

Lesson 19- Melakhim Alef 22

Goals:

1. To more fully and deeply understand the idea of humility and humbling oneself before God which is directly connected to recognizing God's sovereignty.
2. To understand how the narrative presents the consequences of failure to recognize God's sovereignty
3. To appreciate how Biblical narratives convey thematic ideas, relevant in our own lives
4. To further develop skills in reading Biblical narrative, including both a) simple Hebrew reading skills; and b) more developed skills, including the ability to recognize how narrative develops characters and how narrative conveys satire.

Part 1: Preparation for War – Lack of Humility and Overconfidence (verses 1-13)

Begin by presenting the last verse of chapter 21. Ask students what "נכנע לפני" means. Students should understand that the phrase means to recognize God as sovereign, and necessarily implies a lowering of oneself. Ask students what brought Ahab to lower himself before God. Students should remember that the punishment promised by Eliyahu provided this incentive. Ask students: "If there is no immediate threat to his ego, would Ahab lower himself before God?" If discussion fails, try to ask "Would you lower yourself before God?" Re-engage some of the concrete examples from the previous chapter of what such lowering means. It indicates not only declaring that God is higher, but also showing this in practical actions, reflected in limiting our own "agency" or authority. Using slide 2, ask students to provide some practical examples of recognizing God's sovereignty by limiting oneself.

Then, ask students to read verse 2-4, perhaps in havruta, and ask them: What does Ahab very much want to do in these verses? (I suggest leaving out verse 1. Although it is extremely important historically, since it shows that the author of Melakhim is aware that Ahab and Ben-Hadad cooperated to fight Assyria, the historical discussion will take us much too far afield.)

Students should understand that Ahab desperately wants to capitalize on the victory he gained over Aram in chapter 20, by taking Ramot Gilead from the Arameans he defeated previously. (A map of the region is on slide 3, although the only geographic point students need here is to understand that Gilead lies on the border between Israel and Aram and that the war here will be waged by Israel against the old enemy of Aram, whom they met in chapter 20.)

Students should then be asked who the second character in verses 2-4 is. Students should be reminded of the existence of the kingdom of Judah. The teacher should be aware that at least in this narrative, Judah is portrayed as a) more loyal to God than Israel; b) weaker than Israel and subservient to Israel.

Ask students to act out the dialogue between Ahab and Yehoshafat in verse 4. After the acting out, ask students: "Is everything settled?" Presumably, they'll say "yes." Then ask:

"Who speaks next?" (In general, when Biblical narratives state that in a dialogue, one speaker speaks, and then speaks again (ויאמר פלוני, ויאמר פלוני, with no מִיִּשְׁהוּ אַחֵר between them), this indicates that some non-verbal event took place between the two speeches. Here, it appears that Yehoshafat thought over his agreement and realized that he had erred.)

Students should recognize that Yehoshafat in v. 5 has significant qualms about his agreement to go to war. Ask students to identify the source of those qualms. This should bring students back to the point raised in slide 2: Lowering oneself = acknowledging God as Sovereign=Refraining from doing actions one might very much wish to do, but which do not fit with loyalty to God.

Why does Yehoshafat speak up again in v. 5 after having settled the matter in v. 4? Yehoshafat is unclear as to whether this action is really something God wants.

Then, ask students: "Well, can you fool yourself into believing that something God doesn't want is in fact something God wants?" Let the discussion develop for a minute or two, then ask students to read verses 6 and 7. (Slide 4 illustrates verse 7). Then ask them: who is fooled here? Who isn't? Who's fooling whom?

Students should understand that Yehoshafat is not fooled, and that Ahab is trying to let himself be fooled. Ask students what it means to let yourself be fooled.

Then introduce verses 8-10 and use slide 5 to introduce the new character. Students should recognize 3 characters at this point: Ahab, Yehoshafat, and Micaiah, as well as the false prophets, and can illustrate how they all stand together using a smartboard version of slide 5 (based on v. 10). The illustration will be important later.

Tell students that the real message will arrive in verse 13 and following, but while waiting for Micaiah we have a comic interlude. Ask someone to act out verse 11 with proper intonation (vocabulary in slide 6). Ask: who is fooled? Emphasize that one needs to "want" to be fooled.

Part 2: Micaiah's Message: verses 13-27

Then ask students to read verses 13-14 – and ask students whether Micaiah will fool himself. Students should realize that Micaiah can easily lie and tell Ahab what Ahab wants to hear, but that Micaiah's commitment to transmitting the word of God prevents him from doing this.

Tell students that with Micaiah's arrival, the real drama begins. Ask students who are the two sides in this drama. Students should realize that one way of understanding this drama is Micaiah vs. Ahab but another way is Ahab vs. Ahab – his good inclination, that which is "נִכְנַע לַפְּנֵי ה'" vs his evil inclination, that which believes that he can do anything he wants – because he is king. (There is a famous Lubavitcher rebbe story in which he asks a bar mitzvah boy why there are two teams in baseball. The boy explains that otherwise there would be no

game. The rebbe tells him that once you are bar mitzvah, his יצר הרע and יצר הטוב are both on the field, playing against each other to win.)

Ask students how they might encourage Ahab to listen to his יצר הטוב and make a list of suggestions, and say that we'll now see what Micaihu does to encourage Ahab to listen to his יצר הטוב.

Then read verse 15. Ask students: Is Micaihu giving in? Is he telling Ahab what he wants to hear? Let students speak for a moment, then read verse 16 – using slide 7. Students should realize that Ahab clearly thinks that Micaiahu is laughing at him. Given Ahab's reaction, how do students think that Micaihu made his statement in verse 15.

Devote some time to letting students act out the drama of verses 15-16, in which Micaiahu laughs at Ahab, and Ahab realizes he is being laughed at, but doesn't appreciate the humour. This is important because it sets the stage for verses 19-23. Ask students why they think Micaiahu uses satire, as a way of getting Ahab to pay attention to his יצר הטוב.

Then, ask students to read verses 16-18, and undertake the short havruta assignment illustrated in slide 8. This assignment emphasizes:

In v. 16, Ahab asks for "אמת"

Illustrate the scene Micaiahu describes in verse 17. Does the scene described indicate victory or defeat?

In v. 18, Ahab characterizes Micaiahu's statement as "רע"

In summarizing the havruta assignment, emphasize that sometimes אמת is רע. How should one deal with that challenge? Why is it hard for Ahab to accept that in this case the truth hurts?

Then, introduce Micaiahu's final attempt to get Ahab to see truth: vv. 19-23. Here too, he uses satire, but it's more subtle satire. Put on the board slide 5, above, the illustration of Ahab and Yehoshafat and Micaiahu.

Then, ask students to read verses 19-23 and to prepare a drawing of the verses – then ask one or two groups to put their drawing on the board. Ask students to compare this drawing to slide 5, above. Students should realize that Micaiahu is describing God's council as similar to Ahab's council – a throne, with subjects gathered in front of the sovereign. In God's council, God is asking: "Who will tell lies?" just as Ahab is asking in his: "Who will tell me lies?"

Ask them which words from verse 23 repeat from our discussion of verses 16-18 (use slide 9 to illustrate this). Students should realize here that Ahab is looking for שקר, and here that שקר is hiding רעה.

Students should appreciate that Ahab is here seeking out שקר to hide from רעה. At this point, the rest of the chapter follows a well-worn trajectory. Ask students what they think will happen....

First, ask them, who represents אמת and ask them what they think Ahab will do to that person. Then have them read verses 26-28, and recognize that Ahab is trying to hide אמת.

Try to illustrate on the board Ahab's attempts to hide אמת. Students should also know what the אמת here equals – רעה. Ask if they think Ahab can avoid the רעה

Part 3: The Battle: Verses 29-40

Ask students, based on v. 30, what Ahab does to avoid the רעה finding him. Students should realize that Ahab is dressed as a regular soldier, while Yehoshafat is dressed as Ahab – I suggest illustrating this key point on the board, since verse 30 is hard.

Ask students: Will this work? Who is sending the רעה against Ahab? Don't answer the question, but instead:

Ask students to read in havruta verses 31-37, and answer the following questions (in slide 10):

Who killed Ahab?

Who ensured that Ahab would get killed?

After reading these verses, students should then be asked to write a short (3-4 sentences) in-class paragraph explaining "What key lesson does Ahab's death illustrate?" Students should present their answers, and in the discussion emphasize:

1. Ahab tries to hide from אמת (the רעה is אמת).
2. God ensures that his attempts to hide fail.
3. One cannot hide from God –
4. Therefore, it would have been better for Ahab to follow his earlier path of נכנע לפני ה'

In conclusion, read with students verse 38, and ask students: why is it so key to describe what happened to Ahab's blood? Students should be directed back to chapter 21 and read there verse 19 again. Then ask students: Why was Ahab killed? Students should realize that he was killed because he allowed Naboth to be killed. Then ask students: how does that fit with our discussion of how Ahab did not recognize God as sovereign? Students should understand that recognizing God as sovereign means not killing Naboth.

Conclusion and Evaluation

The past three lessons (chapters 20-22) have focused on the character of Ahab, and students should be given an opportunity for a test and/or essay to review these chapters.

I suggest either a test with the following guidelines, or an assignment along similar lines. The goal is to demand that students prepare the pesukim, but also think about larger themes.

1. Review chapter 20, verses 1-13. What is Ahab supposed to learn from encountering Ben-hadad?
2. Review chapter 20, verses 26-28. What is Ahab supposed to learn from his second battle with Ben-hadad?
3. Review chapter 20, verse 34. How does Ahab treat Ben-hadad? Review verse 42 – why was Ahab's treatment wrong? Who really beat Ben-hadad?

4. Review chapter 21, verse 1-7. What is wrong with Jezebel's statement **עתה אתה תעשה מלוכה בישראל?**
5. Who killed Naboth? Students should be able to supply at least two correct answers to this question, and to prove, based on chapter 21 (especially verse 19) that their answers are correct.
6. What punishment was decreed on Ahab for the story of **כרם נבות**? (See chapter 21 verse 19)?
7. Is Ahab capable of recognizing that he was wrong? Answer based on chapter 21 verses 27-29.
8. Based on chapter 22, verses 15-18, show that Ahab understands that **אמת** can include **רעה**.
9. Find in chapter 22 verses 1-27 several occasions on which Micaiah tries to convince Ahab of **אמת**, and explain that truth.
10. Find at least two occasions in chapter 22 verses 26-35 which show Ahab attempting to hide or hide from **אמת** or **רעה**.
11. Explain, in a single paragraph, Ahab's greatest failing. In a separate paragraph, describe how you learned from Ahab's failings.