

SHAMGAR

"And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an oxgoad: and he also delivered Israel." --- Judges 3:31

Shamgar was one of the judges of Israel. The office of a judge in that age was not to administer justice in the ordinary way. It was rather to act the part of a "saviour," one who accomplishes a deliverance on the foundation of righteousness. He was to lead the people to penitence, not only to sorrow for the past, but to reformation for the future. His duty was to see that the law of God be kept by the people as the only secure foundation for a lasting peace. It is easy for God to work deliverance for any people when His law is kept. When that is not done, He cannot deliver.

In Judges 3:31 we read of a deliverance which God wrought for Israel by the hand of Shamgar. The biographical details concerning him are very meager, but they have much to teach all those who are trying to stand and work for God in the world. Shamgar provides us with an illustration of: --

I. Victory in Dark Days.

In Judges 5:6 we are told that in his days "The highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways." That means that the people were cowed and broken. They were afraid to show themselves. Timidly they went about their work. Enterprise, courage, and hope were dead. Surely this teaches us that no matter how dark and how difficult the days in which we live, we need not despair of God's cause. Shamgar did not, and neither should we. It is common in many Christian circles today to stress the unprecedented difficulties of our time. It could be argued that much of this kind of talk is exaggerated, but even if it is not, let us remember that no day is too hard for God to do his work. Instead of being depressed for the challenge of the times, let us be inspired by it as was Shamgar.

II. Victory Against Great Odds.

Shamgar was one against six hundred. This is one of the most singular and astonishing battles in the history of the world. If Shamgar had been situated where the foe could only come one or two at the time it would not have been so wonderful, but he was in the open field, literally surrounded by six hundred desperadoes, who were bent on plunder and death. It gives us some idea of what pluck can do for a man when he is fired with a love of home and country. There is something wonderful, almost miraculous, in the strange battle and unparalleled victory. I wonder how he could muster courage to face so many, and how he escaped when surrounded by such a multitude. I wonder, also, that when the Philistines saw that they were being slaughtered at every blow, and that they had no power to injure their mysterious antagonist that they fought on and stood their ground until the last man was slain. It only shows that men may have courage in fighting on the side of evil without a particle of truth or righteousness to inspire them; that they will sacrifice their lives on the altar of a bad cause as well as a good one.

In the light of the tremendous odds against which Shamgar fought, we are reminded that numbers do not mean everything with God. Sometimes we boast of having twelve million Baptists. But what really counts in Christian work is our relationship to God. A minority really with Him can work miracles. A majority out of touch with Him will be spiritually ineffective.

III. Victory Through An Obscure Man.

We know very little about Shamgar. He is one of the minor figures in the scriptures. He reminds us of the principle which Paul sets forth in I Corinthians 1:26-29:--

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise, men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."

God never selects a lazy or idle man when he is choosing a person to do some noble work. He promotes none but busy men. Shamgar was plowing when the Philistines came upon him. It speaks well of him that he had heart to plow at such a time for the whole country was thrown into great fear and discouragement. Few men had courage enough just then to plow. Such men as this humble, laboring man is an inspiration.

God always has a man for the hour and frequently He finds him in some utterly unexpected place. In Shamgar's time the old people were probably recalling Ehud and bemoaning the fact that he had no successor. So we are apt to recall the giants of bygone days and lament the poverty of our own times, but God has His man for today we may be sure.

IV. Victory With Unimpressive Weapons.

Shamgar did not consider whether he was equipped for attacking the Philistines, but he turned on them from the plow with swift indignation. He achieved the deliverance of his people by means of an ox-goad. The instrument of his assault was not made for the use to which it was put. The power lay in the arm that wielded the goad and the fearless will of the man who struck for his birthright, freedom -- for Israel's birthright, to be the servant of no other race. And Shamgar's ox-goad was sufficient when the power of God was behind it. We may not command much in the way of weapons. Our talents, our means, and our equipment may all be scanty, but if what we have is yielded, God can and will use it. Think of what God did by means of Moses' rod; think of what Shamgar did with an ox-goad; think of what David did with a sling and a stone; think of what the boy in the gospels did with his five barley loaves and two fishes! So let us not waste our time lamenting our limitations and restrictions, but let us give God our all and see what He will make of it and do with it.