

## 17.20 The Deaths of Saul and Jonathan (1 Samuel 31:1–13; 1 Chronicles 10:1–14)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows  
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. 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.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- Toy plastic sword (but do not demonstrate Saul’s falling on his sword)

**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.

- *archer*: a person who shoots arrows from a bow
- *to fast*: to go without eating for a period of time
- *spoil*: the rewards of war taken by the victors from the defeated

### Scripture: (ESV)

1 Samuel 31:1 Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. 3 The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.” But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. 5 And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. 6 Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. 7 And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them

8 The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. 10 They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11 But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. 13 And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

[1 Chronicles 10:1–14 is nearly word-for-word the same as the 1 Samuel passage. Differences are included in the verses printed below.]

9 And they stripped him and took his head and his armor . . . [does not mention beheading Saul]. 10 And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon . . . [Dagon spoken of and not Ashtaroath]. 11 But when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men arose [leaves out *and went all night*] and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. [Leaves out burning the bodies.] And they buried their bones under the oak [tamarisk] in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

13 So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. 14 He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

### Introduction/Review:

What does God think of witches and astrology? [He detests them.] Why had Saul gone to the medium/witch? [To find out what would happen in battle with the Philistines.] Note that according to 1 Chronicles 10:14, he did *not* enquire of God. Why didn't he ask God? [✓Maybe because he had slain the priests; the prophets probably did not trust him and wouldn't help him; God had departed from Saul because of his disobedience.] What did Samuel tell Saul? [That Saul and his sons would die the next day; Israel would be defeated by the Philistines; the kingdom would be given to David.] Will it really happen?

## **Story:**

### ***Defeat of Israel***

When the Philistines attacked Israel, the men of Israel ran from them, but the Philistines caught and slew many in Mount Gilboa. They continued chasing hard after King Saul and three of his sons who were in the battle. Alas, they slew David's friend, Jonathan, and Jonathan's two brothers. Finally, archers shot at Saul, and he was greatly wounded. He knew he would surely die.

Saul said to his armor bearer (the Jews say this was Doeg, the man who had reported David's presence at Nob, where the priests had lived), "Draw your sword, and thrust it through me so that I die. I don't want the Philistines to mistreat me and kill me."

But Saul's armor bearer would not slay Saul because he was afraid. ✓Maybe he didn't want to slay the one God had chosen to be king or maybe he respected Saul or maybe he was just "chicken."

When his armor bearer refused to stab him, Saul took his own sword and again disobeyed God in an act God hates. He took his own life by falling on his sword.

Seeing Saul was dead, the armor bearer followed Saul's example; he fell on his own sword and died.

So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and many others died that same day.

### ***Takeover by Philistines***

The people living in cities of the battle area learned that Saul and his sons were dead and that Israel's soldiers were running away. That meant their homes were in the path of the Philistines. What could they do but abandon their cities? So they got themselves away from this territory, leaving their houses and cities behind. What a prize of battle these cities were; some Philistines came and lived in them.

The day after battle, Philistine soldiers came to strip the dead bodies, taking clothes, weapons, money, jewelry—whatever they could find. Remember, this is how victors became rich. It was called *spoiling* or *taking the spoils of war*.

When the Philistines came to the corpses of Saul and his three sons in Mount Gilboa, they thought, "Aha!" We'll show our nation the body of the king of Israel. We'll send Saul's armor all around our country and then put it in the temple of our god Ashtaroth so that all the people and idols of our country can see how strong we are! We'll put Saul's body and the bodies of his sons on the wall of Beth-shan, a city not far away, where the birds will devour their bodies. We will take the head of Saul and hang it in the temple to Dagon, the fish god."

And that's exactly what they did. How shameful! How gory! How dishonoring to the true God! As Saul had dishonored God in his life, even so he dishonored God in his death.

### ***Loyalty of Jabesh-Gilead***

Meanwhile, across the Jordan in Jabesh-Gilead, the first city Saul had delivered from Israel's enemies, the men of Jabesh-Gilead were grieved and indignant at this treatment of their hero. Bravely, at night they crossed the Jordan, went to Beth-shan, took the bodies of Saul and his three sons down from the wall, brought them back to Jabesh Gilead, burned the flesh,<sup>1</sup> and buried them properly by a tree. Then, in their great grief over the death of their king and hero, they fasted seven days.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible states, “So Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not enquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death” (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14).

Thus, 1 Samuel ends. It “began with the birth of Samuel, but now it ends with the burial of Saul, the comparing of which two together will teach us to prefer the honour that comes from God before any of the honours which this world pretends to have the disposal of” (Matthew Henry).

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<sup>1</sup>“[T]hat is, the flesh of them, for the bones they buried, as in ([1 Samuel 31:13](#)); and this they did, contrary to the common usage of the country, which was not to burn; but this they did, that if the Philistines should come to recover them, they would not be able to do it” ([1 Samuel 31:12 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)).

<sup>2</sup>“ . . . not that they ate and drank nothing all that time, but they fasted every day till evening, as the Jews used to do . . . this they did, as Kimchi thinks, in memory of the seven days Nahash the Ammonite gave them for their relief, in which time Saul came and saved them (1 Samuel 11:3)” (1 Samuel 31:13 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse (biblestudytools.com)).

### **Lessons from This Lesson:**

- We see Jesus:

The Lord put Saul to death because of his sins against the Lord. In stark contrast, although Jesus died a shameful death on the cross, His death was not for His own sins, for He had none. Rather, He died for the sins of those whom He would save.

### **Activities:**

- Play dough: sword; houses
- Snack: (Shall we fast—not have a snack—in order to demonstrate sadness about sin in our country? If so, we should also take this time to pray.)  
Or eat sugar cookies decorated with sad faces, in mourning over the deaths of Saul, his sons, and the Israelite soldiers, or perhaps in remembrance of a fallen soldier known by the students.
- Reenact the Battle of Gilboa with plastic toy soldiers.
- Review questions: (Game: With reference to Psalm 1:2, print on card stock the page found below of clipart Bibles and cut apart. For each correct answer, a student may place a Bible in a pocket chart.)
  1. How did the Battle of Gilboa go for Israel? [The Philistines chased them and slew many of them, including Saul and his three sons.]
  2. How did Saul die? [He was badly wounded by archers; he took his own life by falling on his sword.]
  3. Who, asked by Saul, refused to take Saul’s life? [Saul’s armor bearer.]
  4. Where did the Philistines show off Saul’s head and armor? [Throughout Philistia and the temple of their gods.]
  5. Where in Beth-shan did the Philistines put the bodies of Saul and his sons? [On the wall.]
  6. What did the men of Jabesh-Gilead do? [Traveled all night, removed the bodies from Beth-shan, and buried the bones under a tree.]
  7. Why did Saul die such a death? [Because he had been unfaithful to the Lord, had not obeyed Him, had not sought the Lord but had consulted a medium.]

### **Memory Verse[s]: (KJV)**

- Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law

doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

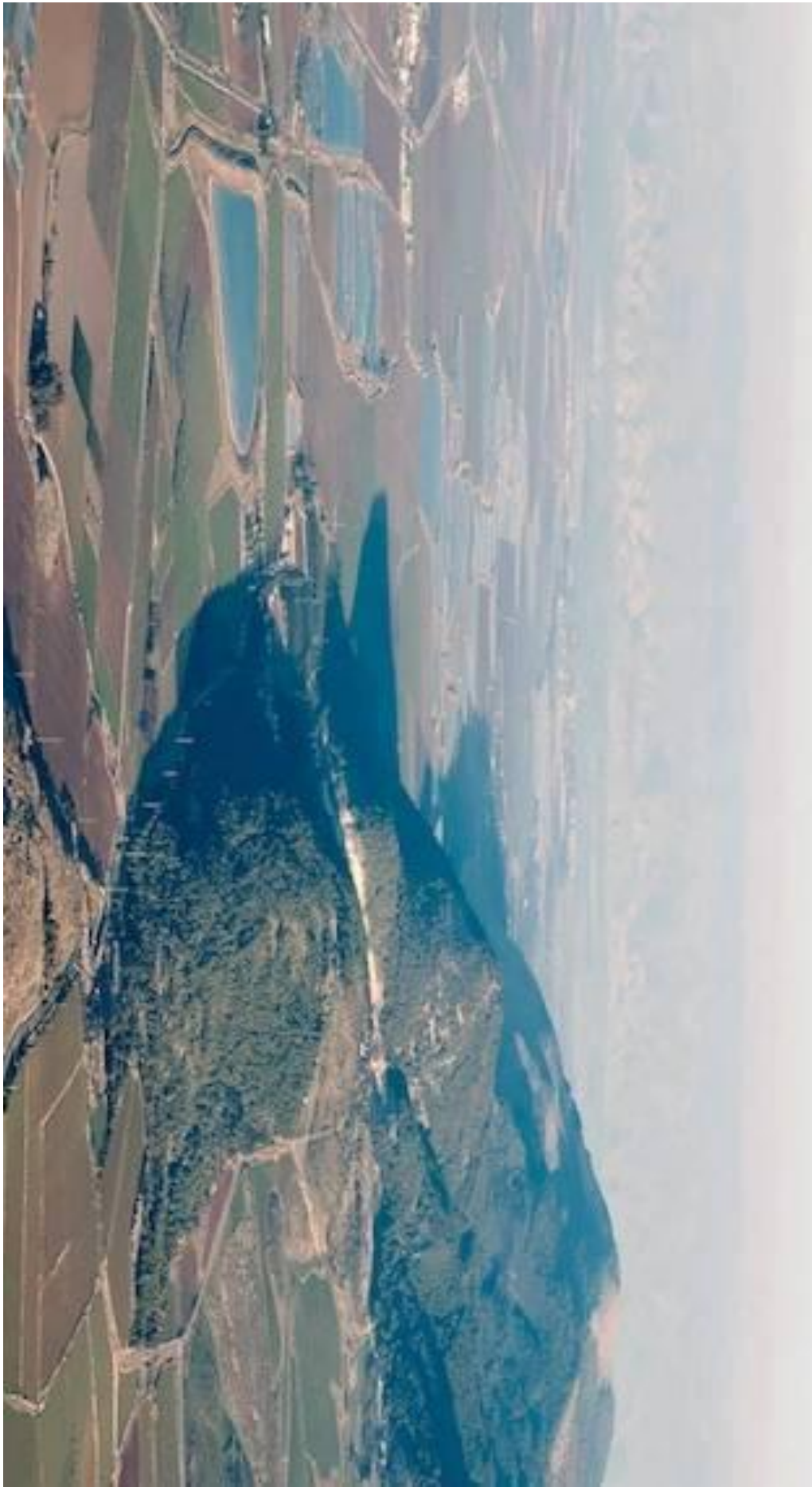
**Handwork:**

- Print and have students color the picture of Psalm 1:2 found below.

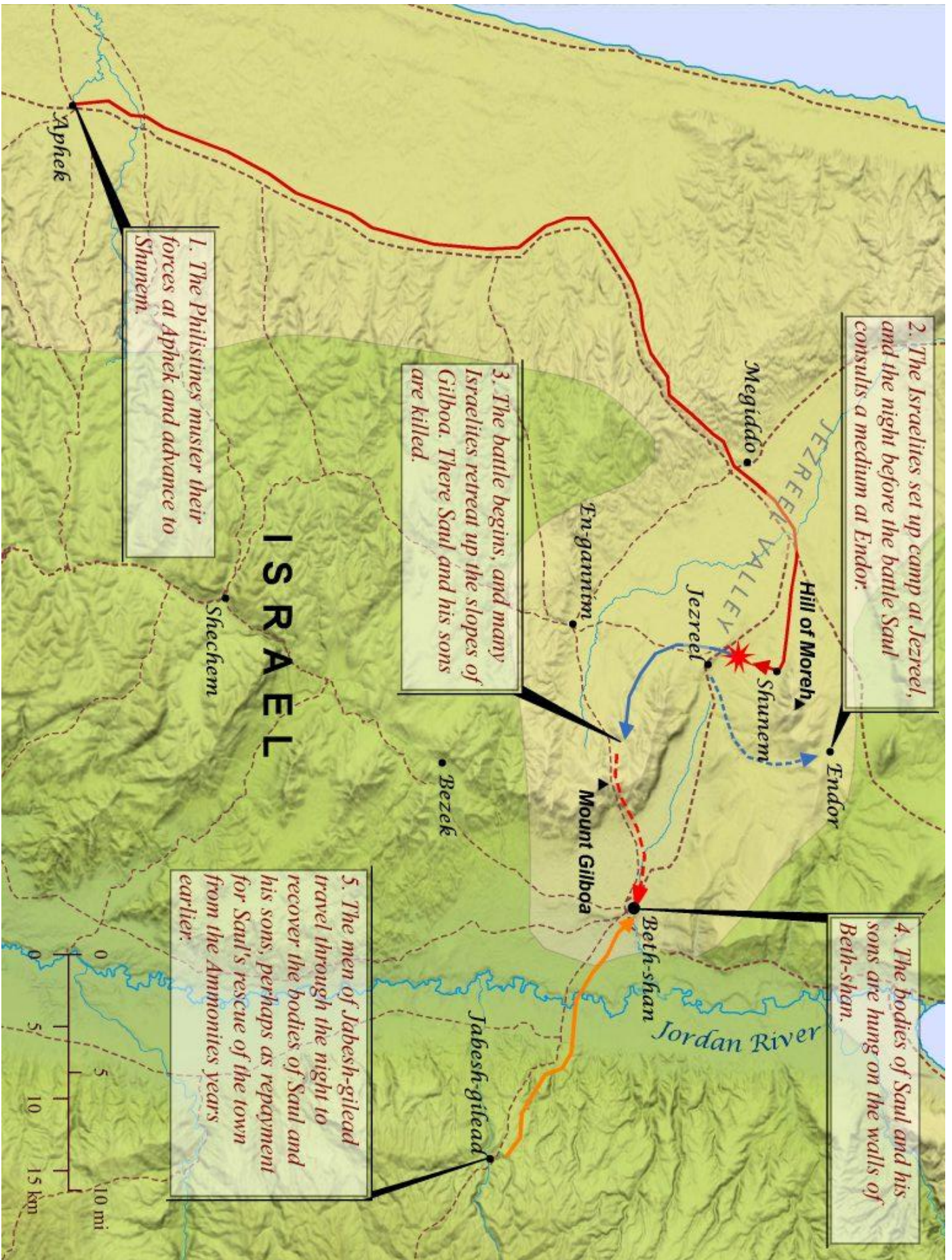
**archer**

**to fast**

**spoil**



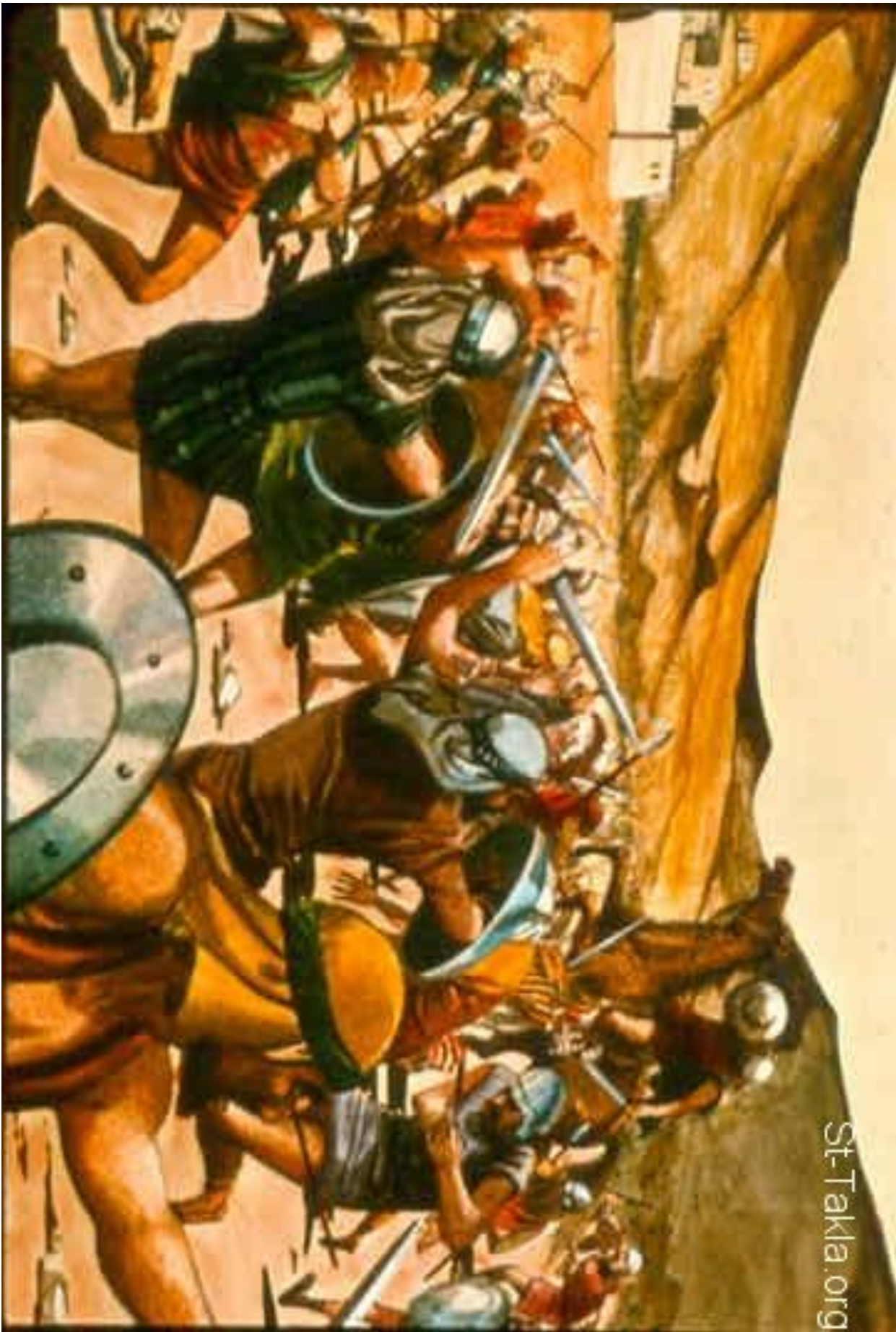
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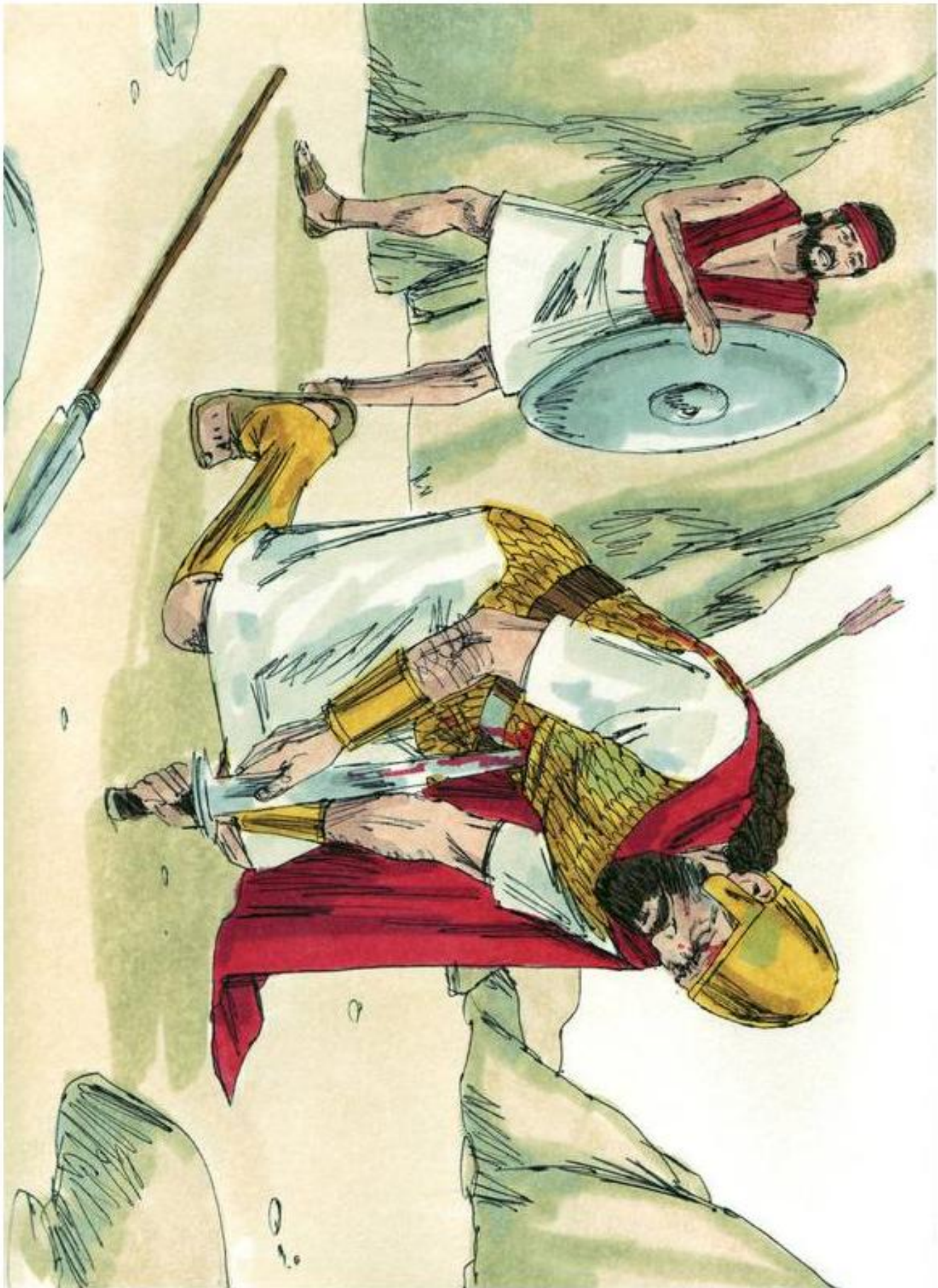
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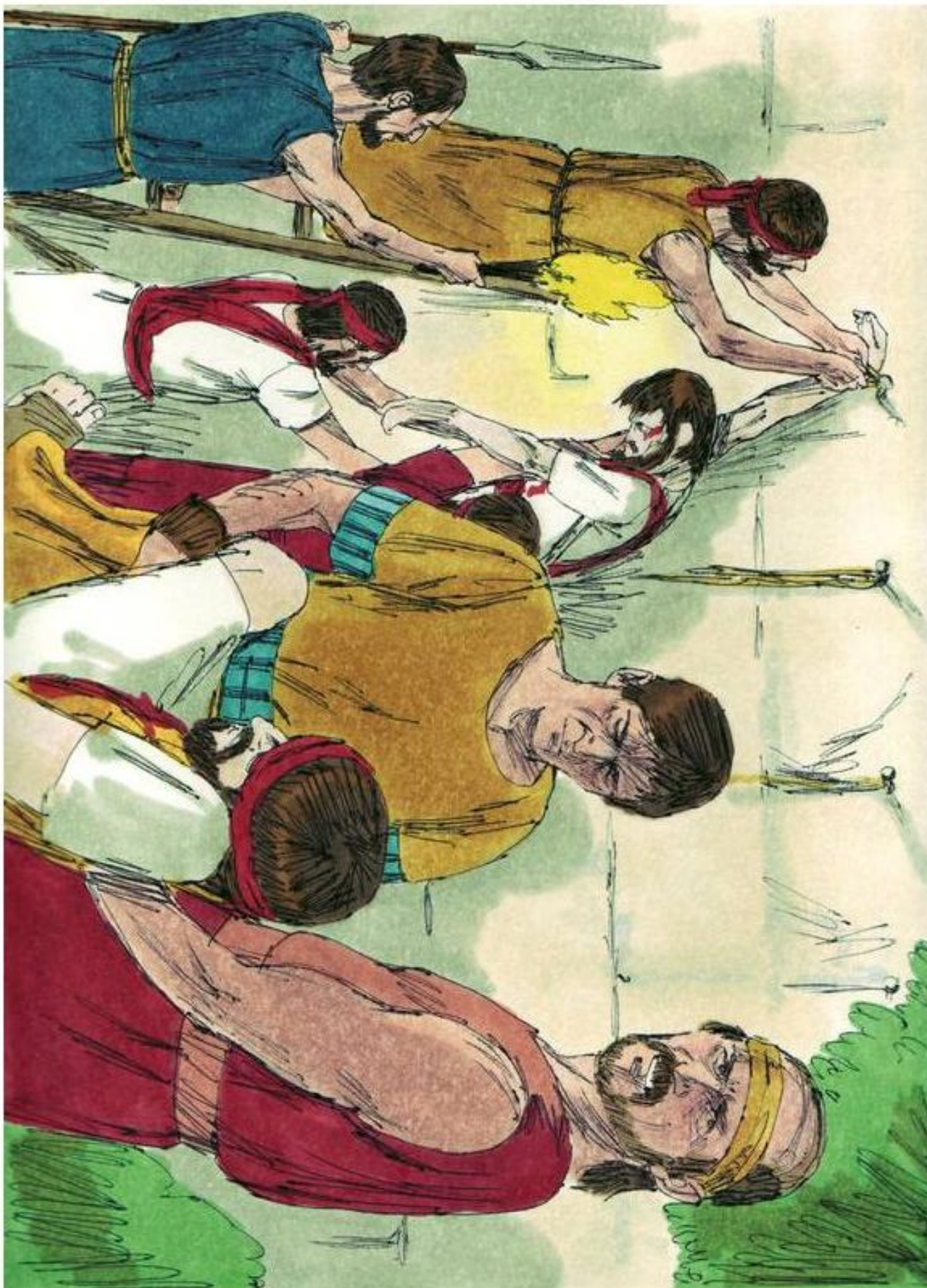


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*His delight is in  
the law of  
the LORD; and in  
His law doth he  
meditate day  
and night.*

*-Psalms 1:2*



