

The Doctrine of Shâmaṭ

Introduction: We are going to attempt to pin down the meaning for this word; however according to BDB, its use in 2Sam. 6:9 and 1Chron. 13:9 is dubious, and this should read *they let the oxen fall (slip, stumble); or the oxen let [it] fall*. Thus the oxen *ran away*; they *slipped out of their yokes*. The basic problem is, it is difficult to assign a meaning to this verb in this verse; and the three ancient translations which I refer to all give shâmaṭ 3 different meanings.

I should warn you that, often when these words are difficult like this, we often end up being unable to resolve anything. Furthermore, others have apparently discussed the use of this verb in this passage.

Topics		
Pronunciation and Spelling	Meanings	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences
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Charts, Maps and/or Doctrines		
	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences	

1. **Pronunciation and spelling:** shâmaṭ (שָׁמַט) [pronounced shâ-MAHT].
2. **Meanings** already attributed to shâmaṭ:
 - a. KJV renderings: *to throw down* (2Kings 9:33); *to release*, (Deut. 15:2–3); *to discontinue* (Jer. 17:3–4); *to overthrown* (Psalm 141:6); *to rest* (Ex. 23:11), *to shake* (2Sam. 6:6); *to stumble* (1Chron. 13:9).
 - b. Strong's renderings: properly *to fling down*, *to jostle*; figuratively: *to let alone*, *desist*, *remit* (Strong's #8058).
 - c. BDB translations: *to release*, *let drop or loose or rest or fall*; (Qal) *to let drop or fall*; (Niphal) *to be made to fall down*, *be thrown down*; (Hiphil) *to cause to let drop*; *to release*, *let drop* (BDB #1030)
 - d. Gesenius translations: *to smite*, *to strike*; *to cast*, *to throw down*; *to fall*, *to let lie*; *to remit [a debt]*; *to desist [from anything]*; Niphal: *to be cast down*; *precipitated [from a rock]*; Hiphil: *to remit*.
 - e. Zodhiates: *to drop [something]*; *to throw it down*.
3. **Cognates:** shêmiṭâh (שִׁמְיָה) [pronounced shê-mih-TAW], which means *a letting drop*; *remittance [or, release] [from a debt]*; *a suspension [from work]*; *dropping [of something]*; *a throwing down [of something]*. Strong's #8059 BDB #1030. Found only in Deut. 15:1-2 31:9-10.
4. **Passages:**
 - a. Qal: Ex. 23:11 Deut. 15:2–3 2Sam. 6:6 1Chron. 13:9 2Kings 9:33 Jer. 17:3–4
 - b. Niphal: Psalm 141:6a: **Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the rock.**
 - c. Hiphil: Deut. 15:3: **You may exact it from a foreigner, but your hand shall release** [or, *be caused to release*] **whatever is yours with your brother.** The context is, the release of debt to one's own countryman. The Hiphil is the causal stem; the person to whom this is addressed *causes his hand to release* the debt.

It is quite helpful to see how this word is actually used:

An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences of the Word

The biggest problem with this word is that is is incorrectly rendered *to stumble* by almost every English translation in both 2Sam. 6:6 and 1Chron. 13:9. It does not mean *to stumble*. The obvious problem is, *if it does not mean to stumble, then what does it mean and how should we interpret it?*

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
Ex. 23:10–11a: For six years you shall sow your land, and will gather in its increase, but the seventh year you will let it rest [<i>release, thrown down, drop</i>] and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the animal of the field will eat.	<p>Qal imperfect. In the first usage of <i>shâmaṭ</i>, it is applied to the land of any Hebrew. For six years, a land is cultivated and harvested; in the seventh, nothing is done to the land. Now, this does not mean that it does not produce, and this does not mean that some do not harvest the land; however, this is left to the poor and the animals of the field.</p> <p>The feminine singular suffix is used here to refer to the land.</p>
Deut. 15:2–3: And this is the manner of the release [or, <i>this is the procedure for cancelling debt</i>]: every creditor will release [<i>throw down, let drop</i>] what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD's release [or, <i>cancellation of debt</i>] has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.	<p>Qal infinitive absolute; Hiphil imperfect. We find both the verb and its cognate here. The noun cognate obviously refers to the <i>cancellation of a debt or obligation</i>; here, our passage is speaking of <i>releasing</i> the debtor from his debt or obligation.</p> <p>The verb is used here without an specific object being named (although, the object is obviously the <i>debt</i> which has been incurred by the debtor). We do not even have a masculine singular suffix. This should indicate to us that this verb can be used without an object, even though an object is clearly implied. However, let me remind you that the Qal infinitive absolute of the verb is found here.</p>
<p>2Sam. 6:6: And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.</p> <p>1Chron. 13:9: And when they came to the threshing-floor of Chidon, then Uzza put out his hand to take hold of the ark, for the oxen stumbled.</p>	<p>Qal perfect. The verses are equivalent. Although the surrounding verbs made the previous meanings clear, here, it is not clear exactly what the oxen do. Many translators simply tell us that the oxen <i>stumbled</i>, although that is not a clear meaning for <i>shâmaṭ</i>.</p> <p>It should not be a problem that there is no direct object here, as we have none in the previous verse. We are speaking of the Ark of God, and apparently, the oxen <i>released, let fall, let drop</i> the Ark of God. This does not mean that the oxen held the Ark in the hooves; they pulled the cart, and in doing so, the Ark began to fall. The oxen are spoken of as the subject of the verb, as they are pulling the cart whereupon is the Ark. Something happens (probably the oxen stumble or the Ark veers off into a large rut), and the Ark is upset and begins to fall.</p> <p>With regards to the direct object, it is possible that one is not found here, nor is a masculine singular suffix, because the oxen only indirectly let the Ark drop.</p>
2Kings 9:33: He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down . And some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her.	<p>Qal imperative; Qal imperfect. Here, the verb is used with an object, and perhaps because that object is not clear in the Hebrew without the feminine singular suffix.</p>

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments					
Jer. 17:3b–4: “Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your high places for sin throughout all your territory. You will drop [<i>let go, release</i>] your hand from your heritage that I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.”	<p>Qal perfect. The use of the verb is more difficult here, as it literally reads, in v. 4: And you have let drop and in your hand from your inheritance [or, <i>estate</i>] which I gave to you.</p> <p>Although there may be a textual problem with this verse (the wâw conjunction preceding <i>in your hand</i> is somewhat confusing, it could possibly be explained as <i>by means of your hand</i>, indicating that their actions (their idolatry) resulted in the loss of their inheritance.</p> <p>It is significant that there is no direct object and no suffix used here.</p>					
Given what we have here, I think that it is reasonable to render this verb <i>to release</i> , <i>to let go</i> [drop]; <i>to throw down</i> ; figuratively <i>to let rest</i> , <i>to remit</i> [a debt]; <i>to</i> [temporarily] <i>abandon</i> , <i>to forgo</i> , <i>to relinquish</i> [use, ownership, an obligation].						
	ESV	God’s Word™	HCSB	LTHB	MKJV	Young
2Sam. 6:8	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to upset</i>	<i>to upset</i>	<i>to release</i>
1Chron. 13:9	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to stumble</i>	<i>to release</i>
Ex. 23:11	<i>to let rest</i>	<i>to leave unplowed</i>	<i>to let rest</i>	<i>to let rest</i>	<i>to let rest</i>	<i>to release</i>
Deut. 15:2	<i>to release</i>	<i>don’t collect [a payment]</i>	<i>to cancel</i>	<i>to release</i>	<i>to release</i>	<i>to release</i>
Kings 9:33	<i>to throw</i>	<i>to throw</i>	<i>to throw</i>	<i>to throw</i>	<i>to throw</i>	<i>to let go</i>
Jer. 17:4	<i>to loosen</i>	<i>to lose</i>	<i>to relinquish</i>	<i>to let drop</i>	<i>to let go</i>	<i>to let go</i>

5. Conclusion:

- a. Most of the translations of 2Sam. 6:6 and 1Chron. 13:9 are simply wrong.
- b. Shâmat can be reasonably and consistently rendered as follows: *to release*, *to let go* [drop]; *to throw down*; figuratively *to let rest*, *to remit* [a debt]; *to* [temporarily] *abandon*, *to forgo*, *to relinquish* [use, ownership, an obligation].