

The Lonely Deliverer

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[0 : 0 0] Verse 31, page 203 of your Bibles. We read after him, after the judge Ehud, after the deliverer Ehud.

It was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox code. And he also saved Israel. It really hardly means me to tell you that throughout the Bible, you know, we come across individuals who appear just for a short, fleeting moment, and then they're heard of no more.

You see that in the Old Testament, you see that in the New Testament. If you remember some time ago, I honestly can't remember when, but some time ago we were looking at the 12 disciples of Jesus.

I think this was in the evening services. And all these disciples were named, of course. And yet, there were some disciples, of course, whom we know next to nothing about their background, and next to nothing about their lives as disciples, next to nothing about their actions as disciples, and later as apostles.

Remember James, the son of Alphaeus? That's all we know about them in detail. Well, Simon the Zealot. Well, we know his nickname. We know, obviously, his political leanings, certainly at one time.

[1 : 2 8] But that's it. And then Judas, son of James. There's only one recorded speech attributed to him. Three men who, we might say, faded into obscurity.

And yet, men by their discipleship, men by their following Jesus, men who showed their faith, men who would stand by Jesus.

Certainly, if you remember last Lord's Day morning, remember when we were thinking of Jesus, when he was addressing the crowd? Remember when he was speaking about feeding on him, taking his flesh and drinking his blood?

Remember when so many people deserted him because of what Jesus was saying? But remember, we read that the disciples stayed with him.

And including these three obscure disciples, along with the more prominent ones, they remained with Jesus. So, you know, these were men, including with likes of Peter and Thomas and so on.

[2 : 3 1] These three men were mentioned already. They, okay, unheralded. And yet, used mightily by God to further God's purposes in building the church, the early church.

And just because an individual isn't accorded pages and pages of description of scripture, doesn't mean to say that he's had no part to play in the work of the kingdom in fulfilling God's purposes.

And that's really by way of introduction to consider this man here, this individual mentioned here, the end of chapter 3 and again in the beginning of chapter 5. Just two little mentions of this individual and then no more.

It just appears for a fleeting moment. Then he's forgotten. But what do we notice? We notice, well, several things we notice, a number of things. He obviously acted in isolation from other people.

He's a lonely witness. No one seems to be supporting him against the enemy. And of course, an enemy, humanly speaking, who would be much, much fiercer and stronger than this individual.

[3 : 45] But this little episode in the life of this, we would say this isolated individual, this man called Shamgar, the more that we consider even this one verse, the more we'll find that this is God teaching us, teaching us about God, teaching us about ourselves in God's service.

You know, even just to bring the bigger picture into this for a moment, you know, apart from very, very few individuals, we're obscure individuals.

Our name is my name, your name is going to be forgotten in the pages of human history. And yet, and yet, within our own fleeting passages of time, our own fleeting existence in earth, God will call you to do work for his service.

God will call you, even so many times, as a lonely witness against the fierce enemy of God and his people.

But you're not to despair. You're not to, you know, sink into some kind of spiritual depression, you know, that sort of argues, you know, what's the point? What's the point? I'm only here for a short time.

[5 : 02] I'm on my own so often against a larger group of those who hate my Saviour, despise God's truth. What can I do for the cause of the Gospel? That's the way you think.

Well, be encouraged from this little, short account of this man, Shamgar. God is so purposed that his name is recorded in Scripture for the encouragement of his people.

To help you to see the power of God. To help you to see God's power in the life even of this individual. And that power exercised for God's glory and for the good of God's people.

So what do we see in this? In this little account of Shamgar, we see firstly a converted man. Now, I think we need to get the context first before we jump straight into that statement.

Because this statement about Shamgar comes at the end of a middling length passage, chapter in Judges. what's the context of this?

[6 : 08] Well, Joshua, Joshua, remember the great successor of Moses, Joshua, who led the Israelites into the promised land. Joshua has now died. And the land's now been occupied by the Israelite tribes.

But there's still enemies to defeat. You see, the problem has been, the problem is, that the work that God had given the Israelite tribes to complete hasn't been completed.

It's not been completed. There hasn't been a full ejection of the local pagan tribes from the land of Canaan. If you were to go back to chapter 1 from verse 27 and following, you can read that.

And you see, because the Israelite tribes had disobeyed God and not fully, not fully driving out these various pagan tribes, these Canaanite tribes, then what happened was that the lure of the false gods of these tribes, the lure was there.

The Israelites were being lured to the false gods of these people. And then they soon worshipped these gods. So much so that the author, the author of this book, the book of Judges, tells us, and you see this refrain repeated again and again, that the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord.

[7 : 25] They've abandoned God for the false gods of the people whom they'd failed to eject from the land of Canaan. And God in His mercy, God raises up judges, these deliverers.

God raises up these individuals to save Israel from their enemies. You see that mentioned at the start of the book. And yet, even in that situation, the people still rebel against the judges, the people can continue in that downward spiral of disobedience, and God will punish them for their following, the false gods, for disobeying God's word.

And that punishment will be through the harassment of enemies. And it's this scenario that we see here, the different names of the judges, the deliverers.

They deliver Israel from enemy oppression. And you notice the context here in chapter 3, the Philistine oppression, these warlike people, one of the great persistent enemies of the Israelites.

It's a sorry state, it's a sorry mess. I mean, the land's been given peace for a certain number of years after the judges defeat the enemies, but then the people return to their evil ways, and then they're oppressed again by their formidable opponents.

[8 : 51] You see the names of the first two judges, Othniel, followed by Ehud, and then this next deliverer, Shagar. I don't know if many of you have heard of this individual, but although maybe we've not heard of him or not heard of him very often, he certainly has much to teach us, much to teach us in our understanding of God's ways, God's ways with his people.

And this little section here has so much to teach us about your and my necessary response to God and obedience to him, particularly when faced with the enemies of God and his people.

This is a man, Shagar, whom God used to save his people, a man, well, this man who was a converted man, and you might think, how on earth do we get that from this verse?

Well, you know, how do we know that Shagar was a converted man? Well, we're not told directly that Shagar followed God, we're not told directly of any particular, you know, acts of devotion that would have emphasized his faithfulness to God.

You know, think of Daniel, of course, we're told of Daniel and his persistent devotion in his act of prayer life, but we're simply given his name and we're given one exploit, one of his exploits against the Philistines.

[10 : 17] But that information is enough. That's all we need and you think, well, how so? Well, the first clue is in his name, Shagar, because that name isn't a Hebrew name, it's not a Hebrew name, it's not an Israelite name like, you know, like Joshua or David, this is a name that's foreign to Israel.

And historians tell us that in all likelihood this name came from the eastern or the area east of Turkey where, oh, you've heard of Armenian people, E-N, R-E-R-M-E-N or I-N, of course, Armenian people, the ancient Hurrian people, okay?

Now, the point is this, not about the Hurrians and so on, but the point is this, at some point in this man's life, in this man's personal past, he was converted. We don't know when, we don't know where, but this man had come into this man from outside of Israel, had come into the covenant community of God's people, he'd come in by faith in the one true God.

He'd left his past behind. He'd come to follow the God of Israel, the one true God. And already this should open up for us, you know, the bigger perspective.

Remember the word that God had given Abraham many centuries before. Look, through Abraham all nations would be blessed. And you're seeing, you know, the developmental fulfillment of that word even in the life of this man, Shagar, even in his name.

[11 : 58] And this is a promise, of course, the promise given to Abraham that, well, you and I can testify to. We are of the nations, the all nations, promised to Abraham.

So, so here's the solitary man, this man from outside of Israel, who's become part of Israel, part of God's people through faith. And he's going to show his faith, he's going to, going to show his covenant faithfulness by attacking the enemies of God and his people.

He's going to show his faithfulness by attacking the Philistines. But before we actually come to that, that fight itself and that victory, let me need to pause for a moment and just reflect on what we've learned so far.

And surely this, maybe simply this, that God will raise up, God will raise up the most unlikely of people from the most unlikely of places to serve him, to serve him and to do so as one of his people.

We mentioned Abraham just a moment ago. Of course, Abraham himself, part from part of the Middle East where in all likelihood are very near where Shamgar had come from. You go to other biblical characters.

[13 : 13] Andy's going to be preaching on Ruth this evening. Well, of course, Ruth was from Moab. She was a Moabite king. Or you go to the New Testament. You go to Mark chapter 7. The woman who met with Jesus, who pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter.

She was a Gentile. She was the Syrophoenician woman from north of Israel. Or think of Paul's missionary journeys. His journeys to the non-Jewish Gentile people.

Well, here's this man Shamgar. He's one of the early, we even say earliest, certainly one of the early non-Jewish converts. Here's a man whose conversion should encourage each one of us.

Each of us who are praying for a particular individual, perhaps, a loved one, a family member, a friend, a colleague at work, someone who lives even in our very street.

Are praying for that person to be converted. Well, be encouraged. Be encouraged even to pray for those who are sowing the seed of the gospel, whether it's in our own land or lands overseas.

[14 : 18] I mean, this man Shamgar would say, trust unto the scene at a time of Israel's spiritual demise. Israel's going through a time of deep spiritual backsliding.

But here in the midst is God raising up this non-Israelite Armenian to save Israel for a particular period of time. And you know, think of our own land, our own spiritual condition, the decay that we see each and every day in our environment.

And there's so much turning from God for idols, the idols of our own creation. And pray that God would raise up people like Shamgar to be used, to be unafraid, to take that stand for truth in the face of so much opposition.

To be those who are faithful in serving the one true God. To take a stand against a world that would seek to stifle the truth and preferring the lies of man-centred idolatry.

Well, Shamgar was such a man, a faithful and courageous individual. And you see that in that next little section. There's one verse in English, there's actually three separate verses in the original language, so that's really what we're doing here.

[15 : 38] We're looking at these three separate verses. And what do we notice in the next little verse he killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox code? What do we see here?

You see a courageous man. And here's the solitary individual, this man of courage, and he's standing before a vast number of Philistines. Now, that's where chapter 5 comes in, because evidently the Philistines have been oppressing Israel so severely that the Israelites are afraid of the Philistines, the tribes are afraid of them.

And that's why we read at the start of chapter 5 when we were reading a little bit of Deborah's song, this female judge, and she tells the sorry state of the country. Verse 6 and 7, In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned and travelers kept to their byways.

Villagers ceased in Israel. In other words, the people are afraid. They're afraid. They're keeping away from the main highways. They don't want to be attacked by the Philistines.

But one man, one man, will take his stand against the enemy. One man is not going to be afraid to step forward and face that formidable force.

[17 : 01] And that's this man, Shamgar. And I think there are a number of points we can take from this, from what we read of his victory over these Philistines. First thing to say, is this surely, that he fights on his own.

He fights on his own and one man against the enemy. One man. I mean, not even Gideon, not even, you know, Gideon with his 300 men against the Midianite army. This is one man.

One man to save Israel. One man to confront an enemy that others had run away from. This is one man, this converted man.

He's going to face the enemy, but of course, he's not going to face the enemy in his own strength. He'll do so in strength of God the Lord. It's you and I. It's you and me.

It's we must face the enemy of our souls. The enemy of the church. The enemy of the Lord Jesus. We're called to confront. Yes, a great power.

[18 : 04] We're called to resist the evil one, but not to rely on our own strength, but to do so in strength of God the Lord. Now, you know, numerically, whether we're talking about ourselves as individuals or as a church, we're small.

We're small compared to the size of so much of the opposition. Many of you will be as one man, even where you work, for example, even where you live at home, even the street where you live.

Remember that old saying, one plus God is a majority. You might be one man, but you're not alone. You might be lonely, but you're certainly not alone.

Why? Because you have Almighty God with you. You are never alone. Not when you're being attacked for your faith. You're not alone when the world ridicules you for being a Christian.

You're not alone when God's law has been trampled on in the name of individual choice. You're not alone. Why? Because God has given you resources.

[19 : 13] He's given you these weapons we were reading off in Ephesians 6. In fact, He's given you a weapon to enable you to fight. To fight. And if only we would use it more often.

We're thinking with the children, the Word of God, the Bible. You see, Shamgar had a weapon that was right beside him. An ox-gord. It wasn't a sword, it wasn't a spear, a such, it wasn't bows and arrows.

I think when we read on in chapter 5 you can see that obviously the Philistines had disarmed the Israelites. That was their policy to weaken the Israelite people.

But Shamgar uses this thing called an ox-gord. And by all accounts it was actually quite a long spear-like implement with a sharpened end of course to prod the ox in so that they would get a move on with pulling the plough.

In other words, this is an agricultural implement. Very fierce looking thing. It was certainly used in farming and it did cause so much damage against humans.

[20 : 19] But I think there are lessons here for us. Even the very little information we have about this ox-gord. Well, if it's an ox-gord then I think we have done fair that Shamgar had some agricultural connection.

It's kept his hand to fight the Philistines. He may well have had a military background but at this point in the story he's using what's available to farmers.

I mean, it's the only weapon that was available to him. I mean, one minute he's been using this implement to go to ox and ploughing the field. The next moment he's using it to defeat the enemy of God and his people.

because even using that one implement is showing that God is in control. That God enabled and enabled his servants to win the victory.

To use what others would have been considering so foolish to use but in the hand of the man of God that was being used effectively and powerfully and victoriously.

[21 : 26] God has given each one of his people. God has given you spiritual weapons to use in the battle and that spiritual warfare against the evil one.

Because every single Christian is a Christian soldier. Every single Christian has been equipped with that armour, the armour of God to fight the devil and to be defended from the devil's attack.

You, I, have the word of God. You, I, have the sword of the spirit to use against all who would seek to damage the church, who would seek to damage the Lord's people, who would seek to rubbish the name of Jesus.

You have what God has placed beside you in that fight against the evil one. And what the world might consider as foolish and as dead, you know is living and active.

It's what we read in Hebrews 4. The word of God is sharper and active, more sharp than any two-edged sword. God has given you the great sword of battle. He's given you his word, the Bible.

[22 : 33] He's given you right beside you. It's like absolutely near you. Use it. Don't neglect it. Use, don't hide the word. Don't, as the children were saying, don't throw it away.

Don't forget God's word. Don't forget that the word is, God's word is more powerful than the most powerful of the enemies that the evil one uses. God has blessed his people with his word.

So use it to the glory of God. Use it when you're called up to fight. You will know that victory that Shamgar knew in his victory over the Philistines.

So what else do we see here? Well, our main heading, he showed courage. He faced the enemy with courage. Knowing that God was with him. Knowing that God was on his side.

See, Shamgar had that faith to believe that what God had provided for him in that battle against 600 of the enemy would be sufficient. Sufficient to gain the victory. It may well have been a makeshift weapon.

[23 : 40] It may even have seemed a rather clumsy weapon to use. It was more for goading oxen than fighting in the people. But Shamgar had faith in God's provision.

Shamgar would face the enemy knowing that the victory is the Lord's. Now, I don't think we need to worry too much about the number that we're given here, the number of the Philistines that Shamgar killed.

You know, in other examples in Scripture of large numbers of men being killed by individuals. But the point surely is this, that we're seeing here a large number of the enemy defeated by one man using a makeshift implement.

What do we see? Surely we're seeing the hand of God in victory. A victory that numerically even would have seemed impossible. All the odds would have been stacked against Shamgar.

but Shamgar prevailing, that one individual prevailing over the 600 Philistines showing that God was with them.

[24 : 47] That God enabled this one man to defeat that large number. I mean, these Philistines would have been equipped with military weapons. They were trained in war. But they were defeated because God helped, God enabled that one man to win the victory.

And it's for you and it's for me to take courage. You know, when we're confronted by what appears to be an overwhelming force, when we see us, we say, just a moment ago, just again and again, day by day, there isn't a day goes by without reading and seeing something about the attacks of the enemies of God against His Word, against His people.

And we might even be tempted at times just to run away, hide, cower, but take heart from Shanga. He didn't run away. He didn't cower in fear.

He had the courage of the believer. He had the courage of the one who knows that the one who's in him is greater than those who are against him. Yes, the media and secular interest groups and politicians and non-believing so-called celebrities might appear to be utterly powerful against the Gospel and against the Saviour.

Remember, God is Lord. God reigns. God is on the throne. The gates of hell will not prevail against Him. So, take heart, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

[26 : 22] Face the enemy. Face the enemies of your Saviour. I know that strength that comes from Him and from Him alone. So, we've seen this converted man, this courageous man and finally this committed man as we see in this final little expression here.

He also saved Israel. Shamgar had fought against the Philistines to save Israel, to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines.

Now, of course, it wasn't a complete deliverance. Of course not. The people themselves returned to their evil ways and the Philistines would resume their oppression. But certainly Israel was given temporary relief from the Philistines and Cursions into their areas.

Shamgar saved Israel for that particular period in Israel's life. He was committed, committed to serve God through the means by which God had given him to fight the enemy, to save Israel, to serve God, to show his commitment to be a witness wherever God would send him.

Now, where does all this lead to? Surely, it leads to Jesus. You know, when we think, you think of the Lord Jesus, then think of his victory.

[27 : 47] Think of his victory over Satan. Think of his victory on the cross. And I do think we can see that the exploits of Shamgar point forward to the Lord Jesus.

Well, think of it like this. In Shamgar's case, one man saved Israel, albeit temporarily. When Jesus came from heaven to earth, he was that one man who saved God's people, not temporarily, but eternally.

And think of the weapon that the Lord Jesus used in that victory over sin, over Satan, over death itself. The weapon that others considered foolish and still regarded as foolish.

What was that weapon? It was himself. Of course, by his offering of himself on the cross, as the children learned when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus using that weapon himself in the victory over Satan. Of course, in his giving of his body and his blood on the cross, he, by his blood, defeated the great power, the power of Satan, the power of sin.

[28 : 58] Jesus conquered his enemies, Jesus conquered our enemies on the cross. Jesus saved. He saved the Israel of God. He saved his church and did so through his total commitment of obedience to his Father's will.

That total commitment to save his people from their sins. And it's by Jesus victory. But you who know him can know victory in your life.

Because if you have Jesus as your saviour, you are equipped with the resources for that fight. Because you have an ongoing battle against the evil one. And like Shandar, you'll have a particular part to play in that battle.

So give thanks that God is using you, you in that battle. That God provides for you all that you need. That you are strengthened.

Even as you look to the Lord Jesus, even as you look to him, the author and perfecter of your faith. So give thanks to God for the recording of this man, Shandar.

[30 : 08] Give thanks for God's word. Give thanks that God is using you, even now who know him, to serve him, to fight for him, to give him the glory.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us for the many times when we do run away in the fight, when we do cower in fear.

Forgive us, Lord, when we lack that courage to face the enemy, your enemy, Satan. Lord, strengthen us, we pray. Give us that courage to know that we can do all things through the one who strengthens us.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to trust in your word, to do your will, to know that the victory is in Christ. Help us, then, we pray, to continue in worship of you now and go before us, we ask, the remainder of this service, the remainder of this day.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 18 on page 21 and we'll sing from verse 29 to 36.

[31 : 22] I trust you'll see the connection of these words with all that we've been thinking. With help from God, I can advance against a troop and write them all. With the aid of my God will give, I can leap over any wall.

29 to 36, the tune is Duke Street. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.