

Judges 1:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them.

Analysis

Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them.

Naphtali's situation mirrors Asher's with significant modification. Initially 'Naphtali dwelt among the Canaanites' (like Asher, v. 32), indicating Canaanite dominance. However, 'nevertheless' (vayih'yu lahem lamas, וְיָהִי לָהֶם לָמָס, 'and they became tributaries to them') shows later reversal—Naphtali eventually gained military-economic dominance, imposing forced labor. This suggests initial weakness followed by growing strength, yet still incomplete obedience (tributaries, not eliminated).

Beth-shemesh ('house of the sun') and Beth-anath ('house of Anat') reveal Canaanite religious character—named after sun worship and Anat (violent Canaanite war goddess). These names indicate strongly religious sites, possibly sanctuary cities. Tolerating such centers maintained Canaanite religious influence even after political-military subjugation. This parallels modern Christians conquering external behavioral sins while tolerating internal thought patterns—

gaining external compliance while maintaining contrary beliefs and values.

Naphtali's partial success-partial failure represents mixed obedience—better than Asher's complete capitulation but worse than complete conquest. The tribe later features prominently in Judges (Deborah-Barak, Judges 4-5) and Jesus' Galilean ministry occurred primarily in Naphtali's territory (Matthew 4:13-16). This demonstrates God's redemptive grace—despite incomplete conquest, God used Naphtali significantly in His purposes. Yet one wonders what greater blessing complete obedience would have enabled.

Historical Context

Naphtali's territory in upper Galilee (Joshua 19:32-39) included mountainous terrain and fertile valleys. Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath's locations remain debated, though likely in upper Galilee near Lebanese border. The names' religious significance (sun worship, Anat worship) indicates these were Canaanite cultic centers. Anat was a major Canaanite goddess—violent warrior deity, Baal's consort, featuring prominently in Ugaritic mythology. Beth-anath ('house of Anat') suggests a temple or sanctuary dedicated to her worship.

Archaeological evidence from upper Galilee shows mixed Israelite-Canaanite material culture during Iron Age I. Tel Dan (in Dan's territory, bordering Naphtali) reveals Late Bronze Age Canaanite city with evidence of Israelite occupation beginning Iron Age I. However, Canaanite religious practices continued—Dan later became site of Jeroboam's golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-30). This pattern—Israelite political control coexisting with continued Canaanite religious influence—characterized northern tribes, with devastating consequences.

Naphtali's later prominence suggests partial success in establishing Israelite identity despite incomplete conquest. Barak, Deborah's general who defeated Sisera, was from Kedesh in Naphtali (Judges 4:6). However, the region's religious syncretism persisted—Jesus' Galilean ministry (largely in Naphtali-Zebulun territory) encountered persistent unbelief despite miracles (Matthew 11:20-24). The seeds of syncretism sown during incomplete conquest bore fruit in generations of spiritual confusion.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What areas of your Christian life show external compliance but internal resistance—behavior modified but heart unchanged?
2. How does Naphtali's eventual military dominance without complete elimination illustrate the difference between victory and complete sanctification?
3. In what ways does God work redemptively through imperfect people while still desiring their complete transformation?

Interlinear Text

Neither did Naphtali	H3808	drive out	H853	but he dwelt	H0	of Bethshemesh
H5321		H3423		H3427		H1053
but he dwelt	H853	and of Bethanath	H0	but he dwelt	H1043	among
H3427		H3427		H3427		H7130
the Canaanites	H3669	but he dwelt	H3427	of the land	H776	but he dwelt
						H0
and of Bethanath	H1043		H1961		H3427	of Bethshemesh
						H1053
became tributaries						