

# A Gracious Interlude

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 January 2024

Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[ 0 : 00 ] An interlude is an intervening period that provides for us a welcome break from an otherwise demanding task.

An interlude is specifically the word that we're thinking of here. And I want you to think for just a moment all the different ways that we experience various interludes. Sporting events have interludes between periods of play that offer athletes and spectators alike some type of moment of rest from the game that they're watching or that they're playing.

Songs that we sing in church have interludes. The song that we just sang, On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand, in between a chorus and a verse, typically there's just a very short interlude, a transition time.

But what it does is it gives you a moment to breathe, a moment to take just a quick break, a moment to reflect. We see this in the Psalms, right? As David very often writing in his Psalms will add in a musical notation that we read out as Selah.

It's actually a musical note is what that's meant to do. And it means to take a pause, to pause and reflect. It's an interlude. It's a transition. Theatrical plays, if you were to go to a Broadway show, they have interludes.

[ 1 : 16 ] And they present the audience with a less than taxing moment of dialogue or moment of humor while the cast transitions from one major scene to the next.

And then there are also interludes and pieces of literature that bridge two elements of a story and provide relief from either an intense part of the narrative that was just before it, or perhaps preparing you for an intense part of the narrative that is just after.

And that's actually what we find in these five verses in Judges chapter 10. This is just a helpful, gracious interlude. And in terms of function, this little section, it acts as kind of a hinge that turns the page from the Gideon cycle, which starts all the way back in chapter 6 and continues through the story of Abimelech.

The Gideon cycle doesn't really end until this point. And this is acting as like a hinge. It's turning the page from the Gideon cycle over to the Jephthah cycle, which begins for us technically in verse 6. And what it does is it provides, I think, a welcome break from two very intense scenes of narrative.

[ 2 : 42 ] Two very tragic scenes of narrative as well. And it gives us a moment for reflection. So functionally, that's how we want to view these five verses.

Now, the author of Judges periodically inserts these interludes, and he does it in a unique way. He does it by telling us briefly about what has come to be referred to as minor judges.

So when we get into the big picture of the book of Judges, there are 12 of them that are listed. Now, there could have been far more than that that actually existed and were operative at that time.

The author chooses 12 to tell us about. Six of them are major judges. Six of them are minor judges. But we don't need to let that term confuse us.

The individuals involved here were not minor in impact or in importance to the narrative. The term just refers to the fact that very little is said about them or about what they did or about what they accomplished.

[ 3 : 44 ] It's a similar concept when we're looking at the Old Testament prophets. We have major prophets and minor prophets. The major prophets are more important than the minor prophets. And the minor prophets' messages aren't less significant than the others.

It's just simply a matter of length. The major prophets are super long-winded. The minor prophets are super short. They're very much smaller in their length.

That's the idea that we have between major and minor judges here. And the first judge, the first minor judge that we looked at, was Shamgar. Do you remember him from the end of chapter 3?

Shamgar was an obscure man in an obscure place. And all we're told about him was that he killed 600 men with an ox code, with a farming tool. And we made appropriate applications then. This interlude has two minor judges. Tola and Jair. And these two minor judges, as I said, constitute a transitional piece, bridging the gap between two really dominant epics in the overall narrative. [ 4 : 54 ] Tola's section, verses 1 and 2, bring a conclusion to the Gideon cycle. That's what it's meant to do. Particularly the scene with Abimelech, right?

That's how the author is using it here. Jair's mention prepares the reader for the shift to the Jephthah cycle. Okay?

So hinge piece here. Even geographically, our attention is being adjusted here from the areas immediately west of the Jordan River in Israel to the areas immediately east of the Jordan River in Israel.

So everything about this is transitional in its function and in its scope. But this text is doing so much more than simply turning the page from one story to another.

It's doing far more than that. It may be simple, but there is meaning here. And I don't want you to miss it. It's an opportunity for us to consider the reality and the purpose of seasons of rest.

[ 6 : 05 ] Seasons of rest. Seasons of peace. When we come to the scripture, there's at least three types of rest, three types of peace that are given to us as gifts from God.

The first one we've talked about at great length already this morning. That is the weekly Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath being a God-given period of rest from the burdens and the stresses that we carry the other six days of the week.

So God gives it to us as a gift that allows time for focused worship and physical rest. It is a welcome interlude in the regular course of the Christian week.

And it takes us all the way back to Genesis chapter 2. That's one type of rest mentioned in the scriptures. Another type of rest mentioned in the scriptures is just these simple periods of what we would say is relative peace.

Relative peace. That's what we have in this passage. In fact, if you go back and you trace all the way back to the end of or to where Gideon's death was. Remember, there was rest for the land for 40 years after Gideon's death.

[ 7 : 18 ] Abimelech has his thing, but that's not an outside oppression. It's certainly difficult. It's tragic. But we might could say, well, that just kind of wedges itself into the middle of this generally relatively peaceful, restful season for Israel.

Then we get to Tola and Jair, and together it's another 45 years. So what we have here in the life of Israel is basically 85 years of relative rest, relative peace from their enemies.

And this interlude here in the passage, it's not just a reprieve for the readers. It's actually detailing for us a reprieve that God gave to his people.

A time frame of relative peace. And here's the thing with this. Life is hard. It is hard. As soon as you finish getting over one obstacle, it doesn't take very long, and there's another obstacle.

And they're very, usually they're not very much the same. They try us in different ways. But God is good to us. He brings us through seasons of intense suffering for his glory.

[ 8 : 32 ] But then he gifts us often with periods of peace. It brings a reprieve from the chaos, a time for healing, a time for getting through and processing the hardships of living in a fallen world.

And that's really what we have in this passage. But there's a third kind of rest that is mentioned to us as a gift from God in the scriptures. It's an eternal rest.

An eternal rest in Christ. All of the talk about peace and rest in the Bible ultimately points us to an everlasting rest for those who believe and follow Christ.

And I want you to just glory in this for just a moment. There is coming a day. It is surely coming. It is promised by our Savior. It is a gift from God. There is coming a day, and it will include a rest that will never end.

[ 9 : 34 ] We will be in the presence of our God and our Savior. We will be made ultimately and eternally free from sin, from pain, from trouble, from the consequences of other sins, from death, from hardship.

It will all be done. And it will be done forever. It's a guarantee for those who are in Christ that an eternal rest is ahead for us.

And we do not have that now. It's coming. But it is promised to us in the scriptures. Three different kinds of rest. The first two preparing us for the final one.

The weekly Sabbath. The seasons of peace pointing us forward to that great day of the Lord when He returns. And He brings His kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth.

Now it's easy to move quickly through a text like this, wondering what real purpose it serves. Why are these five verses here? What possible value can we take from them?

[ 10 : 50 ] Well, since they're scripture, there are at least three components that they must contain. Okay? Because all scripture contains these three components.

Number one, they teach us something about God. They teach us something about God. Psalm 138 verse 2, You have exalted above all things your name and your word.

The psalmist says. What does that mean? That means that God has given us His word as His revelation in order that we might exalt Him. It is His revelation to us.

Therefore, every time you open the scriptures, it doesn't matter where they are. It doesn't matter how simple the story is or how little impact it has on you immediately. It is teaching you something about God.

It is His revelation to us in order that we may exalt Him, in order that we may know Him, and that we may worship Him. But it's not only teaching us something about God. It's teaching us something about serving God.

[ 11 : 48 ] It's teaching us something about serving God. 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 15 through 17. You know the passage well. Paul tells Timothy, From a child you have known the scriptures, the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

And then he says, this is just so wonderful. All scripture is breathed out by God. It is given to us by God for this reason. It is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be whole, complete, mature, equipped for every good work.

The scriptures, by nature of what they are, they teach us something about God. But then they teach us something about serving God. Now, we can say, and some people would suggest, that the ultimate end, the ultimate goal for studying the Bible is to develop dogma or conviction.

But that's only partially true. The ultimate goal of studying the scriptures is application. Because God has given us the scriptures so that we might have teaching.

That is so that we might believe something. That's the conviction. But it's not just conviction. It's also for reproof. So that it might show us what is wrong. Then it gives us correction so that we can know how to make those things right.

[ 13 : 22 ] We're applying those truths to our lives in a very specific way. And then it's given us training in righteousness. It's telling us how to push forward in service to God. Why?

That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished, equipped for every good work. What do the scriptures do for us? They teach us something about God. They teach us how to serve God.

They're practical, relevant for us. Third, they teach us something about salvation through Jesus. They always, always teach us something about salvation through Jesus.

Jesus says in John chapter 5 verse 39, You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me.

This book that you hold in your hand, I hope that you hold in your hand today, from beginning to end, Genesis 1 all the way to the end of Revelation, it has one meta-narrative.

[ 14 : 28 ] And it is this, salvation through Jesus. Everywhere you turn in the Bible, it is ultimately about Jesus.

It has something to teach us about God's glory and salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those are three components every piece of scripture has, which means that those three components must be present in these five verses in Judges chapter 10.

So I want to use that as our structure for understanding the verses today, okay? Number one, these verses teach us something about God. They teach us something about God.

Look at verses 1 and 2 again. After Abimelech, there arose to save Israel Tola, the son of Pua, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar. And he lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

And he judged Israel 23 years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir. So our introduction to Tola is about as basic as it gets. We're given just a few details about his lineage, where he lived and died, how long he governed in that region of Israel.

[ 15 : 43 ] But I want you to notice what the emphasis of this information is on. The emphasis of this information is on Tola's connection to Abimelech.

Remember Abimelech, the son of Gideon, who wreaks havoc on Israel in the proximity around Shechem. Now we're told that Tola saved, quote, saved Israel.

But we're not told how he saved Israel, not explicitly at least. It could very well be that there were enemies coming against Israel. And Tola, as a mighty warrior, as no doubt he was, fought against them and they're just otherwise unnamed in the text.

But I think while that may be true, that's not what the author of Judges intends for us to see here. He intends for us to see this connection, that to stress for us, the leadership of Tola relative to the leadership of Abimelech.

He saves Israel by leading them in a recovery from the fallout from Abimelech's wickedness. This is a real life interlude, a gift from God for the healing of these people in this region who just went through something tragic for three years.

[ 17 : 08 ] And God uses Tola to secure this period of relief. Now this all speaks to one thing.

God's goodness. His kindness toward his people following a time of serious chaos. Do you see it there?

If we just hurry our way through the book of Judges, what it seems like is wave after wave after wave of judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. And really that's essentially what it is. Until we look in at the details and we see, okay, there's judgment, but then there's mercy.

Undeserved mercy. There's mercy. And then there's these periods of rest and peace, even when they're not asked for.

What is it pointing us towards? It's the goodness and the kindness of God. It's a reminder that Yahweh is a gracious and merciful God, as we have learned many times this morning, who is full of steadfast love that endures forever.

[ 18 : 17 ] Dale Ralph Davis says it this way, God does not allow blasting to go on forever. He does not allow his people to be trampled ad infinitum.

But it is his way after the valley of the shadow to anoint our heads with oil. After sorrow and sighing to grant joy and gladness.

Yahweh is a gracious God who never allows Abimelech to be the last word for his people. Never. This is about the goodness of God. Well, how can we really trust that God will be gracious and merciful to us? Can we trust that God will be gracious and merciful to us?

And the answer is yes. How can we be sure, though? Well, we have in his grace and provision a myriad of examples through the scripture, sometimes as simple as two verses about a guy that we know nothing else about.

[ 19 : 23 ] And it shows these patterns of God's mercy, patterns of God's grace. We ought not be surprised to read that Tola's reign was relatively peaceful because God's very character is one that continually shows steadfast love to his sinful creatures.

It's what we can expect from God. It's what we can expect from God because it's who he is. And these are simple reminders of God's character that should cause us to trust that he will bring us to that eternal rest following this season of suffering and sin in this life.

It teaches us about God so that we might trust him and be assured of his goodness. Micah picks up on this in Micah chapter seven.

Who is a God like you? Pardoning iniquity, passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance. He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in mercy.

He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

[ 20 : 45 ] This text teaches us about God. It teaches about his gracious provision of rest. And it's gracious because it's a gift that is given to undeserving sinners.

It's a gracious rest. This section, it's flanked by two detailed stories stories of judgment. And the judgment is centered on Israel's idolatry.

In these five verses, nothing about Israel's heart or false worship changes. Nothing about this in verses one through five says, and Israel turned back to God, therefore he gave them 45 years of peace and rest.

That's not what happens. God gives it to them purely out of his gracious and merciful character. And he gives it to people who are totally undeserving of such peace in their lives.

And whether we're referring to the weekly Sabbath or a period of peace or an eternal rest, the experience of God's rest is always a gracious provision for undeserving sinners.

[ 21 : 58 ] Always. Always. We live in this, with this idea sometimes that we are entitled to things. Everybody's deserving of whatever it is that they want.

And that creeps into the church and into Christian hearts sometimes so that we look at God and we say, yes, God should save me. I deserve to be saved. Yes, God should bless me. I deserve to be blessed.

But the truth is you don't. You don't deserve to be saved. You don't deserve to be blessed. Your blessing comes directly from his character, not yours. Every time he gives it, it is a gracious gift to undeserving sinners.

What does this text teach us about God? It teaches us about his grace. It teaches us about his grace. Number two, it instructs our service to God.

It instructs our service to God. Look at verse three. After him arose Jair, the Gileadite, who judged Israel 22 years. He had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys and they had 30 cities called Havath-Jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

[ 23 : 10 ] And Jair died and was buried in Cainmon. Well, the description of Jair here is about as basic as the one given to Tola. But if you pay attention, there is a distinct difference in emphasis.

Tola was marked by his ancestry and his connection to Abimelech. What we're told about Tola is who his dad was and who his grandfather was and which tribe he belonged to and the emphasis was on his link to Abimelech.

That's not the same for Jair. There's something a little different happening here. We're not told about his lineage. We're told about his descendants. We're told about these 30 sons. We are told that he's in Gilead, but all of that is to connect him to Jephthah, who is also a Gileadite.

This whole next scene that we get to in chapters 10 and 11, it is all centered on this man, Jephthah, a Gileadite, and it is centered in Gilead. So the author's transitioning us, okay?

So that's clear, it's pretty simple, it's basic for us. But there's some things that we can discern here. Though he still enjoyed a season of peace, Jair's leadership helped produce the conditions of idolatry and judgment that are coming in the Jephthah narrative.

[ 24 : 29 ] By mentioning some of these things about Jair, the author is preparing us for what's about to unfold in Gilead in the next chapter. So Tola teaches us about God's gracious provision of rest.

Jair teaches us about misusing God's gracious provision of rest. And here's how we need to get to this, okay?

Let's think for just a moment about why God gives us rest. What is his purpose in that? Why does he do that? What's his intentions? Okay, number one, our rest is meant to produce grateful worship. Grateful worship. When we see and understand God's grace, it should produce in us worship, right? That's a goal of it. That is an intention that God has in it. Consider God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus chapter six, God tells Moses to tell the people that he would deliver them so that they would know his love and serve him accordingly.

[ 25 : 35 ] God's provision of rest from slavery was meant to produce in them true worship of their God. Exodus chapter six, verse seven.

God says, I will take you to be my people. I will be your God. You shall know that I am Yahweh, your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

God gives his people rest from slavery. Why? In order that they may know that he is their God and worship him accordingly. Okay?

So why does God give us these periods of rest? Whether it's a weekly Sabbath or a season of peace or the eternal rest so that it may produce in us grateful worship. Number two, God gives us rest as a time of healing, recovery.

Isn't that what's happening here with Israel and the big picture of it? Isn't that why God brings them rest? He gives them time to actually enjoy their lives even though they do not serve him with their lives.

[ 26 : 41 ] We call this common grace that even the wicked in this life enjoy certain graces from the Lord's love even though they do not serve him. There are seasons that God takes us through.

He gives them to us graciously as a period of healing. Perhaps some of you have been in church settings before where there was a massive failure in leadership and in the process of recovering from that God brings in some interim pastor or a group of elders to serve and it's not that they're

particularly talented but that they serve the church in such a way as to help bring healing and recovery.

Perhaps you've been in a situation in your life where you've left a hurtful situation and God takes you to a place of healing and recovering in terms of a church setting and another congregation. Is that not a gracious gift from God? Does he not give that to us in order that he may soothe us and help us and encourage us? Do you remember what happened with Elijah after that showdown with the prophets of Baal?

You probably know that story. It's amazing. He has this triumphant moment and then Jezebel threatens to kill him and he gets so scared that he runs.

[ 28 : 00 ] He's defeated. It's chaos for him. He runs as far as he can run and then he goes another day into the wilderness from there and he lays down and he says, God, just kill me. Just kill me already because she's going to do it anyways.

And you know what God does for Elijah? Elijah, he gives him a couple of days of just peace and rest. He has him sleep. Then he sends an angel to wake him up, give him a little food, a little water, makes him sleep again.

He gives him just a brief moment to recover. Healing. God is good to us in that way, isn't he? You might be in a season of peace right now.

Maybe you're coming out of a situation of chaos or whatever it may be in your life. God's given you a useful moment to recover and you need to worship him and acknowledge that he is good in that. He's good. There's a third thing that God gives us peace for. He gives us rest so that we might have time to repent. Might have time to repent.

[ 29 : 04 ] He is patient. He allows us a period of peace so that we might respond in faithfulness. Romans chapter 2 verse 4. Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?

Not realizing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? He could just give you wrath. But he doesn't.

He gives you time. 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9. The Lord is not slack or slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.

This is in reference to the Lord's return. He is not slow to fulfill that promise but he waits because he's patient toward us not wishing that any should perish but that they should reach repentance. Why does the Lord tarry? To provide time for repentance repentance so that we may turn to him in faith? This little section about Jair implies that he and all of Israel wasted a period of rest for 85 years.

[ 30 : 19 ] They did not gratefully worship God for the peace. For 85 years they did not recognize a season of healing and recovery and give to the Lord praise in response.

For 85 years they did not turn from their sin and idolatry. They wasted their peace. So this instructs us on our service to God.

Like Gideon, Jair, we're told here he tries to set himself up as a king in Gilead. His 30 sons reflect the harem of wives that he had obtained. The fact that he rode 30 donkeys and which was a royal animal at the time ruled 30 cities it indicates Jair wanted his authority to pass on to his children. But the most disappointing element of his rule is that he did not lead the people back to faithfully worship God. He does nothing to change that because when we open up the Jephthah cycle we find everything's exactly as it was with Abimelech.

The people are worshiping false gods. Though enjoying a period of peace and prosperity Jair's leadership at least made possible the apostasy that we see in chapter 10.

[ 31 : 41 ] Periods of peace they sometimes have a way of making us comfortable with our sins don't they? We rationalize in our minds well times are good God must not be displeased with me otherwise I'd be getting the lightning bolts here and there because he would just be so angry with me in the moment.

But the scriptures confess to us that God's seasons of peace are not because he's careless with us. There are seasons of peace that are meant to bring us to repentance but sometimes we mistake that and we allow it to make us comfortable in our sin apathetic to the Lord.

We also tend to misuse those seasons don't we? I'm not trying to beat a dead horse here but we have application to this in the weekly Sabbath don't we? The Lord's Day? We generally treat it like a second Saturday or a chance to get ahead in our work.

We misuse the day that God has given us for rest and worship. How about the seasons of peace that he takes us through? We misuse those too. When we should express gratitude we often ignore the Lord.

A sense of entitlement leads us to act as if we deserve his blessings. rather than take time to repent sometimes we dig our heels in to the sin that God hates.

[ 33 : 08 ] If you go back to Romans chapter 2 Paul says immediately after that verse in verse 5 he says what you're doing is you're storing up wrath. You're storing up wrath because you're not repenting.

You're just building it up building up God's wrath and eventually it's going to be poured out on God's enemies. Such seems to be the case with Tola and Jair and this little description of his time leading Israel is helpfully instructive in this way.

Don't waste God's gracious interludes in your life. Don't waste them. Thirdly and finally this text points us to salvation through Jesus.

The text points us to salvation through Jesus. It's not what Tola and Jair did that points us to Christ it's what they didn't do. Look at verse 2 again.

Then Tola died and was buried at Shamir. Look at verse 5 again. And Jair died and was buried at Camon.

[ 34 : 12 ] The gospel connection of this interlude is consistent with the key theme of the book. Israel needs a king but not just any king. They need God's king. One who will deliver them from all their enemies who will reign in perfect righteousness who will bring them not only a physical rest but an eternal spiritual rest that will never end.

And it's the temporary nature of Tola and Jair's reigns that point us forward to Christ. None of the judges in this book could do for us or for themselves what only Jesus can do.

No matter how great their leadership might have been, Tola and Jair died like everybody else. And as soon as they died things went back to chaos. They could not do for Israel what only Jesus can do.

And their deaths make us long for a savior who will finally conquer death for us. Who will finally deliver us from sin. Who will eternally deliver us from the chaos and the hardships of life in a fallen world.

That's the connection to Jesus here. It's not in what they did. It's what they couldn't do. Jesus is the true and better savior who perfectly fulfilled God's law.

[ 35 : 33 ] Who died in the place of sinners. Who rose to display his power over death and offers eternal rest to all who will come and trust in him.

Matthew chapter 11. Come to me Jesus says all of you who are labor and heavy laden all of you are doing your best and you're trying your hardest and you don't seem to be getting anywhere. Jesus says come to me I will give you rest. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me for I am gentle and lowly and hard and you will find rest not for your body.

You will find rest for your souls. for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. John 14 Jesus tells his disciples do not let your hearts be troubled.

What would they be troubled about? The fact that Jesus is leaving and he's going to leave them in a world that is terribly fallen and sinful and hard. And he tells them he says don't let your heart be troubled.

[ 36 : 41 ] Believe in God. Believe in me. In my father's house in heaven are many rooms. There's room for you. If this wasn't so what have I told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And listen to this assertion. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again. I will take you to myself that where I am you may be there also.

He offers us a rest that will never end and he promises that he will return to take us to that rest. Tola and Jair couldn't ultimately save Israel and neither yours or anybody else's efforts on your behalf can ultimately save you.

Only Jesus can do that and by his grace he has done that. He has done that for all who will come to him in repentance of sin and faith in who he is and what he's done and what he said.

the debt is paid the rest secured and he invites you to come and receive it by faith.

[ 37 : 58 ] Not all passages of scripture are equally impactful. You may not ever think of Tola and Jair again in your Christian life because it doesn't carry the same impact as say the end of John's gospel when we're told about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

There's a difference in impact there but all scripture is profitable. You may not think there's much to gain from a little excerpt like this one but because it's part of God's word it has tremendous value to us.

In this case it teaches us of God's sovereign grace demonstrating his patterns of mercy for those he desires to save. It instructs us on how to use each season of relative peace and rest for God's glory and for our good.

Finally and especially it points us to God's plan of salvation through Jesus the one and only savior of our sins and provider of eternal rest.  
he is our rest.