Writing and Class Preparation: You should be prepared to answer and discuss the questions on this sheet, but you will not have to submit written answers. Instead, please bring some notes in response to this question (which is sure to grow into a test question): “On the basis of just these brief readings about one prophet, Elijah, discuss the role and functions of a prophet in ancient Israel. Don’t just say, ‘To be a mouthpiece for God.’ Be specific about a prophet’s tasks. A fun way to go would be to write a job description for a Help Wanted ad. In a couple of weeks, you’ll be able to write a much better one, but see what you can do on the basis of just Elijah.”

Reading and Questions:

Harris, pp. 194-199.

Read these few pages, and, especially, compare the map on pg. 195 and the map on pg. 198. (Maps 4 and 5 at the back of our Bible illustrate the same thing.) The break-up of Israel and Judah really starts the decline of the Israelites. Note Harris’s reference to Bethel and Dan. File those names, especially Bethel. They’ll be coming back in the prophets. Fine them on the map, p. 198. Bethel, as a religious sanctuary in the north, becomes a kind of rival to Jerusalem. How many miles away from Jerusalem is it?

1 Kings 16.29 to 17.1

(a) Which of the two kingdoms does Ahab rule?
(b) What are his main sins (ho hum)?
(c) Note that Elijah proclaims a drought in Israel. Start keeping track of the job of a prophet. The footnote is useful here. We won’t read all about the drought, but it will come back.

1 Kings 18.17 to 19.21

(a) What point does Elijah dramatize in 18.17-46?
(b) What is one especially vivid detail that remains with you from this story?
(c) When the drought is about to end, Elijah sends word to Ahab, who gets in his chariot to go to Jezreel (before that first rain makes the freeway dangerous). Enjoy the picture in 18.46 – of Elijah having fun one-upping Ahab, I think.
(d) But is it always fun to be a prophet? Explain. (Do people normally become angry at people who prophesy about the distant future?)
(e) In 19.15-18, what means does YHWH say he will now use in his continuing war against Baal worship?

1 Kings 21.1-29

(a) Who is worse, Ahab or his wife Jezebel? Explain.
(b) What is the nature of the wrongdoing in this story? Ritual or ethical?
(c) Powerful moment in 21.20-22. Be sure to remind me to have one our Hebrew speakers read and translate this for us. Look up other translations, if you can, including the original King James. (Was that website bible.cc?)
(d) Concerning the prophecy in 21.23, do you think it comes true? You bet! See 2 Kings 9.30-37, if you have that kind of curiosity.
(e) Upon hearing the prophecy of doom upon his house, Aha seems to repent. What does this earn him? Have we seen this before? We’ll see it again.

2 Kings 15.29 to 16.20

This is a dense, complicated (but short) reading. You don’t have to keep all the kings and alliances straight. This is about the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance. Look at the map in our Bible, p. 558. “Syro” refers to Aram; “Ephraim” refers to Israel. Their kings form an alliance to resist Assyria, which is growing into a strong empire and is on the march. The two kings besiege King Ahaz of Judah to force him to join their alliance. What a mess! In making these political alliances with non-Israelites, and then getting invaded by Assyria anyway, the Israelites really fall into worship of other nations’ gods. This particular conflict involving King Ahaz will return in a very important part of the prophet Isaiah when we read him.

Harris, pp. 196-197.

Just study this chart a bit. Notice the double list of kings, one for Israel and one for Judah – until the one for Israel stops. And then, on the right, notice the names of prophets. Some preached in Israel, some in Judah. We’ll be reading Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, Joel, and maybe a few more. Find them; notice their years. So far we’ve read only about Elijah. Next: Amos!!