

Lesson 4: Melakhim Bet Chapter 5

Goals:

1. To continue to develop fluency in reading Biblical narrative
2. To emphasize how Biblical narratives develop themes through their choice of phrases and words
3. To emphasize how Elisha is able to convince even non-Israelites to accept that God runs the world.

Note: This chapter is particularly important to teach because it is also a haftarah – for parashat Tazri'a.

Introduction

Begin by asking students regarding the previous chapter: Who caused the miracle? Students should realize that God caused the miracle, but that Elisha was able to get the Shunamite woman to recognize God's power in the world.

Based on verse 1, ask students who Elisha will meet in this chapter. Students should realize that this person is a non-Israelite, and that the attempt to convince him of God's power will be necessarily more difficult than convincing the Shunamite.

Tell students that in this chapter, the dynamic is different than that of the Shunamite woman and Elisha. The dynamic is one of power – who is stronger than whom. We see this already in verse 1, in three different ways.

First:

Ask students to divide verse 1 into phrases based on טעמי המקרא, and understand the words in the verse. Identify the three characters mentioned in verse 1, and use slide 2 to illustrate this:

- Na'aman
- Na'aman's master, i.e. the king of Aram
- God

Using the slide, focus first on the phrase **כי בו נתן ה' תשועה לארם**, and explain, by using the slide, the meaning of these words: for by means of him, God gave Aram "תשועה". The two difficult points here are the meaning of the word "תשועה" – (for which I recommend the meaning "saving" or "power" since the term salvation which has Christological overtones), and the meaning "by means of" for **ב**. Based on this information, students should understand that while God has given Aram power, Aram does not recognize God's power. That is one "dynamic of power" in this chapter, emphasized in slide 2.

(Please make sure that students have at least a vague idea of where Aram is, using the map in slide 1.)

Second:

A second dynamic of power is illustrated in slide 3. This relates to the relationship between Na'aman and his "master" who is the king of Aram. Ask students to point out how the verse formulates that relationship. Students should realize that the word "לפני" expresses a power relationship --- it is like a "less than" (<) sign. If a stands "לפני" b, then a is less than b. The lesser power always stands לפני the greater power. Students need to appreciate this meaning of לפני, which will be important in this chapter.

Third:

One final dynamic of power is illustrated in slide 4. What's Na'aman's problem? Students should realize that the first half the verse portrays Na'aman as full of power, while the second part of the verse focuses on his lack of power, on his leprosy.

Lesson, Part 1: Verses 2-5

Begin with slide 5, which again illustrates the map of Aram and Israel. Tell students that in this period, Aram and Israel are rivals. Ask students what type of fighting between Aram and Israel is described in verse 2. Students should recognize that the phrase "ויצאו גדודים" means that armed bands went from Aram to Israel to capture hostages. Read the verse with the class, and introduce the new character in the story: the "little girl." Go back to slide 3 and ask students where they see in verse 2 the phrase לפני and ask what it means. Students should here realize that לפני means "to stand before" and "to be subservient to."

Ask students how they think this little girl is going to connect Na'aman to the "big question" of recognizing God's power.

Then read with them verse 3, in which the girl expresses her wish. Make sure that students understand that וְאֵלֶּיךָ אֶתֹּוּ מִצְרַעְתּוֹ means "he will remove his leprosy." This phrase לֵאסוֹף appears repeatedly in the chapter. Ask students to look for this phrase in verse 6 and verse 7, and to recognize the meaning of this phrase. This is simply a vocabulary exercise.

After students understand the words וְאֵלֶּיךָ אֶתֹּוּ מִצְרַעְתּוֹ ask students to restate the girl's wish.

Assuming students say "the girl wants Na'aman to go the prophet in Samaria to get healed," ask students to look again at the verse (in Hebrew), and explain what's missing from the summary? What does the girl actually ask for? She asks for Na'aman to be "before the prophet" in other words, she asks for Na'aman to accept that he, Na'aman, the great commander, is less powerful than the prophet. Slide 6 illustrates this power imbalance.

Students should understand this very key point: Na'aman is at this point clearly more powerful than the prophet is, but the girl makes a very meaningful and important statement: if Na'aman were < the prophet, then the prophet would remove his leprosy. This statement is key to the whole chapter. When Na'aman will be לפני (i.e. <) the prophet, the prophet will remove his leprosy.

Ask students to act out verses 4 and the first half of 5 (until the word ישראל) – with one student acting as Na'aman, and one as the king of Aram, and one as narrator. Then, ask students to read the remainder of verse 5 (from וילך), and explain why Na'aman takes

with the equipment he does. Students should be able to figure out that this equipment is designed to be a "present" to Elisha. Spend a few minutes doing two identical skits with students, in which person A does a favour for person B and person B gives person A a huge present, and then an identical skit in which no present is given. Students should be able to figure out that where no present is given, the recipient is indebted to the giver. The "present" Na'aman plans to give to Elisha is designed to avoid Na'aman being indebted to Elisha. In slide 7, the dynamic created by the present is illustrated. With present, Na'aman is more powerful than Elisha because Elisha helped Na'aman, then Na'aman helped Elisha, and no one owes anyone anything, but Na'aman always was stronger. Without present, Elisha helped Na'aman and Na'aman owes Elisha. Students should understand that the present is a way of avoiding the girl's wish of verse 3: "Na'aman < the prophet."

The key question, then is, Will Na'aman reach the stage of being לפני (<) the prophet?

Formulate the question, then let students work through the next verses (6-15) on the worksheet. As students work on the sheet, they should keep in mind the key question noted above. Ask them to evaluate over and over again, as they read the narrative, whether the narrative brings us closer to the point where Na'aman will stand לפני (<) the prophet.

(Before letting them start the worksheet, go over slide 8, which teaches the words

וַיָּבֵא הַסֹּפֵר אֶל-מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Students should understand that וַיָּבֵא means "he brought" and not "It arrived." It is a minor point in the narrative, but one the students should be able to grasp.)

Lesson, Part 2: Verses 15-20

By the time they've reached verse 15, students should understand that Na'aman can stand לפני Elisha only after Na'aman obeys Elisha. Students should realize that the word לפני appears in verse 15 for a reason, after it's omitted from verse 9. Students should further consider: what does Na'aman have to give up in order to obey Elisha. One answer is "his anger." Another, less obvious answer is "his commitment to Aram as superior to the land of Israel." But the most important answer, connected to both of these, is that Na'aman sees Elisha as a "man of God", as verse 15 states. Using slide 9, have students read the two key statements Na'aman makes in verse 15. The first statement is "God is God, and only God is God" (the similarity to the shahada is obvious, but a discussion of this point may distract students from the text). Students should realize that the following three points are related (they appear in slide 10):

1. accepting God as the only God
2. recognizing that one must obey God's prophet
3. standing לפני that prophet, and recognizing that every other person must obey the prophet, and in that sense the prophet is more powerful than other men.

The second point that Na'aman makes brings us back to his plan to give a present, which we saw back in verse 5. Remind students of Na'aman's plan to avoid a power imbalance between himself and the prophet.

Ask students how the words *קח נא ברכה מאת עבדך* re-balance the "see-saw" in which Na'aman is down and Elisha is up.

Then, look carefully at verse 16. Students should realize that because Elisha sees himself as subservient to God "*אשר עמדת לפניו*," he swears that he cannot take anything. Students should be aware of the oath-formulation "*אם אקח*," which means "I swear that I will not take."

Na'aman is then convinced of Elisha's *bona fides*, and in verses 17-19 (which the teacher should read with the class), accepts that he will no longer meaningfully bow down to another god, but asks for a special "dispensation" in regard to his attendance on the king of Aram.

Ask students why Elisha says to him "*לך לשלום*". Does Elisha accept Na'aman's need to "bow down in the house of Rimmon"? It is worth holding a discussion about the difference between level of commitment demanded of a gentile to the Noahide law forbidding the worship of idols, and the level of commitment required of a Jew, for whom the issue of *יִהְיֶה רָגְלְךָ עַל יַעֲבֹד* is relevant.

Lesson, Part 3: Verses 21-27

The last part of the chapter does not need to be intensively taught. It can be assigned as homework, and then students can be asked to write a short essay on:

1. What change(s) does Na'aman achieve in chapter 5, vv. 1-20?
2. How does the episode of Gehazi in verses 21-27 emphasize the importance of those changes?

The teacher may wish to discuss the idea that leprosy here functions as a "symptom" indicating an acceptance of God's supremacy, and when Na'aman accepts that supremacy, his leprosy disappears. By preferring to take a present from Na'aman, Gehazi shows that emphasizing God's supremacy is not so important. Therefore, he receives Na'aman's leprosy as punishment.