

Haftarah Helper 5781: Balak

Zachary Beer (Nachshon Project Fellow, The City College of New York) and
Barry Kornblau (Rabbi, Young Israel of Hollis Hills-Windsor Park, Queens, NY)

Micah 5:6-6:8

At the twilight of the Northern Kingdom, during the rise of the Assyrian Empire, Micha appeared as a powerful prophet alongside Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. He spoke to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel regarding political and spiritual matters, with a strong focus on societal flaws.

The Haftarah's opening section is about a "Remnant of Jacob among many nations", but Micha's exact subject is unclear. Broadly, commentators offer two approaches. The first¹ identifies the Remnant as those exiled from the Northern Kingdom in the later part of Micha's life who live amidst other nations. The second² places this passage at the End of Days, during the apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog: the Remnant, in Jerusalem, is besieged by foreign nations. In either case, similar to the Parashah's account of His saving the people from Bilaam, God will intervene. The Remnant will overcome and destroy its seemingly ascendant enemies. God will also destroy the Remnant's idolatry and military power so that it relies only on Him.

The Haftarah's second section, beginning at 6:1, presents a dispute between God and His people, whom He rebukes for being "weary" of Him. God has provided them with righteous leaders and saved them from enemies - including Balak and Bilaam. The people propose atoning for their sins through sacrificial service, but God demands service through societal justice, lovingkindness, and humility.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 5:6-8: The "Remnant" (see above for details) will be blessed by God and powerful, and will overcome its enemies.

Micah 5:8	מיכה ה:ח
Your [the Remnant's] hand shall be lifted up upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.	תָּרִם יָדָךְ עַל־צָרֶיךָ וְכָל־אֹיְבֶיךָ יִכָּרְתוּ:

Verses 5:9-14: Even as God avenges the Remnant's enemies, God also will eliminate all other powers it relies upon- military power, cities and their fortifications, and idolatry- so that it relies solely on Him.

Micah 5:12	מיכה ה:י"ב
I [God] will cut off your carved idols and your pillars from your midst [so that] you shall no longer prostrate to the work of your hands.	וְהִכַּרְתִּי פִסְלֶיךָ וּמַצְבֹּתֶיךָ מִקִּרְבְּךָ וְלֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עוֹד לַמַּעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ:

Verses 6:1-5: God contends with His people for their misdeeds, reminding them of His kindnesses and righteous victories on their behalf- including saving them from Balak and Balaam.

Micah 6:3	מיכה ו:ג
O My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Testify against Me!	עַמִּי מִה־עֲשֵׂי־יָי לֵךְ וּמָה הִלַּאתִיךָ עָגָה בֵּי:

¹ Ibn Ezra.

² Radak and Metzudat David.

Verses 6:6-7: The people reply, asking whether sacrifices express proper submission to God and satisfy His demands.

Micah 6:6	מיכה ו:ו
With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow low before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves?	במה אֶתְנַחֵם ה' אֶכְפֹּר לֵאלֹהֵי מְרוֹם הָאֲדָמָה בְּעוֹלוֹת בְּעִגְלִים בְּגִי שְׁנָה:

Verse 6:8: God responds that Man must serve Him through justice, kindness, and humility.³

Micah 6:8	מיכה ו:ח
He ⁴ has told you, O Man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? - Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God.	הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מַה־טוֹב וּמַה־ה' דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצְנַע לִכְתּוֹב עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ: (פ)

Connections

The Talmud presents the Haftarah's final line as a “reestablishment”, or summary, of all the Torah's precepts, emphasizing that **even public matters must be done modestly**.

Makkot 24a	מכות כ"ד עמוד א
<p>Micah came and established [the 613] commandments upon three, as it is written: “He has told you, O Man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? - Doing justice, loving-kindness, and walking humbly with you God” (Micah 6:8).</p> <p>“Doing justice” - this is [adjudicating] law.</p> <p>“Loving kindness” - this is bestowing kindnesses [to others.]</p> <p>“Walking humbly with your God” - this is taking the dead out [for burial] and accompanying a bride [to her wedding canopy], [which should be done without glorifying the doer.]</p> <p>And aren't these matters inferred a fortiori? [Yes!] If regarding matters that are not done privately the Torah states, “walking humbly”, then regarding matters done privately, all the more so!</p>	<p>בא מיכה והעמידן על שלש דכתיב (מיכה ו, ח) הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם ה' אלהיך</p> <p>עשות משפט זה הדין</p> <p>אהבת חסד זה גמילות חסדים</p> <p>והצנע לכת זה הוצאת המת והכנסת כלה</p> <p>והלא דברים קל וחומר ומה דברים שאין דרכן לעשותן בצנעא אמרה תורה והצנע לכת דברים שדרכן לעשותן בצנעא על אחת כמה וכמה</p>

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³ Micha's criticisms of his society were harsh even by the prophetic standards of his time. As with all other prophets, however, Micha, in this verse and in general, sought not the elimination of the Temple and its service but rather insisted that a righteous society was its prerequisite.

⁴ The text does not specify who “he” is. Rashi identifies “he” as God; Ibn Ezra identifies “he” as Micha. Alternatively, it refers to no specific man, but means, “It has been told to you.”