

Judges 10:1-16
Tola and Jair

Introduction

1. I want to start with a question today:
 - a. Is there a limit to God's forgiveness (i.e. the number of times He will forgive)?
 - b. Let's broaden that out a bit, Is there a limit to not only His forgiveness, but His grace and mercy?
 - c. In other words, does he ever say, "Enough is enough! I will no longer show you grace or mercy because you just sin too much."
 - d. Now before you give an emphatic "No!" and start quoting your favorite Bible passages about forgiveness (like the whole 70 times 7 thing), the passage we are going to look at today poses an interesting challenge because it **"appears"** to show God doing just that
2. As we've been making our way through the book of Judges we've seen a pattern
 - a. Israel sins against God by committing evil (i.e. idolatry, sexual immorality, child sacrifices)
 - b. God then raises up enemies to oppress and chastise Israel
 - c. Israel then cries out to the Lord
 - d. The Lord then delivers Israel through the hands of different judges
 - e. But then Israel returns to its wickedness
 - f. It's like the directions on the shampoo bottle: "wash, rinse, repeat"
3. Today, we come to a passage that appears to indicate that God has a limit to how much He will endure...at least on first glance
4. A look at this passage will help us answer that question

A. God raises up Tola and Jair to deliver Israel (10:1-5)

1. Tola (1-2):
 - a. After Abimelech disastrous reign God raised up Tola (1a): **"Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel;"**
 - b. We know very little about him:
 - 1) He was from **"Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim"** (1b)-Ephraim was in Central Israel North of Judah just above the Sea of Galilee and west of the Jordan river
 - 2) He judged Israel for 23 years before he died (2)
2. Jair (3-5):
 - a. After Tola, God raised up Jair to deliver Israel (3): **"After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years."**
 - b. He was a Gileadite, which puts him in Central Israel east of the Jordan River in the land of Gilead, which covered the southern portion of Manasseh and northern portion of Gad (almost directly due east from Ephraim mentioned above)
 - c. He judged Israel for 22 years before he died and was buried in the city of Kamon
 - d. The only other thing we know is that he had **"had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day"** (4)

3. An interesting note here is that there is no mention of idolatry, oppression or an enemy in these verses:
 - a. The normal pattern in the book is apostasy, oppression and then the raising up of a judge
 - b. Here, there is no mention of these things before or between Tola or Jair
 - c. However, there must have been oppression because the Lord raised up Tola to “save Israel” (10b)

B. Israel falls deeper into idolatry and is chastised by the Lord (10:6-9)

1. Once again, Israel descends into wickedness (6): **“Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD...”**
 - a. The evil they did was twofold (6):
 - 1) **“They worshipped the Baals and the Ashtoreths...”** (which involved idol worship, sexual immorality, child sacrifices, etc.)
 - 2) **“They forsook the LORD and did not serve Him”**—this means that they no longer attempted to worship God alongside other gods, but rejected Him completely
 - b. In the beginning of the book, the author described an ever increasing descent into idolatry and moral wickedness, with each generation becoming more corrupt than their parents
 - c. The description given here by the author is by far the most detailed so far and may be his way of indicating this downward spiral:
 - 1) Notice he names the many gods (6): **“the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines;”**
 - 2) His description (below) of God’s response is also much more complete than previous descriptions
2. The Lord chastises Israel by oppressing them through the hands of the Amorites (7-10):
 - a. Both the Philistines and the Amorites are mentioned in v. 7, but only the Amorites are mentioned from 10:8-12:31; Philistines aren’t mentioned again until the story of Sampson
 - b. We see God a lot in this book—in His mercy, His compassion, His judgement and His deliverance
 - c. What we haven’t seen a lot of so far (not overtly anyway) is what the author describes in v. 7—God’s anger: **“The anger of the LORD burned against Israel...”**
 - 1) His burning anger is mentioned in the summary of Israel’s repeated apostasy in chapters 1-2 (2:12, 14, 20)
 - 2) His anger is also mentioned with the first instance of apostasy in 3:8 but there it’s only referred to as **“kindled”** where here it is **“burning”** (i.e. more intense?)
 - 3) The author doesn’t mention God’s anger again until now
 - 4) It may be the author’s way of showing an increase in the intensity of God’s response as Israel’s sin grows in intensity
 - d. Even the oppression is described with a new intensity (7b-9): **“He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. 8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.”**
 - 1) Israel was **“afflicted and crushed”** – literally **“they were shattering and crushing the Israelites”**

- a. The first word, shatter, describes breaking something into pieces and is only used one other time in the Hebrew Bible and describes God's right hand shattering His enemies
 - b. The second word, crush, is the same word used to describe the crushing of Abimelech's head when the woman dropped a millstone onto him from the top of the tower
 - c. This resulted in Israel being **"greatly distressed"** (9)
- 2) The oppression extended all the way from Gilead (Gad and Manasseh) east of the Jordan, into three tribes west of the Jordan (Benjamin, Judah and Ephraim)
 - 3) According to v. 8 the oppression lasted for 18 years

C. Israel's "confession" and the Lord's response (10:10-18)

- 1. Once again, the Israelites cry out to the Lord, but this time we see something new: a confession: **"Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, 'We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.'"**
 - a. Up to now, we have simply seen Israel cry out when in distress
 - b. Here, however, the Israelites confess their sin:
 - 1) They recognized their offense was one against God
 - 2) They understood that they had rejected...forsaken...Him
 - 3) They knew it was a result of serving other Gods
- 2. God's response is rather unexpected (11-14):
 - a. At this point we might expect forgiveness because Israel just confessed their sin.
 - b. Instead, God rebukes them and states He will no longer deliver them:
 - 1) He reminds them of His mighty acts of deliverance in former instances of oppression (11): **"The LORD said to the sons of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.'"**
 - 2) Yet, in spite of all these episodes of mercy and deliverance, they still chose to forsake Him (13): **"Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods"**
 - 3) He then refuses to deliver Israel again (13): **"therefore I will no longer deliver you."** (or, "I will not deliver you again")
 - 4) Finally, He tells Israel to go ask their Canaanite gods to save them (14): **"Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."**
 - c. What are we to make of this?
 - 1) It's a bit troubling because we expect God to forgive when we confess our sins (after all, 1 John 1:9 says God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins when we confess)
 - 2) But here, Israel confesses but there is no forgiveness
 - 3) What are we missing? Rather, what was Israel missing?
 - 4) The answer is found in the next two verses
- 3. Israel finally repents and God is once again moved to deliver them (15-16): **"The sons of Israel said to the LORD, 'We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver**

us this day. 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer."

- a. There is a marked difference between Israel's first confession and their second, and it makes all the difference in the world
 - 1) Like the first confession, the second one admits their sin (15): **"We have sinned..."**
 - 2) But the second also admits that the Lord is right and just to judge them for their sin (15): **"...do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day"**
 - 3) However, the most important thing missing from the first confession, but included in the second was REPENTANCE (16): **"So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD"**
 - a) Confession is a declaration that what you've done is sin
 - b) Repentance, however, is a change of heart that leads to a change of behavior
 - c) It's more than just stopping the wrong behavior, but starting the right behavior
 - d) Notice that Israel here not only put away the foreign god, but they started serving the Lord
4. God relents and is moved to deliver Israel once again (16): **"and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer."**

Conclusion

1. At the beginning of our time today I asked a simple question: Is there a limit to God's forgiveness (or for that matter His mercy or grace).
2. That was a bit of a misleading question because this passage really isn't about forgiveness, even though it might appear that way; after all, God said He was done delivering them
3. However, God's initial refusal to deliver Israel wasn't an unwillingness to forgive them, but rather a refusal to remove the consequence of their sin without their willingness to repent from that sin
4. God subjected them to the oppression of their enemies specifically to move them from their disobedience to repentance, but without their repentance He would not remove the oppression
5. This is interesting in light of the fact that prior to this passage God seemed to deliver Israel without their repentance.
6. That's the way God works:
 - a. Sometimes He extends us kindness to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4)
 - b. At other times, He needs to use chastisement to accomplish that
 - c. In fact, I suspect that He starts with kindness, and when that doesn't work He uses chastisement
7. The question for us is whether it takes His kindness, or His chastisement, to get our attention, and when He does, will we repent?