

JUDGES OF PEACE (Judges 12:8-15)

“Only the dead have seen the end of war” George Santayana

This quote has been attributed to Plato although it has never been discovered in any of his works. It was as a matter of fact, written by the pragmatic Santayana in his book ‘Soliloquies in England’ in 1922. What does this have to do with the judges of Israel or peace you might ask? The answer is that, as a whole, the people who inhabit God’s creation will experience war in one form or another until Christ’s return, whether it be spiritual or worldly. With that in mind, between the judges of Jephthah and Samson the nation of Israel had the opportunity to experience approximately 25 years of uninterrupted peace and prosperity with relation to other nations. This is not to say that nothing was happening behind the scenes, as we know that the Lord is always at work. As we will see later on in our next papers, this is merely the calm before the storm, but it should certainly be appreciated that God gave them the opportunity to rest after the struggles during the time of Jephthah. Some may say that because there is next to nothing to say about these three minor judges that they were insignificant, but I certainly disagree considering that all scripture is profitable, this passage being no exception.

First, let us begin with the judge Ibzan of Bethlehem. This gentleman was the 11th judge of Israel and led the Jewish people for seven years beginning somewhere around 1080 B.C. The name Ibzan means “splendid” in the Hebrew and he is a far cry and probably a welcome change from the previous judge of Jephthah. While our previous judge was all business and certainly sought to do the will of the Lord, Ibzan was a judge that lacked drama and sought peace rather than war. In Matthew 5:9 Christ tells us of the blessings of the peacemakers who will be called the sons of God. Some have connected Ibzan with Boaz of Bethlehem considering they lived around the same time and both were from Bethlehem but I do not take that stance. Boaz famously betrothed Ruth and there is no mention of a vast amount of children. While Ibzan is also from Bethlehem, we need to take into account that there are actually two Bethlehems, one in Zebulun and one in Judah. Boaz was from Judah and while there is no mention of a village of kids from Boaz, Ibzan raised thirty sons and thirty daughters, and the judge to follow him will be from Zebulun so it would only make sense that Ibzan is also from Zebulun. This is merely speculation and not a matter of salvation so I appreciate the Lord’s grace and mercy if I am wrong.

What also needs to be discussed concerning Ibzan is the children. This gentleman’s 60 kids are a glaring contrast to the previous judge who only had one daughter. Not only did Ibzan’s predecessor only raise one child, after his ill-advised oath she was forced into a life of abstinence. Here we have a gentleman who was most likely a polygamist and miraculously had an equal amount of sons and daughters, 30 of each. He married off his daughters to men

outside the family, this is not an incestuous reference, the meaning is that he married them off to men outside of Zebulun. He also brought in women from outside of the tribe to marry his sons. What is the relevance to this? Peacemaking is the relevance. This tells me that first, he did his job as a father, raised his children and was involved in their lives. Second, it tells me that he not only had but sought after a peaceful relationship with people outside of his region. Again, a stark contrast to what we saw from the previous generation. For his 30 sons he brought in women from outside of the region to wed them, so I come to the same conclusion when it comes to good relationships and peacemaking. Considering he was a judge of Israel and was involved in the lives of his children, it should be safe to say that his sons and daughters were tied to spouses who also had a relationship with the Lord, a lesson we learn about being equally yoked. After his time of judgement and peace, Ibzan passed away paving the way for the next judge, Elon.

When it comes to Elon, not Musk, we have another judge of peace who is filled with even less information to go on than Ibzan. What we know is that he hailed from Zebulun and judged for ten years. That is it. How do we expand upon that? Well, at this point I have decided to focus on the land of Zebulun considering we have successive judges from this region and they were also instrumental in the battles with Deborah and Barak. We know that Zebulun was Jacob's tenth son, the sixth born to Leah. She deemed him to be a blessing and later on this tribe was one of six tribes chosen to stand on Mt. Ebal and pronounce curses that forbid certain behaviors. Amongst these behaviors were carving idols, withholding justice from aliens and widows, and those who do not uphold the words of the law, along with many others (Deut. 27:15-26). Later in the book of Numbers we learn that those from Zebulun failed to follow God's will and did not drive out all of the Canaanites as He had commanded. They later turned back to God and as I already mentioned, fought valiantly for Deborah and Barak.

That brings us to this point so, how is any of this relevant to this judge? Well, he is from a tribe that has had a relationship with God from the beginning (nearly) and has seen a myriad of ups and downs both personally and concerning Israel as a whole. The tribe of Zebulun has been instrumental in the growth of Israel so I suppose it seemed fitting to the Lord that a judge from this region take the helm. It was time for peace and harmony in the land and Elon was the sort of man to help Israel keep that peace.

This brings us to our third and final judge of this section, a man by the name of Abdon. Here we have one more judge of apparent wealth considering he had 40 sons and 30 grandsons (or nephews) who rode on 70 donkeys. This gentleman judged Israel for eight years and was buried in Ephraim which was one of two tribes of the descendants of Joseph. We may also reason that Abdon was a polygamist considering his vast number of children, a trend that we have seen with spiritual leaders of Israel. I stand to reason that during this time the people of Israel are beginning to grow weary with, not necessarily following the Lord, but with a bit of a hum drum lifestyle in comparison to their neighbors. I believe that intermingling is taking place with the Assyrians, Babylonians and Philistines and that their influence is beginning to

take Israel's focus away from the Lord. Granted there is nothing in the text to indicate such a thing, however I feel that with respect with what is to come, in the near future, the people of Israel are beginning to fall away. With that said, this is not necessarily a reflection on the judgement of Abdon. For all intents and purposed we are given the impression that he was a judge of simplicity and peace much like his last two predecessors. I would like to believe that he used his wealth and resources, to include his large family, to proclaim the word of the Lord to the region. It is not up to him whether or not the word is accepted but I do feel that he was worthy in the eyes of the Lord and after his eight years of judgement died as a noble stead.

As I mentioned during the time of Abdon, I feel that this is when the Israelites began to fall away from the Lord. They had experienced 25 years of peace and prosperity with no interference from their neighbors. With that said, the judges can only keep the peace for so long and it is entirely up to the individuals to accept or deny the will of God. At the end of the day, the Israelites will grow weary with simplicity and servitude (which is what Abdon means in the Hebrew), and fall victim to the Philistines. Their will be struggle, their will be strife but there will also be deliverance. The children of the Lord will have much to endure in the 40 years following Abdon because only the dead have seen the end of war.