

More Minors.

Judges 12:7-15.

Sunday afternoon, August 14, 2011.

I. Historical setting.

- A. Having dealt with Israel's enemy in the East, the Ammonites, under the leadership of Jephthah, and before dealing with Israel's enemy in the West, the Philistines, under the leadership of Samson, the author of Judges turns his attention briefly to three "minor" judges, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.
- B. If you have never heard of them you are not alone in the body of Christ. Even if we have heard their names mentioned before, the memory of having heard these names is likely to fade fast from our conscious minds for the lack of historical (and therefore interesting) detail.
- C. Only the barest of biographical information is given us about these three: Place of origin, family structure (though not for Elon), years of ministry; death and burial place. None of this is so exciting for us that our memories should latch on to it.
- D. We should not conclude from this that these were boring people or unimportant people, nor that nothing of importance happened under their rule.
- E. The sizable families of Ibzan and Abdon shows that they were men of considerable social and political standing and influence in Israel.
- F. What, if anything, can we learn from the bare bones approach Scripture takes to certain historical figures (and they may well have been important figures) in the history of salvation, and the rather elaborate treatment others get?
It may be this, that the story of the Bible is not about man, whether regarded as important or unimportant; whether written about elaborately, or given only a bare bones kind of mentioning. The story of the Bible is about God's saving work in the history of salvation; in, among, and through His people.

II. A lesson in contrast and mystery.

- A. The history of Jephthah and his only daughter is sandwiched in between the accounts of Jair with his 30 sons (and an unnamed number of daughters) on the one hand, Judges 10:1-5, and the story of Ibzan who had both thirty sons and thirty daughters on the other hand.
- B. Of all the Judges, only about Jephthah and Ibzan are we given information about them having daughters.
 - 1. Jephthah had one daughter, and she was his only child, and he loses her.
 - 2. Ibzan had thirty sons and thirty daughters, and he keeps them all, at least past the point of them getting married.
- C. We see here how different, and even contrasting, the pathways are along which God shepherds His children.
- D. There is mystery here, and also danger.
 - 1. Mystery;
Why the difference, why the contrast?
 - 2. Danger;
The danger of biographical studies of characters in the Bible leading us to believe that what God did for them He will do for us too; the way He

dealt with and provided for them is the way He is going to deal with us and provide for us. We need to be careful about drawing such conclusions.

- E. We come across this mystery in God's providence more often in the Bible.
 - 1. Why were Joseph and Mary divinely warned about leaving Bethlehem before Herod's murderous troops arrived, but not the other moms and dads with little boys? Matthew 2:13-23.
 - 2. Why was Peter miraculously delivered out of prison the night before he was to be killed, yet there was no angel for James who met his end by the sword of the same Herod? Acts 12:1-10.
- F. There is a lesson to be drawn from this:

Our carnal natures demand from the Lord to know what is going on; we want an explanation, an accounting, from the Lord.

But grace and faith are of a more humble disposition; they are willing to wait; willing to be baffled by the manifold wisdom of God, and they are willing to bow and worship God during such times.

III. The accounting of time periods in Judges.

- A. Three ways of designating time periods in Judges occur:
 - 1. The number of years Israel served a certain foreign oppressor. The mentioning of these time periods occurs with the life of each major judge in the book of Judges.
 - 2. The number of years the land enjoyed rest under a certain judge. Mentioning of this occurs up to the ministry of Gideon.
 - 3. The number of years that a certain judge served Israel. The mentioning of this only occurs after the ministry of Gideon.
- B. May we from 2 and 3 above conclude that through ongoing apostasy and unbelief Israel forfeited her divine and spiritual rest? May we conclude that even though life went on with a certain sense of normalcy, something was profoundly lacking in her national life, that being the divine and spiritual quality of rest?

Should it surprise us then that when we come to the end of the period of the judges, and the beginning of Samuel's ministry that we come upon "Ichabod" (The glory has departed from Israel) 1 Samuel 4:21?
- C. Should it surprise us, given what we have done with the tangible institution representing the Lord's rest in our midst (the Lord's day or Sabbath day), that the national life of our own nation is perhaps best characterized by the word "unrest.?"

IV. The deaths of the judges.

- A. The deaths of four of God's servants is mentioned in these few verses. They remind us of Genesis 5 where it is said of our fathers prior to the flood: "And he died." And so there will be a tombstone with our name on it as well.

This points us to the fact that no matter how great or small a servant of God may be, his life will draw to a close. This should make us look for a Greater Judge; One who has conquered death, reigns and rules by the power of an endless life, and whose kingdom knows no end. So Judges points us to Christ.