

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

*God Sends Help:
A Study from Judges*

Lesson 4: Shamgar Saves Israel

Bible Text
Judges 3:31

Memory Verse

“Those who know Your name will put their trust in You. For You, O Lord, have never left alone those who look for You.” (Psalm 9:10)

Word List

Canaanite: a person born in the land of Canaan who lived on the land that God gave to Israel before Israel captured it after the Exodus
equip: to give someone the skills or tools needed for a task
oxgoad: a pointed stick used to get cattle to move; a farmer's tool

I have never heard a sermon or a Bible study on Shamgar. His story is told in only one verse: Judges 3:31. We do not know much about him. But what we do know is amazing! He lived over 3,000 years ago but we are still talking about him today. The Bible tells us that he saved Israel.

There are many people mentioned in the Bible. We know a lot about some of their lives. We know very little about many others:

Rahab (Joshua 2), Ittai the Gittite (2 Samuel 15), Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 35:35). There are even more people whose names are not recorded in the Bible but whose name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27).

Shamgar Saves Israel (Judges 3:31)

31 After Ehud, Shamgar the son of Anath became the leader. He killed 600 Philistines with a stick used to push cattle, and he also saved Israel.

We learn from our one Scripture verse that Shamgar became a leader after Ehud. He was the son of Anath. He killed 600 Philistines with a stick normally used to push cattle. And he saved Israel.

We can also learn a little bit more about the times he lived in if we look at Deborah, the next judge. She says that “in the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath...the wide roads were empty. Travelers walked on the side roads. Country towns were empty” (Judges 5:6-7a).

While this does not tell us any more about Shamgar's leadership, it does tell us something about the times. Those were dangerous days. It seems that no outside power ruled over Israel, but the roads were

not safe. It was not safe to travel from town to town. If you did travel, you would stay hidden and off the main roads. Thieves would often attack travelers, stealing their things, hurting or even killing them. Deborah also says the Israelites did not have many weapons or shields: “No battle-covering or sword was seen among 40,000 in Israel” (Judges 5:8b).

What else can we find out about Shamgar, son of Anath? His name seems not to be Jewish. Scholars think his name was Hittite or Hurrian. Both were from an area that is now part of Turkey or northern Iraq. His father’s name, Anath, is the name of a **Canaanite** goddess of war.

A few cities in Israel that had been captured from the Canaanites were named after this goddess. There was a town called Beth-anath in Galilee, and another town called Beth-anath in Judah. It is possible that Shamgar was from one of these two towns.

The Philistines were a small nation to the southwest of Israel, bordering the tribes of Judah and Dan. They were small but were more advanced than the other nations of the area. Plus, they had better weapons.

An **oxgoad** was a stick to push cattle. It was a common farming tool. Usually, oxgoads were about 8 feet (2.4 m) long and about two inches (5 cm) thick at the bottom. One end was pointed. Often, that end would

have a metal spike. The other end of the stick may have a shovel-blade to clean the dirt off of the plow.

With nothing but a pointed stick, Shamgar was able to kill 600 Philistines and save Israel. He may have killed 600 Philistines in a single battle. Or it might have been over a period of time. We do not know, and we do not know how his victory saved Israel.

There are many things we do not know about Shamgar. But there are several things that we can learn from him and his life.

Things to Remember

There is an old saying, “God doesn’t always call the **equipped**, but He will always equip the called.”

Shamgar was equipped with a pointed pole. The Philistines had a well-equipped army. The Philistines had the best weapons and armor in the area. It does not seem like a fair match to put Shamgar against the Philistines. We do not know if Shamgar had an ox or if he was a farmhand working for



A farmer is using an oxgoad to move cattle.

someone else. But God called him and what Shamgar had was enough.

God often calls those who are working at one thing to come and do something else. Moses was tending his father-in-law's flocks when God told him to free the Israelites from slavery. David was tending his father's sheep when Samuel came to honor him as the next king. Peter was washing his nets when Jesus told him to become a "fisher of men." One day, it seems that Shamgar was using a stick to push cattle, and the next day he was using that stick to save Israel.

Shamgar was equipped with a pointed stick. But he was also equipped with the Spirit of the Lord. First Samuel 17:47 tells us that "the battle is the Lord's." Shamgar lived

before Samuel was born, but he knew the same God that Samuel knew. He knew that "God can do all things" (Luke 1:37).

All that he had was a pointed stick and his trust in God. His trust in God and his desire to save Israel gave him the courage to face death when he fought those 600 men. We do not know if Shamgar was confident that he would survive the battle or if he was willing to die in service to his God and the people of God. Either way, he was willing to surrender everything for God.

Let us listen for God's call in our lives. Even if we are in the middle of doing a job, let us be prepared to follow God.

Judges 3:31

31 After Ehud, Shamgar the son of Anath became the leader. He killed 600 Philistines with a stick used to push cattle, and he also saved Israel.

Judges 5:1, 6-7a

1 That day Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang this song:

...6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the wide roads were empty.

Travelers walked on the side roads.

7a Country towns were empty.

...8b No battle-covering or sword was seen among 40,000 in Israel.

Things to Think About

1. Shamgar had a pointed stick to use to serve God. What has God given you in order to serve Him?
2. Shamgar seemed to know that God was all that he really needed. Is God all that you need or do you seek help from something else?
3. Shamgar offered everything, risking his life to serve God. What do you offer to God? Do you risk everything in His service?
4. What is God calling you to do for Him?
5. Some people's names are written in history, but the most important thing is to know your name is written in Jesus' Book of Life. Is yours?
"Nothing sinful will go into the city. No one who is sinful-minded or tells lies can go in. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life can go in" (Revelation 21:27).