

Lesson 17 (Melakhim Alef chapter 20)

Begin this lesson with an introduction to the rest of the Eliyahu stories:

The concluding three chapters Melakhim Alef deal with Eliyahu's attempts to change a single person: King Achav. The key idea that Eliyahu seeks to convey to Achav in these chapters is that God owns the land. This is a difficult idea for Achav to appreciate because:

- a. The popular perception is that the human king owns the land
- b. The surrounding culture promotes belief in Baal, even after the drama at Mount Carmel.

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will improve their fluency in reading Biblical narrative, by reading a longer narrative.
2. Students will develop skills in extracting moral messages from Biblical narrative.
3. Students will recognize the link between personal humility and acknowledging God's rule.

Begin by presenting the introduction above, and then explain that in this chapter and in chapter 22, Achav learns valuable lessons through his encounters with Aram. Using the map in slide 1, show where Aram is. (Students do not necessarily need to know that there are multiple Aramean kingdoms in what is now Syria and southern Turkey, since the kingdom of Aram with which we are concerned here is that centered on Damascus.) Mention that besides his trade links with Sidon, Achav develops diplomatic ties with Aram-Damascus. Under Achav, Israel at times works with Aram-Damascus against common enemies. This is not one of those times.

Students should know that Aram-Damascus is here portrayed as an idolatrous society. (Its main god is Hadad, who is a local version of Baal. In other words, he is also a storm and fertility god.)

The first battle: verses 1-25

Based on that introduction, ask students to read verses 1-9 as a havruta activity. The first page of the attached worksheet guides them through these verses.

Students should understand that the narrative in these verses is about the hierarchical relationship between Ahab and Ben-Hadad, and that the question of "who's on top?" is key.

Using slide 2, illustrate Ahab's view of his relationship to Ben-Hadad. This side of the board should show that Ben-Hadad is supreme, but that Ahab is not abased.

The other side of the slide should show Ben-Hadad's view of the relationship, including Ben-Hadad's supremacy and the abasing of Ahab.

Students should understand that Ahab:

- Is not willing to accept Ben-Hadad's view
- Receives support from the "elders and the people"

Ask how they expect Ben-Hadad to react.

Frontally teach verses 10-12, emphasizing verse 10 (in slide 3) which shows that Ben-Hadad begins a war. (The phrase **אם ישפך עפר שמרון** is explained.)

Ask students what the war is about? (Use slide 4 to record their answers, which should include the question of the hierarchy between Ben-Hadad and Ahab)

And then teach verse 13. What is the war now going to be about? Use the other slide of slide 4 to illustrate the new aspect of the war that the prophet introduces. The war is about recognizing that Ahab and Ben-Hadad are both subject to God, and that He is highest in the hierarchy.

Verses 14-19 can be taught in overview. (More capable students can be given an assignment to read on their own and illustrate the battle scene on a sheet of paper.)

In teaching the overview of verses 14-19, ask students to go back to verse 10, and ask how they think Ben-Hadad feels about his chances of winning this war. Students can then be directed to verse 16, to see Ben-Hadad's misplaced confidence expressed in drinking. If appropriate, students can be called on to act out Ben-Hadad's point of view on the war.

Then, frontally teach verse 20, and highlight to the students who won.

Go back to slide 4. What did the war prove? The review of the key theme is critical to understanding the lesson. Ask students: Does Ahab now think God is supreme? Does Ben-Hadad believe this?

Then, ask students to do a second havruta on verses 23-25. Go back to slide 2, and ask students "In Ben-Hadad's view, who is stronger than whom?" Emphasize the point that if in Ben-Hadad's view, Ben-Hadad can fight in hills and in valleys, but god can only fight in the one or the other, then Ben-Hadad is stronger.

The second battle, verses 26-43

Emphasize to students that this second battle is supposed to convince both Ben-Hadad and Ahab that God is above both of them, as illustrated in slide 4.

Frontally teach verses 26-27 and ask students to illustrate verses 27 visually. Who is expected to win the war?

Then, using slide 5, teach verse 28. Students should focus on the last half of the verse, emphasizing that Ahab will win. Ask: what is the purpose of Ahab winning? Students should be directed back to verse 13, to see the purpose of the war in each case.

Emphasize to the students: It's great that Ahab will win, and is supposed to learn from this that God is supreme. But will Ahab learn his lesson?

Then, teach verses 30-34 by assigning parts to students and having them read the verses. One students should be Ben-Hadad, another group his advisors, and another group should be Ahab. After students have read verses 30-31, ask "Who does Ben-Hadad think is supreme now?" Again go back to the hierarchy slides and show that Ben-Hadad thinks Ahab is supreme. Ask students: Does Ahab think this? Does Ahab recognize God.

Then, allow the reading of verses 30-34 to resume.

When students have finished reading verse 34, ask: What did Ahab do to show the hierarchy between him and Ben-Hadad? Students should understand that the function of ברית is to recognize a hierarchy. Ben-Hadad and Ahab both recognize that Ahab is higher up. Who is left out of this ברית? Students should recognize that God is left out of the ברית and it's for that reason that the prophet objects.

Before proceeding, use slide 6 to again emphasize the prophet's view of "who is higher in the hierarchy"? According to the prophet, who delivered Ben-Hadad to Ahab? Whom should Ahab now recognize as supreme?

I suggest skipping the parable in verses 35-41, or assigning it as independent work.

Using slide 7, teach the verse 42. Focus on the question of defining איש חרמי. The simplest is to use both Radak and Ralbag who understand this to mean "the man I caught in my net" – with חרם meaning net. What does it mean for the hierarchy if Ahab can send away איש חרמי. Ahab thinks he's higher than ____, and that he, Ahab, is the one who holds the net. God therefore says that והיתה נפשך תחת נפשו – you will have to be caught by God to learn that God is supreme, and not you.

Discussion:

Having focused throughout the chapter on the question of supremacy, it's worth taking some time to discuss what it really means to recognize God's supremacy. Ask: is it enough to say "God is supreme"? Ask students what Ahab did which indicated that he failed to recognize God as supreme. How did his making a ברית show that he was not recognizing God as supreme?

Ask students for actions in their daily lives that show a recognition of God as supreme. Some of these may reflect back on the discussion of פוסחים על שני הסעיפים in which sexual behavior was engaged. Try to direct students towards other expressions of recognizing Divine Supremacy, including the question of property rights, which figure prominently in the next chapter.