

Lesson 12: Wars among the Jews – Asa and Ba'asha

Note: Lesson 11 precedes Lesson 12 in number because Lesson 11 should be *assigned* before Lesson 12 (ideally Lesson 11 should be *assigned* before Lesson 10). However, Lesson 12 should be taught after Lesson 10 and before Lesson 11.

Goals:

1. Students will appreciate that the internal battles of Judah against Israel weakened each kingdom. They accelerate the process of exile, which the prophecy in Melakhim Alef 14:15 connected to the sins of Yarov'am.
2. Students will begin to recognize the pattern of Israelite fighting Israelite, in which one side calls a foreign army to fight the other side, and the ultimate destruction of both sides as a result.
3. Students will develop their skills in reading Biblical narrative, especially in recognizing the perfect form of חסר or נח verbs written in the ויקטל form.
4. Students will develop some familiarity with the geography of the Land of Israel and surrounding regions.

Part 1: Melakhim Alef ch. 15, vv 16-22.

Using the map in slide 2, remind students of the invasion of Judah by Egypt, discussed in Lesson 10. Then, using slide 3, remind the students of the prophecy of exile in Melakhim Alef 14:15, and ask at what point that prophecy will be fulfilled. Students should realize that the final exile of Israel will eventuate only at the end of the book of Melakhim, but that there are many small scale invasions of Israel and Judah that take place during the book. These weaken the kingdoms and ultimately make exile possible.

Tell students that the invasion in the coming chapter does not come from the south but rather from the north, but that the story of how the invasion develops is the main lesson of the chapter.

Then refer students to the worksheet on these verses, which forces students to do some careful grammatical work, and directs consider the futility of the whole battle.

In reviewing the worksheet, first transpose the chart from question 1 onto a separate section of the board, that will remain visible during the lesson. At this point, the chart should contain only the names of Asa and Baasha, but Ben-Hadad is added in this lesson.

Then, make sure that students accurately translate verse 17, emphasizing the vav-hahippuch forms of the verbs עלה, בנה, נתן (using slide 4).

Then, using the two maps (larger and smaller) in slide 5, show how building Ramah blocks entry to Jerusalem. While Baasha is acting on his own side of the border, he is limiting access to

Jerusalem. Usually, one of the functions of a fortified city is to tax trade caravans passing through the area, and to assert control of a region. Here, it seems that Baasha is establishing a strong presence of the kingdom of Israel very close to Jerusalem, potentially dissuading trade caravans from going to Jerusalem. Open a discussion of whether Baasha had the right to do this. The clear answer is that while it is צודק, Asa sees it as a hostile act. He sees it as a siege of Jerusalem (as is clear from v. 19.)

Then, ask students how Asa responds. Explain, using slide 6, the location of Aram relative to Israel, and that Aram shares a border with Israel but not with Judah. Add the name of Ben-Hadad to the chart on the board.

Using slide 7, focus in on the words that express Asa's request of Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. Ask students why the other verbiage is there. Students should appreciate that the goal of the statement

בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ, בֵּין אֲבִי וּבֵין אָבִיךָ;

is to justify the alliance. Emphasize the irony here. Using the chart on the board, ask students which two kings are really part of an old historic alliance. Then, note that there is no record in Tanakh of an alliance between Judah and Aram of Damascus earlier. Asa seems to be inventing an alliance for political expediency, while ignoring the real historic alliance with the kingdom of Israel, also for political expediency.

Ask students: Why does Ben-Hadad agree to help? Because of the historic alliance? Students should understand that "everyone" here is acting for their own short term best interest. Use the chart of 3 kings on the board to illustrate that Ben Hadad takes a bribe, Asa gives a bribe, and Ba'asha was trying to limit access to Asa.

Ask students: How can Ben-Hadad help Asa? Using slide 8, illustrate the leverage principle. Leverage means that by using a Lever (whose length is measured here as x), one can produce twice as much force ($2f$) by exerting a force measured as f . Asa can't fight Baasha on his own (analogy to force measured as f). So Asa uses Ben-Hadad to exert pressure on Baasha ($2f$). It is useful for students to understand the leverage principle, and this can easily be demonstrated with a few blocks and balls, but it is not necessary to teach a detailed physics lesson. Students should understand that Asa is able to use Ben-Hadad to exert force on Baasha, even though the cities Ben-Hadad conquers are not near Judah, because it forces Baasha to divert troops to those cities.

Then, using slide 9, show that Asa gained some territory as a result of this war. But ask students: Does Asa really win? Has he gained an alliance? Yes, he gained an alliance with Ben-Hadad. But that alliance is based on temporary convergence of interests. What old, historic alliance did he destroy? Students should realize (and slide 10 illustrates this) that Asa ignored an old historic alliance between Israel and Judah and thus weakened both Israel and Judah.

Part 2: Comparisons to Asa/Baasha

There is, sadly, a series of stories in which one of two rival Jewish factions invite a foreigner to fight the other Jewish faction for them. One such example appears in Melakhim Bet 16:5-8. Read these verses with students, using slide 11, which illustrates the players in this drama. Here, Judah appeals not to Aram, but rather to farther-off Assyria. The consequences of this appeal to Assyria were disastrous - Melakhim portrays this appeal as leading to the Assyrian invasion of Israel and of Judah, which ultimately led to the exile of Israel and the weakening of Judah.

Another example of this phenomenon is the entry of the Romans into Judea, leading to the destruction of the Second Temple. In Josephus' narrative in Antiquities of the Jews, Book 14, chapter 2, the entry of Pompey into the affairs of Judea is portrayed as resulting from the rivalry between two brothers who claimed the throne of Judea, John Hyrkanos and Judah Aristoblos. Here is a passage from Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews, book xiv, chapter 2 (from the website www.penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus)

Pompey sent Scaurus into Syria, while he was himself in Armenia, and making war with Tigranes: But when Scaurus was come to Damascus, and found that Lollius and Metellus had newly taken the city, he came himself hastily into Judea. And when he was come thither, ambassadors came to him, both from Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, and both desired he would assist them. And when both of them promised to give him money, Aristobulus four hundred talents, and Hyrcanus no less, he accepted of Aristobulus's promise, for he was rich, and had a great soul, and desired to obtain nothing but what was moderate; whereas the other was poor, and tenacious, and made incredible promises in hopes of greater advantages; for it was not the same thing to take a city that was exceeding strong and powerful, as it was to eject out of the country some fugitives, with a greater number of Nabateans, who were no very warlike people. He therefore made an agreement with Aristobulus, for the reasons before mentioned, and took his money, and raised the siege, and ordered Aretas to depart, or else he should be declared an enemy to the Romans.

Even if one doubts the historicity of Josephus' narrative, the reality of the battles between the brothers as a factor in Pompey's interest in Judah remains a historical fact.

It is important that students appreciate how destructive it is to abandon intra-Israelite alliances in pursuit of alliances with others against Israelites. This is an overtly political point, but an important one, on which it is worth polemicizing.

Students will probably be familiar with the midrashim on Melakhim Alef 15:22 on Asa drafting Talmidei Hakhamim. It is worth noting that the midrashim are based on the narrative that this is a stupid war, and it is not clear that the same midrashim would be said were this a genuine מלחמת מצוה.

עין במלכים א פרק