In Deuteronomy 33:23, Moses blessed the tribe of Naphtali, saying "Oh Naphtali, satisfied with favor and full of the blessing of the Lord, take possession of the sea and the South."

The word Naphtali means "my wrestlings" or "to struggle with wrestlings." This comes from Genesis 30:8 when Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a son. In verse 8 Rachel said, "'With mighty wrestling I have wrestled with my sister and I have indeed prevailed.' And she named him Naphtali." As you remember, Rachel could not initially conceive after she was married to Jacob. But Jacob had also married Leah, her sister, and Leah started having children right away. So there was a contest between the two of them for Jacob's affections.

When I look at the blessing, the word of God says that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. That's what gives the stability and the foundation for the Church. When I look at the blessing that came from Jacob and the blessing that came from Moses, there is an apostolic blessing and there's a prophetic blessing. As a matter of fact, when Jacob began to speak, he was speaking prophetically and so there is an apostolic and a prophetic blessing that came upon each one of the tribes so that the foundation of those tribes would be settled, would be established, would be firm, and would be strong.

I think about Teen Challenge and how God gave an apostolic and prophetic foundation for the ministry of Teen Challenge. I really believe that's one of the reasons that Teen Challenge has continued to thrive through the years. If you remember, the Lord sent Brother David Wilkerson to New York City. That was an apostolic sending of the Lord for him to go there and Brother Dave operated in a very powerful prophetic anointing that all of us are aware of and have been a recipient of. I believe that's why the foundation of Teen Challenge is so strong—it started out with God sending this man to New York City and the releasing of the prophetic anointing on his life that gave the strength and stability to the foundation of Teen Challenge as a whole. I see a correlation with that same kind of strength that God brought forth the tribes, established them, and sent them forth for his purposes. We continue in that same flow of anointing today.

Naphtali had four children: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem. I want to tell a little bit about what those words mean.

Jahzeel means "God will allot, he will apportion." Guni means "to be protected." Jezer means "to be squeezed into a mold" and Shillem means "to be safe, to be at peace, and to prosper." The tribe of Naphtali got its name from wrestling or struggling because this was the name that Rachel gave the child due to the struggles she had with her sister. So for the children that came from Naphtali, God will allot or apportion to be protected, to be squeezed into a mold, or to be framed with specific boundaries, and there's Shillem, which means "to be safe, to be at peace, and to prosper."

The principal city of Naphtali was Kedesh—we can find this in Joshua 20:7. This word, derived from Hebrew, is where we get the word "holy" or "to be made holy." This was also the territory in Galilee where Jesus began his ministry. Where the tribe of Naphtali was—by the Sea of Galilee—is where he first called his disciples. Also in Naphtali's history is Barak and Deborah, who were two of the judges of Israel. They also came from the tribe of Naphtali.

Naphtali and Asher both were on the last gate that is mentioned on the west side. In Ezekiel 48:34 they were on the west gate. They literally were the feet of the tribes because they both were very mobile. I think that was an appropriate place for Jesus to start his ministry because the Bible says, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news." And this is where Jesus began to bring the good news. It was in the area of the Sea of Galilee and that is really what Naphtali was all about. It was a tribe that was mobile and always moving about. It was a fighting tribe.

Now the word "wrestling" means "to twine or to struggle, to be made strong." One definition in Hebrew refers to how one twines ropes together and they become stronger. When you put two or three strands together, they become very, very strong and that word "wrestling" means "to be twined or to be made very, very strong." Ephesians 6:10 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the [power or] strength of his might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." There was a powerful warfare of spirit that was on the tribe of Naphtali.

I believe that for this particular season of Teen Challenge of Southern California, God is stirring us and getting us ready for what he is about to release to us because as I mentioned earlier, one of the names of the children of Naphtali meant "to prosper or to have favor." I believe that the favor of God is about to come on us as we move into our Jubilee year. And I also believe there's going to be a great opportunity for

opposition to come because we are about to mount up on the airwaves. If things go the way that we are planning—and we're going to be publishing abroad what Teen Challenge of Southern California has been doing for 50 years, asking the media to come and cover it and the word of God calls the enemy "the prince of the power of the air"—that there's going to be an opportunity for the enemy to try to invade our territory.

Therefore we must be strategic in our gatekeeping duties and responsibilities. We must be prepared and standing in our place with the full armor of God on and be watchful in the spirit so that we can receive the insight and the direction that God wants to bring to us in this new season.

The word "Kedesh" that I mentioned earlier was the principal city of Naphtali and where we get the word "holy." We must be holy in all of our conduct so that there is no breach that the enemy would be able to get into to try to distract from the purposes of God, especially as I'm sensing what God is about to do in moving us into this new realm of prominence. Now remember I said that it's not our prominence but our faithfulness and our obedience that God rewards. However, if we are faithful and we are obedient, God will sometimes allow prominence to come. But if he allows the prominence to come, we must be in a place so that we are able to handle that which God brings to us. And I believe that this is the instruction that God is bringing to us from the the tribe of Naphtali.

Ephesians 1:4 says that "he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." 1 Timothy 2:8 says that we are to "lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting." In 2 Timothy 1:9, we are called with a holy calling. First Peter 1:15–16, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" In Hebrews 12:14 it says, "Pursue peace with all men, and [holiness or] sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

That word "see" means "revelation." I believe what God is saying is if we don't walk in holiness of character and conduct in the way that we carry out our gatekeeper responsibilities in this season, that he will close off revelation from us and we will not be able to see the strategies, the tactics and the plans of the enemy and know how to prepare for them, and to know how to be successful. That's what I believe this Kedesh, this holiness, which the most prominent city in the tribe of Naphtali, speaks to us in our season. I believe that God is saying to us, "I have called you for this season as watchman on the wall, as those who are gatekeepers for this ministry and this responsibility." And we must walk in holiness of conduct, holiness of character, holiness of thought so that there is nothing that would block the revelation of the Holy Spirit from giving to us the strategies and the plans of the enemy so that we will

be able to diffuse them and we will be able to walk in all that God wants to release to us in this season of his great favor that he wants to bring to us. This is indeed a very strategic time that God has called us to.

In Genesis 45:26, Joseph was sold into slavery, and then the great famine came and all the brothers, Jacob's sons, went down and then immediately Jacob went down and was sustained there during the famine. But when they went there and encountered Joseph and Joseph told them to go back and tell his father that he was alive, some rabbinical teaching says it was Naphtali who was the first one. In Genesis 45:26, it says that they went back and said to Jacob that Joseph was alive, but they say it was Naphtali who was the spokesman for the group, that Naphtali was the one who spoke up and said, "Father, Joseph is alive" and Jacob was blessed by that salutation that Naphtali brought. I believe that God is favoring us in this time, that he wants to use our mouths to speak hope, to speak comfort, and to speak peace, and to speak deliverance to the world. I believe he's going to open up some opportunities in a great way for us to do that. But in order for us to do that and not be spoiled and not miss out on the fullness of what God has for us, we have to be holy in all of our conduct. We must walk with the kind of walk that honors the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part of the blessing was that Naphtali would be full of the blessings of the Lord. And so I believe that if we are faithful to speak the word of God, to guard our heart, to walk in holiness, that we will be full of the blessing of the Lord and we will be able to walk in all that God has ordained for us in this season.

When David became king over all of Israel after Saul's death, it was the tribe of Naphtali that joined him at Hebron with a large army and also brought food and provisions for the army. You can find that in 1 Chronicles 12 where it talks about how the tribe of Naphtali showed up and they showed up strong. They showed up with many warriors when David was crowned king over all Israel. They said, "Hey, we've got your back." They were keen in warfare, they were very discerning of strategies and plans of the enemy and I believe that this is what God is saying.

But if we're going to be strategic and be watchmen on the wall, we must become keener in our discernment, we must be more aware of those strategies and plans. What God has given us responsibility for is to raise up warriors through Teen Challenge. We're not just raising up folks who will be clean and sober but I believe God wants to release an army from the ministry of Teen Challenge of Southern California that will touch the nations, that will touch all of the U.S., and touch all of the world. I believe that's part of the vision of why we're moving into a Missions Department in the ministry. It's so that we can be more intentional about raising up those world-changing warriors. Just like Naphtali showed up with many warriors and

said “David, we’ve got your back. We’re going to fight with you. We’re going to fight for you,” we’re going to show up with our David, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. We’re saying, “God, we’re showing up with many warriors and we’re going to be faithful with what you have invested into us, because the Bible says, ‘To whom much is given, much is required’ and so God you have invested into our lives and our stewardship, all of these students who come into Teen Challenge. We will be faithful to raise up an army for you, Jesus, and we will join you in your strategic plan to destroy the works of the devil.”

1 John 3:8 says, “For this purpose was the son of God manifest, that he would destroy the works of the evil one,” and so I believe that God will be pleased and will be honored and will be glorified if we look at the responsibility that we have as gatekeepers of this ministry. It’s not to raise up people who will be clean and sober, but to raise up warriors who are ready to fight and join the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and to bring forth his glory and his kingdom throughout the earth.

Right after the temptation of Jesus, when he defeated the enemy, he began his ministry in the region of Naphtali. Beginning in Matthew 4:12, it says, “Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach and say ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee”—again, the whole area of Naphtali—“He saw two brothers, Simon who is 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.’ Immediately they left their nets and

followed him. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and they followed Him. Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.”

This is what I believe God is doing in this season, that he’s saying, “Watchmen on the wall, come and join me.” The work that Jesus began at the Sea of Galilee still continues, he’s still calling disciples, he’s still saying, “Come and follow me,” and so we need to be more intentional. I know that we get so busy with all of our administrative duties and all these other things that we do, but don’t get your eyes off of the pearl of great price. And the pearl of great price is to see the men and women who come into this program come into the fullness of their identity and their purpose in Christ, and that they will become fishers of men and that they will be released from Teen Challenge to go throughout the world and continue to compel people to come and follow Jesus and to be disciples.

That is what God is calling for in this season. That’s why he wants to give us prominence. That’s why he wants to raise us up. That’s why the blessing and the favor of God is upon us. He says, “I’ll protect you, I’ll use you, but this is your assignment: Keep your eye on the most important thing, which is releasing the gifts of God in those who come to this ministry, to be raised up as an army that will continue to be the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ to go throughout the world and say our God is alive. He’s King of Kings and he is Lord of Lords.”

So let’s be watchmen on the wall after the order of the tribe of Naphtali and be those who would guard our heart and would walk in holiness of character so that nothing would hinder us and keep us from the fullness of what God has for us in this season.

