

DHW

BIBLE STUDY CLASS

LESSON 9

JUDGES 10

INTRODUCTION

With the completion of the judgeship of Gideon and the “reign” of Abimelech, chapter ten opens with the introduction of two “minor” judges, namely, Tola and Jair. They are understood as “minor” judges not because the extent of their judgeship was insignificant or they were personally unimportant. They were exemplary judges, and between them they judged Israel for forty-five years. They were called “minor” because so little is recorded about them in comparison with the other judges like Ehud, Deborah, Gideon and Abimelech.

God had and shall always be intimately involved with His people. Thus far in our study of the book, we have learned of this fact. This truth is a great comfort for those who bear the name of Jesus Christ today. What God had done in the past in his dealings and relationship with Israel, His chosen people, He will also do the same with His Blood-bought children today. We can rest assured of this. When we sin we must quickly repent. And if we do not sincerely repent, our so-called repentance does not create any lasting impact in our heart and the next time round our spiritual downslide will be even worse than the previous experience. This is the awful truth. It

is always sliding further down. Our spiritual life either improves or deteriorates.

Israel had sinned again and again and the LORD had been merciful. But Israel had not learned from her previous experiences. Their previous cries of repentance were not genuine. They were actually remorseful expressing their regrets, but not really intending to change. In fact, they were guilty of manipulating God, treating Him as a means of convenience when they were in trouble or when they needed Him. And each time, God had been merciful and gracious to them. God will not be mocked. This time Israel fell deeper into sin. This divine writer teaches us one important lesson on the meaning of true repentance.

The following outline helps us in getting a good grasp of the chapter.

1. Tola and Jair judge Israel for a period of forty five years (10:1-5);
2. Israel plunges into the depths of idolatrous worship (10:6-9);
3. Israel acknowledges her sins and cries to the LORD for deliverance (10:10-14);
4. Israel demonstrates the genuineness of her repentance (10:15-16);
5. Israel does not have a leader to lead her to fight against the Ammonites (10:17-18).

STUDY THE WORD

Tola & Jair Judge Israel

Abimelech died a humiliating death. After his death two judges arose to “defend” Israel one after the other. The first judge was Tola, whose name means “worm” and he judged Israel for twenty three years. The other judge after Tola, was Jair, whose

name means “he enlightens” and he judged Israel for twenty two years, one year less than Tola.

Nothing much is told about Tola. His genealogy is given: son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a member of the tribe of Issachar. From 1 Chronicles 7:1, four sons of Issachar were mentioned: Tola, and Puah [Junior], Jashub, and Shimron. The fact that his father, Puah, named his son, Tola suggests that theirs was a family of prominence. In addition, the fact that his generation was mentioned three generations back proved that he was a man of high social standing.¹

But Tola did not live in Issachar, which was on the west side of Jordan and just south of the Sea of Galilee. Instead he lived in Shamir in the mount of Ephraim, which was much farther south, and the tribe of Manasseh separated Issachar and Ephraim. One wonders why Tola, a man of Issachar, lived in Ephraim and what was he doing there. It is mentioned that he rose to defend and judge Israel for twenty three years (10:1, 2). From whom did Tola defend Israel? Was Israel under any oppression by an enemy? If Israel had been under any kind of oppression by another people, the text is silent about it. One is left to make a considered speculation. It has been suggested that Tola saved Israel from more internal strife which threatened to break up the nation into warring factions. Abimelech operated in the region and seized power in Shechem. He had left

¹ Often in the Old Testament such a genealogical statement is an evidence of high social standing. (K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Judges/Ruth*, p. 238).

the nation in turmoil and Tola prevented the country from further escalation and disintegration.

The next “minor” judge after Tola was Jair whose name means “he (God) enlightens.” His family background and even his parentage are not given. However, he was identified as a Gileadite, and that would naturally place the area of his service on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Transjordan). He judged Israel for twenty two years, one year less than Tola. He had a large family: thirty sons. The fact that he had thirty sons strongly suggests that he had more than one wife. Another indication was that he was an important and influential man in his community. Each of his sons rode on donkeys. This is no laughing matter. In those days, people who rode on donkeys and mules symbolized wealth, security, and at times royalty.² Each of his sons ruled a city and there were altogether thirty cities, which were called Havoth-Jair, which means the “village of Jair.” The people who lived in the region of Gilead must have also approved of his rule, power, and authority. The people were willing to follow him voluntarily. Jair died and was buried in Camon. This indicates that Camon was his official residence, and the city was about 34 kilometres southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

² Judges 12:14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Israel Is Steeped in Idolatry

After the death of Tola and Jair, the children of Israel once again did evil in the sight of the LORD. They “served” not one pagan god but seven. The word “to serve” when used in connection with a person or deity means to express one’s highest adoration and worship. Israel served seven gods: the Canaanite gods, Baalim and Ashtaroh, the gods of Syria in the north (Haddad, Thammuz), the gods of Zidon or Sidon in the northwest (Baal Astarte, the queen of heaven), the gods of Moab in the east (Chemosh), the gods of the children of Ammon in the east (Molech), the gods of the Philistines in the southwest (Dagon, Beel-zebub). Added to this sinful apostasy was that they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him (10:6)! Three glaring action words (verbs) describe the evil they did: “served . . . forsook . . . did not serve”. They forsook their living covenant LORD to whom they were bound by oaths and turned to dead-wood gods of their own choosing.³ The spiritual condition of Israel had struck rock bottom. They had forgotten the wonderful works of the LORD who had performed on their behalf in the history of the nation. The LORD God had repeatedly warned them that they should not forget Him when He had blessed them with many things in the Promised Land.⁴

³ Jeremiah 2:11 Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit.

⁴ Deuteronomy 8:11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: 12 Lest

Once again, the Israelites incurred the burning anger or wrath of the LORD. He “sold” them to the Philistines in the southeast, and into the hands of the Ammonites in central Transjordan in the east. The Philistines and the Ammonites “vexed and oppressed” the children of Israel for eighteen years. The phrase “vexed and oppressed” literally means “shattered and crushed.” The children of Israel who lived on the eastern side of Jordan River in the land of the Amorites which was Gilead were oppressed by the Ammonites. The oppressor Ammonites even crossed over Jordan River to the west and made war against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim. The Ammonites “bombed and blasted” the Israelites on both sides of the Jordan River so that Israel was “sore distressed.” The gods which Israel worshipped and served could not help them. Instead these gods became the very cause of their insufferable pain. What a shame for Israel. God is sovereign and had allowed the enemies to oppress His children so that they would realize their sins, repent, and return to Him. The LORD God acted in love and care for His chosen and covenant people.

Israel Acknowledges Her Sins and Cries to the LORD

Israel’s only refuge and security was the LORD God. In their

when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt *therein*; 13 And *when* thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; 14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

desperation they turned again to the LORD, who had repeatedly saved the children of Israel in the past, whenever they cried to Him for deliverance. The children of Israel acknowledged that they had sinned against the LORD. This is the first confession of sin and it was unlike the previous instances when they just cried to the LORD for deliverance. They also confessed that they had forsaken Him, and even went to serve Baalim (10:10). It was a double insult to the LORD, rejecting Him and turning to Baalim. Were the children of Israel sincere in their repentance? The LORD would know for a certainty.

The LORD responded. He began by reminding them of His faithfulness since the time when He delivered them from the Egyptians to the present moment. Just as the children of Israel committed idolatry sevenfold, the LORD listed seven episodes of past deliverance: the deliverance from bondage in Egypt, from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon (in Transjordan), from the Philistines, and the Zidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites (Midianites). In those instances, Israel cried to the LORD, and He delivered her out of the hand of her oppressors. And yet, Israel had forsaken the LORD and served other gods (10:13). The LORD then said that He would not deliver them, and told them to go and cry to the gods, whom they had chosen, and let the gods deliver them from their tribulation (10:14). The point which the LORD made to Israel is very clear: God's faithfulness to them was perfect and complete and should have motivated them to remain

faithful and devoted to Him also. So, the LORD rebuked them. Since they had rejected the LORD and turned to the other gods, they should then go to those gods for deliverance. Clearly, the LORD was not convinced of the sincerity of their repentance. The LORD required more tangible proof of their repentance. In other words, Israel's repentance was superficial amounting to a form of remorse. It was only regretting the sins they had committed but there was no real desire and action to change.

Israel Demonstrates the Genuineness of Her Repentance

The children of Israel learned the first lesson on repentance. Their response in genuine repentance was fourfold. They confessed that they had sinned. It was the first essential step. They were willing to be treated as the LORD thought fit. In other words they were prepared to be punished by the LORD. Then they demonstrated their sincerity of repentance by putting away the foreign gods among them.—a total cleansing of their house of the idols. And finally, they firmly pledged to serve the LORD unreservedly (10:15, 16).

Israel's action was a genuine repentance. In the past they had uttered words of repentance but this time it was accompanied by appropriate action. They finally got rid of the foreign gods and renewed their pledge to serve the LORD. The LORD was not willing to deliver them on their terms, but on His terms, which they now met. It moved the heart of the LORD who responded in loving-kindness and tender-mercy. He was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Israel Does Not Have a Leader to Overthrow the Ammonites

The Ammonites on the east bank of Jordan “gathered together” (Hebrew, *sa-aq*) in Gilead. The Ammonites were literally loudly calling out to any opposing party against Israel (10:17). They tried to stir up as many people to fight against Israel. The children of Israel on the other hand assembled together at Mizpeh (meaning: *watchtower*). It was a place in Gilead, north of the river Jabbok.

After eighteen years of having suffered devastation and destruction, the Israelites had now a new commitment to serve their LORD. They gathered in Mizpeh but they ran a snag. They had no leader or army general to lead them against the Ammonites who had been harassing and oppressing them. They desperately took counsel with one another: “What man is there that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon?” Note that the LORD did not directly intervene by solving the problem for them as was previously (e.g. 6:12). The LORD let them deliberate and solve the problem by themselves. This set the stage for Jephthah who emerged as one of the most unusual and colourful leaders. .

PRACTICAL VALUE

Idolatry is a constant problem with the people of God. Time and again, in spite of the grace and goodness of God in helping and saving the Israelites from oppression and suffering because of their sin of idolatry, they easily forgot God and turned to serve the useless gods of the inhabitants of the land. This same

problem is facing the church today. God had so loved Christians, forgiven them from condemnation, saved them from eternal damnation in the Lake of fire, and blessed them with many blessings, yet, like the Israelites, Christians today easily forget God. They have turned their backs on the living God of the Bible by serving other modern “gods”—the god of money, power, pleasure, social status, and self-gratification. This ought not to be so. The lesson must be well learnt from this chapter.

How many times Christians turned to God in repentance! But do they know the true meaning of repentance? More often than not, a Christian’s acknowledgement of sin either against God or man is superficial. It is only an emotional expression of remorse. It is merely regretting what has transpired. Such expression of remorse or regret does not go deep into the heart and mind to take appropriate action to change. The LORD rejected the initial cry of the children of Israel in their acknowledgement of their sin until they really confessed again and demonstrated their sincerity by taking appropriate action. This is a very relevant lesson which every Christian must learn. How easy for many a Christian to say that he has confessed his sin to God, but there is no change in thoughts and life; and the same is applicable to a Christian sinning against another person. God is not stupid that He could allow Himself to be manipulated by false sincerity. Man can be fooled but not God. How many people have thought of God as an emergency 000 or 911 or 999

number, to be called twenty-fours a day, seven days a week, only when they are in trouble! However, God is not mocked and Christians should not take the grace, mercy, and love of God for granted. God owes us nothing. Be absolutely sure, your sins will find you out!⁵

Another pertinent point in this study of the book is that when God is acknowledged as the living and true LORD God, whose worship and servitude are required of His people Israel, then they must accept His authority in their lives, individually and corporately as a nation. Similarly, Christians, who recognize the same LORD God, and that there is none else, must also submit to His authority. Appropriately, they ought to obey His commandments and to do the things which please and honour Him. They ought to demonstrate this in their conduct and behaviour—their thoughts, attitude, speech, and actions. There are a few basic questions a Christian needs to ask himself: Do you know for sure that you are a born-again child of God? Are you regularly on a daily basis diligently reading His Word? Do you love to study His Word, which is the Bible? Are you faithful in attending and supporting a Bible-believing church which uncompromisingly acknowledges and proclaims that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of His church? Do you support and care for the leaders of the church who look after your spiritual life? How do you fair in supporting the various works of His church on a

scale of one to ten – five, eight, ten or less? You must prayerfully and diligently search the Scriptures to know the mind and heart of God and the right answers to these questions. It is so easy for every one to say that he is a Christian, but he does not love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. We should take heed of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Mathew 7:21-23: *Not every **one that saith** unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **he that doeth** the will of my Father which is in heaven. **Many will say to me** in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity* (emphasis is mine).

Finally, one of the ways God guides us is that we use our God-given faculties of the intellect, emotions and will, and our special spiritual gifts to make discerning choices and decisions in life. The LORD did not directly seek and choose a military general for the Israelites when they asked: “Who could lead and deliver them from the Ammonites?” Many Christians take the easy and wrong path by simply saying that God speaks to them in a dream, in a vision, in their heart, and even say, “the Holy Spirit spoke to me” without proper attestation from the Word of God and discernment. AMEN

⁵ Numbers 32:23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.