

“God’s Honorable Mentions” (Judges 10:1-5; 12:8-15)

The judgeship of Jephthah (Judges 10:6–12:7) is framed by a brief mention of the five so-called “minor judges” (10:1–5; 12:8–15). For several reasons, their role in ancient Israel seems to have differed from the other judges:

1. Each is mentioned only briefly in a notation containing primarily genealogical information.
2. Missing is any indication that they led Israel in battle against a foreign enemy.
3. The length of time which each served is given in an exact number of years rather than as a round number.¹

A brief biography of the five Judges follows:

- **Tola (Judges 10:1–2):** A bare minimum is recounted about Tola. He saved Israel and judged for twenty–three years.
- **Jair (Judges 10:3–5):** Jair had thirty sons who rode thirty donkeys and controlled thirty towns. He judged Israel twenty–two years.
- **Ibzan (Judges 12:8–10):** Ibzan, from Bethlehem, judged Israel seven years. He had thirty sons and daughters.
- **Elon (Judges 12:11–13):** Elon, from Zebulun, judged Israel ten years.
- **Abdon (Judges 12:14–15):** Abdon, from Ephraim, judged Israel eight years. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode seventy donkeys.

The ministries of these minor judges teach two lessons, one negative and the other positive. Negatively they did not change any of the previous problems in Israel but seem to have maintained the status quo. The fact that several of the judges fathered extremely large families points to their living like the eastern kings of their day. This is further evidence that Canaanite culture was influencing the Israelites adversely. Positively these accounts indicate God’s gracious blessing of His apostate people despite themselves. McCann writes, “Elsewhere in the Old Testament, children are gifts from God [Ps 127:3]; they indicate God’s blessing. So amid the increasing chaotic and violent stories that indicate the Israelites are abandoning God, the two lists of minor judges suggest that God is not abandoning the Israelites (see Judges 2:1, where God says, ‘I will never break my covenant with you.’).”² Furthermore, for forty–five years, the people of Israel enjoyed peace and security, thanks to the leadership of Tola and Jair. This fact suggests that God is working behind the scenes in and through the family and political institutions to promote stability and prosperity.

¹ Paul Wright ed., *Joshua, Judges*. Shepherd’s Notes (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 76.

² J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 271.