

14.06a War with Benjamin (Judges 19; 20)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures. Since very few pictures are available of this story, I suggest using 3-dimensional figures (*e.g.*, plastic soldiers) or stick figures drawn on a white board.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- Make a visual of fifteen connected men [see photo below] and another visual of one man. Or use 15 plastic soldiers of one color and one of another color.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- (None for this lesson)

Scripture: (ESV) (Judges 19 is not given here, nor is it taught in this lesson.)

Judges 20:1 Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah. 2 And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. 3 (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, “Tell us, how did this evil happen?” 4 And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. 5 And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. 6 . . . they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. 7 Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here.”

8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, “None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. 9 But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot, 10 and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin, for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel.” 11 So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man.

12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What evil is this that has taken place among you? 13 Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.” But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. 14 Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. 15 And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men. 16 Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17 And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war.

18 The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, “Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up first.”

19 Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. 21 The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites. 22 But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. 23 And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening. And they inquired of the Lord, “Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?”

And the Lord said, “Go up against them.”

24 So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword. 26 Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27 And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, “Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.”

29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. 30 And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the people of Benjamin said, “They are routed before us, as at the first.” But the people of Israel said, “Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways.” 33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba. 34 And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them. 35 And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword. 36 So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.

The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. 37 Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city 39 the men of Israel should turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, “Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.” 40 But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. 41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. 42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst. 43 Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east. 44 Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. 45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down. 46 So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor. 47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire.

Introduction/Review:

Could anyone in Israel mock God by setting up a new religion and worshiping idols instead of Him? Sad to say, yes, for the northern part of the tribe of Dan did this very thing. They stole Micah’s idols and practiced their false worship. Shouldn’t the rest of Israel have gone after them for such bold disobedience? They should have, but they did not. However, when grievous sin was found in the tribe of Benjamin, they went to great lengths to rid the nation of that sin.

Story:

Israel assembles

Gibeah [gib AY ah], a city in the tribe of Benjamin [locate on one of the maps below], had become very

wicked, like Sodom. All the rest of Israel, because they wanted to cleanse the land of this wickedness, gathered an army at Mizpah [locate] totaling 400,000 [write number on chalk- or whiteboard].

First, they organized themselves, sending one man of every ten to get food because the army intended to go up against the tribe of Benjamin and had promised themselves they would not go home until this problem in Gibeah of Benjamin was corrected.

Then, they verified the facts from the man who had suffered abuse by the men of Gibeah, which was the cause for this potential war. But before they began fighting, Israel sent messengers throughout all the land of Benjamin [locate] asking, “What have you done? Give to us the children of the devil who are so wicked in Gibeah. We will put them to death so that evil will be put away from Israel.”

Benjamin prepares

That sounds like a reasonable offer, but the Benjaminites refused to give over those evil men to Israel. This reminds me of people who do wrong at school, but no one will tell the principal or teacher who the wrongdoers are for fear of people rather than of God.

Benjamin gathered their soldiers together—26,000 from other cities and 700 men from Gibeah itself. Out of all these 26,700 men [write this number on a chalk- or whiteboard], 700 were left-handed¹ (like Ehud who had been from this tribe) and could sling stones at a hair and not miss.

So we see that Israel with its 400,000 soldiers against Benjamin with its 26,700 soldiers was a ratio of about fifteen to one. Looks like an easy win, doesn't it? [Show the 15-man and the 1-man visuals.]

Israel prays and loses

Nevertheless, Israel went from Mizpah [locate] to nearby Bethel [locate] to ask God what to do. “Which tribe should go against Benjamin first?”²

God said, “Judah.”³

In the morning the soldiers of Judah lined themselves up to lead the soldiers of Israel against Gibeah. The battle began. Certainly, Israel would win. Wouldn't God give immediate victory to the side doing right? But, no; this time Benjamin, fighting for evil men, won the battle! In fact, Benjamin destroyed 22,000 soldiers of Israel. [On your chalk- or whiteboard, subtract 22,000 from 400,000, leaving 378,000.] Twenty-two thousand is more than five times the population of our town! [Teacher, compare to your town. Fold back one Israelite man on your visual.] This was unexpected. The men of Israel cried with tears before the Lord all that day until night time.

Israel asked God, “Shall we fight again against our brother, Benjamin?”

The Lord answered, “Go up against them.” So the Israelites got ready for battle the second day. Who would win this time? Hadn't God said to go up?

Again, the Benjaminites won, destroying another 18,000 Israelites. [Fold back another man on the visual and subtract 18,000 from 378,000, leaving 360,000.] Israel had lost a total of 40,000 soldiers! This was terrible! Israel went back to Bethel and cried with tears, sitting before the Lord and fasting all that day until evening. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. What was going on? Why were they not winning the battle against the evil in Benjamin?⁴

Israel prays and wins

They asked God again, “Shall I go up to battle my brother, Benjamin, or shall I stop?”

God replied, “Go up; tomorrow you will defeat them.”

On this third day of battle, just as in the second battle against Ai, several soldiers sneaked around to the other side of Gibeah and hid, waiting. They were called the “liers in wait,” and they planned to ambush the city. The rest of the soldiers lined up as they had on days one and two.

When the battle began, the men of Gibeah came out of the city and began to destroy the Israelites as before. They actually killed 30 more men of Israel.

Benjamin thought, “We are winning just as we have the other two days of this war.”

However, Israel had a plan. “Let’s run away so that Benjamin will come out of the city,” they said.

While the Israelites ran and the Benjaminites chased, the liars in wait, seeing the soldiers leave the city, went into Gibeah and started a huge fire with lots of smoke. When the Israelites saw the huge smoke cloud, they stopped running away and turned back to fight Benjamin. When Benjamin saw the smoke, they turned around, too, but tried to run away. However, Israel struck down ✓26,100 Benjaminites⁵—almost all of them. Only 600 escaped to the rock called Rimmon four miles east of Bethel, where they would stay four months.

Meanwhile, Israel was so intent on cleansing the land that they became vicious in their destruction. Later, they regretted this approach, but they struck down men, women, children, and animals in all the towns of Benjamin. In addition, they set all the towns on fire. The tribe of Benjamin was almost totally lost. The only hope for a restoration of the tribe was through those 600 men hiding at the rock Rimmon. In our next lesson we will learn what happened to them.

¹“Benjamin signifies a son of the right hand, yet this tribe had a great number of lefthanded men in it”
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-20-16.html>.

²“[T]here being no supreme magistrate, judge, or general, to lead them; they did not ask whether they should go to war or no with their brethren; they made no doubt of that, taking it for granted they had sufficient reason for so doing, and that it was according to the will of God; nor did they inquire whether they should be victorious or not, they made no doubt of being victorious, both from their superior numbers, and the justness of their cause; they only inquire who should lead them on, having no general; and this they might do, to prevent any contentions among them about being precedence” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-20-18.html>).

³“ . . . which tribe pitched their standard first about the tabernacle, and marched first in their journeys in the wilderness, and was ordered to go up first and fight the Canaanites, being a powerful and warlike tribe” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-20-18.html>).

⁴“ . . . which was such a rebuff the Israelites did not expect, being engaged in so just a cause, and having such a numerous army. Several Jewish writers think this was on account of their idolatry, that though they were very zealous to revenge corporeal adultery in the case of the Levite’s concubine, and to remove such iniquity from Israel; yet were not zealous to revenge and put away spiritual adultery or idolatry in the case of the Danites, who had set up the image of Micah, and so had spread idolatry not only in their own tribe, but throughout Israel; and therefore God took this opportunity to avenge his own quarrel, and rebuke them for their sin; and now did Benjamin raven as a wolf, according to Jacob’s prophecy, (Genesis 49:27)” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-20-21.html>).

⁵The numbers in the text do not subtract a sufficient amount to have a remainder of only 600 Benjaminites. This can probably be answered by assuming the extra number were smitten (but not recorded) during the first two days of battle. John Gill comments on this.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:

Again, the characters in this lesson are the opposite of Jesus. He was never vicious as were the Israelites against Benjamin. Rather, Matthew 12:19–21, fulfilling Isaiah 42, states, “He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.”

Activities:

- Play dough: 15 to 1 items (spheres, rods, squares, *etc.*)
- Snack: Fruits and nuts such as those that the 1 out of 10 soldiers collected for the other fighters. Suggestions are grapes, almonds, dried figs (kids won't like them, probably), cheese, beef jerky.
- Choose lots to see who "fetches food"; have these students set out the snack.
- Discuss the odds against Benjamin: first 15 to 1; later, 13 to 1. Did Israel win because they had more soldiers? No. Who gave them the final victory? God.
- Let students try to sling a small Styrofoam[®] or foam ball from a slingshot. Or save this activity for the "Review questions" game.
- Review questions: (Game: Make a slingshot as in the "Handwork" below. For each correct answer, a student gets to sling a foam ball from the slingshot using his or her left hand.)
 1. What city in the tribe of Benjamin was guilty of wicked sin like Sodom? [Gibeah.]
 2. How many soldiers from Israel gathered against the tribe of Benjamin? [400,000.]
 3. What did Israel ask of Benjamin before they attacked? [To give up the worthless men of Gibeah who had done wrong.]
 4. What did the tribe of Benjamin answer? [No, they would not give up the wicked men.]
 5. How did the battle go on the first and second days? [Benjamin slaughtered many in Israel—22,000 and then 18,000, 40,000 in all.]
 6. What did the Israelites do before going to battle the third time? [Fasted and prayed and asked God if they should go or not.]
 7. What did God answer? [They should fight, and they would now win.]
 8. What military tactic did Israel use the third day of battle? [Ambush: some soldiers entered Gibeah when its soldiers had departed. These liars in wait burned the city.]
 9. How many Benjaminites survived? [Six hundred only.]
 10. How was Israel vicious against the tribe of Benjamin? [By slaying all the people in its towns and by burning the towns.]

Memory Verse[s]:

- Matthew 11:28: [Jesus said,] "I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Handwork:

- Slingshot

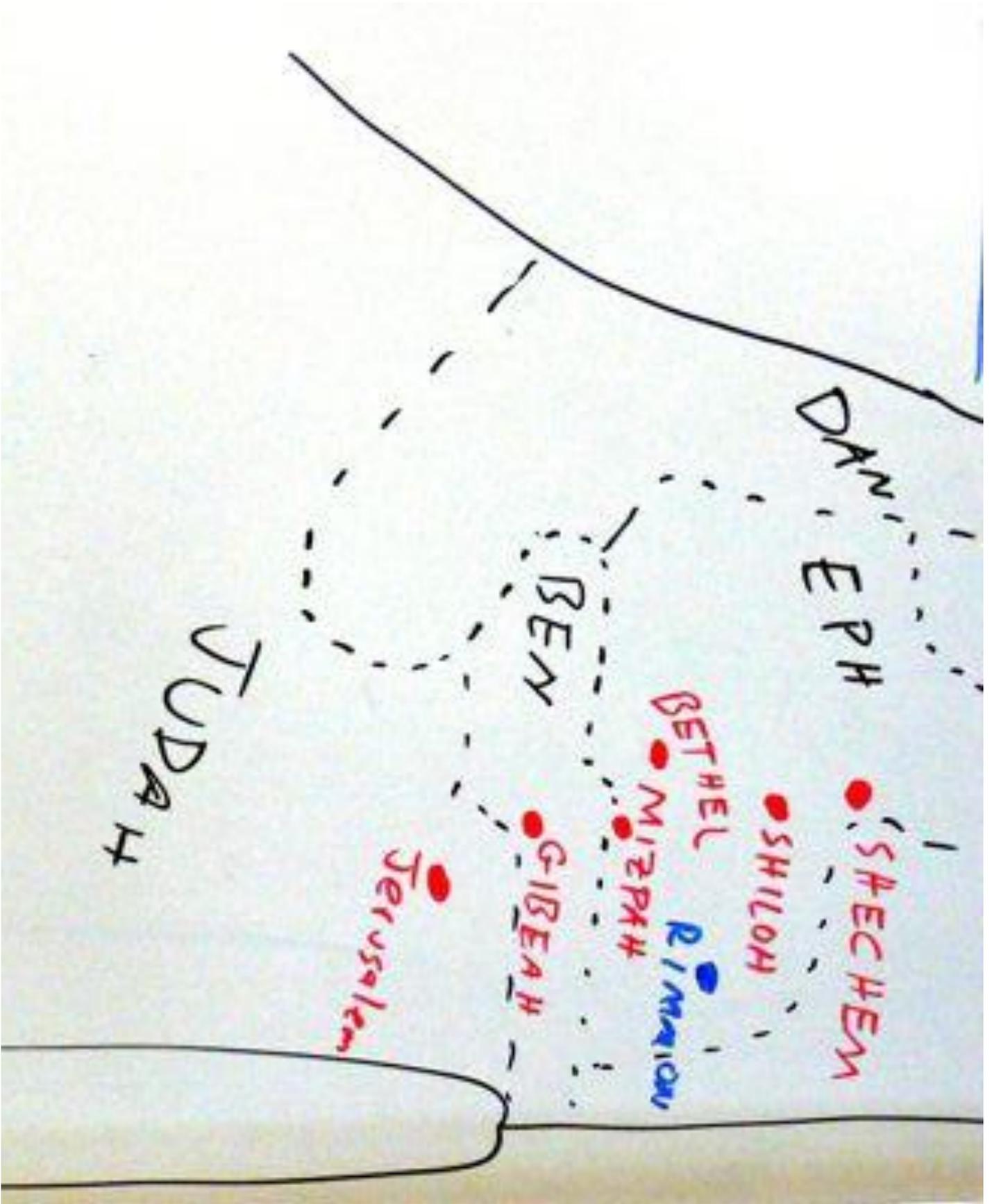
Materials for each student: 5"x3" rectangle out of cloth or a plastic grocery bag; two 2-foot lengths of string.

In the middle of the 3-inch ends of the cloth or plastic rectangle, punch a hole so that a string may be tied to each side of the cloth or plastic.

CAUTION: This craft could be used in dangerous ways. Provide a small Styrofoam[®] or foam ball for each child to take home with his/her sling. If possible, give the student's sling to a parent for supervision of its use.

The following site gives other instructions and also explains how to use the sling:

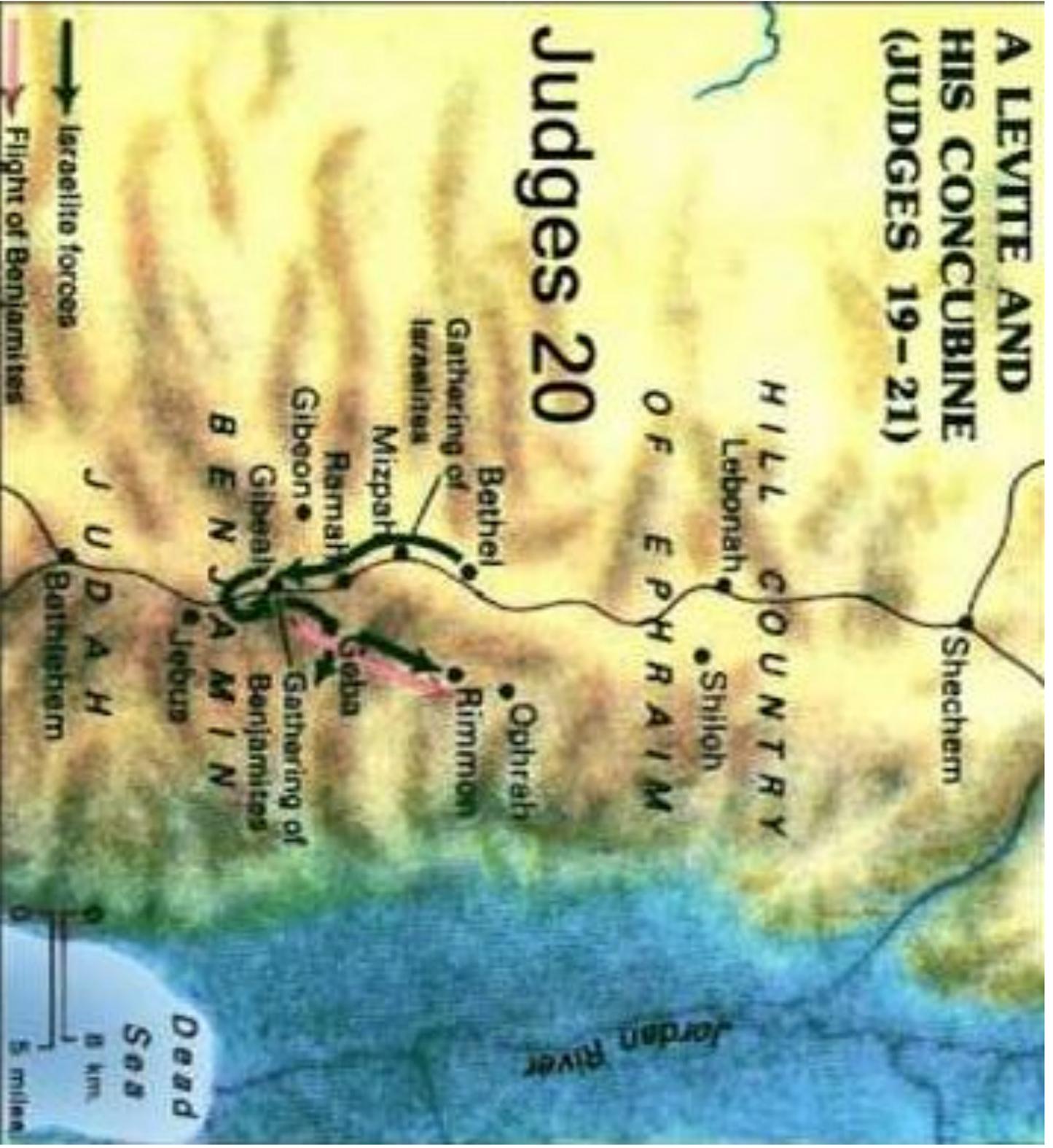
https://www.ehow.com/info_12136391_crafts-david-goliath-sling-shot.html.

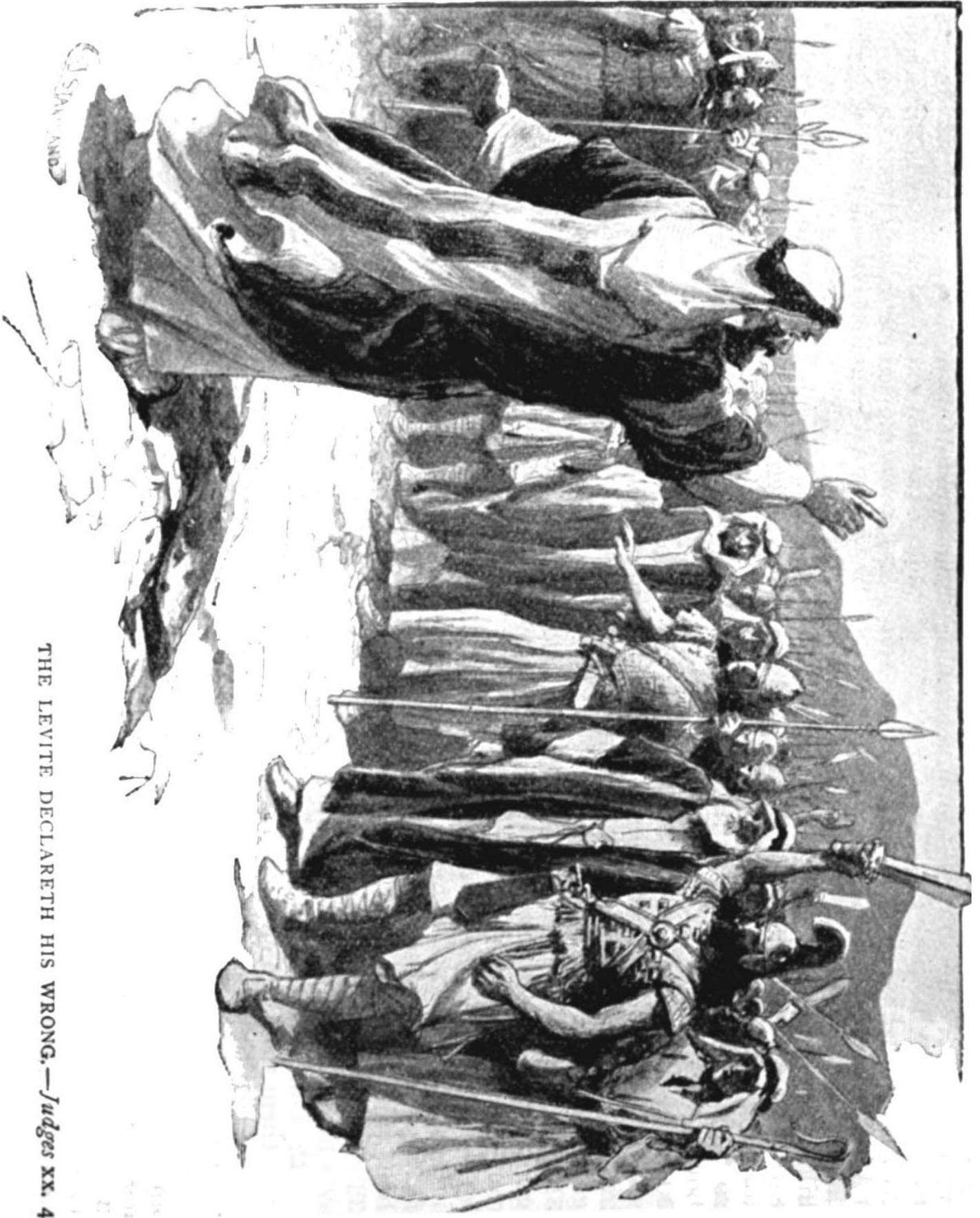


<http://hallel.info/wp-content/uploads/image/Judges-20-map.jpg> (this copy is cropped)

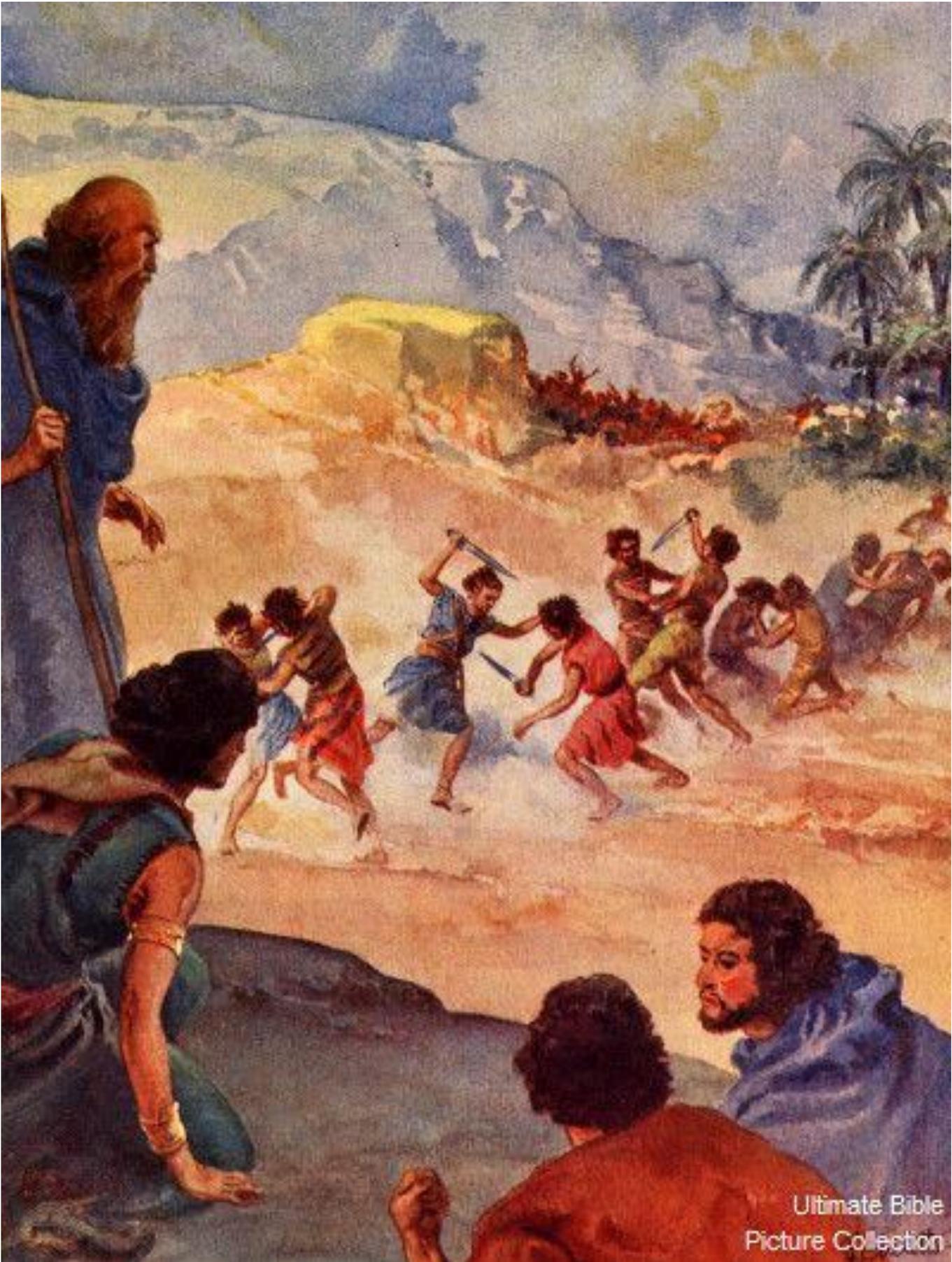
A LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE (JUDGES 19-21)

Judges 20





THE LEVITE DECLARETH HIS WRONG.—*Judges xx. 4*



Ultimate Bible
Picture Collection

Israelites outnumbered the Benjaminites 15 to 1.

