

The Coney

God's Teachers

*"Four things are small (insignificant, unimportant) on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise (skillful, artful, intelligent): **The ants** are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; **The shephanim** (rock-rabbit, the hyrax – coney) are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; **The locusts** have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; **The lizard** (Poisonous – spider) you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces" (Proverbs 30:24-28).*

The scholars disagree on what **shephanim** are. Translators of the NASV just used the Hebrew word from the Old Testament while other translations have rock badger, badger, coney, and rabbit. We can get a better picture of this creature by looking at other passages that use the word. *"Likewise, the shaphan (shaw-fawn), for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you" (Leviticus 11:5).* The best fit for this animal is the Syrian Hyrax, called a coney in some places. It is small and lives among the rocks and cliffs from the Sinai to upper Syria. This animal is not a ruminant, but it moves its mouth while chewing as cud-chewing animals do. To the Israelite looking for food, it would appear to meet this criterion.

The conies are not strong creatures. They have quite soft, furry bodies up to 20 inches long and up to 10 pounds in weight. Many eagles try to make a coney their lunch but seldom capture one. Using the physical attributes given by their creator, they can cling to and hide on cliffs and in crevices in the mountains. As with most small animals, they keep watch and stay alert to warn others. Living in colonies of up to 80, at least two are always on duty as lookouts. In the US, prairie dog towns will always have one or more guards on duty while the remainder of the animals gather food, clean the borrows, and care for the young. Other kinds of small animals have a cooperative relationship with other animals that can do a better job of watching. A giraffe has an advantage over a gazelle to watch for lions. And birds give warning if a hunter is approaching. God has provided various means of protection for even the most vulnerable of His creations.

The coney's wisdom is that they depend on God as their protector and defender. Like this humble creature, we must also depend on God. We do not have cliffs to climb or crevices to hide in, but we do have the Lord. *"But the LORD has been my stronghold, And my God the rock of my refuge" (Psalms 94:22).* Peter reminds us, *"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:6-8).* Like the coney is no match for the eagle without the help given by God, so we are defenseless without the protection provided by our savior.

The coney has soft ridges on the pads of its feet to help it cling to vertical surfaces like a gecko. They have a claw, hoofs, and toes on their hind feet. That's quite a "tool bag" for a small creature. But we have been given tools as well. As we wake up and prepare to face our daily tasks, we should make sure we have adequately prepared for the dangers in the unseen world. Paul tells to *"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Ephesians 6:10).* Not our strength, not our planning, not our abilities, but *"the strength of the Lord."*

How are we to be strong in the strength of the Lord? As we dress for the day and prepare for the things we will do, along with the protective clothing and equipment, do not forget the protection the Lord has provided. **"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"** (Ephesians 6:11-12).

We do not know what the day will bring. We do not know when temptation will confront us. Like the coney and Joseph, we must be prepared to flee if necessary (Genesis 39:11-12). **"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. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God"** (Ephesians 6:13-17).