

Lesson 15 Melakhim Alef 18

Goals

1. Students will consider the difference between a prophet as an emissary of God, who reports God's word to the people, and a prophet as miracle worker/magician who is able to independently manipulate forces of nature. (See extensive discussion in Ezekiel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, transl. by Moshe Greenberg, pp. 85-87.)
2. Students will develop facility in rapid reading of Biblical narrative and will re-inforce their ability to identify and understand the "Hiph'il" construction begun in the last lesson.
3. Students will appreciate the drama of the encounter between Eliyahu and the prophets of Baal at Carmel.
4. Students will reflect on the value of a single transformative event in convincing people to recognize God's sovereignty, given that recognizing God's sovereignty requires obedience to Him in daily life.

Note:

This is one of the longest chapters in Sefer Melakhim. It is challenging to teach all of it. However, I think it is critical to teach nearly all of it, despite its length. The drama of the story is central to understanding the drama of the end of Ne'ila every year, and to understanding all of the Eliyahu stories in Sefer Melakhim. Furthermore, it forms the haftara for Ki Tissa (Ashkenazim usually read the whole chapter, Sefaradim begin at v. 20), and students should be familiar with haftarot. Finally, it is a good opportunity for students to develop fluency in reading Biblical Hebrew.

Focus verses include v. 1, vv. 17-18, v. 21, vv. 36-39.

Frontal Lesson: Background and v. 1

Begin with a frontal presentation framing the lessons that Ahab and the Israelites need to learn from the drama of this chapter. Sefer Melakhim has already hinted at those lessons by presenting the story of the widow before chapter 18.

Ask students what lessons they feel the widow learned from her encounters with Eliyahu, and record answers in smartboard, or using slide 1. Students will probably require some prompting, and ask them to summarize the two narratives. From the first story, of the **כד** **ים** **המים** **וצפחת** **המים**, she learned that God provides and therefore God is sovereign. But what lesson does she learn from the revival of her son? No doubt this re-inforces the lesson that God is sovereign and can grant life. But she tells us what else she learns in the last verse of chapter 17 (slide 2): that Eliyahu is a messenger of God, and that Eliyahu is not acting independently, of his own accord.

With brighter classes, this point can be developed further, from Eliyahu's actions: Ask students to remember the scene Eliyahu enacted with the child. In what way did Eliyahu emphasize that the revival came from God and not from Eliyahu? Put differently, if Eliyahu were simply a magician showing off his own powers, what would he do? (Ask students if they've seen a magic show – how does the magician "show off" his abilities?) Students should recognize that a magician performs for a crowd, and shows his miracles to the crowd. But Eliyahu revived the child in the attic, on his own, through prayer to God. He isn't showing off his own abilities, but rather acting as a channel between people and God.

It is critical that students appreciate from 17:24 that the prophet's job is to serve as a messenger of God – the illustration in slide 2 is designed to that.

Students should connect this with the God/people hierarchy, which was emphasized in lesson 13, in which Israel is required to recognize God as sovereign, and the role of the king in this hierarchy.

Slide 3 repeats the hierarchy of people/God/king from lesson 13, and illustrates how, when the king is not performing the job of enabling the people to recognize God's sovereignty, the prophet fills the role of enabling people to recognize God's sovereignty.

IOW: The king is supposed to encourage the people to recognize God as sovereign. And in our story, since he is not doing that, the prophet takes on this job. Here, the prophet is required to teach not only the people, but also the king, that God is sovereign.

With this we begin chapter 18.

Begin by reading and explaining v. 1, using slide 4, and emphasize the meaning of הראה – to be seen. This word will recur repeatedly in the chapter. (It is difficult to begin teaching Niph'al based on this verb, which lacks the classic Niph'al signs, so I do not recommend doing so, unless students already know grammar.)

Pull out the smartboard list constructed in Lesson 14, where we asked students to list the tools God has to remind people that He is sovereign. Ask students where on this list we find "giving rain". Students should realize that giving rain is not something that will let people recognize God, since it's perceived as a "normal" sort of activity. Ask: What makes this giving of rain into something that will remind people that God is sovereign? Students should realize that in this specific case, after a drought, if the prophet announces: There will be rain, and then rain comes, this indicates the point stated in 17:24: the prophet speaks on behalf of God. So this chapter will be about Eliyahu convincing Ahab and all of Israel:

- a. That God is sovereign –He can give and withhold rain
- b. That Eliyahu is sent by God.

Havruta – 18:2-16

The havruta assignment introduces the Eliyahu-Ovadia encounter. The encounter highlights some of the fears people feel towards Eliyahu, but also shows that Eliyahu is respected even

by Ahab. The havruta also allows students to develop reading fluency – provided that they actually read the verses in Hebrew.

Frontal Lesson: v. 16-41.

In reviewing the havruta assignment, ask students how Ahab feels towards Eliyahu. Students should realize that Ahab fears Eliyahu, but does not think him a fraud.

The teacher should begin with v. 16 in which the servant walks לקראת the master, to receive him. Here, Ahab shows himself to regard Eliyahu as something of a master.

Read v. 17 and ask students: Why does Ahab who seems to respect Eliyahu think Eliyahu is a "destroyer of Israel"? Remind students of the drought and ask students "who caused the drought?" God. Ask "But whom does Ahab think caused the drought? Who told him the drought would come?" Students should realize that Ahab sees Eliyahu as the bringer of the drought.

IN SUM: Ahab at this point respects Eliyahu but does not see him as representing God, but as some magic-man who has powers he can choose to use.

Ask students to illustrate on their own how Ahab sees Eliyahu using slide 5. Compare this to how the woman from ch. 17 sees him. They should understand that Ahab fears Eliyahu, but sees Eliyahu as an independent actor.

Ask students to illustrate on their own (using slide 6) how Eliyahu sees Ahab's role in the drought, in v. 18. The point should be that the drought is NOT caused by magic, but by human action, mediated through God's reward and punishment.

WE have here a clash between two conceptions of drought and of God, illustrated in slide 7: Ahab believes that Eliyahu is a magician independent of God, who causes the drought, and God is not sovereign. Eliyahu believes that God is sovereign, Ahab discourages Israel from recognizing this, and God therefore punishes Israel by causing drought. (Highlight the understanding of vv. 17-18 and in tests, ask students to translate these verses and explain the conflict they contain.)

Who is right? Is God in charge?

That's the conflict that shapes the drama in this chapter.

Continue the conflict in slide 8 – ask students on which slide the prophets mentioned in vv. 19-20 stand. Do they see God as sovereign?

These prophets represent the classic Near Eastern conception of the magician as able to independently influence forces of nature, where those forces of nature are incarnated in a god (such as Baal) who is not all-powerful, but responsible for some forces of nature. Baal, like other gods of the ancient Near East, is not all-powerful, but is one of many gods. Since he's not all-powerful, magicians can influence him. The unique feature of the God of Israel is His transcending nature, and His being the ONLY force above nature. (This is a synopsis of Kaufmann, noted above.)

Emphasize v. 21 using slide 9. Students should memorize the phrase and what it means. Ask students why people would be attracted to worship of God, and why they might be attracted to worship of Baal. Highlight fitting into world culture by worshipping Baal, and the attraction of worshipping a god whom people can control – people decide what's right and wrong, since they know that the god is not all-powerful.

Both tradition and majestic awe draw people to God, but it is much easier to follow Baal – this is the inner conflict Eliyahu highlights in v. 21.

Ask: Why don't the people answer Eliyahu?

In vv. 22-25, Eliyahu outlines his plan. I suggest asking students to read the verses and summarize the plan, and ask students what advantage Eliyahu gives the Baal worshippers, and why he does so. (Students should realize that Eliyahu is not scared of letting them go first- he knows he can't lose – Use the board to make a list of actions Eliyahu does to show that he is confident of victory, and include this action in the list.)

Eliyahu's confidence is also reflected in vv. 26-27. It's worth acting this point out. Ask which is the key element of Eliyahu's mockery in v. 27 - -- students should identify the phrase " כי אלהים הוא" as key to the mockery. Illustrate it in on one side of slide 8 with a question mark after this phrase.

Dramatically read vv. 28-29, and note that at this point Eliyahu decides to end the game.

This too can be added to the list of actions Eliyahu does showing his confidence in victory - because there never really was a contest.

Ask students what Eliyahu's actions in vv. 30-31 symbolize. Students should recognize both the idea of Jewish unity and the connection to זכות אבות, like in Devarim 4:37. (There is a nice midrash from Bereshit Rabba that the Radak quotes, relevant for brighter students.)

Dramatically read vv. 33-35 and add the water here to Eliyahu's actions on the list, that show his confidence.

Highlight to students that v. 36 is the summit or peak of the whole conflict. Focus on the words

כי אתה א-להים בישראל ואני עבדך

and use slide 10 to show how Eliyahu is here proving the points that have been at issue from the beginning of the chapter: both God's sovereignty and his status as Divine emissary.

Ask students to understand the key points in v. 37.

In studying vv. 38 and 39, a good point of discussion is to ask students which of these verses best illustrates Eliyahu's victory. Students should understand that his final goal is to convince the people and thus v. 39 is the great victory.

Slide 11 illustrates the question of Eliyahu from v. 27 about Baal (כי אלהים הוא?) and how this contrasts with the people's declaration in v. 39. See on v. 39 Rashi's comment which highlights the contrast.

And ask students: If Baal is not god, then in whose name are his prophets speaking? V. 40 illustrates the anger of the people at the prophets of Baal who have tricked the people to get benefits.

As a homework assignment, ask students to read on their own vv. 40-46 and find in them hints of a new hierarchical relationship between Eliyahu and Ahab. Where do we see Ahab listening to Eliyahu? Where do we see Eliyahu honouring Ahab?

Students should recognize that Ahab obeys Eliyahu in vv. 41-42 and that Eliyahu honours Ahab by serving as his runner in the last verse of the chapter. Ask students, as part of the assignment, or when reviewing it, to draw a diagram of the new hierarchical relationship between Eliyahu and Ahab that we find at the end of this chapter.

Students should realize that Ahab and Eliyahu are now both committed to encouraging Israel to recognize God as sovereign.

I recommend conducting a test or evaluation on this chapter, as well as on chapter 17, because of the quantity of verses. At minimum, students should have to translate and explain central ideas in 17:1-6, 17:8-11, 17:16, 17:20, 17:24; 18:1; 18:17-18, 18:21, 18:36-39.