

Judges 10:1-5, 12:8-15

Introduction - First of all, these passages are great examples of why it is necessary for preachers to preach through books and not simply land on their favorite passages. When was the last time you heard a sermon on Elon the Zebulunite? Second, while all of the Word is profitable (2 Tim 3:16-17), it is certainly true as well that all of the Word is profitable in differing degrees and ways. God was not simply filling space in listing these judges. But, these passages require that we pull away and consider their placement in light of the greater passages and the whole book to make sense of what they are to teach us.

The Structure - Gideon had seventy sons. The last in this list of minor judges, Abdon, also had seventy sons (or sons/grandsons). Connect Abimelech to Gideon and then move inward in this list. Tola and Elon both judge Israel, but there is nothing about children - no dynasty. Then Jair and Ibzan, both with thirty sons. In the center of this list is Jephthah who had no sons at all. Sevens and threes are often signs of accomplishment and completeness in the scriptures. Considering Gideon's temptations, what we may see here is the vacillating struggle to establish a pagan-like dynasty, not a godly kingship. This is only reinforced when we consider that, like Gideon, having so many children would be an indication of having many wives, just like the pagan kings (and we also see Ibzan giving his daughters away in particular marriage-alliances while bringing in daughters 'from elsewhere' for his sons).

No More Rest - The Lord granted rest after the work of the first judges (3:11, 30, 5:31, 8:28). Now, beginning with Abimelech, there is no mention of rest for the people. Life goes on, but it is as if because of the constant apostasy of the people, the divine gift in time has been lost. There is no rest; there is only more human activity.

Emphasis on Burials - With these judges, we know nothing of their battles. They are described as judges, but we hear nothing of the people crying out for, nor the Lord sending them as, 'yashas' - as deliverers, saviors. But beginning with Gideon, we are told where each judge is buried. Gideon was buried in Ophrah. Tola in Shamir. Jair in Kamon. Jephthah in Gilead. Ibzan in Bethlehem. Elon in Aijalon. Abdon in Pirathon. Why?

Memorials - Burial places are memorials. The graves were reminders of the temporary nature of these judges' deliverances or reigns. Because of sin, there is no real complete deliverance from the power of sin and death. It points to the need for a final Deliverer, who would save us from death itself.

Mercy, Again and Again - The fact that God is pointing out these reminders is, in itself a thing of grace. And consider, over and over, in spite of all their sin and rebellion, God keeps raising up judges to rescue and protect and lead His people. He didn't have to. But He did - and that is grace.

Efficacious, if only for a season - 10:6 and 13:1 both point to the fact that after those judges ruled, Israel fell back into idolatry. This tells us that, during their administrations, they were used by God to keep the people from idolatry. They were effective means, given by God, to lead the people in righteousness.

The Context of the Book - "*In those days there was no king in Israel...*" (Judges 21:25). If Samuel, or someone in Samuel's day is writing, he is contrasting the lack of a godly king to the final rule and establishment of David as king of Israel. God does finally give the people a king who is 'after God's own heart'. But David's own family will lead the people back into sin. At long last, though, God has given His people the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Struggle, the Longing, the Grace - This is the story of the church, and the work of God in each member of the body of Christ as well.

Consider the Church - She is established in grace. She is brought up in the grace of the Lord. She struggles with temptations to idolatry. God brings reformation. She grows. She falters again and again. God continues to raise up 'judges' for her that lead her again out of false-teaching and practices. And what shall we expect in this struggle - where will it end? Unity, perfection and glory (Eph 4:11-16). A beautiful bride for the Father's Son (Rev 21:2).

Consider Yourself - You were brought into this world by His grace. You were brought to Christ by His grace. You look back over your life, or just this last week, and you see a long history of sin and struggle. You have faltered here and there over and over again. God has brought you 'judges' in your life, in His Word preached, in the discipling by friends and loved ones, in the singing to one another. He has lifted you up again and again - and it is all grace. Where will it end? Perfection and glory (Phil 1:6, Rom 8:32). God will not leave you, just as He did not leave Israel, with "Abimelech" being the last word. Your last word will not be 'failure' or 'sin'. He has given us 'Jesus' - 'yasha' - salvation. And after all of your struggle with sin and failure and falling, He will give you 'Jesus' - 'salvation' - for all eternity.