



Judges - Chapter Ten

II Judges 3:7-16:31 - **The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy (continues)**

Summary of Chapter Ten

The chapter commences with two very brief accounts of the next two judges, Tola and Jair. When the Israelites again turned away from the Lord and worshipped the gods of the nations around them, he handed them over to the Ammonites, who oppressed them for eighteen years. When the people cried out to the Lord for help, he rebuked them, refused to help and told them to cry out to the new gods they now worshipped. However, when they finally repented, the Lord relented and he gathered the people together in order to raise up a new leader to fight against the Ammonites.

II.g Judges 10:1-5 - Tola and Jair

Tola was the sixth judge, the second minor judge, one about whom little is recorded; Shamgar being the first; Tola judged for 23 years. He arose to save Israel (v.1), which it needed after Abimelech's tyranny. This brief account echoes that of Deborah's early activity, especially that recorded in Judges 4:4-5 and 5:7.

Jair was the seventh judge, the third minor judge, and he judged 22 years. He was rather wealthy (v.4), and lived in Transjordan, the same area as the next judge, Jephthah (Judges 11:1). His thirty sons and those of Ibzan of Bethlehem, the next minor judge (Judges 12:8-10), form a sharp contrast to Jephthah's ultimate childlessness.

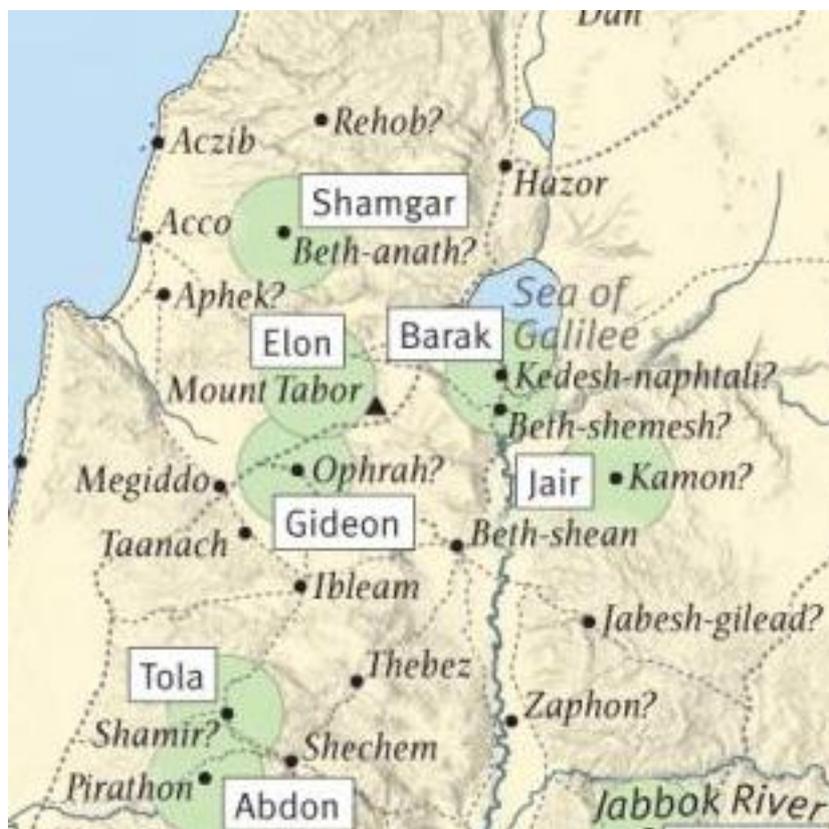
¹ After Abimelech, Tola son of Puah son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, who lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim, rose to deliver Israel. ² He judged Israel for twenty-three years. Then he died, and was buried at Shamir.

Judges 10:1-2

Abimelech was the wicked son of Gideon who became a king of the Shechemites, as recorded in Judges Chapter 9.

Tola and Puah are inherited family names in the tribe of Issachar, named after the sons of the tribal patriarch: <<*The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron*>> (Genesis 46:13 NIV).

There is little recorded about the career of the judge Tola; only that his service as a judge lasted a relatively long time. He was from the tribe of Issachar and lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim, which indicates his likely area of operation. Refer to the map.



Areas where Tola and Jair judged

³ After him came Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴ He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; and they had thirty towns, which are in the land of Gilead, and are called Havvoth-jair to this day. ⁵ Jair died, and was buried in Kamon.

Judges 10:3-5

Little is known either about Jair's service as a leader of Israel. It is recorded that he served for about the same number of years as Tola before him. As a Gileadite,

he was from the half tribe of Manasseh that had settled in Transjordan: <<*The descendants of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir was the father of Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites*>> (Numbers 26:29).

He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; and they had thirty towns. This shows that Jair was likely a polygamous man, and a man of wealth and prestige. His many sons had transportation not available to the common man and their own territory in which to rule. Jair never took the title of king but it seems that he may have acted like one.

Which are in the land of Gilead. It seems that Jair exclusively judged in the Transjordan region, the area in which the half tribe of Manasseh had settled.

II.h Judges 10:6-18 - Oppression by the Ammonites

The introduction restates the themes in Chapter 2 about Israel's apostasy and God's mercy. A new theme emerges, however, concerning the Israelites' confession and repentance. These verses set the scene for the next judge, Jephthah, the account of whom is told in the following chapter.

⁶ The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, worshipping the Baals and the Astartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. Thus they abandoned the Lord, and did not worship him.

Judges 10:6

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. This phrase is repeated seven times in the Book of Judges. It shows that the evil of Israel was even worse because they did it in the sight of God. It could be said that it is bad enough to commit adultery, but it is far more offensive to commit adultery in the presence of a spouse.

Israel was attracted to these other gods not because of the beauty of an idol image, but because of what was associated with the pagan deity. Baal, the weather god, was associated with financial success. Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility, was associated with love, sex, and romance. As for the other gods of the neighbouring nations around them, it was a matter of conforming to the popular culture and doing what everyone else did. Israel's worship of neighbouring gods is a reminder that the people of God are often in danger of worshipping the same things that the world worships.

The kings of Israel in particular followed this pattern but at least one king, Hezekiah, acknowledged this: <<*For our ancestors have been unfaithful and*

have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the Lord, and turned their backs>> (2 Chronicles 29:6), and did what was right by God during his own reign.

The references to the seven groupings of foreign gods, which are linked to the seven nations that God directly references in vv.11-12, shows the wide scope of Israel's apostasy. Not only did they worship the major Canaanite deities: Baal, Asherah, and Ashtoreth, but also, apparently, the gods of any people with whom they came into contact.

Thus they abandoned the Lord, and did not worship him. Perhaps Israel did not consciously forsake God. Yet adding the worship of pagan gods to the worship of the true God was to forsake the Lord. It seems that Israel was willing to worship just about anything except the true living God. When a person stops believing in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything.

⁷ So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, ⁸ and they crushed and oppressed the Israelites that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. ⁹ The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was greatly distressed.

Judges 10:7-9

The Philistines; the Ammonites. If Israel wanted to serve the gods of the Philistines and the Ammonites, God would allow them to do so. He allowed them in the fullest sense, by selling them into servitude to the Philistines and Amorites: *<<How could one have routed a thousand, and two put a myriad to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, the Lord had given them up?>>* (Deuteronomy 32:30). The next two major judges were God's instruments against the Ammonites (Jephthah) and the Philistines (Samson).

The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim. The problem was not restricted to those dwelling in Transjordan for their armies came west into the Promised Land to oppress other tribes as well.

They crushed and oppressed the Israelites that year. Of course, Israel was never blessed when they served these other gods. Instead, they were crushed and oppressed; they were greatly distressed, but God gave them what they wanted. Had they stayed loyal to the Lord, he would have given them what they needed!

¹⁰ So the Israelites cried to the Lord, saying, 'We have sinned against you, because we have abandoned our God and have worshipped the Baals.' ¹¹ And the Lord said to the Israelites, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? ¹² The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites oppressed you; and you cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. ¹³ Yet you have abandoned me and worshipped other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. ¹⁴ Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.' ¹⁵ And the Israelites said to the Lord, 'We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you; but deliver us this day!' ¹⁶ So they put away the foreign gods from among them and worshipped the Lord; and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer.

Judges 10:10-16

We have sinned against you. The words of this cry seem fine, but God's response seems to indicate that he saw something lacking in Israel's repentance. One may cry out to the Lord, yet really just wish things were different. Crying out to God with the voice is not necessarily the same as crying out to him with the heart. God wanted from Israel the same thing he wants from Christians, a heart that will put its hand to the plough and not look back; refer to Luke 9:62. He wants his people to come to the place where they know that there is nothing worth following except God: <<*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it'*>> (Mark 8:34-35).

Therefore I will deliver you no more. God was harsh with Israel because they had to be genuinely sick of their sin before they would genuinely turn to God. The Lord allowed Israel to experience the sickness of their sin. For the first time it is recorded that he refused to save them, reminding them of how repeatedly that he had delivered them in the past, and yet they had turned back to their evil courses. In the message of his anger there was clearly evident a purpose of love.

One technique used to help people stop smoking is to put them in a small, unventilated room and make them smoke for hours on end, until they can hardly bear it. It makes them sick of smoking, and makes them truly want to stop. In the same way, sometimes God will allow the natural consequences of sin to crash upon the sinner in concentrated form, so they can become sick of sinning.

The gods whom you have chosen. God makes it clear that they were not forced to worship these gods but had done so by their own freewill, and it was this that was the cause of their current distress. The Israelites had also chosen new gods in Deborah's time: <<*When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?*>> (Judges 5:8).

So they put away the foreign gods from among them and worshipped the Lord. Israel finally discovered that the worst aspects of serving God are better than the best of serving idols.

He could no longer bear to see Israel suffer. Many scholars see this as a reference to God's great mercy and his capacity to be moved by Israel's misery and repentance: <<*Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them*>> (Judges 2:18). Another interpretation is that it is Israel's unfaithfulness, the cause of their misery that makes God impatient. This would indicate that Israel's repentance here was only a superficial one: <<*But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone*>> (John 2:24-25), and: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12).

God looked upon disobedient Israel with compassion, not hatred. It was difficult for God to allow Israel to stay in their misery, although it was the best thing for them if they were to learn their lesson. Like the perfect loving parent, God hated to see Israel suffer, even when it was good for them. He longed to rescue them but would not do it until it was the right thing for them: <<*For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their saviour in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old*>> (Isaiah 63:8-9).

¹⁷ Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead; and the Israelites came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. ¹⁸ The commanders of the people of Gilead said to one another, 'Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.'

Judges 10:17-18

The Israelites came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. In response to the Ammonite threat, Israel gathered together for defence. Mizpah means watchtower

in Hebrew and was named after the covenant pillar between Laban and Jacob: <<*Laban said, 'This heap is a witness between you and me today.' Therefore he called it Galeed, and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, 'The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other'*>> (Genesis 31:48-49). It became a regular place where Israel would gather during the time of the Judges, including Samuel.

Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? Israel gathered, but had no leader. God's pattern for doing great works among his people is to raise someone up. He could do the work all by himself; he could send angels to do the work for him; he could use a leaderless mob or a committee. Yet God's normal means of operating is to raise someone up, and through that person to do a great work. God preferred model is to use servant leaders.