

SHAMGAR

Where do I begin with the infamous Shamgar? Quite literally, where do I begin? This gentleman, the son of Anath was given one verse at the end of chapter three, so there is not much information to go with. "After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad; and he also saved Israel" (Judges 3:31).

Should we pick up where we left off, we would take the tail end of Ehud's time as judge of Israel and settle into 80 years of peace and prosperity. We know that during the exodus and post-exodus, the people of Israel have had difficulty staying faithful and focused. A common theme amongst the people has been blessings, apostasy, punishment, cry out to God, He welcomes His children back. I believe that it is safe to say that after 80 long years, the people of Israel had once again lost their way. Should we fast-forward to chapter five, verse six we read "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, and travelers went by roundabout ways." Supposing this is the same Shamgar, we deduct that Israel had lost its way and the nation was falling into disarray. This would lead those outsiders who were not subdued early on (Moabites, Canaanites, etc.) to take notice and seek an opportunity to overtake the land of God's people. So, let us take chapter 3, verse 31 and chapter five, verse six and see what we can deduct.

After the death of Ehud, it is anyone's guess just how long it took for the Israelites to fall away. More often than not, these things are not an instant occurrence, but a progressive act. Christ tells us in Matthew 24:10-13 "And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." If this proclamation by the Son of God could be applied to the Israelites then it is likely that he is speaking from experience. We see that after the death of Ehud, the people of Israel have fallen away. The nation is desolate and lawless which is what we see when people have to use byways to get from point A to point B. They are looking for ways to avoid struggle or disruption.

Back to Shamgar; scholars have surmised that his presence in the book of Judges placed between Ehud and Deborah could be a mistake. Many Jewish manuscripts have him placed after Samson rather than Ehud which could be a possibility. Jews had a way of writing text in relation to topic rather than chronology so, for Ezra it may have seemed fitting to place it between Ehud and Deborah. Other Jewish manuscripts suspect that he was a Hittite because his name is similar to one that was associated with Sangara, a Hittite king of Carchemish. I like this premise, whether it is accurate or not (it is really up for speculation and salvation is not dependent upon the placement of Shamgar). The reason being, if he is a Hittite then it is possible that he was fleeing the idolatry and pagan worship of the Hittites to pursue a God-

fearing land. He has entered the land with a love and fear of the Lord only to discover that Gods people have abandoned their Lord and fallen into idol worship themselves. He is appalled at this discovery and begins to ponder his decision. During this time, the Philistines, who have been a thorn in the side of Israel for years, take the opportunity to infiltrate the land and instill their own government. It is at this time that Shamgar gives out a rallying cry to those Hebrews still loyal to the Lord to rise up against the Philistines. Likely without much of an organized army, I envision Shamgar and his loyal battalion ambushing the Philistines in the night for an extended period of time until they finally pack up camp and return to their land. The legend of Shamgar is spread throughout the land speaking of the God-fearing Hittite that has shown no mercy for those infiltrating Gods land and has struck them down brutally with an ox goad. The Jews are quite anxious to get a glimpse of this incredible man and he uses this opportunity to preach the gospel of God and lead His people back to Him.

Again, I have no idea if any of this is accurate but I do know that Shamgar was a man sent to judge Gods people and had to use brutal force in the process. Following God will not always be pretty with smiles and hugs. Sometimes defending the Lord will take struggle and sweat and that is the moral of this story.