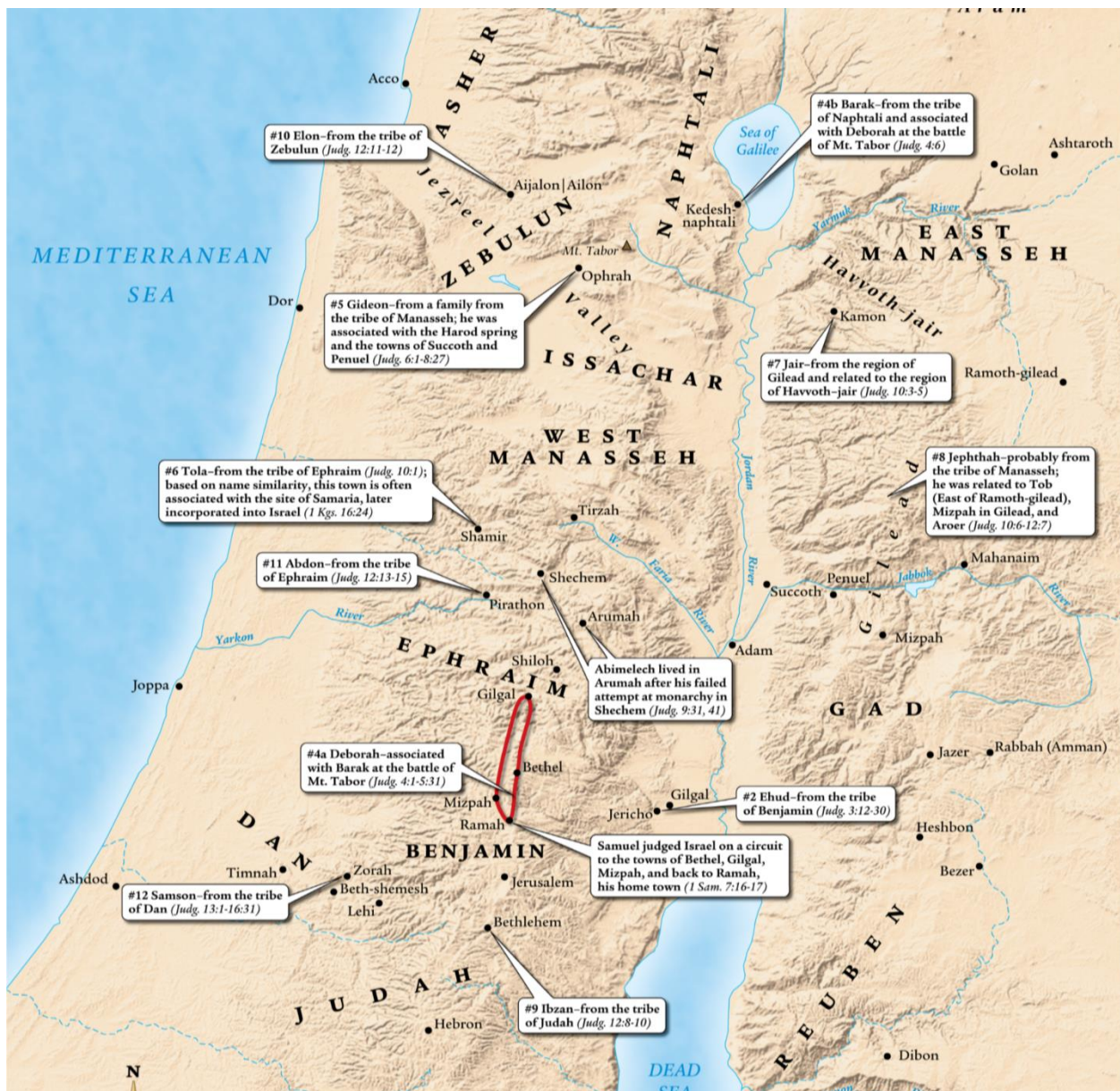


Immediate Context

Abimelech was dead. His short reign was book-ended by shedding the blood of his own family. His legacy was one of self-destruction, much like the overarching theme of the nation of Israel. Truly, a nation often gets the leaders it deserves. With his death, a vacuum of power and leadership was left in Israel, yet this position would soon be filled by another. Judges 10 serves as a narrative bridge between the detailed reign of Abimelech and that of Jephthah in Judges 11-12.

Judges 10:1-5 – Tola and Jair, the Judges of Israel

Tola and Jair collectively judged Israel for 45 years, but are only addressed by five verses. What was the occasion of Tola’s rise to power as a judge? Abimelech died and likely left Israel in a state of chaos, especially in and around Ephraim, West Manasseh, and Issachar. It is interesting that the next leader of Israel arose from this area.

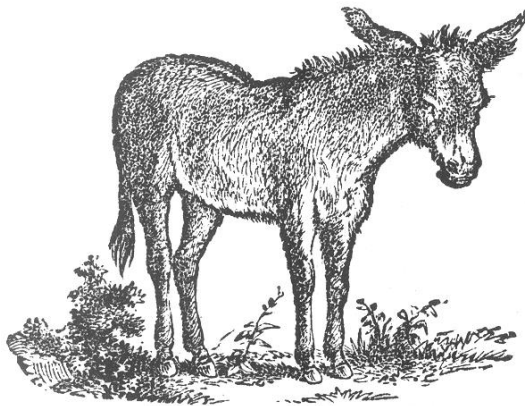


Tola was an Issacharite through and through. He was named for the first-born of Issachar's sons and his father Puah was named for another of Issachar's sons. Tola's name means, "worm", an interesting choice to follow Abimelech, "the king is my father".

Why did Tola move from his tribal allotment in Issachar to the city of Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim? We cannot know with certainty, but it appears that he moved to be more centrally located in Israel. Shamir may have been very near or coincident with the city later known as Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The fact that Tola's leadership was 23 years and is otherwise unremarkable could be interpreted as a great blessing after the chaos and bloodshed of Abimelech.

Jair arose as a leader after the death of Tola and was from the Trans-Jordan (east bank) region in East Manasseh area called Gilead. Jair's name means, "he enlightens". His reign was one year shorter than Tola's 23-year reign. He was from the tribe of Manasseh (see *Deuteronomy 3:14*).

What do we learn about Jair from the mention of his 30 sons with authority over 30 cities? He was a prosperous man. He likely had multiple wives and was able to support a large family.



What is the significance of his 30 sons riding on donkeys? See *Judges 5:10*. At this point in history, a donkey was considered a more regal animal than a horse among some populations. Commentator Daniel Block quotes a palace official who a few hundred years prior instructed King Zimri-Lim of Mari: *[If] you are king of the Haneans, you are, moreover, a 'king of the Akkadians.'* *[My lord] should not ride horses (that is, in tribal fashion). May my lord drive in a wagon and mules (that is, in a "civilized manner"), and may he (thus) honor his royalty.*¹

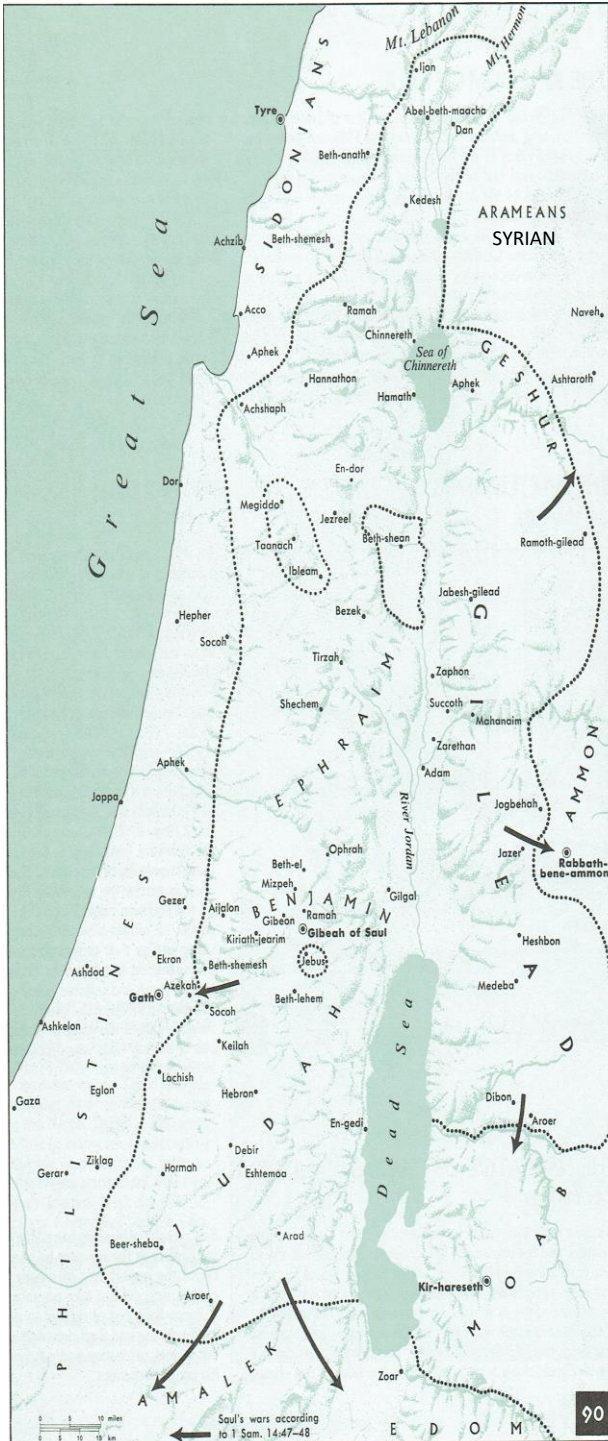
Having 30 sons riding 30 donkeys would be the modern-day equivalent of giving each kid a Porsche to drive around. The point is that Israel was experiencing an era of peace and prosperity under Jair, especially the Trans-Jordan region.

Judges 10:6-9 – The Sin of Israel

This is an all-too-familiar refrain in Judges. The Israelites went after the idols of the remaining Canaanite people in the midst and on their borders. This time, they did not limit themselves to one idol in particular, but the idolatry was varied and wide-spread. We know Baal and Ashtaroth were worshipped by the Canaanites who lived in the midst of Israel; and the Israelites had been drawn to them during the days of Gideon (see *Judges 6:25*).

¹ Block, Daniel, *The New American Commentary, Volume 6, Judges, Ruth*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group. 1999. Page 340

What do we learn from the naming of the gods? First, there were seven gods named. Seven is a significant number in Scripture because it is the number of God, a symbol of fullness. The map showing the region of Israel below also provides a geographical context for this passage. Syria was to the northeast, Sidon to the northwest, Ammon to the west, Moab to the southeast, and Philistia to the southwest. Essentially, Israel was completely influenced by the idolatry within and outside their borders. They weren't just a bit into other gods, they were fully given over to idolatry.



What was the disposition of Israel toward the true God? He wasn't worshipped alongside the other gods; He was forsaken.

What was the consequence of their idolatry? How does this relate to the period of Jair's leadership in Gilead? They were "sold" into the hands of the Philistines (to the southwest) and the Ammonites to the east. The Ammonite oppression was severe as they went beyond the Trans-Jordan Israelites and were able to cross the Jordan and oppress some of the strongest tribes to the west as well (Judah, Ephraim, and Benjamin). The source of this oppression is significant because during the days of Jair, the Trans-Jordan tribes enjoyed much peace and prosperity. **Their blessing was turned to oppression by idolatry.** It is also very relevant to the Jephthah narrative in chapters 11 and 12. The Philistine oppression is relevant to the Samson narrative in chapters 13-16.

Judges 10:10-16 – A Cry for Salvation
Describe Israel's cry to God in verse 10. It is an honest assessment. They understood what they had done, which didn't remove their guilt but in some ways made it greater.

How does the Lord's response in verses 11-14 show us the quality of Israel's cry for help in verse 10? It indicates that Israel's cry in verse 10 was not sincere confession and repentance. It was a cry for deliverance, not a cry for salvation.

The Lord likely responded to Israel through an angel or prophet, though the individual is not named here. Break down His response based upon the verse groupings below:

- Verses 11-12: The Lord identified seven nations of people who oppressed Israel and were defeated. Many of them are the same nations that had arisen to oppress Israel at this time. By naming the seven nations, the Lord is demonstrating that the fullness of their idolatry (seven idols) had been matched by the fullness of His mercy. He had been merciful enough. The Lord is also highlighting this cycle and spiral of moral decay and unfaithfulness.
- Verse 13: He proclaimed that He will no longer deliver Israel because they had forsaken Him. Israel was on the verge of being forsaken by God.
- Verse 14: He told them to go to the false gods they had chosen for deliverance.

This appears to be somewhat of a tipping point in the way the Lord would deal with Israel. As dark and difficult as this book has been thus far, darker days lie ahead.

Part of Israel's problem is that they did not know or understand God. He was not just a source of power or protection. He is a jealous God that demands sincere and singular worship. He is not a tool to use to overcome obstacles in life; He is the Creator of all, the Holy One of Israel. Whether your lot in life is good or bad at the moment, He is good and He is worthy to be worshipped.

How do we interpret Israel's response to the Lord in verses 15-16a? It sounds really good. They placed their destiny in the hands of the Lord, recognized their sin, requested deliverance, put away the false gods and reinstated worship of the Lord. This looks like repentance because it was more than acknowledgement of sin and a request for deliverance. It involved confession, surrender, and forsaking sin and the pursuit of righteousness. We can't know with certainty whether this was sincere or not, but it is important to notice that the Lord's reaction wasn't based upon the quality of their repentance.

Verse 16 doesn't tie the Lord's compassion to her repentance, but rather to her suffering. As Dale Davis says in his commentary, "Our hope does not rest in the sincerity of our repentance but in the intensity of Yahweh's compassion...", and "Repentance may be a condition but not a cause of God's restored favor."² *Joel 2:12-14* makes this point very clear. **The call to repentance is not a suggestion based upon a guarantee that God will deliver. It is a command from God because you have sinned against a good and loving God.** Who knows whether He will deliver... it won't be because of you, but because of Him.

There is also a great point here for the lost. All who repent and believe are PROMISED salvation. Yet, the basis of salvation is not the quality of your salvation but rather the love and mercy of God as demonstrated by the sacrifice of Christ. Repent because you are a sinner. Believe because He is the risen Christ. By His mercy and grace, He will save you. The basis of His action was not that God repented of the evil that was to befall them, but rather was sorry or indignant about their state.

² Davis, Dale Ralph. *Judges, Such a Great Salvation*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications Ltd. 2000. Page 134