

Ibzan, Elon, & Abdon

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Date: 01 March 2015

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Judges chapter 12, and you can go ahead and find verse 8.

I'll read it here in just a moment. We're going to consider the next three judges of Israel as they're revealed to us, given to us here in the book of Judges.

And that would be Ibzan, Elan, and Abdon, two very popular names, and I haven't met any children named that yet, but maybe there are some.

Maybe there's a little Ibzan running around out there somewhere, I don't know. So some really old Hebrew names, Ibzan, Elan, and Abdon, and these are the next three judges and we'll take these all together.

And, you know, they were not, I guess, to say they were not judges in the usual sense. And what I mean, they were certainly judges.

[1 : 05] They were bonafide judges, God called them, apparently, though there's nothing said in the Scripture about it. We're to assume that. Ibzan came along, then Elan, and then Abdon, and they were certainly judges in the official sense, but not in the kind of usual sense that we've come to be used to when we read judges, you know, because there's just, there's not a lot about them here.

They certainly were not. You know, the other word is deliverers. That's what the word means, really. Judges, we translate it that way. Deliverers is the idea here.

And these guys certainly were not deliverers in any military sense, as we're going to see. And therefore, they were, as we call them, minor judges.

Minor judges. I kind of introduced that way back in chapter 10 when we were considering Tola and Jair, or Jair. I'm not sure how you pronounce his name.

I've heard a number of different pronunciations. But remember, I introduced those two guys and said that they were, quote, end quote, minor judges.

[2 : 21] Minor judges. And they're given that name, or called that, because of the scant information that the Bible gives us here in the book of Judges. We just don't know hardly anything about them.

And really, we could say that there seems to be nothing worth mentioning about these three judges, or the minor judges.

Nothing about their leadership, great leadership. Although I think we can find some implications there, as we'll get to it here in just a moment. Very little said about that.

Nothing said about any big accomplishments. You know, we have some of that with many of the other judges that we've already studied. And so there's nothing really here in the text, as you shall see, about anything that they may have said.

You know, nothing about that. Nothing, really, anything about what they did. You know, accomplished. No, you know, particular qualities they possessed.

[3 : 23] Nothing in the passage here is about that. They fought no battles. They led no armies. They had no enemies. Nothing mentioned even about enemies here in this passage, or during the time of when these guys judged Israel.

And so I guess we could assume, and I think correctly assume, that they judged during a time of relative peace. And so, since they judged during a time of peace, there was no enemy.

They fought no battles and so forth. And so we don't have anything really exciting, you know, to read about when we start reading this passage. All right, so who were they? Well, let me read the passage, starting with verse 8, and we'll read all the way to the end of chapter 12.

All right, so after him, who would that be? That would be Jephthah. We finished him up last time. After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

He had 30 sons, and he gave away 30 daughters in marriage and brought in 30 daughters from elsewhere for his sons.

[4 : 34] He judged Israel seven years, then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem. After him, Elan the Zebulonite judged Israel.

He judged Israel ten years. And Elan the Zebulonite died and was buried in Ajalon in the country of Zebulun.

After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Paraphanite judged Israel. He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons who rode on 70 young donkeys.

He judged Israel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Paraphanite died and was buried in Paraphan in the land of Ephraim in the mountains of the Amalekites.

All right, interesting, isn't it? I mean, just to really get your blood kind of pumping and you get excited and you start, you know, your heartbeat gets a little bit elevated when you read about these three judges.

[5 : 37] And it's so exciting, so thrilling. I think Hollywood should make a movie, you know, about these guys. Don't you think? Well, maybe not.

Of course, Hollywood's pretty good at adding things that really weren't there to begin with. And so I guess they could do something with at least the names of these guys anyway. I don't know. Now, I'd have to admit to you that I was tempted again, like I was with, you know, the other minor judges back there in chapter 10, tempted to just kind of, you know, maybe give a brief honorable mention for these guys and then just move on.

And, you know, it's pretty tantalizing to move on to the next judge who is Samson. And we'll spend quite a lot of time on Samson because the book of Judges tells us quite a lot about him and he was certainly an interesting character.

And so tempted just to kind of, you know, here are these three guys, nothing really said about them. Let's just, we'll just move on and go on to Samson. And, you know, they're just not anything to work with here.

I mean, this is tough for a preacher and a teacher. You know, you've got to have something that's really neat and something great and something substantive and, you know, to develop any kind of a sermon.

[6 : 57] And otherwise, you need to have to take these guys and just put a lot of filler in there and take up your time and that way you don't feel ashamed when you draw your paycheck. You know, I'm just kidding.

Just kidding. Just kidding. There really isn't much to work with here, is there, in these few verses. You know, these guys, they lived and they died and they were buried.

That's just about all there was to it. And, you know, also, most of my favorite sources. You know, I don't have all this stuff rolling around my head.

I read a lot and do a lot of research. And I read as many commentaries as I can get my hands on and even sermons. And I have some favorites I like to go to and see what their perspective is on certain passages in the Bible.

And every preacher does that. And so I go to my favorite sources, both scholarly sources as well as some practical sources. And barely even any mention of these three guys.

[8 : 03] In fact, many of them don't even mention them at all. I look at the list of commentary or sermons that were preached by one of my favorite preachers.

And they're all the judges. And you get down to chapter 12, verses 8 through 15. And they just skip it all together and they just move on to Samson. And so I'm thinking, well, maybe that's what I need to do.

You know, just forget these guys. Well, the problem is God mentioned them. That's the big hang-up here. Big barrier to, you know, this notion to just kind of move on.

You know, skip over these guys. God mentioned them. They're mentioned here in the book of Judges. Though, you know, God mentioned, though I cannot help but wish that he had said a little bit more.

About them. But he didn't. It's just all we have. So, we're left then, or I'm left in my preparation with this question. What can we learn from these three minor judges?

[9 : 07] Minor judges. And I've come to this. That there are three things. Three principles, really. That I think we can learn.

Now, these three principles are not taught here in any deliberate way. All right? I've got to give a little disclaimer here. You know, don't find anything else, say, in the New Testament where Paul

referred back to, you know, Ibsen and said, you know, this is what we learned from this. You don't have any kind of connection there. Nothing in the passage itself. And no corollary passages in the Old Testament or New Testament that might help you find out what the author's intent was.

What he wanted us to learn from these guys. And so, the principles I think we can learn here are implied here. And they're just part of what I think we should understand when we consider the text and what has been said about these three judges.

All right, so here they are. There are three principles that I believe we can learn. And they're really very simple. The first one is perhaps the most obvious.

[10:28] And though you may not have thought of it, possibly you did think of it. But here's the principle. You do not have to accomplish great things for the Lord. That is, in the way we would define great things.

You just have to be obedient and faithful. Now, that's a principle that we can learn from these three guys. You don't have to accomplish, you know, astounding, wonderful, great, magnificent things for the Lord.

You just have to be obedient, faithful. And if God is, you know, desires to use you to do something great, something notable, something that would, you know, cause people to say, God did a wonderful thing through him or through her.

Now, God can do that and does do that and has done that through a number of people all throughout history. But there are very few because the fact of the matter is most of us, in fact, I might even dare say all of us in this room here, have not accomplished great things like a Gideon did or like even a Jephthah did or some of the other judges or some of the other people, notable people in the Bible or even people in history.

God has not done those things through us, but it's not required. So you don't have to accomplish great things for the Lord. You just have to be faithful and obedient. You know, as I've already said, we're told so little about these three judges and it is as if the author of the book of Judges mentions them just in passing.

[12:16] I mean, you have kind of that sense. In fact, the other minor, the first two minor judges, Tola and Jair, they're mentioned and then we have kind of an interruption, kind of an in-between, this Jephthah.

And we have a lot about Jephthah. And then we come back to these three guys. It's like the author is just kind of, you know, just kind of in passing. Here are these three. They lived and they died and they were buried and this is where they were buried and so forth.

And so it seems that way when we read that. And really the only information that we're given here that pertains directly to their ministry, that is the ministry of judgeship, the only thing that's mentioned here is the length of their service.

Do you notice that? If you're looking for something that God wants you to know about these judges that pertains to their actual judgeship, then all you have is their length of service.

Ibsen, verse 9, judged Israel 7 years. Verse 11, Elan, judged Israel 10 years. And then verse 14, Abdon, judged Israel 8 years.

[13:27] And that's it. That's it. Just their years of service. Now, as for some general information about them, we're told where they were born.

We're told what tribe they belong to. We're told a little bit about their families, except for Elan. We're not even told anything about his family.

And then we're told where they were buried. And that's it. That's it. And yet, God called each of them to a task.

Right? Or they would not have been mentioned here. And they were, all three of them, faithful and obedient to the Lord. Now, I have read some commentators, Bible commentators, who seem to suggest that these three were, you know, miserable failures.

They didn't do anything. They didn't accomplish anything. But I just don't see that. You'd have to assume something here based upon silence. I think they were just faithful men.

[14:35] And they just did what God called them to do. And it just happened that in their lives there wasn't any big thing, any notable thing, no big enemy, no big battles to fight and so forth.

They were just faithful men. And so the fact that there was nothing notable to mention about their service is not important. And here's kind of the application.

You know, there are a lot of people today and over the course of history, a lot of people within the kingdom, within the church, who are striving to be great men of God or great women of God, when really we ought to just be striving to be men of the great God or women of the great God, see, and not worry about being great men or great women.

And if God is pleased to allow you and to raise you up to a place of a broader influence and a broader greatness and accomplishment, then that's his business.

We ought to strive to just be obedient and faithful to the Lord. You do not need or have to accomplish great things for the Lord. You just have to be obedient and faithful.

[15:54] That's lesson number one that we can learn. And again, it's implied. There isn't anything here that the author gives us that says, this is what God is saying to you here. We just understand that from the fact that God just simply mentioned these guys.

And then it's implied that they were faithful men. And that's what God requires. Then a second principle that we can learn from these minor judges is this.

And this you might not have noticed. But here's the principle. It's never too late to serve the Lord. It's never too late to serve the Lord.

And I think this is interesting. I want you to notice what the Bible says about each of these judges. Look at verse 9. Then Ibzan died.

Verse 11. Elan judged Israel 10 years. And what? He died. And Elan the Zebulunite died.

[17:01] Verse 14. Abdon judged Israel 8 years. Then he died. There's a pattern here, isn't there? Then Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Parathanite, died.

All right? Now, what can we say about each of these judges? We can say, well, they all three of them died. All right? But I'm looking for something a little more than that. They each served the Lord to the end of their lives.

Right? To the very end, they served the Lord. But we can say more than that. We can say that Ibzan and Abdon, and we don't know this for sure about Elan because there's just nothing in here about it, but we can say that at least Ibzan and Abdon, that these men served the Lord late in life. They served the Lord late. And I think we can assume Elan did as well. I mean, he judged Israel 10 years and died. I think we can assume that was late in his life.

All right? He served the last 10 years of his life. The others served the last few years of their life.

Now, how can we say that? How can I come to that conclusion?

[18:18] Because the Bible gives us some conclusive evidence to that effect. What evidence? The size of their families. I mean, it's just really clear, isn't it?

Ibzan had 30 sons and 30 daughters. That's big family, isn't it? I mean, you just don't get a big family like that overnight.

Abdon had 40 sons. I mean, he went 10 better. Of course, he doesn't say anything about daughters, but he had 30 grandsons.

That's a big family. See, these guys had been around a while. Had to have. And here they are in their twilight years.

What are they doing? They're serving the Lord. I think there's a lesson here. And they served the Lord to the very end, didn't they? The last years of their life.

[19:18] That doesn't mean that they, you know, had no devotion to Yahweh God, did not worship Him, did not serve Him the other years of their lives. But God called them to a big task late in life.

Late in life. And so, what can we say about that? Well, we can say that God never gives up on us. There's never a time when we, you know, should just kind of kick back and say, well, you know, I've served the Lord in my day and now it's time for the younger people to take over and do things. Have you ever heard anybody say that? I certainly have. You know. God might call the oldest among us to serve Him in a special way.

And we never, ever, it's never too late to serve the Lord. That principle, I think, is pretty clear. We just glean this from what is said about these three judges.

[20:27] All right? So here are the two principles so far. You do not have to accomplish great things for the Lord. You just have to be obedient, faithful. And it's never too late to serve the Lord.

And then here's the third principle. We all have different gifts that God uses to accomplish different purposes among His people.

And we see something different about each of these judges. Something distinctive about them. Even though what is said seems a little weird.

For example, here's the first one. Ibzan. I think we can say from what is said here in the passage, this little bit that's said, we can say that Ibzan was a unifier.

He was someone who sought unity among people, the people of God. Verse 9 tells us that Ibzan had 30 sons.

[21 : 29] All right? But it says something a little bit more about them. It says that he brought in 30 daughters from elsewhere for his sons.

Now, why would we have that? Why would he do that? I mean, what's going on here? Elsewhere, in fact, most translations translate this outside.

So he brought in some wives for his sons. Brought them in from outside of his community, outside of his tribe. It does not mean that he brought them out from outside of Israel, like from the pagan nations.

It just means that he brought them in from outside of his tribe to marry his sons. Ibzan arranged marriages. Now, this is not a lesson on arranging marriages.

All right? That's not the principle. It's what this accomplished. That's the principle. He arranged marriages for his sons, and those arrangements reached across the borders of surrounding Israelite tribes.

[22 : 38] And this would, what? It would accomplish, it would develop peaceful and meaningful relationships between the tribes of Israel. It brought unity during his time of judgeship.

National unity. That's the idea behind this little bit, this little blurb about Ibzan. And he did the same thing with his daughters, only kind of in reverse.

In verse 9, And he gave away 30 daughters in marriage. So he brought daughters-in-laws in to marry his sons, and he sent his daughters out to marry Jewish men, Israelite men, in other tribes within the nation of Israel.

God used Ibzan to unify the children of Israel. That's a principle. Second, Elan was a maintainer. He was a maintainer. All right, Ibzan was a unifier, and Elan was a status quo guy.

[23 : 57] A maintainer. I mean, how would you sum up the judgeship of Elan? Elan. He lived, he died, and he was buried.

I challenge you to find anything else in there about Elan. That's all there is to it. He lived, he died, he was buried. There's nothing more to add.

Nothing paramount happened. Nothing earth-shaking, shattering happened. No big change, no big rearrangement, no big leadership in a different direction, no cleaning of house, no, nothing else happened.

He just, he just keeps things going. He just keeps everyone happy. I know we're assuming some things here, but there's nothing to add, and so I think the idea is, he just maintained things for 10 years.

Kept things going as they were, and I said, status quo, and really that's the idea. And sometimes we need people to be good at maintaining the status quo.

[25 : 16] See, we got this idea that the status quo is always wrong. It's not always wrong. Now, it can be wrong if it goes beyond the point that God would want it to go, and it becomes, you know, kind of creates a stagnation, and all kinds of other things can happen, but we need seasons of status quo.

We need it in our own lives personally. We need it in the church. There's time. Let's just, let's just keep things maintained for a time. Some people are gifted, you see, to fight the battles and win the peace, and then others are gifted to maintain the peace for a time until, by God's providence, you know, there's a battle again to be won.

And so, what are we talking about here? We're talking about different gifts that these men had that God used for different purposes. You know, there's Ibzan, and he was a unifier, and God uniquely equips and calls people in the body of Christ to be unifiers, to be peacemakers.

I mean, have you ever known anyone who just seemed to have that knack, you know, to bring peace, to bring unity, kind of a special gift? And then we have Elan, who was a status quo.

He's a maintainer. He maintained things. The peace that had been accomplished, he maintained that for a season. And we need people like that as well. And then, thirdly and finally, there's Abdon.

[26 : 52] And Abdon was a communicator. He was a communicator. Verse 14 tells us, I think, something very interesting.

He had 40 sons. Now, that's not unusual to have that recorded. I mean, we have that all the time. We've had that in Judges. We had that just in our text here.

How many sons, how many daughters a person had. But then he says, in 30 grandsons, that's going even a little further into the more unusual. And then this part, who rode on 70 young donkeys. I mean, you know, at first, you know, we might be thinking that is a bunch of useless information. 30 sons, or 40 sons, and 30 grandsons, and these 70 people rode on young donkeys.

70 young donkeys. Now, here's what I think we should understand about this. Abdon's sons and grandsons served really as an extension of himself.

[28 : 10] When it says they rode, that means they rode everywhere on these things. 70 donkeys. They rode around the kingdom. They represented Abdon, his sons, his grandsons, they rode on these donkeys.

And they rode throughout Israel keeping the people connected with Abdon's leadership. I think is the idea here. You say, well, why donkeys?

Well, they rode on donkeys, not horses. Because horses always signify strength and force. They were used by soldiers and they were used in battle.

They were part of the war machine. But donkeys, signify peace. Peace time. And they served, they were used for travel.

And they were used for mail, for communiques, for communication. They, when you saw the donkey coming, a rider on a donkey, you were not afraid.

[29 : 14] This was not some warrior coming to conquer. If you've got a bunch of guys riding on donkeys, you're not afraid of them. soldiers didn't hop on their donkeys and go off to battle and conquer people and lands.

And so, this was the way that it was done. And so, you see, Abdon made sure everyone was informed. He made sure everyone was on the same page, is the idea.

And we need people like that in the body of Christ. You know, people like that to lead that way.

People who make sure that the people of God's people are informed and on the same page.

Now, we're not talking about gossips, okay? Some people, you might be thinking, well, that's just my job. I do that all the time. I tell people, what's going on? Did you know that so-and-so was...

That's God's word. I'm talking about that. All right? We're talking about people who know the vision and serve as communicators to reinforce the vision of the church.

[30 : 26] God raises up people like that in the body of Christ. So, it doesn't just come from the pulpit. It comes from God's people in the church who are extensions of the pastor and they reinforce the vision of the church, the focus of the church, the purpose of the church and people who know how to communicate the doctrine of the church and people who know how to inform the church of the needs in the church and all kinds of other points of communication.

you know, so, you know, I want to close at this point and so, maybe, here's what we ought to be thinking, well, maybe these minor judges were not so minor after all.

You know, maybe they're pretty important and these minor judges could possibly teach us a thing or two about what God expects from us service.

And that's not great and paramount things about service and the fact that there really is no retirement in Christian service and to teach us about what maybe he's gifted us to do and how we can use that within the body of Christ and we go way beyond just these three things represented by these judges here.

Thank you.