

Ibzan - Elon - Abdon

12:7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Judges 12:8-15

(between Jephthah and Samson)

12:8 And after him **Ibzan** of Bethlehem judged Israel. **12:9** And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. **12:10** Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem. **12:11** And after him **Elon**, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. **12:12** And **Elon** the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. **12:13** And after him **Abdon** the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. **12:14** And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. **12:15** And **Abdon** the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. **13:2** And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. **13:3** And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold . . .

three minor judges?

Zechariah, Hosea, Jonah, and others are unfairly called minor prophets, even though they wrote much. (Zechariah, for instance, has more chapters than Daniel.) But there truly are some “minor judges” about whom very little is recorded. Three of these are Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, who served as judges over a period of 25 years after Jephthah and before the much better known Samson.

Although there are several chapters about Samson, the final judge in the Book of Judges, there are only two or three verses each about Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. (See on the left.) Moreover, a full-length Hollywood film was made about the life of Samson (and, of course, Delilah) which went on to become the most successful movie of 1950. For obvious reasons, there will never be a major movie made about these three minor judges.

Yet, it is not a bad thing that these three little-known judges have been ignored by Hollywood movie makers!

Nor, of course, should the peace that the land of Israel enjoyed while these judges were in charge be viewed as a negative. Notice that *after* the last of the three died (12:15) the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord and were troubled by the Philistines for forty years (13:1).

negatives

Naturally, if Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon were well known, they would not be included in this “neglected people” series. But *why* do we know so little about them? Most of the lines below are attempts to answer this basic question.

Many of the lines are very easy to judge. For instance, all you have to do to determine the correctness of point A-1 is to count the number of verses about each judge on the previous page. Likewise, to judge line A-2, reading Hebrews 11:32 quickly shows which of the judges are mentioned in that chapter.

Several lines (A-3, B-5, B-10, C-5, C-10) require some familiarity with the main characters in the book of Judges. Even so, it should not take long to skim through this action-packed book to make a decision on each of these points.

Many of the negatives below are about the lack of action in the lives of these three judges. Unlike other judges, apparently they did not need to fight foreign enemies. Ibzan and Abdon were apparently very active at home, however, since they had many children. (Lines B-2, B-6, C-13, and C-14 are about this.)

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon are little known.
A-1	() There are only two or three verses on each of these judges.
A-2	() They are not mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. (See Heb. 11:32.)
A-3	() We know far more about Samson. (See chapters 13-16.)
B	() Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon did not do very much.
B-1	() They did not judge for very long.
B-2	() They had too many children (12:9, 14).
B-3	() They probably were wealthy land owners.
B-4	() There is no evidence that they traveled very far.
B-5	() They did not fight the Philistines like Samson did (13:1).
B-6	() Ibzan's children must have taken up a lot of his time (12:9).
B-7	() There was no compelling reason to write much about them.
B-8	() Each of them died peacefully and was buried in his home area.
B-9	() It was a peaceful period. So they did not need to do much (13:1).
B-10	() The Spirit of the Lord did not come upon them (13:25, 14:19).

positives

Judging Israel for seven to ten years involved doing many things, even if the passage does not spell out exactly what the work was. **They were in charge of judicial matters of course, but they also had to take care of their families as well.**

Interestingly, the passage does not tell us anything about how these three judges were chosen. Various factors were probably involved, and several worksheet lines (B-3, C-1, C-7) deal with the possible factors. It is clear, however, that they did not inherit their position like kings and priests usually did.

How do we know that these three “minor judges” did a good job? Most of the lines below attempt to answer this question. Of course, some arguments are stronger than others. What do you think is the strongest point in their favor?

One of the weakest lines is C-14, about the families of Ibzan and Abdon. Their many children must have been borne by several women though it does not directly say so. According to Psa. 127:5 a large family can be a blessing from God. Is this why their polygamy is not clearly exposed? (Cf. 8:30-9:57.)

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon were good judges.
C-1	() The people probably trusted them.
C-2	() Nothing bad about them is reported.
C-3	() They were like Tola and Jair (10:1-6).
C-4	() They were like good pastors (1 Tim. 3:2-7).
C-5	() They were probably less rash than Jephthah.
C-6	() It does not say that they misused their authority.
C-7	() According to 12:8-15, they were chosen by God.
C-8	() It was better to be a peacetime judge than a war hero.
C-9	() They were judges (12:8,10,11,13, 14) rather than kings.
C-10	() They were not violent like Abimelech. (See chapter nine.)
C-11	() The people were not evil during their 25 years (10:6, 13:1).
C-12	() They probably had to deal with internal problems within Israel.
C-13	() Their children may have helped them judge Israel (10:4, 12:14).
C-14	() It does not directly say that Ibzan and Abdon were polygamists.
C-15	() It probably was good that none of them judged more than 10 years.

conclusions

worksheet answers

Most worksheet lines in this study are either correct or partly correct. Some are controversial, however.

First, since we do not know much about what these judges did, it may be correct to say that they did not do much (B). (They were not involved in fighting the Gentiles like Samson, B-5.) Even so, judging Israel for seven, ten, and eight years must have involved a lot of time and effort.

Second, since there is no direct criticism of these three men, they seem to have been good judges (C). However, it is obvious that Ibzan and Abdon had several wives and / or concubines since they had many sons (C-14). Though having many children was viewed as a blessing from God (Psa. 127:5), polygmy was not in line with God's original plan.

Since God is the giver of life, who are we to say that Ibzan or Abdon had too many children (B-2)? Nevertheless, it is clear that they did have too many wives, like Gideon in chapter eight. (Also see Jair in 10:3-5.)

Moreover, the passage does not directly say that the Holy Spirit came upon these three men (B-10) or that they were chosen by God (C-7).

So what about line C on Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon being good judges? There is still more to say about this.

Like Samson, they were used by God to help build up Israel even though they were not perfect. Elon may have been the only one of the three who was not a polygamist. Even so, Ibzan and Abdon seem to be honored, rather than criticized, for their large families (B-2, C-13).

Like these three judges themselves, Israel was, of course, not without sin during the 25 years that they judged the nation (C-11). However, there was apparently less sinful living in the sight of the Lord—especially less blatant, open idolatry—during those 25 years than during the following 40 years of oppression under the pagan Philistines. (See 13:1.)

As is sometimes the case today as well, the people may have been better than their leaders. Wealth enables sinful excess. So polygamy was mostly practiced by wealthy landowners and leaders (B-3).

Finally, we are challenged here to think about the relationship between God's sovereignty and personal responsibility regarding one's family.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
