

JAIR, 22 YEARS OF HARMONY

Down around Bethlehem there is a beautiful love story taking place between ancestors of Jesus. Somewhere between 1200 and 1300 B.C., give or take, Ruth, the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi is wooing a suitor by the name of Boaz. They will be the parents of Obed who will be the father of Jesse who will be the father of King David who will be the great relative of Jesus, the son of man. However, this is not going to be the topic of discussion, it simply seemed relevant to mention that this takes place during the same time as our actual story. Roughly 120 miles northeast in the land of Gilead, West Manasseh a gentleman by the name of Jair has been given the task of judging Israel.

Up to this point Israel has had a revolving door of struggle and redemption but has seemingly found peace at last after 23 years of peace with Tola. Now, a God-fearing individual from an outward tribe has been called to continue that peace. There is beauty in the inclusivity of the Lord when it comes to the judges. He has a way of making sure everyone is included. While he could stick to the primary tribes of Judah, Levi, or the like He found a way to bring in one of the forgotten wandering tribes from the other side of the Jordan. This likely built up the people of Manasseh, making them feel as important as the rest.

Over the years of wandering and captivity, the people of Manasseh had become one of the lost tribes that had been infused with the blood of foreign lands. It may be safe to say that they were not of pure Hebrew blood, but that did not stop God from using their land and citizens as a blessing to the rest of Israel. They very well may have felt like outcasts not only because of the impurity but also because of their geographical separation from the other tribes. They may have been happy to be set apart from the others or they may have felt unincluded, I do not really know. They lived in a land that was wonderful for fruitful crops as well as the sheep that they tended to.

So, what about the judge himself? His name was Jair, which means "He shines" or "He is enlightened" in the Hebrew. We are told little more than he had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys and had 30 cities. What we have here is a man that has acquired a large chunk of land and made it fruitful. He is a prosperous man that is responsible for much and it would appear that the Lord would make him responsible for more. If he had 30 sons, I venture to say that he had more than one wife and quite possibly concubines as well. While that is something that God did not condone, I am afraid that was not uncommon. After Lamech we see this happen with the likes of Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Kings David and Solomon as well as the judge Gideon, among others. Those 30 sons rode 30 donkeys which would be similar to me having 30 sons that drive 30 Cadillac's today. Donkeys were not so common that the common man had the luxury of having one. We can stop here and examine this text for just a moment. A wealthy man, a lot of land and fine possessions. We see that it is quite possible for a man of wealth to

be a godly man. We see that neither God nor the people condemned him because he had acquired much. We also see that God did not require him to give away his possessions or land to the people out of fairness. I say this because we live in a time where people are being condemned not because they aren't wearing Armani but because they are. What I mean by that is that we see an increasingly large group of people, evangelical and others that are anything but, condemning those who have been blessed with good things. Frowning upon someone because they have new furniture or a new car. If this were the measurement of judgement then we would see the likes of Moses, Job, David and Solomon in hot water. Here, Jair is using his wealth as an advantage for the Lord. Taking advantage of the land he possesses, the citizens who live on said land, the large number of sons that he has and the resources they have by which to travel as a means to carry out Gods word. All of this from a man from the other side of the river.

This is going to go on for 45 years total when we include the previous judge Tola. This is not to imply that every citizen of Israel was compliant to the will of God. The thought of that would be naïve. What that does mean is that the naysayers and those who idolized false gods were kept at bay. They would have likely felt out of place being open about idolization in a society that feared the Lord. It would have been taboo for handmade images of false gods to be sold at the marketplace. Under the watchful eye of Jair and his 30 sons whom he utilized to the fullest extent, Gods influence was proclaimed throughout the land. Peace and a simple way of life had become the norm and we can use that as an example for today. Those who follow the Lord are seen as dull and out of place because we don't partake of illicit substances or spend our time in liquor establishments. That is not to say that Christians do not enjoy life, it is to say that we have established priorities and God is at the top of that list. Partaking of a baseball game or a trip to the zoo or aquarium is fulfilling because it is time that we get to spend with our families and praise the Lord for the wonderful experiences and people that He has blessed us with. Partaking of rated R movies or 90 proof are now activities that convict our soul and lead us away from God. Faithful and joyful is something that Jair had helped establish in Israel and something that we are to establish in our lives. Not excitement for smoke and wine but excited for the blessing of salvation from the Lord. Let us not grow weary or discontent with what He has given us and rejoice always for the Lord is faithful.