

Lesson 9: Decentralization of Worship, and the Downfall of the House of Yarov'am

Goals:

1. Students will appreciate how the split of the kingdom made centralization of sacrifice more difficult, and how de-centralized sacrifice is seen as idolatry.
2. Students will recognize that non-Davidic kingship is conditional and that the king will only last as long as he supports the centralization of worship
3. Students will develop their reading skills in Parshanut.
4. Students will recognize that Biblical narrative contains subtle messages about themes, which are related to the explicit information in the text.
5. Students will recognize the prophecy/fulfillment cycle both in cases where Torah contains the prophecy or promise and Navi contains the fulfillment and in cases where both prophecy/fulfillment are in Navi.

Part 1: Melakhim Alef ch. 12, vv 25-32.

Begin lesson by projecting the map which appears in slide 2. Ask students: Now that Yarov'am established his kingdom, over the northern tribes (it is important that students understand the geography of the divided kingdom), what sorts of national institutions do you think he needs to establish? Emphasize the line on the map between north and south and ask what important city remains in the south. Students should recognize that the northern tribes have lost Jerusalem, and with it both the royal center and the Temple.

Use slide 2, which also shows the replacement royal centers and the replacement "religious centers" to teach verse 25. Referring to the map, emphasize that Yarov'am's kingdom covers both sides of the Jordan, and that he established a royal center on each side of the river, to exert control over both sides. (The placement of Yarov'am's royal center at Penuel will be important in teaching Shishak in the next chapter, so it is worth taking a moment to emphasize this now).

Then, using slide 3, ask students to consider whether it is worthwhile for Yarov'am to establish a competing religious center to Jerusalem. The purpose of the question is to open a discussion, in which students will recall the lessons we learned in Devarim chapter 12: that sacrificial worship takes place ONLY in the Temple, and that sacrificing outside of the temple creates the potential to see God as residing in multiple places, and therefore as having multiple facets. Students will then learn verses 26-32 be-havruta.

This is a fairly detailed havruta sheet, in which nearly all the questions deal with Yarov'am's alternate religious centers and the religious impact of decentralizing worship. Questions 3 and 7 are designed for students who work at a quicker pace (hence the stars). It is useful to project the

map from slide 2 while students are working so that they can see the locations of Bethel and Dan.

In reviewing the sheet, two points need to be highlighted.

The first is Yarov'am's attempts to legitimate his rule, i.e. to create legitimacy. Use slide 3 to list the many ways in which Yarov'am appeals to past leaders in creating his sense of legitimacy. The Radak unpacks these appeals in his commentary which the students need to work through in the handout. Work through the sections in question 4 – in section 1, highlight how he legitimates his rule; in section 2, highlight how he legitimates the use of calves by appealing to Aaron; and in section 3, highlight how he legitimates the choice of Bethel as cult site.

The second key point is the transition from de-centralized sacrifice (i.e. sacrifice outside of Jerusalem) to identifying God as one of many gods. This is a more complex and nuanced point, and the students are asked to broach this subject in creative writing (question 5) and in diagram (question 6). Students should understand that while in theory, it is possible to say that the calf at Bethel and the one at Dan are simply reminders that God dwells at that site, in practice, people will begin to see the calves as actual representations of God and once there is more than one such representation, people will come to believe that there is more than one god. Hence, there is a direct connection between taking sacrificial worship out of the temple and gradual abandonment of monotheism. This is not a connection that derives strictly from logic, but from human experience of seeing multiple images and beginning to associate those images with God. Ask student to listen to the short creative writing piece in question 5 and to put their diagrams from question 6 on the board.

Then put the following question to the students. Yarov'am tried hard to create legitimacy, by appealing to the heroes of the past: Ahiya, Aharon, Yaakov Avinu. Did Yarov'am succeed in creating legitimacy? What important aspect of legitimacy did he neglect?

Students may go back to the hierarchic schema we used in discussing Shelomo, and point out that Yarov'am neglects to recognize the supremacy of God.

This leads us directly to the next narrative, which I recommend teaching frontally.

(Note that there are several interesting narratives in chapter 13, which the teacher can assign as reading to more advanced students. But since the main idea of those narratives [centralized worship] has been unpacked, I am choosing to use the time for other narratives.)

Part 2: Melakhim Alef ch. 14, vv 1-20.

In resuming the discussion deriving from the last part of the lesson, ask students what experiences they can think of that might remind them of the supremacy of God.

Students may highlight the idea of miracles, but ask them if there is anything less good that can remind them of God's supremacy. Then begin by reading 14:1 – and ask students how Yarov'am might feel at this time. Students should recognize the helplessness that a parent feels when a child is seriously ill, and that this helplessness forces a person to acknowledge God's control.

Read (or ask students to read in a short havruta) verses 2-4, and ask students the two questions in slide 4:

מדוע בקש ירבעם מאשתו ללכת, ולא הלך בעצמו?

מדוע שלח ירבעם מתנות רבות לאחיה?

Students should realize that Yarov'am feels profoundly uncomfortable about going to Ahiya (Radak) and that the present is designed (as in the story of Na'aman later in the book) to show that the prophet is in the employ of the supplicant. Yarov'am hopes to get a good answer by sending someone the prophet does not hate, and by emphasizing that Ahiya "owes him."

Then, ask students to note what Yarov'am tells his wife to do in v. 2. Using slide 5, ask them: What does Yarov'am expect the prophet to know (what will happen to his son); what does he expect the prophet not to know (that the woman is Mrs Yarov'am). There is something rather ridiculous in what Yarov'am expects the prophet to know and not to know, and the verses emphasize this.

Then, read verse 6 with the students, before you read verse 5. Ask them (using slide 5) how Ahiya overturns Yarov'am's expectations of what Ahiya ought to know. Then ask students to read verse 5, and explain what allows Ahiya to overturn Yarov'am's expectations. How do verses 1-6 highlight the idea of God's supremacy? Students should understand that the narrative itself illustrates the idea of God's supremacy without Ahiya giving any substantive message to Yarov'am.

The verses then move to Ahiya's answer. Ask students to look at slide 6, which presents verses 7 and the first half of 8. Use these verses to illustrate the principle of dividing verbs with accusative endings, as well as the Hiph'il which was discussed on the worksheet and use this to emphasize that God MADE Yarov'am "higher" than the people (הרמתי אותך=עשיתי אותך רם). Why do these verses precede the answer to Yarov'am's question? What do they teach Yarov'am? Who "owes" who here? (Remember Yarov'am's attempt to make Ahiya his debtor.)

Using slide 7, teach the second half of verse 8. Yarov'am attempted to create legitimacy by being like Ahiya, Aharon, and Ya'akov, but he is accused of failing to be like David. David represents the ideal of royal legitimacy, and a king is expected to act like David, if he wishes to have a lasting dynasty, such as David has.

In teaching verse 9, highlight the hierarchy that Yarov'am's actions represent. What type of hierarchy did Yarov'am create, involving multiple gods? Ask students to fill in the Yarov'am box in slide 8. Students may suggest that Yarov'am was just like Rehav'am, in placing himself above

other people, and ignoring God – ask students to justify this by explaining where we see Yarov'am riding roughshod over the people. One good answer is that in designating holidays and worship locations, he is dictating to them. That is legitimate when the king acts in God's name but illegitimate when he acts of his own volition. Other hierarchical diagrams are also possible, including one in which Yarov'am turns his back on God (as in the verse), or one in which Yarov'am creates multiple gods.

The imagery of v. 10 is hard to teach in a mixed class, and the teacher may choose to skip it. But I have included a slide (slide 9) which illustrates משתין בקיר (male, without details), עצור (property, see Radak), עזוב (farm animals, see Radak), and the burning of dung (leaves no residue, unlike burning wood which leaves charcoal).

Emphasize the total destruction implicit in the burning of dung image.

If the teacher has taught verse 10, ask students what verse 11 adds to verse 10; if not, ask what verse 11 adds to an image of total destruction. Students should understand that v. 11 implies embarrassment and shame- the family is so weak that they cannot bury their dead. This is highlighted in the final curse in verses 12-13. (On the end of v. 13, see Radak/Rashi; the midrash is an interesting side point in illustrating how Hazal develop answers to unanswered questions in the verse.)

Verse 14 illustrates an important point: the dynasty of Yarov'am will not last – a new dynasty will replace him.

Verse 15 highlights a new point in Melakhim: as a result of Yarov'am's sins, Israel will be exiled. In other words, not just the dynasty of Yarov'am will be destroyed, but the very existence of Israel on its land will be destroyed because of the idolatry which developed out of Yarov'am's establishing worship-sites at Bethel and Dan. Slide 10 illustrates verse 15, and can be used to teach the meaning of the bulrush in water image, and the meaning of "across the river" (i.e. to Assyria). Ask students to stop and consider why exile is an appropriate punishment for the sins of Yarov'am. Students should appreciate that the people of Israel are given the land conditionally, as part of a covenant, or "deal," with God: if you will accept God, you will receive the Land/if not, you won't. Refer to the 2nd paragraph of Shema (Devarim 11:17; slide 11) to emphasize this point. End the lesson with a sense of the magnitude Sefer Melakhim attributes to the sins of Yarov'am, a point emphasized in Mishna Avot chapter 5 mishna 18.

For homework, ask the students to read 14:17-20 and 15:25-32, and tell them that they will be responsible for explaining how the narrative in those verses fulfils the prophecy in 14:10-14. Use slide 12 in reviewing the homework. Note that the final prophecy (in v. 15, about exile) is not fulfilled in these verses, but the others are.

