

Lesson Plan Isaiah Chapter 6, Part 3:

Goals:

Students will be able to:

- Develop textual skills in understanding Biblical Hebrew by studying Isaiah 6:6-13
- Use טעמי המקרא to divide difficult and long verses so as to break them into sections and understand them better
- Consider the prophet's reaction to the throne room vision in 6:5 and the element of personal responsibility it contains
- Learn to recognize the "command" (imperative or ציווי) forms in 6:9-10
- Recognize the theological difficulty of denying free will inherent in 6:9-10
- Reflect on the Radak's theological response to this difficulty, and on what might cause God to withhold free choice from humans
- Understand the significant degree of human responsibility inherent in humans having free will, and connect this responsibility to the previous lesson, which discussed the human's ability to restrain impulsive behavior
- Reflect on the connection between free will and Divine punishment, as represented in Isaiah 6:11-13.

Lesson Plan

A.

הבא לטהר מסייעין בידו – פסוקים ה-ז

The teacher will begin by recalling the previous lesson of the vision in the throne room. In contrast to the Assyrian throne room, Yeshaya sees a vision of God's throne room. He says a single verse in response: verse 5.

The teacher then allows students to answer question 1 on the worksheet, and reviews it, focusing on two points:

ממה מפחד הנביא? (ממיתה – נדמית=הנני מת, לפי רש"י)
איך הדברים שראה קשורים לפחדו? (אני טמא – את ה' צ-באות ראו עיני)

The purpose of this lesson is NOT to review the midrashic explanation of the prophet's sin, and therefore the question of the people's impurity is NOT to be emphasized. The lesson focuses instead on the prophet's recognition of his own impurity, the contrast with God, and the difference in level between man and God. All this implies the need for man to maintain humility and submission in relation to God. The teacher may wish to mention the following passage from R. Isaiah MiTrani's commentary:

שהיה סבור למות בעבור שראה ה', ולא היה ראוי לראות כבודו.

The teacher then directs the students' attention to question 2 on the worksheet and the class together considers:

בחלק האחרון של פסוק ה', הנביא עשה פעולה שהשרפים לא עשו. מה הפעולה?
מדוע פעולה זו היתה טעות?

The teacher highlights how the angels hid their faces in God's presence, as a sign of their recognition that God is on a higher level than they. Yeshaya failed to do this. Once

Yeshaya recognizes his error, the seraphim can remove the prophet's sin. The recognition of error is a key element in achieving absolution.
Question 3 on the worksheet highlights this point.

B. Ready for a mission, start the countdown – Verse 8

Verse 8 is in simple Hebrew. Students should be able to divide it into three parts (question 4 on the worksheet) and to understand it without difficulty. The teacher will first ask students to act out the dialogue, and inquire as to why the prophet volunteers. Students ought to realize that the prophet has learned a valuable lesson in verses 5-7, through his sin, and he is now ready for a mission.

The teacher will then explain that verses 9-10 are the essence of the prophet's mission, but they are quite difficult. Therefore, the teacher will give students "hints" to understand these verses. Point out the "punctuation" in verse 8 – the three sections that the students noted are marked by a זקף קטן on the word אמר and a אתנחתא on the word לנו. Students should be taught that these are מפסיקים and that טעמי המקרא are punctuation, not just singing notes. Powerpoint slide 2 presents the list of מפסיקים, adding מונה רביעי.

C. Understanding verses 9-13: grammar reveals theological problems.

Students should use this list to divide verses 9-10, to understand the words, and to give initial consideration to their theological difficulties of these verses in worksheet questions 5-8.

The teacher will direct students to use the worksheet to break down verses 9-10 into sections, understand the grammar, translate the sections, and identify the theological problem.

In reviewing the worksheet, the teacher will ensure that students can break down these two verses into sections and translate them, and identify the problem "Why does God tell the prophet to talk to the people but prevent them from understanding?" The students should understand that preventing people from understanding means preventing them from returning to God, and having Him "heal" their relationship with God. IOW, "understanding" leads to "teshuva" and here the prophet is told to deny them teshuva. The teacher should use the Hebrew word מונע, "to prevent" which will appear in the Radak later on.

D. Discussing the theological problem of denying free will.

To recall the previous lesson, the teacher may wish to ask "Can you think of someone we've talked about in class who presents a powerful experience to others. He then relies on that experience to prevent people from thinking about what they've seen and changing their ways." The students ought to recall the lesson about Assyria and how this is the approach used by the Assyrian royal court.

The teacher may wish to suggest that Yeshaya is here evoking that idea to teach the people how absurd it is to be overwhelmed by Assyria. He is poking fun at the Assyrian method by saying “You wouldn’t accept this if it came from God, why do you accept it if it comes from Assyria?”

But the teacher must emphasize that in verses 9-10, God is giving this message to the prophet. Does God want to prevent people from “understanding” so that they will not do teshuva?

Here, the teacher should present the following lines from Radak, which appear in powerpoint slide 3:

וזה דין משפט מאת הא-ל יתברך,
כשירבה החוטא לחטוא, הקב"ה מונע ממנו דרכי התשובה עד שיקבל עונשו
ולכן נאמר בפרעה "ויחזק ה' את לב פרעה" (שמות ט/יב)

Students should be able to identify two steps in this process: first the sinner sins “a lot” and only then does God prevent him from teshuva. IOW, the individual actually has free will and only after a great deal of sinning is the opportunity for “teshuva” gone.

Par'o is not forced to start denying God. He chose to start, and at a certain point, God prevents him from stopping.

Nor are the Jews in Yeshaya’s time forced to start accepting Assyria as the world sovereign instead of accepting God. They chose to start doing so, and at a certain point, God may prevent them from stopping.

The Radak thus explains the beginning point of מניעת התשובה.

The teacher will then ask students in English “How would you say in Hebrew: how long does מניעת התשובה last?”

Students will suggest various Hebrew formulations. The teacher can write these on the board, until the students ask “עד מתי מניעת התשובה”. The teacher will ensure that students understand the phrase עד מתי before they approach verse 11.

E. God as destroyer and preserver in 6:11-13

The teacher will then ask students to find the phrase עד מתי in verse 11, and ask students to explain the question. Students should be able to understand that the question is עד מתי מניעת התשובה, and teacher can direct students to Rashi, who understands the question in this way.

The teacher will then use powerpoint slide 4 to teach the second part of 6:11 as follows:

- Divide God’s answer into three, using מפסיקים.
- Identify the root שאה, which appears twice, and connect it to שואה, “destruction”
- Translate the three parts of God’s response
- Understand how these answer the prophet’s question: when a terrible destruction has happened, the Jews will have received their punishment, and then God will no longer prevent them from doing Teshuva.

Students will be able to understand that מניעת התשובה ends with a terrible destruction.

Students may ask “But what’s the point of תשובה if everyone’s dead?”

The teacher will state that verses 12 and 13 answer this question.

The teacher will first direct students to the first four words of verse 12 (slide 5) and ask students “Are people dying?” – Students will understand that this verse refers to Exile, not death. The teacher may wish to note that עזובה at the end of the verse refers to abandoned land, caused by the exile.

The teacher will then direct students to the second half of verse 13, on powerpoint slide 6.

Like the tree-trunk that remains after the leaves fall, זרע קדש will remain of the Jews.

IOW, some portion of the people will survive the exile.

The teacher will highlight that this leaves open the possibility of return, as explained by the Radak in slide 7.

(Note that the first part of 6:13 is textually very difficult and is therefore left out.)

The teacher will ask: Who is קדש in this chapter? Students should recognize that God is קדש from verse 3, and should recall the Targum’s understanding of God as beyond time. But students should also realize that the prophet describes the Jewish people as קדש because they will survive the coming exile.

F. Summary of Isaiah 6:7-13

Q: Will there be an exile? Where do we find this predicted?

A: 6:11-12

Q: Who will survive and return? Where do we find this? What image is used to explain this?

A: 6:13 – some of the Jews, the tree surviving Fall.

Q: Why will there be an exile? Where is this explained?

A: 6:9-10 imply that this is because the people have set themselves on the path of “not understanding” that God is the sovereign. Perhaps they are overawed by the Assyrian display of power discussed yesterday.

Q: What is the problem in verses 9 and 10? How does Radak limit the problem?

A: Problem: Why does the prophet say “See but don’t understand” in v. 10 and “Lest they see and return” in v. 11? Radak explains that God only prevents תשובה after people make an initial choice to sin.

Q: Is God good to the Jews or bad to the Jews?

This is the key question in the chapter, and it is critical that students understand:

- a. God requires us to acknowledge Him as king
- b. He gives us a chance to do so, but punishes refusal both by מניעת התשובה and by exile.
- c. Would it really be better if God were “nice” all the time and gave us infinite second chances? We must develop our personal responsibility.

The teacher should conduct some discussion of personal responsibility to ensure that students internalize this concept.

The teacher may wish to assign an essay (perhaps in conjunction with the English class) on the topic: “You are free from everything but the consequence of your actions.”