

Melakhim Bet Perek 3

Goals:

1. Students will appreciate the historic background behind the events of the chapter, and recognize that the Israelite kings are not simply literary figures but historical ones as well.
2. Students will develop their skills at reading biblical narratives
3. Students will explore how some motifs and ideas in previous chapters (Melakhim Alef ch. 22 and Melakhim Bet ch 1 and 2) repeat in this chapter.
4. Students will appreciate how Elisha becomes accepted by Ahab's descendants.

Lesson:

Begin by assigning students with better reading skills the responsibility for presenting the Mesha Stele to the class. The teacher needs to know that the Mesha Stele is a stele written by the Moabite king mentioned in Melakhim Bet Perek 1 verse 1 and again in Perek 3 verse 4 and following. He, like Ahab and family, were historical figures, who left us messages.

The story of the stone's discovery (in the 19th century CE) is fascinating, but not worth wasting class time on -it's a good assignment for a student who is frustrated at reading Hebrew and needs some class project where he can research and tell a dramatic story to the class.

The students with better reading skills should be given the attached handout with the alphabet chart of the ancient Hebrew letters, and the drawing of the Mesha stone, without the transcription into regular Hebrew letters. (The Moabites used an alphabet almost indistinguishable from the one used by speakers of Hebrew at this time.) They should be told to read and prepare as follows:

- The first two lines and the first eight letters on the third line
- The last three letters on the fourth line, all of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth lines and the first eight letters on the ninth line.

Tell students that there are not always dividers between words and they will have to figure out the word divisions at times on their own based on context. They should realize that Moabite is very close to Hebrew, and if they can read Hebrew and learn Gemara in Aramaic (if they can...) then they can certainly read Moabite.

These students should then show the stone to the class and guide the class through reading the lines noted above. They should realize that Mesha sees himself as the legitimate king of Moab, that Omri "oppressed" (ויער) Moab, and this was a result of the god Chemosh's anger at his land (Moab).

The text then gives a general statement of how Mesha "saw" (i.e. saw the defeat, as in Tehillim 118:7) of Omri and Omri's house. It then gives a specific statement of how Mesha took back the land of Medeba from Omri.

At the end of the presentation, students should be able to identify Mesha, Moab, and Medeba on the map in slide 2.

Tell students that Melakhim Bet Perek 3 tells the story of how the king of Israel reacted to Mesha's attempts to get rid of Israelite control.

Using slide 3, show students that after the death of Ahaziah, Yehoram becomes king of Israel. It's important that students realize this is "Yehoram of Israel" (because later they will learn about Yehoram of Judah). Ask students to identify in verses 1-3 the evaluation of Yehoram's religious views. Then ask students:

1. How they think Ahaziah will react to Mesha's attempts to take back his country?
2. What they think Ahaziah's attitude to Elisha will be?

Record their answers to question 2 on a smartboard, to be pulled out at the end of the lesson.

Then read with them verses 4 and 5, emphasizing how great an economic loss to Israel is the loss of Mesha's territory and taxes.

Verse 6 answers question 1 above- ask a weak student to read this easy verse and explain what Yehoram's plan is.

But then explain that Yehoram seeks additional strength to ensure he will win, and ask students to read verse 7 and recall where that phrase was used in the past. They should recognize its use in Melakhim Alef 22:4 and know that here, as there, Israel is the stronger kingdom and is inviting Yehuda to join. Depending on the level of the class, it may well be worth dividing the verse using טעמים מפסיקים.

Using slide 4, teach verse 8 and ask students what they think will happen to the army. The picture was taken by my Bar-Ilan students in the area of the route towards the Dead Sea and the desert of Moab (which is in the south of the Dead Sea.)

Verse 9 should confirm their suspicions: an army marching through the desert without water is in trouble.

Read verse 10 carefully with the students. Ask: Is Moab actually winning? Who is actually defeating the Israel-Judah army? Students should realize that the problem is water, and that providing water is part of Israel's relationship with God.

And thus, verse 11 brings us back to question 2 above: How will Yehoram relate to Elisha.

This is essentially Elisha's first test as a prophet in relation to the king.

Then, ask students to break into groups of four. In each group there should be an Elisha, a Yehoram, a servant of Yehoram, and a Yehoshafat king of Judah. The groups should prepare verses 11-18, by first dividing the verses using טעמים מפסיקים, and then figuring out which person in each group reads which lines. Tell students that the teacher will be narrator, and that they need to be ready to read the correct lines, since the teacher will jump from group to group, calling out group names as you read the pesukim.

The vocabulary needed for these verses is in slide 5.

After the students have presented these verses, ask them: Who will win this war? Students should realize that Yehoram's strength doesn't avail, and that it is God who will win the war by providing water.

Then read verse 20 explain that in Midbar Yehuda, flash floods are not uncommon, and that the area can flood when it rains far away because the rain is carried through the desert canyons. The film attached illustrates this –

Then read verses 21 and 22, explain the Moabites reaction, and then verse 23 with the victory of Israel and Judah. Ask students whom they think really won?

Then, go back to the smartboard slide on Yehoram's attitude to Elisha. How do students think Yehoram now appreciates Elisha?

Conclusion:

Ask some of the students who did the initial study of the Mesha stele who wins the war in the end of the Mesha stele? Does Moab become independent? (Answer: yes) If so, why does the story in this chapter end in Israel's victory?

Note to students that the very end of the chapter – verse 27, describes how "there was great anger on Israel, and they departed from upon him and returned to the land" (i.e. to the land of Israel.)

(IMO, it is not worth trying to unpack v. 26, which is extremely difficult, with most classes.)

Ask students: IF in the end, the Moabites do become independent, why does the Navi emphasizes the first stage of the war, in which Israel's army is saved from dying of thirst?

The answer is clearly in order to show that Yehoram learns to respect Elisha, and to recognize in Elisha a messenger of God, just as Ahab respected Eliyahu. Again, this can be illustrated by taking out the smartboard of answers developed at the beginning of the lesson.

It might be worth developing a discussion of people who don't see themselves as obedient to God's commands who nevertheless respect and honour those they see as "holy men" or as "God's messengers."

Judah in the Mesha Stele:

The story in Melakhim Bet mentions Judah. So does the Mesha stele, in its last lines. For more on this, see the article by Andre Lemaire, attached.

