

Judges 10:1-18

Two judges give Israel peace for 45 years, but then Israel fell into idolatry again. So for 18 years, God gave them over to the hands of the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites in the east. The chapter then shows Israel realizes a great truth concerning repentance.

This was all preparation for the rise of the ninth judge, Jephthah.

Two judges - Tola and Jair

Judges 10:1-2 - "And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir."

"defend" = "deliver" - this was always the attribute of judges

"arose" = *qûm* - arise, stand up This is different than previous descriptions in which God is the one who "raised up" Judges (**Judges 2:16; Judges 2:18; Judges 3:9**) Possibly these judges were chosen by the people, or put themselves forward.

It's a reflection of the weakened character and spiritual state of Israel at the time.

Tola means "worm" and *Puah* probably refers to a plant from which a red dye was obtained. Their clans may have been connected with the trade in purple dyes, which often cost more than gold, obtained in the secretions of molluscs.

Tola is the only judge from the tribe of Issachar.

Dodo = from the same Hebrew root as David, "beloved"

Judges 10:3-5 - "And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon."

Gilead was in the northeastern Transjordan area, and was possessed by the half-tribe of Manasseh.

In **Numbers 32:41** we are told of a Jair, the son of Manasseh, who "took the small towns" of Gilead, and called them Havoth-jair. The Jair of **Numbers 32:41** was said to be descended from Judah on the father's side, and on the mother's was a great-grandson of Manasseh.

Perhaps this current Jair is his namesake, or his story was later inserted into the earlier account. (See also **1 Chronicles 2:21-23** and **Deuteronomy 3:14, 15**)

Scholars say his 30 sons were probably circuit riders who, traveling by "colts of the ass" heard disputes and brought justice to different areas.

No enemy is mentioned opposing these two judges, so they may have "delivered" Israel simply through prudent governing and spiritual guidance keeping the people from idolatry and internal divisions and preventing tyranny like that of Abimelech.

This tells us something about the different styles and gifts of leadership that God provides. In some situations, the times require a bold warrior willing to take risks. Other times require steady and consistent watchfulness, strengthening defenses, sharpening weapons, training and shoring up the spiritual battlements.

Some years after Jair died, Israel began to slide into idolatry again.

A Falling Away

Judges 10:6 - "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashteroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him."

Rashi - Seven idols are enumerated here.

See "Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible"

https://www.academia.edu/30069945/Dictionary_of_Deities_and_Demons_in_the_Bible

The Gods of Syria

Belus and Saturn, Astarte, and Atargatis the consort of the god Hadad were worshipped in Syria. Atargatis is related to the Semitic mother goddess Asherah. Asherah is often translated as "grove" in the Bible, because of her association with trees, specifically a false "tree of life." Her shrines are found under trees (**1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10**) and her idol is carved from wood by human beings (**1 Kings 14:15, 2 Kings 16:3-4** - "under every green tree").

The ancient "mother goddesses" probably stemmed from a twisted veneration of the transgressive story of Eve, who was called "the mother of all living" in **Genesis 3:20** and was responsible for the loss of the real tree of life by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Genesis 3**).

"On the Syrian Goddess" by Lucian of Samosata in second century A.D. describes her worship as including ritual sex, with giant phallic pillars set up at her temple, which were climbed and decorated once a year. The idea was that by imitating the sacred union of the god and his consort by sex with temple prostitutes, worshippers would reap the fertility and fruitfulness for their own household and fields.

Pagan worship was such a threat to Israel because of the direct assault on marriage

and procreation, and the ability to trace someone's lineage accurately. Not only the true meaning of marriage as a type of the Bridegroom and the Bride would be lost. The Messiah was prophesied to be born from a specific tribe - Judah - and a specific lineage - King David's. Rampant idolatry involving temple prostitution and ritual sex would sow "confusion." and true parentage would be impossible to prove.

Paradoxically, priests and devotees would often castrate themselves. This, combined with the sometimes parallel passing of children through the fires of Molech, would tend to slowly eliminate a population's ability to produce children at all.

The Gods of Zidon (Phoenicians)

Ashtaroth/ Astarte - a form of the Sumerian Innana, which became the Babylonian Ishtar. A goddess of fertility, sexuality and war. "She was often depicted on Sidonian coins as standing on the prow of a galley, leaning forward with right hand outstretched, being thus the original of all figureheads for sailing ships."

The Gods of Moab

In Genesis 19:37-38 we learn the origin of the Ammonites and the Moabites. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the daughters of Lot - thinking everyone had been destroyed, and influenced by growing up under the evil cultural influence of Sodom - resolved to get Lot drunk and have sex with him to continue his lineage.

- **Genesis 19:37-38** - "And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day."

By this time, these peoples had forgotten Yahweh and were worshipping gods of their own creation.

Baalpeor (**Numbers 25:3,5,18, Deuteronomy 3:29**) and Chemosh. Chemosh is possibly also another name for Shamash, a Semitic sun god.

The Gods of the Children of Ammon

The Ammonites also worshipped Chemosh, like the Moabites.

On critical occasions a human sacrifice to Chemosh was considered necessary to secure his favor (See **2 Kings 3:27**)

The Ammonites also worshipped **Milcom** or **Molech** (Moloch), to whom children were sacrificed (**Leviticus 18:21**)

- **1 Kings 11:6-7** - "...Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon."

Milcom/Malkam - means "our king" and he was associated with the bull, and had a connection to the stars or planets. He is often depicted as supporting the heavenly bodies above him. El was the main god of the Ammonite state, but Milcom may have been the patron god of the Ammonite royal house. A god called *mlkm* is mentioned on a list of gods from the earlier kingdom of Ugarit.

Jeremiah prophecies against Ammon:

- **Jeremiah 49:3** - "Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king (*Milkom*) shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes together.

MLK appears in the texts from ancient Mari as *Maliku*, a god of the underworld. This may be the reference of Isaiah:

- **Isaiah 28:15-18** - "Because ye have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves' "

The "covenant" could also refer back to Baal-berith - Baal of the covenant ("agreement"), worshipped in Canaanite Shechem.

Molech

The word *MLK* can mean "king" or "rule" in Hebrew, but probably originated in the proto-Semitic "to own, possess" and later the Punic word for "to promise, to present."

In this way we can see the spiritual meaning of a parent's expectations "promising, presenting" their children's lives and sacrificing their future to their own preconceptions as a parallel to this kind of idolatry.

See Deuteronomy (**Deut. 12:31 18:10**), 2 Kings (**2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 17:31; 21:6**), 2 Chronicles (**2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6**), the Book of Jeremiah (**Jer. 7:31, 19:5**) and the Book of Ezekiel (**Ezek. 16:21; 20:26, 31; 23:37**).

Idolatry was considered spiritual adultery by Israel against her husband Yahweh, no matter if it was a with god or goddess:

- **Leviticus 20:5** - "Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people."

- **Psalms 106:37-39** - "Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions."

- **1 Kings 11:5, 7** - "Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ...Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon."

The Gods of the Philistines

Dagon the god of Ashdod was the principal deity of the Philistines. The Semitic word "*dagan*" means "earth," and Dagon was a god of increase of grain and agricultural fertility. (See **Judges 16:23, 1 Chronicles 10:10**) In Ebla and later in Ugaritic texts he appears as the father of Baal in the same way that in Greek mythology Kronos was the father of Zeus.

- **1 Samuel 5:3-5** - The Ark was captured by the Philistines, taken to Ashdod and put it in the temple of Dagon. The result:

"And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day."

This incident displays perfectly how completely the revelation of Christ (the ark) by the Spirit without any human intervention topples our self-serving ideas, and reveals our idols to be impotent, powerless and helpless.

After King Saul was killed, the Philistines "put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the Temple of Dagon." (**1 Chronicles 10:10**)

Philistines also revered **Ba'al Zəbûb** "Lord of the flies" the god of Ekron, (perhaps from *Ba'al Zəbûl*, "lord of the heavenly dwelling). He was originally a healing god, driving away flies, considered to represent demons causing sickness. A freshly killed "sacrifice to Ba'al Zəbûb" would draw flies to it and away from you. (The Talmud equates Ba'al Zəbûb with the Baal-Berith worshipped in Shechem, **Judges 9**).

Ba'al Zəbû Referenced by Jesus:

- **Matthew 12:25-28** - "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

Some of Jesus' enemies identified Ba'al Zəbû with Satan himself:

- **Luke 11:15-18** - "But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the demons."

The Targums refer to him derogatorily as *Baal-zebel*, meaning "Lord of Dung," which also attracts flies, implying his idolatrous followers are no better than flies.

In **2 Kings 1:2**, King Ahaziah of Israel, after seriously injuring himself in a fall, sends messengers to inquire [in vain] of Ba'al Zebûb, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, to learn if he will recover.

The Philistines also worshipped **Marnas** the god of Gaza. Marnas means "our lord" in Aramaic. He was traditionally equated with the Cretan Zeus, and the Philistines were thought to originate in Crete. It could have just been another designation for Dagon.

Finally, **Derketo** was the Philistine goddess of Ashkalon, probably a local manifestation of Atargatis. (Derketo is a contraction of Atargatis). She was revered as a half-woman, half-fish, and her sanctuary included a lake in which her idol would be ritually immersed.

Besides being a snare to Israel, the cities of Philistia later displayed stubborn opposition to Christianity, and were among the last bastion of paganism in the Roman Empire.

By adding that Israel "forsook the LORD, and served not him," **verse 6** means that sometimes Israel would worship Yahweh along with other deities. In this case they did not do even that. They forsook the Lord completely.

A Warning Against Idolatry

This lapse by Israel is here for a warning to us. The world offers us an idol to cover every aspect of our lives: Self confidence, desire for success, fear of failure, protection from calamities or evil spells, community solidarity, sex and fertility, intense ecstatic experiences or simple entertainment, war and conquest. Idols promised secret knowledge, the ability to foresee and even control the future.

But we can't serve both God and Mammon. "Mammon" means anything we "have confidence in." It later came to signify an evil "greed for wealth." But it is whatever we choose to put our confidence in instead of God. That is a good definition of idolatry.

Perhaps the scariest aspect of idolatry is that it opens us to even more evil supernatural influences:

- **Deuteronomy 32:16-17** - "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, With abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto demons, not to God; To gods whom they knew not, To new gods that came newly up, Whom your fathers feared not."

- **1 Corinthians 10:20** - "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they

sacrifice to devils (demons), and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

The progression here is self-seeking desire and covetousness, then creating or adopting an idol as a solution we think will provide what we want, and then sacrificing to it - perhaps even murdering others in its service. But we are never satisfied, and achieve only slavery, serving demons - left without meaning in our life, and still burdened with guilt and shame. Idols are an empty refuge.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21)

Joshua had challenged Israel to "Choose this day whom you will serve," but to do it from the standpoint of humility, knowing that we're all too susceptible to idolatry and in our own strength, we "cannot serve the Lord."

Judges 10:7 - "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon."

The Philistine oppression is discussed later, in the story of Samsom.

Here the children of Ammon attack first the transjordan in Gilead - the land settled by Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh - and later cross the Jordan to harass the other tribes - Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim. This goes on for 18 years.

Judges 10:10 - "And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim."

But God is fed up with Israel and declares, "I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." (**Judges 10:13-14**)

This is similar to the challenge of Gideon's father:

- **Judges 6:31** - ""Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down."

Jeremiah repeats this to Israel later:

- **Jeremiah 2:26-28** - "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah."

... and Elijah's challenge to the priests of Baal emphasized the impotence of false gods:

- **1 Kings 18:20-40** - "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

Real Repentance

Then the children of Israel do something remarkable. They display a hint of the real meaning of repentance.

Judges 10:15-16 - "And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."

"do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee" - They understood and confessed they deserved chastisement - whether pestilence or famine - and asked only that God deliver them from this one enemy, the Ammonites.

This viewpoint is echoed throughout the Bible:

- **Daniel 3:17-18** - "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

- **Habakkuk 3:17-18** - "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

- **Job 13:15** - "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"

- **Job 42:6** - "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

God responds because He hears His Son speaking whenever believers take this position:

- **Luke 22:42** - "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

This sets the stage for the rise of Jephthah as a judge to deliver them. We'll look at that next week.

Addendum:

The metaphysical Christian poet John Donne is known for quotes from his works, like “Death be not proud,” “No man is an island” and “Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

He wrote a series of amazing poems called the “Holy Sonnets” regarding his struggles to come to terms with his own sinful “black soul,” and his inconstant and unreliable faith.

One called “Batter My Heart” pictures himself as a rebellious city resisting God’s dominion. He calls for God to “batter his heart” - to break through the city gates - because even his human reason, which is supposed to guide him toward God, is hopelessly weak, and although he loves God, he is in fact “betrothed” to God’s enemy.

“Batter my heart, three-person’d God; for you
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
 That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me and bend
 Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.
 I, like an usurpt town, to another due,
 Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
 Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
 But is captiv’d, and proves weak or untrue.
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
 But am betroth’d unto your enemy:
 Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.”

- Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter My Heart, by John Donne, 1609

This reminds us of Joshua’s admonition that “Ye cannot serve the Lord.” And the man in the gospels who tells Jesus, “I believe, help thou my unbelief.”

To be spiritually “chaste” - separate from other gods and idols, and faithful to God - he understands is something only God can accomplish in him.

So - let John Donne’s prayer to “make me new” be our prayer, too.