

Lesson 8: Rehav'am and Yerov'am (I Kings 12:1-19)

Goals:

1. To develop skills in rapid reading of Biblical Hebrew, and skills in correlating Biblical narrative to the ideological considerations behind the narrative.
2. To appreciate the emotional challenges inherent in humility and eschewing arrogance.
3. To evaluate Solomon's "wisdom" in retrospect, and to review the material learned in the first eight lessons in Melakhim Alef.

Part 1:

For homework, before beginning this lesson, students should be given the word bank (handout) and be told to briefly prepare Melakhim Alef 11:40-43 (know the general idea) and to more intensely prepare Melakhim Alef chapter 12 verses 1-19 the night before. Students are responsible for knowing how to explain and translate every verse in 12:1-19. It is worth testing this with a selection of questions from those in handout 1.

In teaching this unit in class, create as a backdrop the "hierarchy" slide from Lesson 6, which reappeared in Lesson 7 (reappears as slide 3 in lesson 8). Project this on the screen while the students are divided into groups to act out 12:1-19. One person should represent Rehav'am, one person should represent Yerov'am, one group should represent the Israelites of Ephraim and surrounding tribes who gather in Shechem, one group should represent Rehav'am's friends, and one group should represent the elders of Jerusalem.

The teacher should begin by reading out and briefly explaining 11:40-43, and then use the map in slide 2 to explain the locations of Jerusalem and Shechem. (Then move to slide 3.) The students should then begin acting out the verses.

When students reach v. 4, the teacher should "freeze" the skit and ask the class, using the backdrop, to explain how the people of Israel perceived Solomon's understanding of the hierarchy. The teacher should emphasize that what is now at issue is how Solomon's heir will understand the hierarchy that exists between him and the people.

Let the skit continue until v. 7. Ask the students (as many as possible) to draw on the board what sort of hierarchy the elders are suggesting. (Try to use the side to the left of the backdrop slide for this.) Students should appreciate that what the elders recommend is a sort of "mutual aid" in which at times, Rehav'am is a servant of the people and at times, the people are servants of Rehav'am – this is the idea of the king as a member of the people which appears in the "backdrop slide" – slide 3.

Then, let the skit continue until v 11. Ask the students (as many as possible) to draw on the board what sort of hierarchy the friends of Rehav'am are suggesting. (Try to use the side to the

right of the backdrop slide for this.) Students should appreciate that what the friends recommend is a “king in control” model, in which the king sees himself as above the people and unresponsive to their demands.

Ask students what ideas and feelings they think are going through Rehav’am’s head as he realizes he has to choose among the competing models illustrated on the board. Students may raise the idea of how power makes a person feel, how attractive it is to be in power, how power creates a desire for more power. (There are many possible analogies to be drawn to many literary works.) Students should consider what thoughts Rehav’am would have had to think in order to choose the elders’ model of the king as servant of the people who are servants of the king. Students should appreciate that caring about other people is an antidote to the ego-driven demands of power. (This may be a good time to introduce the idea that אהבת האדם contributes to 'אהבת ה').¹

Then let the skit continue until verse 17, and ask students why they think Rehav’am chose as he did. Students may say that God had already forced him to do so by appointing Yarov’am in the previous chapter, but the teacher should emphasize that a general promise by God does not negate an individual’s free choice.

Let Rehav’am deliver a monologue on his frustration, leading to his decision to send Adoram in v. 18. Ask him to explain why he chose Adoram for this mission.

Then let students act out vv. 18-19 in some bloodless fashion. Emphasize that this shows that the split will be hard to reverse.

Then have students act out vv. 21-24 without preparation. (This is good practice in reading Biblical narrative). Students should be able to appreciate that the split is no longer reversible.

Emphasize to students that the split of the kingdom does not portend a survival of Solomon’s kingdom in two halves. On the contrary, each half of the kingdom was considerably weaker than the united kingdom. None of the succeeding kings reaches even a small percentage of Solomon’s greatness in the descriptions in Sefer Melakhim.

Part 2: Review

As an evaluation and review of the first 12 chapters in Melakhim, I recommend the following two part assignment:

1. List of quotes. Students should be given a list of verses in advance, some of which will appear on a test. They are responsible not only for translating the verse, but for

¹ מספרים על הצדיק מאפטא, בעל "אוהב ישראל" שבא אליו חסיד ואמר לו ששמע כי הרבי מחלק סגולות בדוקות ליראת שמים, ואת זאת הוא מחפש כבר זמן רב. צחק הצדיק ואמר לו: "סגולה ליראת ה' אין לי, אך סגולה לאהבת ה' יש לי" "בשפע" שמח החסיד ואמר לו: "אשמח לקבל סגולה בדוקה ומנוסה לאהבת ה', ויואיל נא רבנו למסרה לי" השיבו הרבי: "הסגולה הגדולה ביותר לאהבת ה' היא אהבת ישראל"

knowing who said it to whom, how it fits into the verses surrounding it, and how it fits into the rise and decline of Solomon's kingdom. The verses include:

1:17

1:30

2:3-4

3:5-9

4:6-19 – which areas are excluded and which are included

5:26-28

6:2-3

6:11-13

10:18-21

10:26-29

11:1-6

11:11-13

11:29-32

12:1-17

The second part of the evaluation should consist of an essay or short term-paper, in which students use the above-noted verses to answer the question: Did Solomon's kingdom demonstrate wisdom? Students should provide at least three arguments from the verses which show how Solomon demonstrated wisdom and three which show lack of wisdom. One interesting outcome of this essay will be that students will recognize that there is not a linear rise of Solomon to wisdom and then a linear decline as soon as the Queen of Sheba episode ends, but rather an ongoing mixture of wisdom and lack thereof throughout the narrative.