

Meet Shamgar

(Leader Guide)

An introduction to the unique characters of
The **OBSCURE** Bible Study Series

This lesson is provided free as a PDF file for those who want to examine first-hand the nature and characteristics of the **OBSCURE** Bible Study Series. This is the Leader Guide version.

From Book 1

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Shamgar

the lone warrior judge

Occurrences of "Shamgar" in the Bible: 2

Themes: Courage; Involvement

Scripture

Judges 3:31 *After him [Ehud] was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel. ESV*

Judges 3:31 *After Ehud, Shamgar son of Anath, became judge, He delivered Israel by striking down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. HCSB*

Judges 5:6-7 *"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. 7 The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. ESV*

NOTE: This is part of Deborah’s Song of celebration (Judges 5) that she and Barak sang in response to their victory over the Canaanites.

The Context

Judges were men or women raised up by God to deliver Israel from her enemies. They were often charismatic leaders who would rally Israel to defeat or drive out invaders. They were God’s agents to free Israel during times of oppression from neighboring kings, city-states or nations.

Shamgar is one of the "minor" judges because very little is said about his tenure as a judge. Shamgar has one little verse in the Bible – that’s it! He kills 600 men with a stick and he only gets one verse. Our challenge is to see what we can learn from one verse.

Shamgar became a judge after Ehud and before Deborah, or during the time of Deborah. Shamgar’s story is almost humorous because his one verse appears at the end of the chapter describing another judge, Ehud. The chapter ends with this verse and then Chapter 4 begins describing the time of Deborah. Nothing more is said of Shamgar and his life. I find this both strange and interesting at the same time.

During the time of Ehud, "the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord . . ." (Judges 3:12). Ehud rescued Israel and the land was at peace for 80 years until he died. Then Shamgar became a judge, killed 600 Philistines and delivered Israel again. The first verse of Chapter 4 leading into the story about Deborah and Barak, tells us that the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The Scripture then tells about the exploits of Deborah. Shamgar’s service to Israel is not mentioned again in any way, except for the reference in 5:6-7.

What Do We Not Know?

How, when, where, and why Shamgar killed 600 Philistines is basically unknown. Yes, he used his oxgoad, but that doesn’t tell us much, other than he turned a farm implement into a weapon. It is not clear why this verse is inserted here because no details are provided to give us any hint as to what happened.

Therefore, let’s begin by listing what we do not know:

***NOTE to LEADER:** The purpose of this list is to provide context to the participants. If you start your discussion talking about this list of what we don’t know, it will likely disrupt or derail the flow of the discussion questions. If participants start raising these questions, encourage them to wait until the end.

1. We don’t know over what period of time these 600 men were killed. If they had all been killed in one big battle one would assume that more details of Shamgar’s strength, courage, or cunning would be provided.

2. If God had assisted Shamgar in some way, one would assume that the author would want to preserve that fact in order to give God the credit, but nothing is said about how the 600 were killed.

3. It’s possible the circumstances of how these men were killed is an embarrassment to Israel, so the writer simply mentions the situation and provides no details. Maybe they were killed against the wishes or instructions of God, or maybe they were killed in a manner not pleasing to God.

4. It’s not clear how this many men could be killed with an oxgoad. It’s possible one could beat someone to death, but it would take some time and the enemy would surely kill or capture the attacker in the process. It’s possible the oxgoad had been sharpened and used like a spear, but even that would not explain how 600 men could be killed.

5. Given the nature of the weapon and the number of men killed, one might conclude that the Philistines were drugged or speared to death in their sleep. But even that sounds incredible.

6. The most likely scenario is that these men were killed over a long period of time in many battles or individual encounters.

7. We don’t know whether the 600 were killed when only Shamgar was present or whether Shamgar was involved in a number of battles with other soldiers helping him and he received the credit because he was the leader.

8. We don’t know if the large number of kills is the result of extraordinary courage and bravery or the result of deception, shrewdness, and lies.

9. We don’t know how Shamgar became a judge and if he attacked the Philistines on his own or if he was following God’s orders and using God’s battle plan.

10. We really don’t know how significant the killing of the "600" Philistines is because we don’t know any of the circumstances. It might have been in insignificant little battles over a period of months (perhaps many months). The author simply states it at the end of Chapter 3 and then moves on to the story of Deborah.

11. We don’t know how long this campaign allowed Israel to live in peace, if at all.

12. The entire situation with the Philistines and the deserted road and villages may have been only a local situation, and so wasn’t worth providing any more information.

WE DON'T KNOW MUCH, DO WE?**What Do We Know?**

Based on the Holman translation (HCSB), we know eight facts:

- 1) Shamgar was a "**judge**,"
- 2) Shamgar "**delivered**" Israel,
- 3) The "delivery" **did not last** long,
- 4) Shamgar killed **600** Philistines,
- 5) He used an **oxgoad**,
- 6) Shamgar was the **son of Anath**,
- 7) The main **roads were deserted**, and
(travelers kept to side roads)
- 8) The **villages were deserted**.

Discussion Questions**A. Historical Context:**

A1. What is the general timeframe of the period of the Judges?

- *After the death of Joshua and before the appointment of Saul and then David as King
- *During the period of the judges, from about 1380 B.C. - 1050 B.C., the government of Israel was a loose confederation of tribes gathered about their central shrine, the ark of the covenant.

A2. What was the major problem of those days that was re-stated throughout Judges like a catch phrase?

- *Judges 17:6 *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* ESV

A3. There was a pattern of behavior in those days that kept repeating itself. What was it?

- *THE PATTERN: People were faithful – people sinned and rebelled against God – God disciplined the people by sending oppressors – people cried out to God – God raised up a deliverer (judge) – the Judge delivered the people from the oppression.

A high moral and religious point at the beginning, but that was followed by a downward spiral of sin and rebellion so that by the end of the book Israel looked just like the pagans they were living among – defiled, unfaithful, and wicked.

The book demonstrates what happens to men when they can do whatever they want → moral and spiritual chaos. It shows what happens when God's people allow the world to dictate their lives rather than God. Israel almost forgot Yahweh

A4. What did the people demand from God? Why?

- *A King! Other nations had a King
- *Judges 8:22-23 *Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and*

your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." 23 Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you." ESV

*JUDGES: Without a human king/leader to guide them, the people tended to rebel and fall into worship of false gods time and time again. "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). These were chaotic times. To punish the people, God would send foreign nations or tribes to oppress the Israelites.^{1 (Nelson's)}

B. Examination of eight facts (what we know):

B1. Shamgar was a "judge."

B1a. What was a "judge"?

*Judges were men or women raised up by God to deliver Israel from her enemies. They were often charismatic leaders who would rally Israel to defeat or drive out invaders. They were God’s agents to free Israel during times of oppression from neighboring kings, city-states or nations.

These judges or leaders would rally the people to defeat the enemy. As God's agents for justice and deliverance, they would act decisively to free the nation from oppression. But the judges themselves were often weak, and results of their works were short-lived. The people would enter another stage of rebellion, only to see the cycle of oppression and deliverance repeated all over again.^{2 (Nelson's)}

NOTE: There are 15 judges identified in the Bible. Six of them are considered minor judges because little is said about them and they may have been active during times when other judges were also serving. The judge did not necessarily rule over the entire area of Israel but often over a specific smaller geographic area which I suspect was the case for Shamgar. The other minor judges are Tola (10:1-2); Jair (10:3-5); Ibzan (12:8-11); Elon (12:11-13); and Abdon (12:13-15). The well-known judges are Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

B1b. How do we know Shamgar was a judge? If I said that Shamgar was not really a judge, how would you respond?

- *It is never stated in many translations (KJV, NASB, ESV, NIV) that Shamgar was a judge
- *the Hebrew text for 3:31 does not say he was a judge.
- *Holman appears alone in its translation.

B1c. Was Shamgar appointed or raised up by God?

- *Don't know!
- *There is no evidence that he was appointed by God.
- *He just appears in the text between Ehud and Deborah.
- *3:31 does not include any of the normal information about judges, for example: divine calling, tribal affiliation, geographical details, duration of rule, and place of burial.

B1d. What is the best evidence that he was a judge?

- *He is mentioned in the text after Ehud
- *Text says he "delivered" Israel
- *Historically thought of as a minor judge
- *He performed a heroic feat
- *He is mentioned by Deborah (but, he is associated with a non-judge, Jael). This may be stronger evidence that Shamgar was not really a judge.

B2. Shamgar "delivered" Israel.

B2a. The text says that he "delivered" Israel. What do you think that means?

- *What did he deliver them from? Unsafe deserted roads?
- *Probably freed from Philistine domination.
- *Probably just a local operation versus leading all of Israel.

B2b. Is there any evidence that Shamgar acted in any ruling or leadership capacity?

- *No, there is no evidence that Shamgar did any ruling or leading – just a mighty warrior who killed 600 Philistines.

B2c. The judges were to be rescuers and leaders. What characteristics would you want in a leader if you lived in those days?

- *Peace and safety
- *These were strange days because there were no longer strong leaders in charge after Moses and Joshua.
- *Result was: the people did whatever they wanted.

B3. The "delivery" did not last long.

B3a. Do you think Shamgar’s reign as a judge was successful? Why? Why not?

- *PRIOR VERSE: (3:30) says that after Ehud’s victory over the Moabites, they had peace for 80 years. Then first verse after 3:31 says the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord.
- *Probably not – Judges 5:6-7 . . . *they were deserted in Israel, until I, Deborah, I arose, a mother in Israel.*

B4. Killed 600 Philistines

Many assume this verse implies there was no army, no support troops, no chariots, etc. Do you think Shamgar did this alone or was he part of a group? Why? Why not?

- *600 is a round number; probably not meant to be specific
- *Feat almost requires God (if against Philistine warriors) and there is no mention of God

B5. With an oxgoad.

B5a. What is an oxgoad?

*The goad used by the Syrian farmer is usually a straight branch of oak or other strong wood (usually about 10 feet long) from which the bark has been stripped, and which has at one end a pointed spike and at the other a flat chisel-shaped iron. The pointed end is to prod the oxen while plowing. The flattened iron at the other end is to scrape off the earth which clogs the plowshare.^{3 (ISBE)}

B5b. How do you kill 600 people with a stick?

- *oxgoad converted to weapon
- *possibly not killed at one time but over a period of time in many battles/confrontations
- *possibly Shamgar had help and because he was the leader he got all the credit
- *He may have had God's supernatural help
- *Maybe killed the 600 in their sleep
- *Some special circumstances: ambush, Philistines incapacitated in some way;

B5c. Why an oxgoad? Why not use a real weapon? Normally the weapons used in a battle would not be mentioned. Why do you think the oxgoad is mentioned in this verse?

*They had no real weapons – Philistines had confiscated them.

*1 Sam 13:19, 22 *Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears." . . . 22 So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them.* ESV

B6. Son of Anath

B6a. If you simply read this text, what do you naturally assume that "son of Anath" means?

*Family

Shamgar being the "son of Anath" invites further consideration because *Anath* is not a Hebrew name.

HOME LOCATION: Some believe Anath is a contraction of *Beth Anath*, an ancient fortified city of the Canaanites. If this is true, then Anath may be the place, location, or city from which Shamgar came, and not his father. This would be similar to Moses saying, "I am a son of Israel."^{4 (Nelson's)}

WARRIOR: Anath is also connected with the Phoenician and Canaanite goddess Anat, who was worshipped in Egypt. She is mentioned in monuments of the 18th Dynasty, coupled with the war-goddess Astart. The goddess Anath (the sister and consort of Baal) appears in Ugaritic literature as the goddess of war as well as of love. Thus, the phrase "Shamgar ben Anath," could possibly mean "Shamgar, the warrior."^{5 (ISBE)}

B6b. If either of the above is true, what is one obvious conclusion?

*Shamgar is not an Israelite

B6c. If Shamgar was not an Israelite, and maybe not even a follower of Yahweh, what might this explain?

- *the reason that Shamgar gets very little mention concerning his exploits in Israel
- *He was not part of the family of God, the Israelites.

B6d. Were there any "rules" about judges that would prevent a foreigner from acting in that capacity?

- *Apparently not. The only rule was the sovereignty of God
- *God raised up the judges
- *We really don't know for sure that God appointed Shamgar as a judge!

B6e. Do you think it makes any difference that Shamgar may have been a foreigner and not a Hebrew?

- *No, the judges were not necessarily spiritual leaders. They were warriors who freed Israel from oppression.
- *The priests would have been the spiritual leaders.
- *God could have used Shamgar simply as an instrument to help keep the main road safe etc. and he was not really involved in leadership.

B6f. Does being a foreigner or a pagan have any special implications here?

- *It was the foreigners (or native inhabitants) who were oppressing them.
- *God may have used one of their own against them.

B6g. If Shamgar was a foreigner and a pagan, why would he choose to act as a deliverer for Israel? Why would God choose and use a foreigner?

- *Try to shame Israel. They could not do it themselves, thus, must rely on a foreigner
- *Gentiles are not necessarily all evil and bad . . . except the Canaanites.
- *It was a minor skirmish in God's overall plan and Shamgar was available.

B7. Main roads and villages deserted

This is the only hint of information as to why Shamgar killed the Philistines and it is only an assumption because Deborah mentioned the problem in her song. But the problem also existed during the days of Jael.

B7a. Do you think this is a big enough problem to warrant one warrior killing 600 Philistines?

- *Hard to say
- *If truly deserted the problem had to be significant.

B7b. Given what you know about where the Philistines and Israelites settled, other than dangerous conditions, why else might the roads be deserted?

*The Israelites had originally taken the high country.

B8. Interesting speculation:

The limited information about Shamgar has led to a great deal of speculation because it raises a number of problems for Old Testament historians. The entry at 3:31 almost seems like an afterthought. Maybe the author, after seeing Deborah’s reference in her song (5:6), went back and inserted 3:31 in order to make the text complete.

B8a. Do you think the lack of information is because Shamgar was a "minor judge?" If not, then how do you explain?

*No – arguing that Shamgar was only a minor judge does not change or explain the lack of information

*Maybe: There was something embarrassing about the story that the author did not want to repeat

*Maybe Shamgar was a Canaanite

*Maybe the killings were not sanctioned by God

*Maybe it was ineffective in solving the bigger problem with the Philistines and there was overlap with Deborah.

*Maybe Shamgar was unknown to later editors, but since Deborah mentioned, it is inserted with a heroic feat.

*Some scholars identify the similarities between the heroic feat of Shamgar and other military exploits in the OT (e.g., those of the "mighty men" of David in 2 Sam 21:15-22; 23:8-12, and especially Samson's slaughter of a thousand Philistines at Lehi with the jaw-bone of an ass, Judg 15:14), leading to the conclusion that Shamgar was inserted in the list of judges and supplied with a suitable heroic feat in order to provide some background for an otherwise unknown figure (or at least unknown to the later redactor who inserted 3:31.^{6 (ISBE)}

*SPECULATION: Several writers have challenged the Biblical account on the following grounds: that in Judg 5 no mention is made of any deliverance; that the name "Shamgar" resembles the name of a Hittite king and the name "Anath" that of a Syrian goddess; that the deed recorded in Judg 3:31 is analogous to that of Samson (Judg 15:15), and that of Shammah, son of Agee (2 Sam 23:11 f); and lastly, that in a group of old Greek manuscripts and other versions, this verse is inserted after the account of Samson's exploits. None of these is necessarily inconsistent with the traditional account. Nevertheless, they have been used as a basis not only for overthrowing the tradition, but also for constructive theories such as that which makes Shamgar a foreign oppressor and not a judge, and even the father of Sisera. There is, of course, no limit to which this kind of *interesting speculation* cannot lead.^{7 (ISBE)}

C. Conclusion

C1. Since we have so little information and if we believe nothing happens by accident with God, then there must be some good reason why the story of Shamgar appears here. What do you think that could be? If this story were not included in the Bible, what would be the impact? If your answer is "nothing," then why is the verse here? Why do you think this verse is here? What is your thoughtful view?

C2. What did you find most interesting or curious about this story?

C3. How do you see God at work in this story?

*If someone kills 600 of the enemy with a stick – he would have needed God’s help!

D. Application

Too little is known to make many definitive observations. But the story does afford the opportunity for some interesting and challenging sermon topics:

1. God will use anybody He needs to accomplish His purposes.
2. If you are called on to "fight" for God, use what you know and what you have available to you.
3. The battle can be won despite incredible odds if God is on your side.
4. Do you need to pick up your oxgoad and get in the battle?
5. What oxgoad has God given you? What are your spiritual gifts? You could be using them as a weapon!
6. Is it time to attack the oppressor in our midst?
7. If God was looking for another Shamgar, how would He find you? Are you ready? Are you available?

D1. Which one of the above do you like the best and why? Do any of the sermon subjects nick at your heart? Is God speaking to you in any of these topics?

D2. What "oxgoad" has God given you? What does God want you doing with your tools? Is it time for you to pick up your oxgoad?

D3. If you did decide God is nudging you, what would that look like?

E. Challenge Exercise:

Chose one of the preaching topics listed above and develop a three point sermon outline. An example for #4: "Do you need to pick up your oxgoad and get in the battle?"

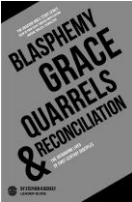
- 1) What are you presently doing for God?
- 2) Are you making a difference?
- 3) What legacy will you leave?

Coming in 2020



Meet Shamgar, Jethro, Manoah & Hathach

This book of four lessons is provided at a reduced cost in order that students and leaders can get a first-hand experience and introduction to the *OBSCURE* Bible Study Series.



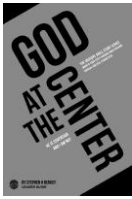
Blasphemy, Grace, Quarrels & Reconciliation

This book presents such characters as Joseph of Arimathea, Joanna, Ananias, Hymenaeus, and Cornelius (one of the centurions). It illustrates the nature and challenges of life as a first century disciple. Life has real challenges, but they can be overcome.



The Beginning & the End

This book has four lessons from Genesis and four from the book of Revelation. It covers such topics as creation, rebellion, grace, worship, and eternity. It illustrates how God is leading us to worship in the Throne Room. This book will be a great introduction to "The Story of the Bible" (28 lessons) to be published in 2021.



God at the Center

This book touches on the virgin birth, worship, the sovereignty of God, prayer, compromise, and trust. In all these stories and events we find God. He is there in the shadows or openly orchestrating our lives. Regardless of the situation He is at the center of our lives – a sovereign almighty God.



Women of Courage

This book examines the lives of Jael, Rizpah, the woman of Tekoa, Tabitha, Shiphrah, and Lydia. We find these women exhibiting great courage and faithfulness. God used them in some amazing ways doing some serious business in their lives that we can use for encouragement and spiritual leadership.



The Beginning of Wisdom

In this book we find courage, loyalty, thankfulness, love, forgiveness, and humility. It is clear that our personal character counts – it is important to God. It is important to make good decisions because all our choices have consequences. Building your life on wisdom is critical in standing firm in your faith. We don't want to follow the example of Demas who deserted Paul for the values of the world.



Miracles and Rebellion

This book contrasts the stories of biblical characters who rebelled against God and those who trusted and believed. God hates sin and loves to heal the faithful. The rebellion of Korah, Haman, and Alexander are included to compare with the healing stories of Aeneas, a slave girl, and the cripple at Lystra.

End