

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

Time simply would not permit reference to these so-called minor judges in the sermon today. But they belong with Jephthah, rather than with Samson, who follows. Part of the reason Judges includes verses 8-15 is to complete a literary structure that emphasizes the tragedy of Jephthah's vow.

In this structure, Jephthah (and his 1 daughter-whom he loses) lands at the center. On either side of him is a deliverer with 30 sons. His immediate predecessor was Jair (10:3-5), whose 30 sons rode on 30 donkeys and had 30 cities. Ibzan, the first judge *after* Jephthah, also had 30 sons. Just to rub it in a little, he also had 30 daughters. And 30 daughter-in-law.

Moving one more judge distant, before Jair came Tola (10:1-2). We don't know anything about his children. If he had any, they aren't mentioned. Ditto for the second judge after Jephthah, Elon. Perhaps the progeny of these two judges weren't equal, so the author makes them balance the literary structure by not mentioning the offspring of either one.

If we move one more judge further back in history, we arrive at Gideon and his 70 sons (for he had many wives-8:30). And, at the other end, third from Jephthah, is Abdon and his 40 sons. Oh! And 30 grandsons! Again, the selection by the author to make the structure work. Include the grandsons, then it makes 70.

These judges are only "minor" in that so little is delivered to us about them in Scripture. In their day they may have been every bit as important as Jephthah or Gideon. But Judges isn't really a book about them. It's about God. It's about Christ. The lives of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (and Tola and Jair) are condensed to just a few verses in order to underscore Jephthah's tragedy. Which, in turn, shapes Christ for us.