

## Lesson 14 Melakhim Alef 17

### Goals:

1. Students will internalize the meaning of the idea God as Sovereign, discussed in the previous lesson, not only in political life, but in daily life, reflected in God's providing both the necessities of life and life itself.
2. Students will develop the skill of fitting a prophetic narrative into its larger narrative context.
3. Students will develop fluency in reading Hebrew narrative.
4. Students will practice understanding the meaning of "Hiph'il" verbal forms.
5. Students will understand that narratives express themes by means of character development, and have didactic purposes.

### Lesson Plan – vv. 1-16

The overall lesson tries to fit the Eliyahu story in this chapter into the problem which is presented in chapter 16 and which is developed in chapter 17. Under Omri and Ahab, Israel for the first time in this book begins to worship a god other than YHWH. This is understood as challenging the concept of God as sovereign over Israel, a concept with very deep roots throughout Tanakh and which was illustrated in Yehu b. Hanani's rebuke of Baasha in Melakhim Alef 16:2.

Begin with a review. Ask students to evoke the main accomplishments of Omri and Ahab – they should remember the building of a new capital, and the alliance with Sidon and sea-trade. But they should also remember how Ahab's ties with Sidon are said to have led to the introduction of Baal and Ashera worship in Israel. Effectively, this means that Omri and Ahab impugned the concept of God as sovereign over Israel. Remind students of this by referring back to slide 3 from the previous lesson.

Then, ask students: what tools does God have to remind people that He is sovereign? (Then and now). Record students' answers in a form that you can refer back to later, perhaps in a smart board.

Students will come up with answers such as "earthquake", "war" all of which are important later on in the stories.

But first, ask students to look at the second paragraph of Shema. Why does God promise reward and punishment by means of rain? Students should understand the necessity of rain in getting crops to grow (no, Susanna, cucumbers don't come from the supermarket). God's role as provider of rain is also connected to his providing life.

Then, use slide 1 to present the first pasuk of ch. 17. Students will no doubt ask "who is Eliyahu" and here too (as in the case of Yehu), we know nothing about Eliyahu until this point.

Ask students to look carefully at v. 1. How does the formulation show that this is not an ordinary drought, but is directed by God? Students should recognize the importance of the last four words. Students should also recognize the importance of Ahab being told about this in advance – the combination of Divine sign and prophetic explanation is intended to convey a message. Ask an open-ended question: What does God expect Ahab to learn from this experience? The answers should relate to "God controls rain" and is therefore "highest king" but there are also other points which can be elaborated:

1. Baal is a rain god. (We know this from the Ugaritic material.) The story is an implicit polemic against worshipping Baal, hoping that he will provide rain. He can't.
2. The story also reminds Israel of the importance of agriculture as providing sustenance. You can't eat sea trade.

But look at the sharp and abrupt way Eliyahu conveys this news to Ahab. No previous discussion, no attempt to engage his feelings. (The teacher can demonstrate this by giving a punishment without prior discussion; the student will inevitably feel resentment.) Is it likely that Ahab will be receptive to the message? Before this message can be conveyed to Ahab, Eliyahu needs to learn what an announcement of drought means. Like Yonah, Eliyahu needs to go through an educational experience, in which he learns what it means to have your means of earning a living cut off? Look back at v. 1 – we know one thing about Eliyahu – does he live somewhere? We're told he's "among the dwellers in Gilead," and the Hebrew "mittoshave" indicates that he is settled somewhere, that he has a home, and is not a wanderer.

What is this person, who has a home, told in vv. 2-3?

Leave your home.

Show on slide 2, where the Jordan valley is, and note that it's not an area in which there are cities (even Jericho does not actually reach the Jordan itself and is on higher ground)- it's extremely hot, and anyone who can move into the surrounding hills where the summer is more bearable. Eliyahu is told to live outside civilization.

What does God provide Eliyahu instead of his home – ask students to look at v. 4 –

Once they realize that the "Orevim" are providing for Eliyahu, define the Orevim כַּפְּשׁוּטֹ as ravens (following Radak). I don't think that the discussion in Hazal on miracles, which R Yosef Kaspi develops on this verse, is a priority for class discussion. Ask what the obvious problem is with telling someone who has a home that he's now living in an unsettled place and dependent on ravens. Who is he actually dependent on? (Answer: God)

Ask students which words in pasuk 4 illustrate this.

Students should realize that Eliyahu's dependence on God is expressed in the last three words of v. 4. Ask students to scan down and see where those words repeat.

Students should realize that v. 9 repeats the same words – and understand that in v. 9, a new provider is appointed to Eliyahu.

Ask: what happened to the ravens? Did they get tired?

Look at vv. 6-7 – students should realize that God dries up the Jordan, and somehow the ravens stop bringing food. This seems deliberately designed, to deprive Eliyahu of sustenance a second time. In this way, Eliyahu's experience parallels what will happen to Ahab when God's promise of drought (mentioned in v. 1) is delivered.

Students should realize that while God said He'd provide for Eliyahu, that provision is gone at the end of v. 7. On whom can Eliyahu rely?

There is a powerful lesson about belief in God here. God doesn't only expect loyalty when He does provide for a person, but even when He takes away provisions.

In v. 8-9, whom does God appoint instead of the ravens? Ask the students: what's the difference between the way a person relates to ravens and to an אֱלֹמֶנָה. Students should realize the obligation of Eliyahu to treat the widow with sensitivity and caring. Furthermore, Eliyahu has to teach the widow, whereas he has no reason to teach ravens. He is now finished the part of his career away from civilization.

Instead, he is going to a city that is close to Sidon, part of the center of Baal worship, and is supposed to teach people about relying on God. How does he do this?

Ask students to read on their own v. 10, and extract: what is the first thing Eliyahu says to this woman?

One may be critical of Eliyahu's "opening line" here – this difficulty in empathizing with others, and in feeling the other's pain, seems to recur in other stories of Eliyahu.

But here, his main function is to convey to this woman that God provides. And so he comes with a second demand: in v. 11 – ask students to identify the demand

Then ask a student to read with empathy and pathos, the woman's speech from v. 12.

Then, use slide 3 to teach vv. 13-14. Ask: What does Eliyahu hope to teach the woman by asking her to give him first a little of her provisions?

He asks her to recognize that God can provide, and that if God provides then one recognizes this by obeying His commands, even when they involve self-sacrifice.

Teach v. 15 frontally. The woman fulfils Eliyahu's demand in v. 15, and thereby demonstrates her willingness to obey God, even in the case of self-sacrifice.

Ask students for examples of such self-sacrifice in their own lives, that they've experienced or that they've heard about.

## Lesson Plan vv. 17-24

Until now, the lesson Eliyahu taught the woman relates to accepting God as sovereign and obeying Him.

The story in vv. 17-24 adds to the lesson Eliyahu taught the woman, and also teaches Eliyahu something.

Students should work through vv. 17-24 using the worksheet, which unpacks the verses while also teaching Hiph'il forms. I suggest this as a havruta activity.

In reviewing the homework, ask students to focus on two key questions: one is what the woman learns from the story, and the other is what Eliyahu learns.

In discussing what Eliyahu learns, the teacher should focus on v. 20 (slide 4, with the picture designed to illustrate empathy), in which Eliyahu for the first time empathizes with the people he is supposed to teach. This seems different than his behavior in his first speech to the woman. In v. 20, he expresses empathy not by speaking directly to the woman, but by talking to God and showing caring for people. Eliyahu here cares about a person, and expresses this to God, and this may be an important preparation for Eliyahu before speaking to Ahab.