

LEADERS IN THE BIBLE - A CURRICULUM FOR MADRICHIM

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### RATIONALE

The Hebrew Bible is replete with outstanding leaders. These leaders take many forms, from those figures who physically lead groups from place to place, to more subtle figures who, by following their own hearts, act in a way which changes the direction or the fate of the Jewish people. The efforts of leaders in the Bible do well to inform the efforts of leaders today.

Leaders in the Bible can be approached from a variety of perspectives. Their lives and actions can be examined within the contexts in which they took place. What was the situation around the figure? What brought the figure to his/her leadership role? What were the historical circumstances? The social realities? One can also look at the Biblical character him/herself. What characteristics did this person bring to his/her predicament? What personality traits make this person a leader? What part did God play in making this person a leader? A third perspective useful in examining the Biblical leaders is a philosophical examination of the character's motives and spiritual experiences. Using this perspective, it is possible to distill elements of the character's life and examine them in light of modern reality.

In keeping with a Reform ideology, it is appropriate to examine the Biblical leaders within their historical contexts. The Biblical leaders may be viewed as guides, but not as ideals; as human and not as perfect. I believe also that the motives of Biblical leaders, understood in context, can serve to inform Jewish leaders today. The content for this course, therefore, would examine 10 to 15 leaders from the Bible. Each character would be studied in his/her context, putting an emphasis on the personal attributes and motives of that character which would most serve to inform the leadership of young Jews today.

The "stories" of the Bible are found scattered throughout the curriculum of any religious

school. In my particular setting, the stories of Genesis are taught in first grade, and students return to and exploration of Biblical texts in fourth grade. These beginnings will do well to set the stage, to give students a familiarity with Biblical settings. This closer examination of specific Biblical characters as considered through a lens of leadership will serve to further connect the student's life to his/her Biblical ancestors. Judaism may be seen not only as an ancient heritage, but also as a living guideline, an inspiration for modern lives.

The madrichim in this educational setting are eighth graders who are training to work as teaching assistants the following year. In their classrooms, they will be leaders, responsible for aiding with the education of their students. By examining leaders who have come before them in the Bible, madrichim can witness the plethora of Jewish leadership styles. Students can try out various leadership techniques within the safety of their own learning situation. They will have the chance to examine the dilemmas which faced the Biblical leaders, and extrapolate to dilemmas which might challenge their own leadership situations. Students can examine Jewish values which are placed on different types of leadership, and can come to see their role as future Jewish leaders as valid, necessary, and steeped in Jewish tradition.

A Leader in the Bible is defined as someone who, through his or her own actions, positively changed the course of history for the Israelite people. The qualities which become evident through these leadership behaviors inform the lives of teenagers and Teaching Assistants today.

The Leaders in the Bible curriculum is made up of six units. Each unit focuses on one main leadership quality which is displayed by various Biblical characters. Within each unit, students will have the opportunity to examine the leadership quality; study the Biblical characters within their appropriate contexts, exploring their motives and results; determine the leadership styles which follow from specific qualities; and evaluate the leadership quality in the light of their own lives and in light of their future work as TAs.

The Biblical characters who are included in the curriculum are listed on following pages. The "biographies" which accompany each character highlight how each character demonstrates the quality or qualities for the units he or she is included in. An effort has been made to include an equal number of men and women.

Biblical chronology has not been emphasized in this curriculum. It is assumed that the students, by eight or ninth grade, have some familiarity both with Biblical chronology and with many of the characters who are included in this curriculum. The main emphasis here is on the leadership qualities which the Biblical characters embody, and not the larger stories of which these characters are a part. The teacher may choose to address issues of chronology in a separate or overarching way. A visual time line might be displayed in the classroom, or a list of the books of the  $\text{תנ"ך}$  could be provided, with the Bible characters filled in as they come up in class.

This curriculum is designed to be implemented along with a parallel curriculum which focuses on teaching the skills necessary for being a Teaching Assistant. There exist many possibilities for cross-overs between studying Biblical leadership qualities and TA skills.

### Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- list several qualities of leaders and several styles of leadership
- detect and explore these qualities in Biblical characters
- investigate the situations and effectiveness of several Biblical leaders
- define what makes a leader, both in the Bible and in their own lives

### Goals

This course will:

- ▶ encourage students to examine their own leadership styles in light of Biblical leadership qualities and styles
- ▶ enable students to apply Biblical leadership qualities in their own future work as Teaching Assistants

## Leaders in the Bible - Units

The six units of the Leaders in the Bible are:

1. Brains
2. Initiative/Risk
3. *Hesed*
4. Religious
5. God
6. Leader

Within each unit description is the number of weeks (one class per week) which should be devoted to this unit. For each lesson, the teacher may decide to focus on an aspect of the unit leadership quality, calling on several Biblical characters who display this quality, or the lesson may focus on one or two characters, bringing out their total embodiment of the unit leadership quality. (For example, in the first unit, one lesson could focus on arguing with God, and Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Samuel could be used as examples. Or, a lesson could focus on Abraham and the many facets of his relationship with God, namely arguing, trust, gaining God's trust, and so on.)

It is important to note that most Biblical characters personify many of the above qualities. However, for the purpose of this curriculum, those characters whose qualities stand out have been chosen for specific units within the curriculum.

### Unit-by-Unit Outline

1. **BRAINS:** The characters included in this unit are leaders (at least in part) because they are smart, clever, knowledgeable, or otherwise demonstrate they have brains, or these characters make important decisions for themselves and/or others, or they embody true wisdom. This unit is the first unit because the attributes to be explored are very concrete, allowing the students to approach the material at a variety of levels. The concepts here are also more easily applicable to the lives of the students. (6 weeks)

#### Students will:

- Examine several Biblical characters as they display brains, by being smart, clever, by making decisions, by displaying wisdom, including Jacob, Rebecca, Joseph, Deborah, Ruth, Solomon, Hulda, Mordecai and Esther
- Determine how using their brains made the Biblical characters into leaders
- Relate the concept of using one's brains to the job of being a TA and to being a leader in the modern world

#### learning activities:

-read and discuss several tales of the wisdom of Solomon. Allow students to write their own tales, either about Solomon, another Biblical character, or themselves.

-experiment with "what-if" situations (what if Rebekah hadn't decided to go with Abraham's servant to marry Isaac? What if Hulda didn't verify the book Josiah found?) Thinking through these "what-if" situations will help students see the importance of characters acting on their intellect. Students can also explore the same situations with a "what would I do" angle (what would I do if Abraham's servant asked me to come marry Isaac? What would I do if my mother-in-law Naomi was going back to Bethlehem and wanted to leave me behind? What would I do if Pharaoh asked me what his dreams meant?)

2. **INITIATIVE/RISK:** The characters included in this unit are leaders (at least in part) because they took matters into their own hands, acted even under threat of personal risk, and/or they took the initiative to correct injustice. In many cases, this initiative involved breaking the conventions of their time, and operating outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior, perhaps even including deceit or trickery in their behaviors. (4 weeks)

Students will:

- Examine several Biblical characters taking risks and initiatives which change the course of Jews in their contexts, including Rebecca, Tamar, Puah & Shifra, Ruth, Hannah, Esther and Mordecai
- Determine why this is a leadership quality
- Decide how and when this is an appropriate and/or important quality to have as a leader in today's world, and as a TA in the school.

learning activities:

-have students enact a court scene, to "try" one or more of the characters who "broke the law." For example, put Puah & Shifra on trial for disobeying Pharaoh, or put Rebecca on the stand for deceiving Isaac. The characters must defend their actions and the court must decide if the ends justified the means, so to speak.

-read and discuss feminist midrashim on several of these characters (see Taking the Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible and Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible.) Analyze the character's actions in their historical and social contexts.

-ask students to envision one way (or time or activity) in which they will be taking a risk or may need to take matters into their own hands when they are a TA. Have them explore the possible outcomes (through writing, small group discussions, etc). Encourage the students to name the Biblical characters who might serve as their role models, or as a warning of what not to do.

3. **HESED:** The characters included in this unit are leaders (at least in part) because they display *hesed*, kindness, or generosity. It is important to note how this personality trait figures into each character's leadership style, and to examine *hesed* in its light as a core Jewish value, as well as a quality of leadership. (4 weeks)

Students will:

- Probe the Jewish value of *hesed*
- Examine this quality as displayed by several Biblical characters, including Isaac, Rebecca, Ruth and Esther
- Determine why and how this is a leadership quality
- Experiment with how to incorporate *hesed* into their own leadership style, and how to employ *hesed* in TA tasks such as discipline and one-on-one instruction

learning activities:

-role play several different TA situations which require *hesed* to be successful. Have all students discuss the role play afterwards.

-read the book of Ruth. divide the students into 3 groups. Have each group study either Ruth, Naomi or Boaz, distilling that character's displays of *hesed*. Have each group communicate their findings to the rest of the class in some creative way, either a skit, song, dance, or another method of their choosing.

4. **RELIGIOUS:** The characters included in this unit are leaders (at least in part) in a more religious or worship-oriented way. Specifically, each character leads the people in religious observance, or acts as a religious role model for the people to follow and learn from. Although all the characters in this curriculum serve as models of Jewish leaders, this unit focuses on the religion-specific aspects of leadership. This unit incorporates an important TA skill, being a "dougma." The objectives of this unit include both being a "dougma" for general behaviors, and being a religious "dougma" for more observance-related behaviors. (5 weeks)

Students will:

- Examine several Biblical characters in the capacity of being religious leaders/role models, including Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Miriam, Ruth, Samuel, Solomon, Hulda, Ezra, and Mordichi.
- Explore the concept "dougma" (role model or example), and the importance of being a role model in the context of being a leader
- Experiment with being a dougma/role model
- Investigate being a religious or Jewish dougma, especially in the context of being a TA

learning activities:

-choose and study a text or group of texts from the  $\text{ת"ו}$  which demonstrate a character (or characters)'s religious leadership. For example, Miriam leading the women in song and dance after crossing the Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), or Moses and the People standing at Sinai (Exodus 19), or Samuel and the People's request for a king (1 Samuel 8), or Ezra's sermon to the People returning from exile (Ezra 9-10). Allow the students to do a "handmade midrash" related to these texts. A handmade midrash is a physical, artistic exploration of a text. Using construction paper and glue only (no scissors or drawing implements) students create an interpretation or midrash which, in abstract or more concrete images, reflects what is significant for them in the text, and enables the student to put him or herself into the text (see Handmade Midrash). When students finish, they should discuss and/or write about their handmade midrash.

-role play being a dougma (a TA modeling behavior during an assembly, or how to handle angry feelings at the teacher, for example), and being a religious dougma (a TA modeling behavior during services, or handling a discussion about wearing a tallit). Through discussion, explore the differences, and why it's important to be both.

5. **GOD:** The characters included in this unit are leaders (at least in part) due to God. Specifically, a character's leadership qualities may stem from his or her relationship with God, his or her trust in God, God's trust in him or her, his or her ability or willingness to argue or wrestle with God, and/or his or her worship of God. (6 weeks)

Students will:

- examine several Biblical characters and their relationships with God, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Hanna, Samuel, David, Solomon.
- investigate how God, or the relationship with God, causes each character to be a leader
- begin to explore their own relationship with God, looking also at how this relationship might factor into their own leadership qualities

learning activities:

-act out or use Torah in Motion dance ideas (see the book in "other resources") to explore the Akeda, as a starting point for discussing trust in God and God's trust in us.

-spend a session or 1/2 session discussing student's impressions of and relationships with God, allowing students to explore their own feelings, hear other's views, and relate this to their sense of leadership.

-study/discuss Reuven Kimelman's lesson on Abraham, Moses and Elijah in *Jewish Education News* (CAJE, Spring 1993, 14/2, also included toward the end of this guide)



6. **LEADER:** This unit explores several of the most obvious leaders in the Bible - characters who started nations, or ran countries, or physically led the people Israel from place to place. Serving as a unit of synthesis, the format of this unit will differ from the previous five. Instead of focusing on leadership qualities, the emphasis will now shift to detailed character analysis, identifying how the qualities of previous units blend together to create a "leader." (5 weeks)

Students will:

- Examine several "obvious leaders" in the Bible, including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, David, Solomon.
- Analyze the presence or absence of various leadership qualities in these characters, including relationship to God, brains, initiative, *hesed*, and religious dogma.
- Develop their own theory of "what makes a leader"
- Write a personal leadership statement, describing leadership qualities which are already a part of their style, and which qualities they would like to develop.
- Determine how their leadership style will help or hinder them in being a TA

This unit can be broken down, using several or all of the following focus points for in-depth study of the characters in parentheses:

Fathering a People (Abraham)

Running a Country (Joseph)

Leading an Exodus (Moses)

From the shadows (Aaron, Miriam & Joshua)

A Tale of Two Kings (David & Solomon)

learning activities:

-dance or act out the exodus from Egypt, allowing time for exploration of the feelings and motives and qualities of the main characters.

-in one of the last few classes, students should be given ample time to write their own personal leadership statement. The statement can include the student's own theory of "what makes a leader," incorporating what the student thinks of qualities such as relationship to God, brains, initiative, *hesed*, and religious dogma. The student should consider leadership qualities which are already a part of their style, and which qualities they would like to develop. Finally, the student should determine how their leadership style will help or hinder them in being a TA. There should be enough time saved for the teacher to read and react to, or discuss, the statement with the student, and perhaps also for the students to read/hear and react to each other's statements.

### Culminating Activities/Memorable Moments

1. Brains - Students could design awards for the best and the brightest of the characters studied in this unit (i.e. "The Best Judge" goes to Deborah for her court under the tree, or "The Most Clever Mail-Order Bride" goes to Rebecca for her foresight in going with Abraham's servant to marry Isaac) Or, the class could go one step further and design similar awards for each other, likening themselves to the Biblical characters ("The Jacob Award" goes to Jennifer for her ability to arrange any deal to benefit herself, for example). Either way, the awards could be awarded with a schmaltzy measure of pomp and circumstance.

2. Initiative/Risk - A session with the rabbi should be arranged. Students should prepare questions probing, attacking and defending the actions and motives of the characters they studied. The session could be used for an examination of these risky kinds of behaviors, and a scholarly view of the validity or non-validity of the motives behind them. This opportunity might also be used for the students to ask the Rabbi about appropriate boundaries and guidelines for today.

3. Hesed - Students can decide on a project which will demonstrate their understanding of *hesed*, as it plays a role in their own lives. This might emerge as sending letters to someone who is sick, or just had a baby, or been flooded out in the Midwest. It may take the form of volunteering at a food pantry or soup kitchen (in the image of Rebecca), or tutoring some younger students in their lessons, or keeping a *hesed* journal with their families, to record all the instances of *hesed* which occur in the family within a certain time period.

4. Religious Students can practice being religious dougmaot, by leading services for the school or some portion of the school (perhaps the younger grades).

5. God After studying several Biblical examples of leaders who argued with God, students will have an opportunity to argue their issues with God. "God" can be a guest speaker who may come dressed in some God-like way (maybe as a burning bush?!?), or if there is an intercom system, God could be a voice on the loudspeaker. Students will have to prepare issues beforehand, and then argue their points before God. They will have to use their best leadership skills to sway God in the direction they desire. God, of course, will argue back, forcing the students to strongly consider their own issues and their own motives.

6. Leader For this culminating event of not just this unit but the entire curriculum, students should be encouraged to synthesize all the various leadership qualities studied throughout the year and emerge with a fairly cohesive picture of what a Leader looks like to them. An activity based on "The Taking of the Land" from Using Bible Simulations might fit the bill. The simulation in the book divides the students into the groups the Priestly class, the Jahwists, the Egyptians, and the Nomads for the task of choosing a leader to replace Moses (ignoring for the purpose of the exercise the fact that God already chose Joshua). I propose that the madrichim divide into 3-4 groups. Each group should take on the task of defining the qualities they want in a leader, and then choose the character who most closely fills their ideal from one of Biblical characters studied during the year. Each group would need to defend their choice, using texts (Bible passages or other midrashim, etc, employed throughout the year), to the rest of the class. A vote at the end can elect Moses' replacement.

## Leadership Qualities of Several Leaders in the Bible

**Abraham**- first one to believe, followed God, had enormous trust in God (Akeda, Genesis 22), brave enough to argue with God (Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 18:16-33), hospitable, able to laugh, immoral (passing Sarah off as his sister to the king in Egypt), allowed Sarah to send Hagar away (weakness, or trusting someone else's judgement). Along with Moses, Abraham is the strongest character in the God unit, in that there are many, varied ways he interacts with God. Abraham is also included in the Leader unit, as the Father of a People.

**Isaac**-had faith in his father, and in God; immoral (attempted Abraham's trick with Sarah in Egypt with Rebecca); allowed others to make important decisions for him (Rebecca was chosen for him); was fooled by Rebecca and Jacob; checked out his actions with God (journeying outside of Israel); in later life came to terms with Ishmael (at Abraham's death, Gen. 25:9). Isaac is included in the God unit, because he had a direct relationship with God. He is also included in the *Hesed* unit because of his united action with Ishmael.

**Jacob**- outwitted his brother Esau, and his father (with help of his mother Rebecca); traveled, fell in love, worked hard; was fooled by and then fooled his father-in-law Laban; wrestled with a divine being and prevailed; made peace with his brother Esau; played favorites among his children; switched the blessings for Manasseh & Ephraim according to an almost prophetic foresight; blessed all his sons, essentially summing up their lives. Jacob is included in the God unit especially for his ladder dream (Gen. 28:10-22), and for wrestling with a divine being (Gen. 32:23-33), but also for his ongoing relationship with God. Jacob is also in the Brains unit for his dealings with Laban (Gen. 30:25-43), and the blessings he bestows on his family at the end of his life (Gen. 48-49).

**Sarah**-supported Abraham, followed him, played the role of sister, sent Hagar and Ishmael away in jealousy, gave birth at age 99, laughed, had fear of God. Sarah is included in the God unit for her relationship with God, most notably in Gen 18:1-15. Sarah is one of only a few women who God talks to, or at least about.

**Rebecca**- beautiful, generous, giving, made her own decision (to go and marry Isaac); deceived Isaac to help Jacob. She is included in the Brains unit for her decision to marry Isaac (Gen. 24, esp. :55-65). She is included in the Initiative/Risk unit for her deception of Isaac in her efforts to gain for Jacob what she knew he deserved (see Gen. 25:22-28, & 27:11-18). Rebecca is also in the *Hesed* unit for her actions at the well (Gen. 24:1-21).

**Joseph**-dreams (had and interpreted), overconfident, attributed power to God, good organization skills, personally impressive, forgave and reunited family, saved Egypt and family from famine, in leadership/powerful position. Joseph's inclusion in the God unit represents a new kind of relationship - although God never spoke to Joseph, God was with him, and Joseph attributed all of his interpretive powers to God (Gen 39:21-23, 40:6-8, 41:15-16, :38-39, etc.). Joseph is also in the Brains unit for his impressive performances in the house of Potiphar (Gen. 39:1-6) and in Egypt as the Pharaoh's right hand man (gen 41:33-57). Finally, Joseph is in the Leader unit for his overt skills in running a country.

**Tamar-** had to go against the law to get what was rightfully hers, took the law into her own hands (which led to the line of David), clever, plotting. She is included in the Initiative/Risk unit for just this reason (Gen 38).

**Puah & Shifra-** had to go against the law (Pharaoh's law) to do what was right, saved the Jewish people, thought for themselves, risked their own lives. They are included in the Initiative/Risk unit, and their (brief) story is found in Exodus 1:15-22.

**Moses-**in obvious leadership/power position; found God, went face to face with authority to do what was right, led the people out of slavery toward freedom; put up with a whiny people, served as judge for the people but was able to take the advice of others (father-in-law), brought the law to the people from God, performed miracles with the help of God, had bouts of anger and doubt, didn't make it into the promised land, died with his sight and strength intact. Moses joins Abraham in having the most active relationship with God (starting with the burning bush in Ex. 3 and ending with Moses' death in Deut. 34, with countless examples in between), and so is in the God unit. Moses also serves as a religious role model (standing at Sinai, Ex. 19, is but one example) and is included in the Religious unit. And of course, Moses is included in the Leader unit for his brilliant role in actually leading (with help) an Exodus and 40 year trek through the desert.

**Aaron-** helped lead the Exodus, was the first priest (holy relationship with God), took part in (led) the making of the golden calf, also dealt with whiny people. He is included in the Religious unit for his role as the first priest (see Ex. 27:20-28:5 for starters). He is also included in the Leader unit, for his on-going "side-kick" role in the Exodus. God orders both Moses and Aaron from Exodus 24 through Aaron's death in Num. 20:28.

**Miriam-** helped lead the people, specifically the women, argued with God and got punished, was considered a prophetess, protected Moses as an infant. Miriam is included in the Religious unit for her song and dance in Ex. 15:20-21. Miriam is include in the Leader unit for participation in the Exodus, especially as a leader of the women (Ex. 15:20-21) but also in her continued role throughout the Exodus (see Numbers 12). Miriam dies in Numbers 20:1.

**Joshua-** led the people into the promised land (not Moses), received the spirit of wisdom from Moses, was instructed by God, led the people into battle, worshiped God. Joshua is included in the God unit for his relationship with God (God speaks to him), really beginning in Joshua 1 (and continuing throughout the book of Joshua). Joshua is in the Religious unit for his worship of God, and especially his instruction of the people in being faithful to God (Joshua 23-24). Joshua is in the Leader unit for his support of Moses throughout the Exodus (see Ex. 17, Numbers 27), and because of his continued leadership after Moses (see Deut. 31:7-8 & 34:9 for the transference of power, and the book of Joshua for his leadership of the people, especially in leading them through wars and in portioning out the land).

**Deborah-** a prophetess and a judge, one of the only (perhaps the only) female judges, (Judges 4:4-10) people came to her for judgement, she sent Barak/the people into war, went with Barak to protect him/Israel, Deborah's song (Judges 5). Deborah is included in the Brains unit for the position of authority she held, and the decisions she made for the people.

**Ruth-** followed Naomi, "converted" to Naomi's people and God, was good and kind, full of hesed, was clever, took Naomi's advice but also took things into her own hands, supported Naomi, bore into the line of David. Ruth appears in 5 out of the 6 units. All the citations for Ruth are in the book of Ruth. Because of the brevity of the book, I will not cite specific passages. Ruth is included in the Brains unit for her independent decision and insistence to go with Naomi, and because of her intelligent handling of the encounter with Boaz. She is in the Initiative/Risk unit because of her willingness to enter into risky situations and to take matters into her own hands. Ruth is in the *Hesed* unit for her kindness to Naomi and to Boaz. Ruth is in the Religious unit as a role model of a Jew-by-choice, and her adherence to the laws of Judaism. Finally, she is in the God unit for her unprecedented acceptance of a God which was not hers, and her continued allegiance to God.

**Hannah-**barren, prayed to God, spoke up for herself, gave birth to Samuel, gave him up into the service of God, was given 5 more children. Hannah is included in the Initiative/Risk unit for her bravery in addressing God and in standing up for herself (1Sam. 1, esp. :13-18 & :22-28). She is also in the God unit for her direct prayers/pleas to God for a child, and God's remembrance of her (1Sam. 1:1-20 and 2:1-10).

**Samuel-** served God from birth, an accredited prophet of God, tried to keep the people faithful to God, get them to return and not stray (every prophet's "cross to bear") advised the people not to request a king, but gave in to them when God told him to listen to the people ( he made Saul the 1st king), preached to the people based on their heritage, tried to keep Saul in line. Samuel is included in the Religious unit for his instruction to the people in religious observance (for example 1Sam. 8). He is also included in the God unit for his service to and relationship with God (see the 1st book of Samuel, from 1Sam 1 - 12, & 15-16. Samuel dies in 1Sam. 25:1)

**David-** King in line after Saul, David "loved" Jonathan, married Michal, warrior, musician (played the lyre and wrote poems), love/hate relationship with Saul, respected and married Abigail, he was 30 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for 40 years, first in Hebron, then he took over the kingdom in Jerusalem, the people followed him faithfully, in and out of battle, many wives, incident with Batsheva, communicated with God (mostly through Nathan), ruled the people with the fear of God. The story of David begins in 1Sam 16, continues throughout 2Samuel and ends with David's death in 1Kings 2:10. David is included in the God unit for his relationship with God, beginning in 1Sam. 16:12 and on-going through his story, often with his communication being mediated through Nathan the prophet. David is also included in the Leader category. He was the first great king (although he was the 2nd king after Saul) and he can be studied on his own merit, or compared to his son, Solomon, who succeeded him to the throne.

**Solomon**- son of David and Batsheva, King after David, loved God, revamped the worship, very wise, solved problems for the people, God gave Solomon wisdom, understanding, and a big heart; build the First Temple in Jerusalem, amassed a huge amount of wealth, foreign wives, allowed his wives to build alters to their Gods. Solomon is included in 4 out of the 6 units. His story begins with his birth in 2Sam. 12:31, and picks up again in 1Kings 1:11, continuing through chapt. 11. Solomon is included in the Brains unit for his legendary wisdom, for his wise and understanding heart which is requested and granted in 1Kings 3 (see also 5:9-14). He is included in the Religious unit for building the First Temple (1Kings 5:15-7:51) and for religious leadership of the people (1Kings 8). Solomon is in the God unit for his love for and relationship with God (see 3:3 and throughout his story). Finally, Solomon is included in the Leader unit as a great king, who guided and changed the course of the Jewish people. Again, he can be studied on his own merit, or compared to his father, King David.

**Hulda**-the prophetess who verified the book of Deuteronomy when it was found by King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14-20). Caused the reinstatement of observance of the commandments, & study of the Torah. Hulda is included in the Brains unit for having the wisdom and authority to make this momentous decision. She is also included in the Religious unit for serving as a prophet and a religious example and instructor to the people.

**Ezra**-scribe and prophet who led and instructed the people upon their return from the Babylonian exile. Ezra is included in the Religious unit because he led the people in religious observance and instructed them in proper religious behavior. His story is found in Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8-12. See especially Ezra 10.

**Esther**-Esther stood up for what she believed in, personal risk in facing the king and revealing herself, a leader of the people. The stories of Esther and of Mordecai are found in the book of Esther. Due to the brevity of this scroll, I will not cite specific passages. Esther is included in the Brains unit for her clever planning of the events which led to Haman's demise. She is included in the Hesed unit for her kind and winning nature which won her the Queen position in the first place. She is in the Initiative/Risk unit for risking her life in facing the king and revealing herself.

**Mordecai** -Mordecai was clever and aware, he motivated Esther and made sure she was in the right place at the right time, he saved the king's life, stood up for his own religious beliefs. He is included in the Brains unit for the advice with which he guided Esther and for saving the king's life. Mordecai is also included in the Religious unit for holding onto his religious beliefs and not bowing down to Haman.

ship to emphasize the importance of upcoming meetings and the decisions to be made there. A "tap on the shoulder" to invite a teacher to attend a local Federation meeting gives personal attention not only to the teacher, but also to the meeting. Inviting a teacher to attend a community meeting may be the first step in establishing greater visibility for members of the education community. Their presence makes a statement of communal concern and commitment to the issues through a public forum.

The third step is to provide leadership development for teachers through formal or informal means. There are ample opportunities for formal leadership development sessions during staff training or in-service. Informally, however, teachers need to be given opportunity for input within their own school. As curriculum is developed and programs are planned, teachers must be involved from the earliest phase and each step along the way. Their valued experience and expertise must be given credence and voice. By involving teachers in an open dialogue on curriculum or program planning, we begin to model the community process.

### BECOMING CHANGE AGENTS

Rather than being only the messengers of change or the delivery service for an innovation, teachers become the change agents themselves. They become vested in the process as well as the product. As participants in the process, they not only become part of the consensus, but learn how to build consensus. As the process is repeated, it is up to the school administrator to draw the parallel between the workings of the school as a microcosm and that of the general Jewish community. Along the way, teachers must be assured that they have skills and knowledge to take on new, higher profile roles in the Jewish community at large.

Our mission as Jewish educators is to plan for the future. We insure the continuity of Judaism through education and educational planning. Within our vast resources lie talented, skilled and dedicated individuals who are waiting to be nurtured and guided to channel their talents to maximum benefit. Twenty-first century Judaism will meet many new and some old challenges. Now is the time to cultivate new leadership to face them head on. ■

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## A Lesson in Leadership

# ABRAHAM, MOSES AND ELIJAH

by Reuven Kimelman

*The following article on leadership using biblical models first appeared in Perspectives, Volume IV, Issue 1, 1988, published by CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. It is reprinted here, with the permission of CLAL and the author, for use in the classroom as a text-based lesson on the qualities and quandries of leadership.*

**W**hat is the limit of responsibility to a community of a leader? Are all conflicts of interest to be resolved in favor of the community? What about conflicts between the community and God—should a leader resolve them always, as it were, in God's favor? Does God always take precedence over the community? Cannot a leader oppose God on behalf of the community?

These questions touch upon some of the crucial issues in the lives of three prophets: Abraham, the first prophet and progenitor of Israel; Moses, liberator and lawgiver of

tion of Israel, Abraham appears on the scene; at the revelation at Sinai, Moses stands between Israel and God; and at the redemption, it is told, Elijah will be the harbinger.

In looking for leadership models, let us examine how each comported himself in the face of what was thought to be imminent Divine punishment.

### ABRAHAM'S CHALLENGE OF GOD (Genesis 18)

The story of Abraham's challenge of Divine justice is introduced by God's question, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (*Genesis 18:17*). The question assumes a degree of intimacy between God and Abraham as if God, in the words of Amos, "does nothing without having revealed His purpose to His servants the prophets" (*3:7*). Pondering whether He should tell Abraham, God weighs three factors: First, Abraham will one day become a great and populous nation; second, he is to serve as a medium of blessing to all the nations; and third, Abraham has been the object of Divine attention in the expectation that he would succeed in instructing his posterity in the way of the Lord, namely, doing what is just and right. The last factor weighs most heavily, for upon it hinges the Divine commitment to fulfill the covenantal promises.

To demonstrate to the reader the city's total depravity, the narrative has God personally check out the extent of its criminality, for the threat of devastation being as it is contingent upon *all* having acted according to the cry of outrage from the city. If only *some* had acted so, an alternative distinguishing between the guilty and innocent would have to be found. The fact that Abraham objects to the plan of total destruction attests to the fact that God could not come up with sufficient number of righteous to justify sparing the whole city. Unaware of this, Abraham, not be-

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*Common to all three prophets is an encounter with God over the fate of a people.*

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his people; and Elijah, religious revivalist *par excellence*. Common to all three prophets is an encounter with God over the fate of a people, with Abraham challenging God over the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses dissuading God from destroying Israel after the worship of the Golden Calf, and Elijah adducing before God evidence of Israel's waywardness. They are also linked up as beginning, middle and end. At the crea-

ing able to imagine such a large metropolitan area bereft of any saving grace, questions God's right to the mantle of universal judge, being prepared as He is to destroy the righteous along with the wicked. Getting away with his initial impudence, Abraham immediately ups the ante and suggests that God should forgive, or at least delay, punishment of the whole city if there be found fifty innocent *within* the city. No city tolerating a righteous community in its midst can be all that bad. Since the righteous community might ultimately prevail, forbearance is surely in order.

In the end, no community countering the depravity of the city was to be found. Abraham stops at ten, knowing that it takes a community to morally save a community. Less than ten leaves only individuals, themselves worthy of being saved, as Lot and company, but lacking sufficient merit to forestall the doom of others.

Was Abraham a success? It all depends on one's perspective. There is no question that were he operating on a contingency fee he would fail to collect from the

*Was Abraham a success?  
It all depends on  
one's perspective.*

demolished cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. From the perspective of God, however, he was a rousing success. God had already ascertained that the cities, having no saving grace, were to be destroyed. The only unresolved issue was whether to apprise Abraham of it. Risk is involved in either case. If God does not divulge the plan, Abraham would rise the following morning only to see two cities supernaturally devastated. Undoubtedly, as we have seen already, Abraham's presumption of innocence of some Sodomites would have led him to harbor doubts about the absolute justice of God. As such, his ability to transmit the commitment to total Divine justice to his descendants would be sorely impaired, thereby endangering the whole covenantal enterprise.

The alternative risk is in divulging the plan only to find Abraham adopting the posture of conventional piety by deferring

Divine authority. Nothing could have prompted Abraham to fail Divine expectations more than for Abraham to proclaim, "Glory to God on the highest" in

the face of Divine inscrutability. Challengers, not sycophants, are God's chosen ones. Not because of his obsequiousness did Abraham merit special Divine attention, but because of his commitment to justice, the self-proclaimed way of the Lord. Abraham's allegiance to justice was so unequivocal that he was willing to risk his relationship with God in order, paradoxically, to adhere to the way of God! Realizing that the "seekers of God are pursuers of justice" (*Isaiah 51:1*), Abraham chose his God-taught commitment to justice over fawning obeisance. The result was that Abraham's belief in Divine justice was not only confirmed, but his continuing worthiness of Divine promises was maintained. After all, how can a just God endow a people with greatness without first testing its commitment to justice? Biblically, the growth of power must be laced with the bonds of justice for the descendants of Abraham to go on being a blessing to all peoples.

#### MOSES'S PLEA ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE (*Exodus 32*)

It only took forty days after the revelation for the people to retrograde to idol worship. Moses had assured the people he would return from his ascent up Sinai in forty days—that is, forty full days. When Moses failed to appear at dawn of the fortieth day, the people panicked and fell to worshipping a Golden Calf. Enraged, as it were, for their bowing low to a molten image and accrediting it with their redemption from Egypt, God disowns them (referring to them as Moses's people) and plans their punishment. He promises that Moses would supplant Abraham, become the father of a great nation to replace faithless Israel, if only he would let Him be.

Spurning the inducement, Moses rises to Israel's defense. This people is surely God's, he counters, for the manner of their redemption testifies to the unique power of the Redeemer. Furthermore, he points out, God's reputation—indeed, His moral investment in history—is at stake. However just God's claim may be, the people's demise would be excuse enough for the nations of the world to disdain any notion of Divine justice. The judge of all the earth must not only do justly, He must be perceived as doing so. Such is the price of God's reputation being intertwined with the destiny of Israel. Finally, Moses notes, if the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can be so easily disregarded, what worth would any future promise of God have? These appeals to God's stake in Israel, the



success of His moral enterprise, and the credibility of His being a covenant-making God prevail. God relents.

The following day, Moses beseeches Divine forgiveness. He admits their guilt, but nonetheless seeks pardon at the pain of being erased from the Divine record. Rejecting Moses's offer, God instead commissions him to go and lead the people.

Again we have a test of leadership. The drama focuses on Moses. Will he be up to overcoming the appeal to self-interest for the sake of his people? Moses, like Abraham, passes with flying colors. Transcending his own interests, he proclaims his willingness to go down with the ship, lest his survival serve as a pretext for the destruction of the people. Willing to sacrifice all, he salvages everything.

The similarity of structure and the common promise of becoming a "great nation" invite comparison between the two. Let us ask, "Who in arguing with God was more admirable, Abraham or Moses?"

The case of Abraham is cogent. His challenge of God is unprecedented. (Who knows what might have been the cost?) He intervenes for a community not his own, unequivocally demanding justice if not more. Moses, for his part, appeals unabashedly for mercy. Justice would have left him without a people. He stands up unequivocally for his own and rejects the enticement to put his interest above that of his people, even at the price of life itself. Abraham is to be praised for getting involved at all. Moses, however, would have been expected to defend his people, which is why there must be an inducement to keep him out lest his true leadership mettle go untested.

The question "Who is the greater?" must ultimately remain unresolved. There clearly is a time for justice and a time for



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*Who in arguing with God was more admirable, Abraham or Moses? The question must remain ultimately unresolved.*

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mercy, a time for standing up for one's own and a time for standing up for more than one's own. Neither one's people nor humanity in general can ever be totally excluded. Greatness in leadership, apparently, is irreducible to a single paradigm. At least two models are necessary.

#### ELIJAH AT SINAI (I Kings 19)

The successes of Abraham and Moses as leaders can be contrasted with the ultimate failure of a figure of equal grandeur, the prophet Elijah. In the aftermath of his triumph on Mt. Carmel over the priests of Baal, Elijah is dismayed to find himself still the target of Queen Jezebel's plot of assassination. Disillusioned, possibly disoriented, he flees for his life to the wilderness of Judea only to pray, upon his arrival, for his death. Instead of granting his wish, God has him trek for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, whereupon he enters a cave. There God asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" At this moment, with all the echoes of Moses's experiences reverberating in one's ears, the reader expects Elijah to mount a Moses-like defense of the people. Moved instead out of his zeal for God, Elijah provides a brief (not once but twice) for the guilt of Israel, documenting how much Israel has gone astray and forsaken the covenant. Seeking a "people's defender" like Moses, God instead got Himself a prosecuting attorney!

Bemoaning Israel's failings, Elijah seeks the release of death, not as a Mosaic act of solidarity, but as an act of resignation. In failing to rise to Israel's defense, Elijah proves himself unworthy of the prophetic mantle. Thus when he is sent back, he is told to anoint a prophetic successor, the only prophet to do so in the whole Bible.

Elijah's life ends in glory as he is transported right to heaven. Not being able to bear the ambiguities of history, Elijah is to return only as these reach their resolution in the end of time. In the meantime, his place is in heaven, not as an earthly leader.

What Elijah, as opposed to Abraham and Moses, failed to realize was that the *sine qua non* of prophetic leadership is dual loyalty, allegiance to both God and people. Prophetically speaking, there cannot be one without the other. Moses is thus exalted for having stood in the breach of Israel's moral wall, warding off the impending Divine fury (*Psalms 106:23*). Isaiah (50:2), however, laments the failure of God to come up with a comparable defender of the people of Israel, someone who would plead their case in the Divine tribunal. Israel's fears, he prophesies, will be realized precisely because when God "called, no one answered" (66:4).

When leaders fail to rise to the defense of the people, the people become all the more vulnerable to Divine indictment. Such was the situation, according to the prophet Ezekiel, on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem. Precisely because there was "fraud, robbery, wronging of the poor and needy, and defrauding of the stranger," God is reported seeking "a man among them to repair the wall or to stand in the breach before Me" (23:30). Having found no Moses-like defender of the people, God is left to mete out their just deserts. The people Israel do not lack for condemners or contemners. There is no shortage of people who live by the adage, "Seek iniquity and you shall find it." But there is no rebuking worthy of the name without continuing to champion Israel's cause.



Biblically, one must both defend God and the people, and mediate between them. The prophet's role is to bring about a reconciliation, not just to apportion blame. Since Israel's destiny as a "great nation" is linked to God's moral purposes in history, its leaders are to be committed both to moral principle and to the imperfect peo-

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*It is not easy to sustain loyalty both to God and to the people. Leaders must learn to bear the burden of dual loyalty.*

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ple whose very existence testifies to Divine involvement and ultimately to Divine justice.

It is not easy to sustain both loyalty to God and to the people. There cannot be moments of tension between the two. Some, finding it unbearable, seek to relieve the tension by siding with one or the other. Out of zeal for God, one can give up on the people, yea condemn them; out of love for the people, one can end up turning against God, indeed denouncing Him. Either case disqualifies one from exercising leadership. Lest they be proven unworthy of either loyalty, leaders must learn to bear the burden of dual loyalty. ■

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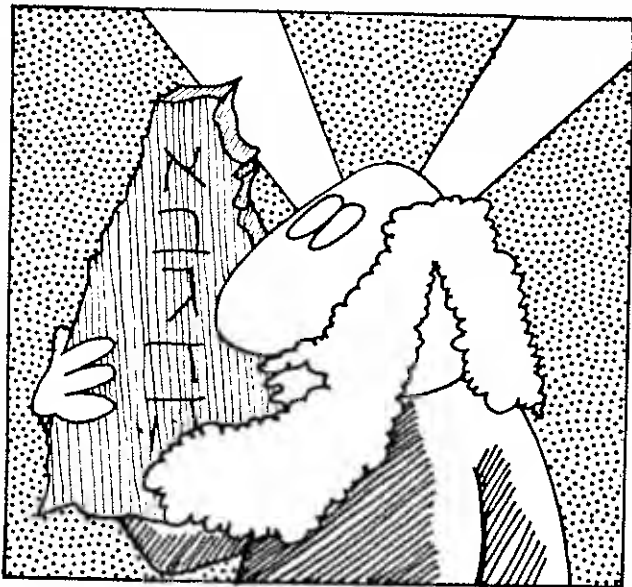
# PROPHECY

## “A PROPHET IS...”

An Instant Lesson  
Ruth Levy

### INTRODUCTION

Lots of different kinds of people are called “prophets.” In common English, we call some one a *prophet* when they have successfully predicted the future. In the Bible, we find warrior prophets, court prophets, traveling prophets, literary prophets, leader prophets, outcast prophets—prophets in all kinds of “job roles.” In this *Instant Lesson*, we are going to let you compare the lives of seven different prophets and evolve your own definition of prophecy.



**MOSES**

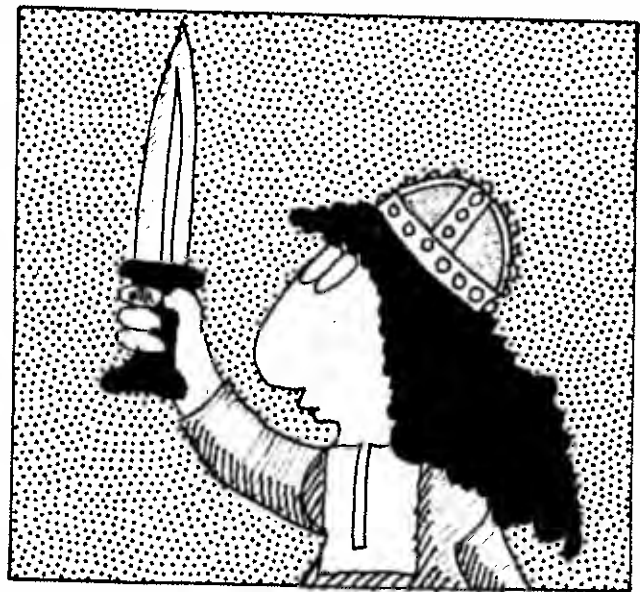
Moses was both the prototype for all of Israel's prophets and yet unlike any of them. He was the one and only with whom God spoke face to face. He is the one who God chose to be the leader, guide, teacher, law giver, interpreter, and mediator between God and the people during the long years of wandering in the wilderness.

Moses was born, hidden away, and then adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. He was raised in Pharaoh's house. When he grew to adulthood, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster while seeking to

protect a fellow Hebrew. He was forced to flee for his life. He went to the land of Midian, where he was “a stranger in a strange land.” There he married one of the daughters of Jethro, the local priest, and went to work herding his father-in-law's flocks. Outside of this, we have no knowledge of what happened during the almost eighty years until he reappeared as the prophet, demanding in the name of God the release of the Israelites from bondage to the Pharaoh.

His leadership and guidance preserved the Israelites in the wilderness, shaping them into a nation. He gave them the laws of God, taught them their meaning, and judged the people according to these laws. His teachings serve not only as the basis of the Jewish faith and tradition, but also as the base of Western civilization's world-view and beliefs.

Midrashic tradition teaches that Moses wrote the whole Torah—the five books of Moses—the pentateuch. The last chapters of Deuteronomy, describing his death and burial, are attributed to Joshua. The last line of the Torah says: “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses, who knew the Lord face to face...”

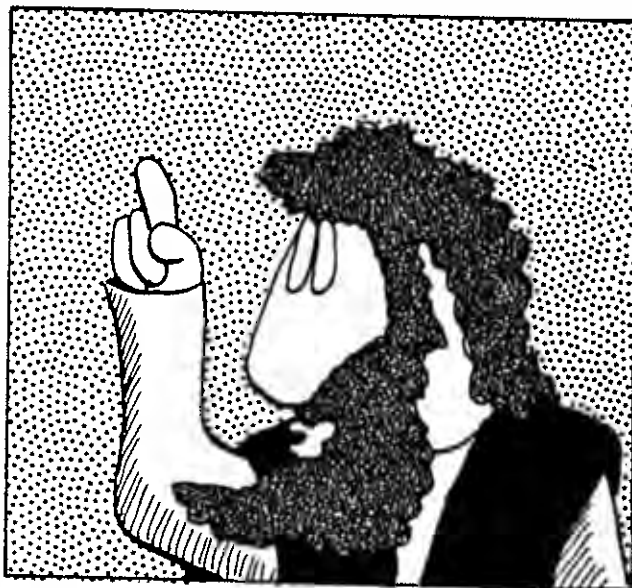


**DEBORAH**

Scholars believe that Deborah lived between 1200 and 1125 B.C.E. She was a judge and a prophetess in Israel during the period of the judges, in the days of Jabin, the king of Canaan. Deborah was unique in that she was a leader of Israel (or at least of some of the tribes) in time of crisis, serving as a military advisor, judge, and prophet all in one. She had great faith in the ability of Israel to stand up to its mighty enemy, the Canaanites, and she succeeded in infusing the people with her enthusiasm. The only account of her activities is found in chapters 4 and 5 of the

book of Judges. In the first of these we read a narrative of the events in which the tribes, led by Deborah and Barak Ben Avinoam, won a victory over the army and chariots of the Canaanites; the second chapter is a song attributed to Deborah, retelling the events, glorifying God, and praising the tribes who fought the battle.

In the tradition of the book of Judges, we are told that Deborah's leadership brought Israel forty years of peace.



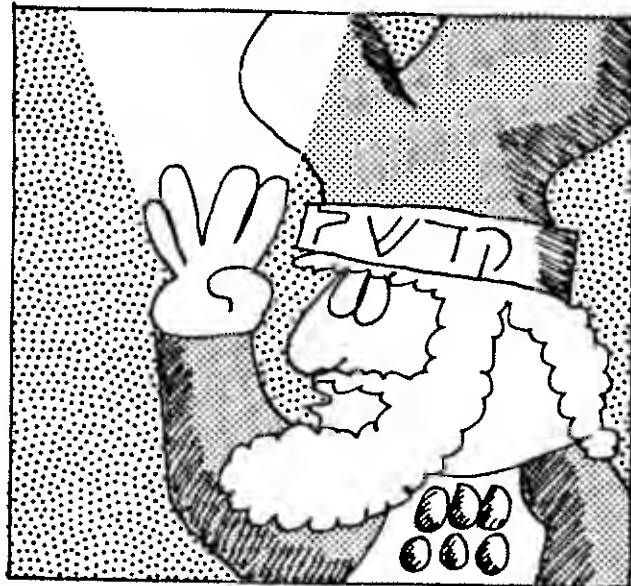
**NATHAN**

Not much is known about the prophet Nathan. The Bible does tell us that he was active in the days of King David and that together with the priest Zadok he anointed Solomon as king after David. He was a court prophet, one who gives advice and counsel to the king. Such a prophet was supported by the court, living in or near the palace. Since he was kept by the king, one would expect to hear him speak only in praise of the king's actions. Nevertheless, the most famous story about Nathan talks about his being in conflict with the king in a matter that could have cost him his life. The first time Nathan is mentioned in the Bible is when David seeks his advice about the building of a Temple. At first Nathan approves, but then he receives a message from God which forbade David's building the Temple. God didn't want the LORD's house built by a warrior. However, Nathan did prophesy about the eternal promise God made to the house of David that the Davidic dynasty will be established forever.

Nathan's most famous actions involved criticizing King David's conduct in his affair with Bath-Sheba. She was the wife of another man, but David found her attractive. He arranged to have her husband killed. When he died, David took Bath-Sheba as a wife. Nathan confronts the King

using a parable. He told him the story of a poor man who had only one lamb which was stolen by a rich man who had many sheep. David was trapped by the story and passed judgment upon himself. Nathan demanded that the king follow the same rules that he applied to govern the land. He stressed that the king is not above the law nor exempt from it.

His strong rebuke of the king put him in the same category with prophets like Elijah and Elisha who fulfilled their missions despite personal risks. Like them, he put truth and justice above personal concern.



**SAMUEL**

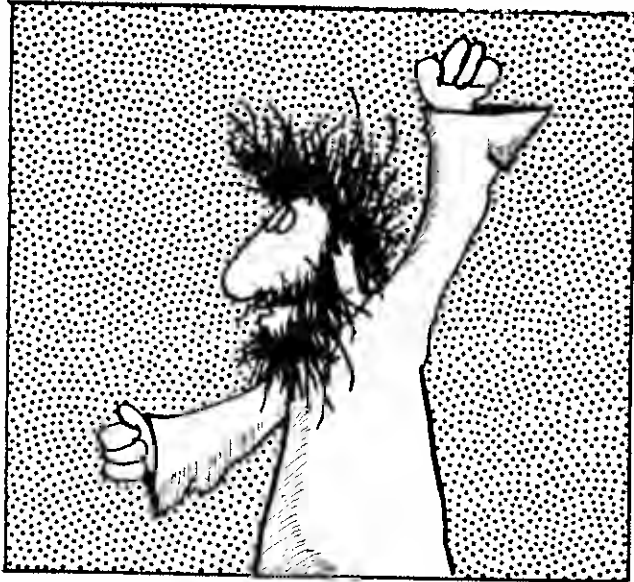
Samuel was a judge, priest and prophet who lived in the 11th century B.C.E. The Bible tells of special circumstances which surround his birth and how because of these, his mother dedicated him to God's service. Therefore, he grew up in the house of Eli, the priest of Shiloh. One night God visited him there and told Samuel about the end of Eli's house. After the tragic death of Eli, Samuel became the High Priest and national leader of Israel.

His life was closely interwoven with the transformation of Israel from a loosely interconnected group of tribes into a unified nation with a central monarchy. He is the one who anointed Israel's first king, Saul, as well as its second king, David. He did this in response to pressure from the people, even though he was totally opposed to the idea of monarchy. Samuel followed God's commands.

Samuel was one of the early prophets. Even though we have two books that bear his name, we do not have a collection of his prophecies. He served as a judge for Israel as long as he lived. Each year he made the rounds of Bethel, Gilgal,

and Mizpah, and acted as judge in each location. Then, he would return to Ramah, his home, and there, too, he would judge Israel.

Samuel was a charismatic personality. He was a military leader, a spiritual leader, a teacher, a counselor to kings, and a priest.



## ELIJAH

Elijah was active in Israel during the reign on king Ahab (874-853 B.C.E.) and King Ahaziah (853-852 B.C.E.) In the biblical account of his activities he acted as a messenger of God, interpreting God's message and relaying it to both the king and to simple folk. There are stories that show him performing miracles, helping people, wandering around in the land, and being driven by "the zeal for the Lord."

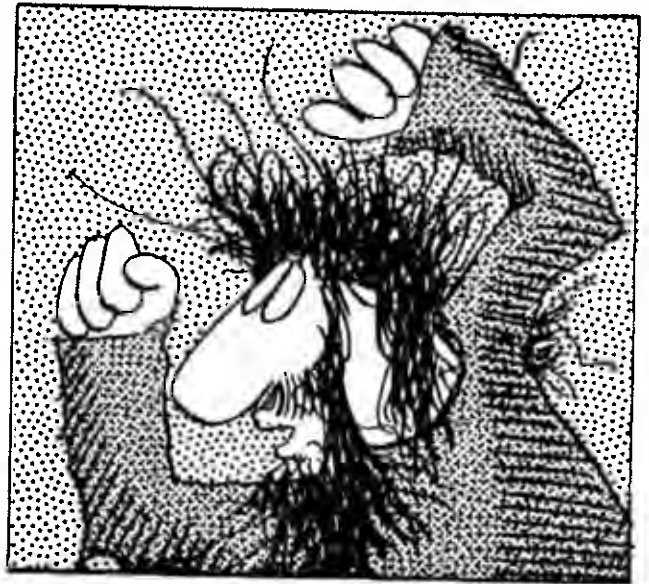
His relationship with the king was complex. Ahab, the king, sometimes sought his advice and sometimes persecuted him. Elijah was involved in the internal politics that brought about the demise of the house of Ahab. But above all, Elijah's activities focused on his war against the worship of the pagan god Baal, introduced to Israel by queen Jezebel, Ahab's Zidonite wife.

Elijah is unrelenting in his fight against the idolatrous rites and customs that engulfed Israel. His most famous encounter was with 850 priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. There, he asked the people: "How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow God; and if Baal, follow Baal!" During this encounter he defeated the priests of Baal.

Even though his life was already in danger, and even though he was being persecuted by the queen, Elijah confronted Ahab over the case of Naboth's vineyard. Naboth was a landowner who was put to death by orders from the queen so that the king could take possession of his land. Elijah's

words to Ahab were, "Would you murder and take possession? Thus said the Lord: In the very place where the dogs lapped up Naboth's blood, the dogs will lap up your blood, too."

Elijah holds a unique place in the Jewish tradition. The final biblical story involving him tells of his being carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire. This created a unique role for him in the *midrashim* and legends of Israel. In legends, he regularly comes back to visit the Jewish people and will return to announce the coming of the Messiah.



## AMOS

Amos was born in the village of Tekoa, southeast of Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Judah. He was "a cattle breeder and a tender of sycamore figs." His prophetic activities, though, took him to the Northern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel. There, his outcry against injustice, moral decline, and corruption was not always welcome. He was the first prophet whose prophetic speeches came to be written down and collected in a book of his own. He prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel." Also reflected in Amos are the great political and military changes that took place during the 41-year reign of Jeroboam, son of Joash.

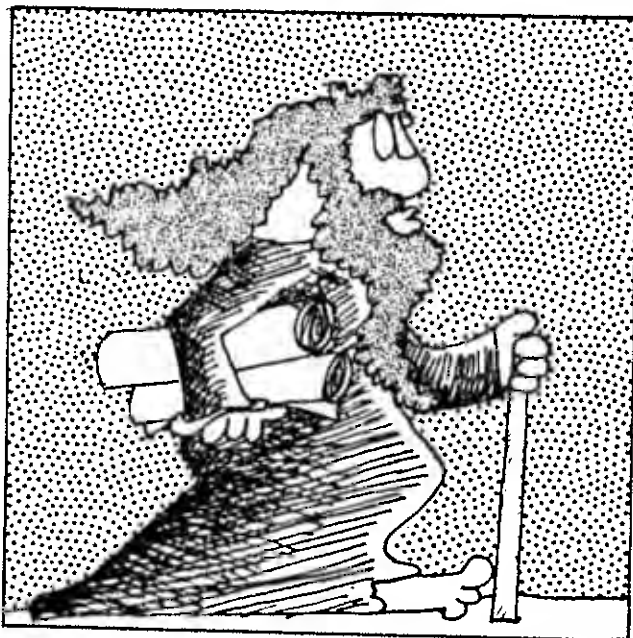
Under the reign of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel, reached the height of its power. During this entire period, when Assyria was weak and Syria on the decline, Jeroboam took advantage of the weakness of both to extend his kingdom, promote commerce, and accumulate wealth.

When Amos appeared in the North there was pride, plenty, and splendor in the land. The cities were filled with elegance and there was might in the palaces. The rich had their summer and

winter palaces adorned with costly ivory; during their feasts they reclined on damask pillows, eating and drinking to excess. At the same time there was no justice in the land, the poor were afflicted, exploited, and even sold into slavery. The judges were corrupt, the merchants cheated their customers, and people treated one another with arrogance and insensitivity.

Amos mocked the happiness of the people for their military conquests and predicted a coming disaster. He cried out against the worship in the temples, which was done with rich sacrifices, huge assemblies, and shouts of joy. The people did not sense that all these exhibitions of wealth and formal public ceremonies would not change the fate that awaited them and their place of worship. The coming destruction would be punishment for their transgressions. The only hope for rescue was in seeking the Lord, which was seeking the good. It meant creating a moral and social reform.

Amos was also concerned about the people's misinterpretation of what it means to be "the people of the Lord." To the people, chosenness was mistaken for immunity from retribution. For Amos, chosenness was a clear indication that, while God is concerned with history and with each and every nation, God will deal more seriously with The LORD's own people. For Amos, the Jewish people were subject to direct judgment and punishment.



## JEREMIAH

Jeremiah prophesied in Judah during the period that led to the destruction of the first Temple. It was "in the days of King Josiah son of Amon, throughout the days of King Jehoyakim, son of Josiah, and until the end of the eleventh year of

King Zedekiah, son of Josiah of Judah, when Jerusalem went in exile in the fifth month." Jeremiah is a prophet who is remembered both for his deep concern for the fate of the nation, and for the eloquence of his personal "confessions."

He was born to a priestly family in Anathoth, four miles northeast of Jerusalem, around 645 B.C.E. His prophetic activities began in 627 B.C.E. The political as well as the religious atmosphere in his days led him to proclaim that the nation was under judgment. Even though the king, Josiah, was attempting a reform in the religious practices of the nation and trying to establish the centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem, things were not good. Jeremiah pointed out repeatedly that it was not the place of worship or the number of sacrifices that makes a difference, but the ethical quality of life that the people led outside of the Temple that counted for or against them in the final judgment.

Jeremiah compared the relationship between God and the people to that of a husband and wife. He said that love, concern, and loyalty were all part of this relationship, and he mourned the passing away of the old days when life was simple. The rituals had been made elaborate and more people were substituting appearance for substance. They forgot God's demands and teachings and they could not imagine that God might harm the LORD's own "house" (the Temple).

Jeremiah's heated speeches against the Temple cult and against the political moves of the nation's leaders got him into trouble. His life was at risk. He had to hide but he was found and jailed. He was put on trial as a traitor but throughout his ordeals he kept carrying the words of God and denouncing the wrongdoings of the people in the hope of preventing the coming destruction of the land.

Among the prophecies of Jeremiah we find a number of personal confessions that describe the hardships and loneliness of his mission. He was mocked, isolated from his own people, and felt at times as if even God had deserted him.

Jeremiah was unsuccessful in his attempts to change the fate of the nation. After the first exile that preceded the destruction of the Temple, he wrote to the exiled people, encouraging them and restating his belief that the real following of God can be done anywhere, not only in Jerusalem. Jeremiah is credited with writing the book of Lamentations, the scroll that laments the destruction of the First Temple and the exile of the people in the year 586 B.C.E. Jeremiah died in exile in Egypt.

# PROPHECY "A PROPHET IS..."

## An Instant Lesson by Ruth Levy

Instant Lesson  
1-3 HOURS  
GRADES: 6-ADULT  
HISTORY  
BIBLE  
PROPHECY  
ETHICS  
SOCIAL ACTION

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### ABSTRACT

PROPHECY is an inquiry lesson that leads students to create their own definition of who is a valid Jewish prophet. This is done through the a comparison of 7 different biblical prophets: Deborah, Nathan, Samuel, Elijah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Moses. Students read a series of overviews of individual prophets and use them to generalize prophetic traits.

### OVERVIEW

Rarely throughout the years of Bible study do students have an opportunity to look at biblical phenomena. We tend to teach stories, laws, chapters, and maybe people, leaving the concepts and macro-structure to later years of study, if at all.

We sometimes introduce terms like "prophet" and "prophecy" with no preparation, springing them on the students as the occasion arises, most commonly as an afterthought when teaching the Early Prophets, or as a general umbrella under which names like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel are linked.

More often than not the students have already acquired some misconceptions regarding the prophets of Israel. At best, they would define any prophet following the model they shaped from their encounter with ONE prophet.

This instant lesson is designed to give students a chance to define prophecy through biblical case study. For each prophet we present a basic overview with a little historical background, pointing out the person's main concerns and achievements. These are meant to help the student grasp their diversity as well as their mutual traits. We believe that working with the material according to the guidelines we suggest will enable the students to form their own ideas of what prophets and prophecy is about.

### PURPOSE

1. Students will be able to generalize a number of traits that pertain to prophets.
2. Students will recognize the diversity of the term "prophet" and will gain an understanding of the vast scope of prophecy.
3. Students will be able to relate basic facts about the lives of the seven prophets included and will be able to place these prophets in historical context and sequence.
4. Students will be able to use the general information and concepts learned here to relate to other biblical prophets.

### PROCEDURE

#### SET INDUCTION

START by asking students "Who are you?" We can expect names as the common answer. This is not enough to KNOW a person. What else can we ask? Some answers to that may be: full name, occupation, place and time of birth, description of activities.

POINT OUT that a lot of times we use professional traits as a helpful guide to who a person is. Examples: a lawyer, a doctor, a baseball player. ASK: When we say "Jerry is an athlete" we may have a lot of information. What do we know when we say "Jerry is a prophet?" ANSWER: Not very much.

CONCLUDE: We need to work out a useful definition of a prophet.

#### INQUIRY TASK

1. DISTRIBUTE the student folders—one to each student. Have students work alone or in small groups. You may assign specific prophets to specific individuals or groups, or have them cover two or three prophets of their choice. TELL the students to read quietly each article and fill in the ID forms to the best of their ability. Each article should yield a completed form. It is not imperative that each student read and fill all seven forms. For each student to read

- about four might be enough, as long as the teacher makes sure that all seven have been covered in the class. You may want to have a few copies of the Bible handy (the new J.P.S., in three separate volumes, is the most convenient here). Mark the appropriate books/chapters for students to skim through and refer to.
2. **SHARE** the information: **PLAN A:** Have a student **READ** an information sheet aloud and then read his/her ID form. Ask for additional comments to the same prophet. Go through all seven personalities in the same manner. **PLAN B:** In cases where every student read all seven information sheets, you might want to read aloud the ID cards only, also adding comments and completing the necessary details together.
- At the end of the round each student will have at least four filled in ID cards. Give the group a moment or two to look through their collection and begin to form their ideas.

### MODEL BUILDING

1. **ASK:** "So, who is a prophet?" (This question is voiced at this point in order to provoke thought—not to create a coherent answer.) **EXPAND** the discussion by asking: "Are all the people about whom we've read the same? How are they the same? How are they different? Are there any things we can say about them that would fit all of them? Most of them? Only one of them?"
2. **WRITE** the definitions that the students suggest on the board. Suggest some of your own, based on the traits that appear on the chart.
3. **HAVE STUDENTS TURN TO THE CHART.** **ASK** them to mark the appropriate box for each prophet they have learned about. (They can use markers to color the boxes or make an "X" or check mark—as long as the graphics as well as the content will emerge.) After all have completed their charts, you ask for comments.
 

**IF EVERYTHING WORKS**—the chart will reflect the evolution of a specific (limited) role for prophets. As Israel developed, the secondary leadership roles were transferred to others, and a prophet's monolithic role was to speak for God. Moses should receive the most "X"s, having been the total national leader. Jeremiah, the last of the prophets, should only receive checks regarding his message.
4. **DEBRIEF** this research. Have the class look at the charts they have filled out and **GENERALIZE** conclusions.
 

One conclusion that can be drawn from the encounter with the different prophets, is that they shared a special feeling of **MISSION**—a relentless search for a better future, and a devotion to the tasks they were chosen to carry out even in the face of personal suffering and danger.

A second conclusion is that the *moral* element of the prophets' concern was the most important factor. Prophets served as voices of Israel's conscience: predicting the future was only the byproduct of their ethical warnings.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

An important part of the learning process is the students personal involvement with the subject matter. Here is a chance to relate the information and insight gained to the students' concerns. Suggest that they choose one or more of these activities to round out their encounter:

- Bring two of the prophets together. What are they going to talk about? How will they relate to each other? What are their mutual concerns? What can they learn from each other? Write the meeting up as an interview, a magazine article, a news item, an editorial.
- A prophet of your choice finds him/herself in your neighborhood. Report what s/he sees and what his/her reactions are.
- Following Deborah's example, write a song commemorating an important event in your time. Use the song of Deborah as a model.
- Write a letter to the editor in the name of one of "our" prophets, pointing out what is wrong with a specific aspect of our life and what can be done to correct it.
- Prepare a debate with other students, involving some of the prophets, presenting their concerns and ideas.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

There are numerous books that deal with prophecy and individual prophets. It is always a good idea to have more information handy and available than the students will need for a particular task (you never know—the interest and curiosity might result in some surprises). Here is a sample bibliography of some available titles. Some of the books are general, dealing with the phenomenon rather than its personal manifestations. These books might be more suitable for the teacher and advanced students. Some of the books devote chapters to individual prophets and may be suitable reading for the class. The decision of how to use the bibliography, how much, when, and in what context depends on the class and the teacher.

Hamilton, E. *Spokesmen For God*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1949.

Heschel, A.J. *The Prophets*. New York: J.P.S., 1962.

Hoenig, S.B. and S. Rosenberg *A Guide To The Prophets*. New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1942.

Hoschander, J. *The Priests and Prophets*. New York: J.T.S., 1938.

Isserman, E.M. *Rebels and Saints: The Social Message of the Prophets of Israel*. St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1933.

Koch, K. *The Prophets, Volumes I & II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

Neher, A. *The Prophetic Existence*. New Jersey: A.S. Barnes & Co, 1969.

Robinson, T.H. *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*. London: Duckworth, 1979.

Rowley, H.H. *Men of God*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963.

Stack, H. *Prophetic Voices of the Bible*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1968.

Von Rad, G. *The Message of the Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962

The best sources of additional information about the individual prophets will be found under their names in Jewish encyclopedias, Biblical personalities collections, and in the commentaries (Anchor Bible, I.C.C., etc).



# PROPHET ID

Prophet's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Where did he/she prophesy \_\_\_\_\_

Other known activities \_\_\_\_\_

Major concerns \_\_\_\_\_

Special personal traits \_\_\_\_\_

Achievements \_\_\_\_\_

Prophet's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Where did he/she prophesy \_\_\_\_\_

Other known activities \_\_\_\_\_

Major concerns \_\_\_\_\_

Special personal traits \_\_\_\_\_

Achievements \_\_\_\_\_

Prophet's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

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Prophet's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Where did he/she prophesy \_\_\_\_\_

Other known activities \_\_\_\_\_

Major concerns \_\_\_\_\_

Special personal traits \_\_\_\_\_

Achievements \_\_\_\_\_

# PROPHET CHART

MOSES    DEBORAH    SAMUEL    NATHAN    ELIJAH    AMOS    JEREMIAH

	MOSES	DEBORAH	SAMUEL	NATHAN	ELIJAH	AMOS	JEREMIAH
JUDGE							
POLITICAL ADVISOR (as COURT MEMBER)							
LAW INTERPRETER							
SPIRITUAL LEADER							
MILITARY LEADER							
LAW GIVER							
COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE (Jiminy Cricket)							
REVOLUTIONARY							
MORAL ROLE MODEL							
ANTIESTABLISHMENT AGITATOR							

## Support Materials

### Learning Materials

There are no textbooks which can be used as is for this curriculum. Most textbooks which deal with Biblical stories or characters are aimed at much younger grades. In the place of a textbook, I would recommend using:

- The  $\text{תנ"ך}$  (JPS translation is highly readable)
- Jewish texts such as midrashim

The Book of Legends, *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, eds. Bialik and Ravnitzky, Schocken Books, New York, 1992

This book contains translations of selected midrashim covering the entire  $\text{תנ"ך}$  and beyond. This text is appropriate for the insight it suggests for character motives, and due to the authority it carries as a classic Jewish text. In reading these texts, students can gain a broader view of the characters, and can gain some comfort with thinking about the texts in midrashic modes (i.e. asking questions which probe the text, and coming up with answers).

Taking the Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible, ed. Jane S. Zones, Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, San Diego, CA, 1989

Within this book are 23 midrashim written by contemporary Jewish women. The majority center around texts in Genesis, but they address portions of Exodus, Judges, Ruth and Esther as well. This text adds a different kind of insight and perspective to the Biblical leaders. The modernity of the texts in this book may help to lead the students into similar levels of analysis. This book will afford students an alternative to ancient, Rabbinic view of the texts.

Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible, Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum, Delacorte Press, New York, 1991

This book consists of modern stories expressing the Biblical women's point of view, drawing on Biblical and midrashic sources. There are 13 stories involving women from Genesis to the Apocrypha, plus seven shorter pieces on women who are mentioned only fleetingly in the Bible, including Hulda. In that these stories are more like fiction than midrash, they will enable students to feel the freedom and authority necessary to try their hand at this kind of writing.

### Teaching Materials

\*RESOURCES These books are included to provide background information on the Biblical characters for the instructor.

-Patriarchs and Prophets, Stanley Frost, McGill University Press, Canada, 1963.

This book provides character portraits of many of the characters included in this curriculum, including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Solomon. The character sketches include historical and narrative background and character analysis. The book is written with a highly Christian slant, but much useful information can be distilled for this curriculum.

-Great Men and Movements in Israel, Rudolf Kittel, Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1968.

Kittel's aims in this book are to describe the role of great men in the religious development of ancient Israel, and of mankind as a whole; and to support the theory that history is made by Great Men. Kittel focused on what happened, surrounding the Biblical characters whom he highlights. Included in his book are Moses, Deborah, Samuel, David and Ezra.

-Assertive Biblical Women, William E. Phipps, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1992.

This book purports to make a feminist, Christian, modern analysis of several Biblical women. The analysis are scholarly and cover several aspects of each character and their contexts. There are chapters on Sarah, Tamar, Women Saviors (including Shifra and Puah, Miriam, and Deborah), Naomi and Ruth, Hulda, and Esther.

-Living Personalities of the Old Testament, Hagen Staak, Harper & Row, New York, 1964.

This book is generous with its information of the biblical context surrounding each character. Staak writes from a Christian perspective, and provides interesting interpretations for the motives and feelings of the characters he deals with. Included in this book are Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, David, Solomon, Hulda (in the chapter about Josiah) and Ezra.

-Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book, Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books, 1984.

Steinsaltz provides very little background information for the twenty-five characters (12 of them women) he addresses. Assuming the reader is familiar with the characters, Steinsaltz analyzes the character's motives, and examines their spiritual experiences within the context of their own historical period. Steinsaltz focuses on one facet of each character, and avoids characters who are too complex, such as Jacob, Moses and David. He does include the rest of the matriarchs and patriarchs, the other participants in the Exodus, Deborah, Samuel, Solomon, Ezra and others.

### \*AGE APPROPRIATE OR EASILY ADAPTABLE LESSONS AND RESOURCES

-Prophecy: "A Prophet Is..." An Instant Lesson by Ruth Levy, Torah Aura Productions, 1985.

This lesson examines Moses, Deborah, and Samuel, among others, in light of their role as leaders and prophets. It gives students an opportunity to define the traits necessary to be a prophet. This lesson could be used more or less as is, or could be used just for the background information it provides, or as a starting point for a different lesson.

-"Abraham, Moses and Elijah" A Lesson in Leadership, Reuven Kimelman, in *Jewish Education News*, CAJE, Spring 1993, (14/2)

This is a "text-based lesson on the qualities and quandaries of leadership," and will fit in whole or in parts into the Leaders in the Bible curriculum quite well.

-Sedra Scenes and Bible Scenes by Stan Beiner, A.R.E. Publishing, 1982

These books contain Weekly Portion and Bible scenes transformed into skits and plays. The material is a little young, but not drastically so, and these skits can be used as starting points for discussing the characters and their situations.

\*TEXTS AIMED AT YOUNGER GRADES These textbooks can be used for their basic information, and the lesson ideas can be adapted for use with eight graders.

A Child's Bible: Lessons from the Torah and A Child's Bible: Lessons from the Prophets  
Ktav Publishing

These textbooks are very young (third to fourth grades), but the lessons in the teacher's manuals pertain to many of the characters included in this curriculum, and can be adapted for eight graders.

Stories From Our Living Past Behrman House 1974

Again, the text is really young, but more adult translations of the midrashim could be substituted and similar lessons conducted. The focus of Unit III is "Love of thy neighbor - Justice, mercy and compassion -is holy" and the lessons here can be utilized for the *Hesed* unit of the Leaders of the Bible curriculum. Unit IV, "Our Responsibilities," includes a lesson on Samuel's call from God.

First Book of Bible Heroes parts one and two, Ktav Publishing, 1963

Very young Bible stories, may be useful for most basic information on contexts and situations.

\*OTHER RESOURCES The following provide different approaches to Biblical materials. They promote various ways of teaching and relating to Biblical texts.

-Bible People Songs by Jeff Klepper, A.R.E. Publishing

written for guitar or piano, these songs provide a humorous, musical and sometimes insightful look at the characters, including Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, Jacob, Puah & Shifra, and Moses. Supposedly a tape is available as well.

-Torah In Motion: Creating Dance Midrash, Tucker and Freeman, A.R.E. Publishing, 1990

This fascinating book provides instructions and inspirations to putting movement and dance to I can't even count how many Biblical moments (Torah only). Definitely provides an alternative to sitting and reading to find out about each leader in the Bible!

-Handmade Midrash, Jo Milgrom, JPS, New York , 1992

Handmade midrash is "visual theology." It is a personal, artistic, unique approach to studying and entering text. It is developmentally appropriate for almost any age (about 8 to adult). Milgrom provides in her book detailed directions for doing handmade midrash for Genesis 1:1-4:2 and Genesis 22:1-19, but this technique is easily adaptable to any text.

-Using Biblical Simulations, Miller, Snyder and Neff, Judson Press, 1973

"A biblical simulation is the reenactment of some particular biblical event in an attempt to portray accurately some selected features of that event." (from the book) *Beyond Sedra Scenes*, this book attempts to enable students to truly interact with the material, to really understand motives and feelings behind the character's actions. This book provides detailed simulations for "The Taking of the Land" (choosing a leader to replace Moses, Numbers 14), "The Making of a King," (deciding whether to have a King, I Samuel 8), and "Josiah's Dilemma (accepting the reforms of the newly found Law, 2 Kings, 22-23). This book can also be used as a model for creating other Biblical simulations.