

# CHAPTER 10

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The peaceable times Israel enjoyed under the government of two judges, Tola and Jair (v. 1-5).
- II.** The troublesome times that ensued.
  - 1.** Israel's sin that brought them into trouble (v. 6).
  - 2.** The trouble itself they were in (v. 7-9).
- III.** Their repentance and humiliation for sin, their prayers and reformation, and the mercy they found with God thereupon (v. 10-16).
- IV.** Preparation made for their deliverance out of the hand of their oppressors (v. 17, 18).

## <700> JUDGES 10:1-5

### GOVERNMENT OF TOLA AND JAIR

Quiet and peaceable reigns, though the best to live in, are the worst to write of, as yielding least variety of matter for the historian to entertain his reader with; such were the reigns of these two judges, Tola and Jair, who make but a small figure and take up but a very little room in this history. But no doubt they were both *raised up of God* to serve their country in the quality of judges, not pretending, as Abimelech had done, to the grandeur of kings, nor, like him, taking the honour they had to themselves, but being called of God to it.

**1.** Concerning Tola it is said that he arose after Abimelech to defend Israel, v. 1. After Abimelech had debauched Israel by his wickedness, disquieted and disturbed them by his restless ambition, and, by the mischiefs he brought on them, exposed them to enemies from abroad, God animated this good man to appear for the reforming of abuses, the putting down of idolatry, the appeasing of tumults, and the healing of the wounds given to the state by Abimelech's usurpation. Thus he saved them from themselves, and guarded them against their enemies. He was of the tribe of Issachar, a

tribe disposed to serve, for he *bowed his shoulder to bear* (<sup><0494></sup>Genesis 49:14, 15), yet one of that tribe is here raised up to rule; for those that humble themselves shall be exalted. He bore the name of him that was ancestor to the first family of that tribe; of the sons of Issachar Tola was the first, <sup><0463></sup>Genesis 46:13; <sup><0423></sup>Numbers 26:23. It signifies a *worm*, yet, being the name of his ancestor, he was not ashamed of it. Though he was of Issachar, yet, when he was raised up to the government, he came and dwelt in Mount Ephraim, which was more in the heart of the country, that the people might the more conveniently resort to him for judgment. He judged Israel twenty-three years (v. 2), kept things in good order, but did not any thing very memorable.

**2.** Jair was a Gileadite, so was his next successor Jephthah, both of that half tribe of the tribe of Manasseh which lay on the other side Jordan; though they seemed separated from their brethren, yet God took care, while the honour of the government was shifted from tribe to tribe and before it settled in Judah, that those who lay remote should sometimes share in it, *putting more abundant honour on that part which lacked*. Jair bore the name of a very famous man of the same tribe who in Moses's time was very active in reducing this country, <sup><0424></sup>Numbers 32:41; <sup><0630></sup>Joshua 13:30. That which is chiefly remarkable concerning this Jair is the increase and honour of his family: *He had thirty sons*, v. 4. And,

**(1.)** They had good preferments, for they *rode on thirty ass colts*; that is, they were judges itinerant, who, as deputies to their father, rode from place to place in their several circuits to administer justice. We find afterwards that Samuel made his sons judges, though he could not make them good ones, <sup><0881></sup>1 Samuel 8:1-3.

**(2.)** They had good possessions, every one a city, out of those that were called, from their ancestor of the same name with their father, *Havoth-jair* — *the villages of Jair*; yet they are called *cities*, either because those young gentlemen to whom they were assigned enlarged and fortified them, and so improved them into cities, or because they were as well pleased with their lot in those country towns as if they had been cities compact together and fenced with gates and bars. Villages are cities to a contented mind.

## ISRAEL OPPRESSED BY THE AMMONITES

While those two judges, Tola and Jair, presided in the affairs of Israel, things went well, but afterwards,

**I.** Israel returned to their idolatry, that sin which did most easily beset them (v. 6): *They did evil again in the sight of the Lord, from whom they were unaccountably bent to backslide, as a foolish people and unwise.*

**1.** They worshipped many gods; not only their old demons Baalim and Ashtaroth, which the Canaanites had worshipped, but, as if they would proclaim their folly to all their neighbours, they served the gods of Syria, Zidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. It looks as if the chief trade of Israel had been to import deities from all countries. It is hard to say whether it was more impious or impolitic to do this. By introducing these foreign deities, they rendered themselves mean and despicable, for no nation that had any sense of honour changed their gods. Much of the wealth of Israel, we may suppose, was carried out, in offerings to the temples of the deities in the several countries whence they came, on which, as their mother-churches, their temples in Israel were expected to own their dependence; the priests and devotees of those sorry deities would follow their gods, no doubt, in crowds into the land of Israel, and, if they could not live in their own country, would take root there, and so *strangers would devour their strength*. If they did it in compliment to the neighbouring nations, and to ingratiate themselves with them, justly were they disappointed; for those nations which by their wicked arts they sought to make their friends by the righteous judgments of God became their enemies and oppressors. *In quo quis peccat, in eo punitur* — *Wherein a person offends, therein he shall be punished.*

**2.** They did not so much as admit the God of Israel to be one of those many deities they worshipped, but quite cast him off: *They forsook the Lord, and served not him* at all. Those that think to serve both God and Mammon will soon come entirely to forsake God, and to serve Mammon only. If God have not all the heart, he will soon have none of it.

**II.** God renewed his judgments upon them, bringing them under the power of oppressing enemies. Had they *fallen into the hands of the Lord*

immediately, they might have found that *his mercies were great*; but God let them *fall into the hands of man*, whose tender mercies are cruel. He *sold them into the hands of the Philistines* that lay south-west of Canaan, and of the Ammonites that lay north-east, both at the same time; so that between those two millstones they were miserably *crushed*, as the original word is (v. 8) for *oppressed*. God had appointed that, if any of the cities of Israel should revolt to idolatry, the rest should make war upon them and cut them off, <sup><61312></sup>Deuteronomy 13:12, etc. They had been jealous enough in this matter, almost to an extreme, in the case of the altar set up by the two tribes and a half (Joshua 22); but now they had grown so very bad that when one city was infected with idolatry the next took the infection and instead of punishing it, imitated and out-did it; and therefore, since those that should have been revengers to *execute wrath on those that did this evil* were themselves guilty, or *bore the sword in vain*, God brought the neighbouring nations upon them, to chastise them for their apostasy. The oppression of Israel by the Ammonites, the posterity of Lot, was,

1. Very long. It continued eighteen years. Some make those years to be part of the judgeship of Jair, who could not prevail to reform and deliver Israel as he would. Others make them to commence at the death of Jair, which seems the more probable because that part of Israel which was most infested by the Ammonites was Gilead, Jair's own country, which we cannot suppose to have suffered so much while he was living, but that part at least would be reformed and protected.
2. Very grievous. They vexed them and oppressed them. It was a great vexation to be oppressed by such a despicable people as the children of Ammon were. They began with those tribes that lay next them on the other side Jordan, here called *the land of the Amorites* (v. 8) because the Israelites had so wretchedly degenerated, and had made themselves so like the heathen, that they had become, in a manner, perfect Amorites (<sup><23413></sup>Ezekiel 16:3), or because by their sin they forfeited their title to this land, so that it might justly be looked upon as *the land of the Amorites* again, from whom they took it. But by degrees they pushed forward, came over Jordan, and invaded Judah, and Benjamin, and Ephraim (v. 9), three of the most famous tribes of Israel, yet thus insulted when they had forsaken God, and unable to make head against the invader. Now the threatening was fulfilled that they should be *slain before their enemies*, and should have *no power to stand before them*, <sup><4817></sup>Leviticus 26:17, 37. Their

ways and their doings procure this to themselves; they have sadly degenerated, and so they come to be sorely distressed.

## <0700> JUDGES 10:10-18

### THE REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL

Here is,

**I.** A humble confession which Israel make to God in their distress, v. 10. Now they own themselves guilty, like a malefactor upon the rack, and promise reformation, like a child under the rod. They not only complain of the distress, but acknowledge it is their own sin that has brought them into the distress; therefore God is righteous, and they have no reason to repine. They confess their omissions, for in them their sin began — “We have forsaken our God,” and their commissions — “We have served Baalim, and herein have done foolishly, treacherously, and very wickedly.”

**II.** A humbling message which God thereupon sends to Israel, whether by an angel (as <0700> Judges 2:1) or by a prophet (as <0700> Judges 6:8) is not certain. It was kind that God took notice of their cry, and did not turn a deaf ear to it and send them no answer at all; it was kind likewise that when they began to repent he sent them such a message as was proper to increase their repentance, that they might be qualified and prepared for deliverance. Now in this message,

**1.** He upbraids them with their great ingratitude, reminds them of the great things he had done for them, delivering them from such and such enemies, the Egyptians first, out of whose land they were rescued, the Amorites whom they conquered and into whose land they entered, and since their settlement there, when the Ammonites had joined with the Moabites to oppress them (<0700> Judges 3:13), when the Philistines were vexatious in the days of Shamgar, and afterwards other enemies had given them trouble, upon their petition God had wrought many a great salvation for them, v. 11, 12. Of their being oppressed by the Zidonians and the Maonites we read not elsewhere. God had in justice corrected them, and in mercy delivered them, and therefore might reasonably expect that either through fear or through love they would adhere to him and his service. Well therefore might the word cut them to the heart (v. 13), “Yet you have

*forsaken me* that have brought you out of your troubles and *served other gods* that brought you into your troubles.” Thus did they *forsake their own mercies for their own delusions*.

**2.** He shows them how justly he might now abandon them to ruin, by abandoning them to the *gods that they had served*. To awaken them to a thorough repentance and reformation, he lets them see,

**(1.)** Their folly in serving Baalim. They had been at a vast expense to obtain the favour of such gods as could not help them when they had most need of their help: “*Go, and cry unto the gods which you have chosen* (v. 14), try what they can do for you now. You have worshipped them as gods — try if they have now either a divine power or a divine goodness to be employed for you. You paid your homage to them as your kings and lords — try if they will now protect you. You brought your sacrifices of praise to their altars as your benefactors, imagining that they gave you your corn, and wine, and oil, but a friend indeed will be a friend in need; what stead will their favour stand you in now?” Note, It is necessary, in true repentance, that there be a full conviction of the utter insufficiency of all those things to help us and do us any kindness which we have idolized and set upon the throne in our hearts in competition with God. We must be convinced that the pleasures of sense on which we have doted cannot be our satisfaction, nor the wealth of the world which we have coveted be our portion, that we cannot be happy or easy any where but in God.

**(2.)** Their misery and danger in forsaking God. “See what a pass you have brought yourselves to; now you can expect no other than that I should say, *I will deliver you no more*, and what will become of you then?” 5:13. This he tells them, not only as what he *might* do, but as what he *would* do if they rested in a confession of what they had done amiss, and did not put away their idols and amend for the future.

**III.** A humble submission which Israel hereupon made to God's justice, with a humble application to his mercy, v. 15. *The children of Israel met together*, probably in a solemn assembly at the door of the tabernacle, received the impressions of the message God had sent them, were not driven by it to despair, though it was very threatening, but resolve to lie at God's feet, and, if they perish, they will perish there. They not only repeat their confession, *We have sinned*, but,

**1.** They surrender themselves to God's justice: *Do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee*. Hereby they own that they deserved the severest tokens of God's displeasure and were sure he could do them no wrong, whatever he laid upon them; they humbled themselves under his mighty and heavy hand, and *accepted of the punishment of their iniquity*, which Moses had made the condition of God's return in mercy to them, <sup><364></sup>Leviticus 26:41. Note, True penitents dare and will refer themselves to God to correct them as he thinks fit, knowing that their sin is highly malignant in its deserts, and that God is not rigorous or extreme in his demands.

**2.** They supplicate for God's mercy: *Deliver us only, we pray thee, this day*, from this enemy. They acknowledge what they deserved, yet pray to God not to deal with them according to their deserts. Note, We must submit to God's justice with a hope in his mercy.

**IV.** A blessed reformation set on foot hereupon. They brought forth fruits meet for repentance (v. 16): *They put away the gods of strangers* (as the word is), strange gods, and worshipped by those nations that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and to the covenants of promise, and they *served the Lord*. Need drove them to him. They knew it was to no purpose to go to the gods whom they had served, and therefore returned to the God whom they had slighted. This is true repentance not only for sin, but from sin.

**V.** God's gracious return in mercy to them, which is expressed here very tenderly (v. 16): *His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*. Not that there is any grief in God (he has infinite joy and happiness in himself, which cannot be broken in upon by either the sins or the miseries of his creatures), nor that there is any change in God: he *is in one mind, and who can turn him?* But his goodness is his glory. By it he proclaims his name, and magnifies it above all names; and, as he is pleased to put himself into the relation of a father to his people that are in covenant with him, so he is pleased to represent his goodness to them by the compassions of a father towards his children; for, as he is the Father of lights, so he is the Father of mercies. As the disobedience and misery of a child are a grief to a tender father, and make him feel very sensibly from his natural affection, so the provocations of God's people are a grief to him (<sup><350></sup>Psalm 95:10), he is *broken with their whorish heart* (<sup><310></sup>Ezekiel 6:9); their troubles also are a grief to him; so he is pleased to speak when he is pleased to appear for the deliverance of his people, changing his way and method of proceeding, as

tender parents when they begin to relent towards their children with whom they have been displeased. Such are the tender mercies of our God, and so far is he from having any pleasure in the death of sinners.

**VI.** Things are now working towards their deliverance from the Ammonites' oppression, v. 17, 18. God had said, "I will deliver you no more;" but now they are not what they were, they are other men, they are new men, and now he will deliver them. That threatening was denounced to convince and humble them, and, now that it had taken its desired effect, it is revoked in order to their deliverance.

**1.** The Ammonites are hardened to their own ruin. They gathered together in one body, that they might be destroyed at one blow, ~~(16:16)~~ Revelation 16:16.

**2.** The Israelites are animated to their own rescue. They assembled likewise, v. 17. During their eighteen years' oppression, as in their former servitudes, they were run down by their enemies, because they would not incorporate; each family, city, or tribe, would stand by itself, and act independently, and so they all became an easy prey to the oppressors, for want of a due sense of a common interest to cement them: but, whenever they got together, they did well; so they did here. When God's Israel become as one man to advance a common good and oppose a common enemy what difficulty can stand before them? The people and princes of Gilead, having met, consult first about a general that should command in chief against the Ammonites. Hitherto most of the deliverers of Israel had an extraordinary call to the office, as Ehad, Barak, Gideon; but the next is to be called in a more common way, by a convention of the states, who enquired out a fit man to command their army, found out one admirably well qualified for the purpose, and God owned their choice by putting his Spirit upon him (~~(17:12)~~ Judges 11:29); so that this instance is of use for direction and encouragement in after-ages, when extraordinary calls are no longer to be expected. Let such be impartially chosen to public trust and power as God has qualified, and then God will graciously own those who are thus chosen.