

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

8. Tola's Judgeship: Overcoming Dysfunctional Upheaval By Selfless, Biblical Exemplifying (Judges 10:1-2)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Webster's Dictionary defines the word "dysfunction" to mean "impaired or abnormal functioning," and our lives in today's world are certainly affected by what is "dysfunctional," and we need to know how to deal with it:

(1) Sohrab Ahmari's piece, "The End of the Arab Spring Dream" (The Wall Street Journal, December 19-20, 2015, p. A15) claimed, "(T)oday the Middle East is less stable, and less hopeful, than it was before the Arab Spring."

(2) In a letter to the Republican-American, December 11, 2015, p. 8A, Wink Wilson of Goshen wrote: "It certainly appears that God isn't fixing our nation's problems . . . We have legislated Him out of the schools . . . banned Bible reading . . . slaughtered millions of babies before they could exit the womb, banned Nativity scenes . . . and . . . redefined marriage . . . Do you think God has had enough . . . to . . . give us over to our desires?"

(3) Dysfunction affects us locally: this last week, several of our Church members independently of each other told me of disturbing and even mentally and emotionally catastrophic dysfunctional experiences faced by Christians!

(4) Tuesday afternoon, another member called to report how radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh had fielded a call from a woman who was distraught over news media reports of troubling world conditions, for they gave her no peace. Rush had replied that the news media could offer no peace, that we have to look to God for that.

Need: *So we ask, "What does God direct that we do to handle upheavals in life due to dysfunctional issues?!"*

- I. By way of review, we recall that Abimelech's dysfunctional background and sin had led to his having a catastrophically dysfunctional reign over the nation Israel, Judges 9:1-57 (as follows):**
- A. The seeds for Abimelech's dysfunction were sown by his father Gideon, a war hero in Israel. When a grateful nation had asked Gideon to establish a dynasty, he rightly declined, claiming God was Israel's King (Jud. 8:22-23). Yet, Gideon then made a gold ephod to extol God, but it became an idol in Israel, and that led Gideon to become proud and *act* like a king: he wed many wives and sired 70 sons, Jud. 8:24-30; B. K. C., O. T., p. 396.
 - B. Much like a king, Gideon also acquired a concubine, a mistress who bore him Abimelech, whose name meant, "my father is king," Judges 8:31; Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, v. One, p. 15-16.
 - C. However, as the son of a mistress, Abimelech was a lesser son than Gideon's other 70 sons who were born to his wives. Also, Abimelech was raised in Shechem by his mother while his father lived in Ophrah, Jud. 8:31, 27. In addition, Shechem was inhabited by amoral pagan Canaanites (Judges 9:26-28), a bad influence on Abimelech. Thus, fatherlessness, exposure to amoral Canaanites and a lesser sonship role led Abimelech to grow up full of ruthless, selfish ambition, yearning to fulfill the meaning of his name and be king as his father Gideon had acted. Thus, Abimelech led evil Shechemite men to kill Gideon's full sons, men hired with money from Shechem's pagan Baal-Berith temple coffers, and he arranged to be crowned in Shechem, Judges 9:1-6.
 - D. Abimelech then made a political move, choosing to live in nearby Hebrew Aruman (Jud. 9:41a) to be accepted by Israel's Jewish population so he might rule the whole nation as the son of Gideon (The MacMil. Bib. Atlas, 1968, p. 55), but Abimelech left his deputy in Shechem to retain a ruling influence there, Judges 9:28b.
 - E. He had thus "ruled," but Judges 9:22 uses the word *sarar* to note Abimelech "acted as a prince" versus ruling as a king or judge who was established by the Lord, H. A. W., Theol. Wrdbk. of the O. T., 1980, v. II, p. 884.
 - F. God fulfilled a curse by Jotham, a full son of Gideon who had escaped Abimelech's murder of his brothers: the Lord caused war to erupt between the men of Shechem and Abimelech, and Abimelech was slain, Jud. 9:7-57.
 - G. So, with Abimelech's coarse politicking, mass murder of a war hero's many sons and a subsequent civil war, Israel was left in a state of spiritual decay upon Abimelech's death, Ibid., Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 399.
- II. Judges 10:1-2 thus reveals how God raised up Tola to check the destruction caused by Abimelech's rule:**
- A. Only in the case of Tola in the book of Judges is the past ruler, Abimelech named with the introduction of the new judge, Judges 10:1. Thus, Tola's ministry directly countered the bad effects of Abimelech's awful rule!
 - B. God thus used Tola to deliver Israel from the decay of Abimelech's rule, and the Biblical text explains this:
 - 1. First, opposite Abimelech's fatherlessness and birth as a second-class son to a concubine, Tola's father and even grandfather are listed, meaning he came from a background of established father figures, Judges 10:1.

2. Second, opposite Abimelech's corruption by amoral Canaanites and sordid dealings with a pagan temple's coffers to finance mass murder, Tola was a "nobleman," an *'ish* (Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 384), an established, respected man in his community. (Robert B. Girdlestone, Syns. of the O.T., 1973, p. 48-50)
3. Third, opposite Abimelech's murderous coup, Tola "arose" *qum* (Ibid., Kittel; B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 877-878; Judges 10:1 KJV), becoming recognized by Israel as a leader by upright means!
4. Fourth, Tola followed the selfless Biblical example of Joshua before him unlike self-serving Abimelech:
 - a. Generations before Tola, Scripture records that Joshua had become concerned about Israel's tardiness in displacing pagan Canaanites and clearing the land in the interior hill country of Ephraem, Joshua 17:14-18.
 - b. Thus, Joshua had moved the tabernacle, the nation's hub, up from Gilgal by the Jordan River into the hill country of Ephraem at Shiloh to motivate Israel to displace the area's pagans and clear the land, Jos. 18:1.
 - c. Though he had a right to choose a better inheritance, Joshua then selflessly chose the "rugged, infertile" and "mountainous" city of Timnath Serah in that hill country so he himself would need to displace its pagans and clear its land and even build a city to example what the rest of Israel should do, Joshua 19:50b.
 - d. Tola knew the Scriptures about Joshua, so he mimicked him, leaving his home in Issachar to move to Shamir in the same hill country to example godliness where selfish Abimelech had left chaos, Judges 10:1.
5. Fifth, opposite Abimelech's despotic "rule," Tola "dwelt" (*yashab*, Ibid., Kittel; Ibid., B. D. B., p. 442-443) in Shamir and judged Israel, using good character and godliness to lead by example, Jud. 10:1; 1 Peter 5:3.
6. Sixth, Shamir (*shamir*, Ibid., p. 1038-1038) means "thorn-bushes, token of a waste-land," so Tola lived in a **humble** place in Manasseh in humility in contrast to the self-serving, arrogant Abimelech, Judges 10:1.
7. Seventh, Tola stayed in Shamir until he died and was buried there 23 years later, so he **faithfully** exemplified nobility and godliness in calling Israel to follow God opposite Abimelech's erratic, short rule, Judges 10:2.

Lesson: *Tola handled the destructive effects of Israel's past dysfunctional ruler, Abimelech by using his established, solid family background, his established personal character in selfless, exemplary, humble and faithful devotion to example before needy Israel the correct way to think and to live for the Lord.*

Application: *If faced with unsettling dysfunction in any way, (1) may we trust in Christ as Savior to have eternal life and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, John 3:16; Romans 8:9b. (2) Then, relying on the Holy Spirit for power in living (Gal. 5:16), may we (a) heed the example of Biblical forerunners like Tola and Joshua (b) to rely on God to put us into a position of influence, and there to use our established family background, established personal character along with selfless, exemplary, humble and faithful devotion to live an upright, exemplary life before the needy around us. (3) If we ourselves suffer from a dysfunctional background, may we rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to do what Tola did -- to MIMIC a past Biblical man or woman of God (as the case may be) in how he or she faced a similar situation, or even to mimic the informative example of the godly around us, Philippians 4:9.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We have an illustration of what it means to be a credible example in a dysfunctional world in Stephen Lind's op-ed, "You're a Merry Man, Charlie Brown," in The Wall Street Journal, December 21, 2015, p. A21. He told how Charles Schulz, author of the "Peanuts" cartoons, was approached by TV executives fifty years ago, back in 1965, and asked about airing a special Christmas program titled, "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Schulz was "surprised by the opportunity to make a TV special at all," but he agreed to it. In the process of writing it up, he inserted a segment where the character Linus recites the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke, giving the true meaning of Christmas, Ibid. The TV executives balked at the idea, afraid it would be "risky" to run such a strong religious tone in the show, but "Schulz responded simply, 'If we don't do it, who will?'" (Ibid.)

The program was set to air quite soon, so the executives felt they had no choice but to proceed with it, so they aired the special, and it was met with "wild adoration" from the public, Ibid. In fact, America has continued to love it, with the special becoming an "annual spiritual validation on mainstream television" of "(a) lonely kid who hears deep truths and is comforted by flawed but well-meaning friends," Ibid. The show has "(r)e-aired every year since -- more than any Christmas special save 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,' which debuted a year earlier," and it is being aired again twice this year of 2015. (Ibid.)

Charles Schulz's exemplary action of using his first chance to address the nation by exposing it to the true meaning of Christmas as found in God's Word, "a breath of fresh air" (Ibid.) -- it still serves us, and it serves us well.

May we face dysfunction in our world with faith in Christ for salvation followed by lives lived in the power of God as upright examples that direct other people in a dysfunctional world to the Lord.