

-Save This Page as a PDF-

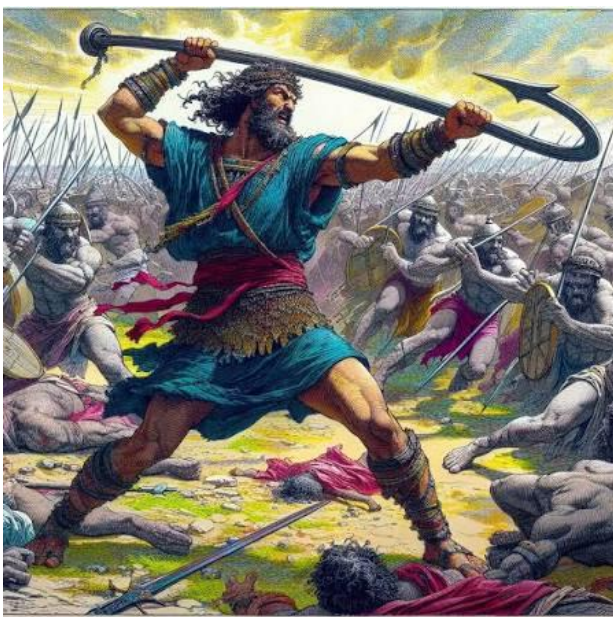
The Third Cycle: Shamgar

3:31 and 5:6-7

The third cycle: Shamgar DIG: How did Shamgar's name show the Canaanite influence on the Jews? What is Shamgar known for? In what ways were Shamgar and Samson similar? What is remarkable about his battle with the Philistines? As far as his judgeship was concerned, what was his association with Ehud?

REFLECT: Between Othniel, then Ehud, and now Shamgar, how has the pattern of how God judged shifted before our eyes? Ha'Shem remains the Judge, and He Himself is the Great Deliverer; but how He judges is up to Him? Have you, your family, or your church taken on a Canaanite lifestyle? How can you change that?

With a total of twelve judges, there were actually twelve cycles, but the author does not detail all twelve cycles, only seven. Shamgar is one of those not detailed.



After Ehud came Shamgar, son of Anath. Shamgar is an unlikely hero. In the time of **the judges**, many would know **Gideon**, some would know **Samson** or **Deborah**, and perhaps even **Jephthah**; but, who in the world is **Shamgar**? These two verses are all that recorded Scripture says about **him**. **He** is the first of **the judges** that are not detailed. **Shamgar** is a Hurrian name, used of a people known in the Bible as the Horites. **He** was **a Jew** who was **the son of Anath**, a name dedicated to the goddess **Anath**. Among the Canaanite deities, **Anath** was the Canaanite goddess of sex and war. The name shows Canaanite influence on **the Jews**. Certain characteristic features of the narratives concerning **the judges**, like **rebellion**, there is no mention that **Isra'el did evil in the sight of ADONAI**; **repentance** and **restoration** are also missing in connection with **Shamgar**. Nor is there any direct mention of any **Philistine** oppression or its duration. The length of time when the land enjoyed **rest** is also missing. **His** is the shortest of all twelve accounts.

He struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. God's instruments of **retribution** seem to have an interesting, if odd, collection of tools. **Shamgar's oxgoad** joins **Ehud's dagger (3:16)**, **Jael's hammer and tent peg (4:21)**, **Gideon's shofars and torches (7:16)**, **the woman's millstone (9:53)**, and **Samson's jawbone** (not **his** but **a donkey's**) **(15:15)**. **Ha'Shem's judges** had plenty of variety. While **Ehud** employed great planning and deception (see [Aq - The Second Cycle: Ehud](#)), **Shamgar** seemed to act almost impulsively. While both required dexterity, **Ehud** relied on stealth to assassinate **Eglon**, while **Shamgar** relied on brute strength to impale **six hundred Philistines**. **He** was a farmer at war. **Six hundred** warriors was a common troop configuration (cf. the **six hundred** warriors sent by **the tribe of Dan** to conquer **Laish** in **18:11**; also see **First Samuel 13:15, 14:2, 27:2**; and **Second Samuel 15:18**).⁷⁹ The **six hundred** may be **Shamgar's** lifetime total, and not a result of a one-time battle. But we really don't know. The Hebrew for **oxgoad** is *malmad*, and was used to urge **oxen** to move forward, and was as much as eight feet long. It was pointed at one end with a metal tip, and had a chisel-shaped blade on the other end for scrapping a plowshare, and so it could be effectively used in place of a spear.⁸⁰ They, like **Eglon**, got the point of the message.

Here was a man who obeyed **YHVH** and defeated the enemy even though his resources were limited. Instead of complaining about not possessing a sword or a spear, **Shamgar** gave what **he** had to **the LORD**, and **the LORD** used it. The few words that are recorded about Shamgar give the impression that he was a man of

persistent courage, which, of course, was born out of his faith in **ADONAI**. To stand his ground against **the enemy**, having only **a farmer's tool** instead of a soldier's military equipment, highlights **Shamgar** as **a brave man** with steadfast courage.⁸¹

He also rescued Isra'el (3:31 NIV). The word **also** connects **Shamgar** with **Ehud**. His judgeship may have inspired after **Ehud's** restoration, but before **Ehud's** death. That is why the historical notation, **after Ehud died (4:1)** continues after the death of **Ehud**, not **Shamgar**. So it might be very well that **Shamgar's** actions occurred within the period of **Ehud's** judgeship. The next **cycle** (see **As - The Fourth Cycle: Debrah**) shows that **he** was a contemporary of **Debrah** and **Barak**, and so may have appeared about the same time that **the Philistines** were beginning to settle in the coastal plain. As a result, **Deborah** and **Barak** are viewed as following **Ehud**, not **Shamgar**.⁸²

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, people avoided the main roads because **they** were afraid of **the Philistines** or didn't want to pay the heavy tolls, **and travelers stayed on back roads**. The situation was that of total destruction of communication and trade. **Verse 7** describes the total lack of leadership in **Isra'el**. **There were few people left in the villages of Isra'el - until Deborah arose as the mother of Isra'el (5:6-7 NLT)**. The theme of these verses is the impoverished, pitiful condition of **Isra'el** under the **Philistine** yoke. They describe the situation in the land prior to **Debrah** and **Barak** rising up and **restoring** the nation. **Shamgar** and **Jael** are viewed as contemporaries, which further demonstrates that **Shamgar's judgeship** came within the same time period as **Ehud**.⁸³

While **Ehud's** deceptive ways are a step down from the heroic **Othniel's**, **Shamgar's** lack of details surrounding **him** clearly signal to the reader the narrator is depicting a downward trend in **Isra'el's** story. While **Ha'Shem** does save **Isra'el** from **her enemies**, **His** chosen means of doing so may not be easy to predict or explain. This trend will only accelerate in the accounts that follow, an acceleration accentuated by the striking links between **Shamgar** and **Samson**, both who contest **the Philistines**, both act alone, and both use an unlikely weapon. **Shamgar** confronts **the Philistines** and successfully delivers **Isra'el**, while **Samson**, the wayward **Nazirite**, constantly courts **Philistine** women and fails to deliver **Isra'el**. Thus, the appearance of **Shamgar** is both positive and negative. On the one hand, **he** is a reminder that **YHVH** uses the most unlikely characters; but on the other hand, **he** represents the loss of nerve among **the Israelites** by the fact

that **he** had to act alone, without **tribal** support.⁸⁴

The dilemma faced by **the Israelites** in the dark days of the judges is not without parallel in the Church today, which is often at the mercy of the world. Dependence on secular business ethics and methodologies has increased in the Church as godliness and genuine spirituality among its leaders has decreased. But a Church that has permitted itself to be squeezed into the mold of the world should not be surprised to find itself held hostage by its enemies. The Lord is under no obligation to those who bear **His Name** in vain, or to those who claim to be **the people of God** but act like **Philistines**. However, **He** remains sensitive to the groaning of **His people** and waits to demonstrate **His** power and **His** grace in freeing them from the tyranny of evil and **their** own foolishness. **ADONAI** is resourceful and often rescues **them** through unexpected agents in spite of **His people** and **their** leaders.⁸⁵

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for being such an awesome **Savior**! You are the Savior of the whole world! Besides you there is no Savior. **Before Me no God was formed, and there will be none after Me. “I, I am ADONAI – and there is no savior beside Me (Isaiah 43:10c-11).** You care so tenderly for your children. **For I am Adonai your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:3a).** The only wise response to one who can predict the future is for all the ends of the earth to turn to you and be saved. **Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God—there is no other. By Myself I have sworn—the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, and is irrevocable: that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear. (Isaiah 45:22-23).** Thank you for being the strength and wisdom behind **Shamgar’s** being **Israel’s savior**. Words cannot even begin to express my gratitude for being **the Savior** of the world. **Yet will I triumph in ADONAI, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17-18).** I rejoice in **You**, my awesome Savior! In **Messiah’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*