

Meet Shamgar

(Personal Study 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 Personal Study 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?

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

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

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

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

B1. Shamgar was a "judge."

B1a. What was a "judge"?

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?

B1c. Was Shamgar appointed or raised up by God?

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

B2. Shamgar "delivered" Israel.

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

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

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

B3. The "delivery" did not last long.

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

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?

B5. With an oxgoad.

B5a. What is an oxgoad?

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

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?

B6. Son of Anath

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

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

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

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

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

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

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?

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?

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

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?

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?

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?

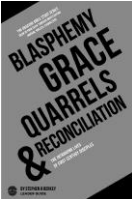
3) What legacy will you leave?

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.



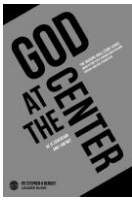
Blasphemy, Grace, Quarrels & Reconciliation

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