



Balak: Micah 5:6-6:8

During the rise of the Assyrian Empire, Micah prophesied alongside Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. He spoke powerfully 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 Micah's precise subject is unclear. Commentators offer two approaches. Ibn Ezra identifies the Remnant as those exiled in the later part of Micah's life from the Northern Kingdom, living amidst other nations. Radak and Metzudat David place 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 and Balak, God will ensure that the Remnant will overcome and destroy its enemies. God will also destroy the Remnant's idolatry and military power so that it relies only on Him. This accords with a recurring prophetic rejection of God's people, and especially their leaders, dependence on diplomacy, alliances, idols, and economic and military strength instead of relying upon Him alone for all their needs.

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 sacrifices, but God demands service through justice, kindness, and humility. This exchange, too, is part of a recurring debate between God's prophets and His people about how best to serve Him- through sacrifice as the people think, or through societal righteousness as the prophets demand. Although Micah's criticisms, here and elsewhere, were harsh even by the prophetic standards of his era, he sought not the elimination of the Temple and its sacrifices but rather insisted that a righteous society was their prerequisite.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 5:6-8: Sustained by God alone, the powerful "Remnant" will overcome its enemies.

Micah 5:8	מיכה ה:ח
Your [the Remnant's] hand shall be raised over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.	תָּרַם יָדְךָ עַל־צָרֶיךָ וְכָל־אֹיְבֶיךָ יִכָּרְתוּ:

Verses 5:9-13: God will eliminate all powers the Remnant 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 פְסִילֶיךָ וּמַצְבֹּתֶיךָ מִקִּרְבְּךָ וְלֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עוֹד לְמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ:

Verses 5:14: Alone, God will angrily wreak vengeance on the Remnant's enemies.

Micah 5:14	מיכה ה:י"ד
I [God] will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the nations, such as they have not heard.	וְעָשִׂיתִי בְּאַף וּבַחֲמָה נִקְמָה אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׁמְעוּ: {פ}

Verses 6:1-5: With the mountains as witnesses, God contends with His people. He challenges them to state how He has burdened them. He reminds them of the Exodus, the leaders He provided for them- including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam- and His kindness and 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!	עֲמִי מִה־עֲשִׂיתִי לָךְ וּמִה־הִלַּאתִיךָ עֲגָה בְּיָ:

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?	בְּמַה אֶקְדֶּם ה' אֶבְרָא לְאֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם הָאֲקַדְמִנִּי בְּעֹלוֹת בְּעִגְלִים בְּגִי שָׁנָה:

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

Micah 6:8	מיכה ו:ח
He ¹ has told you, O Man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you- Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God.	הֲגִיד לָךְ אָדָם מִה־טוֹב וּמִה־ה' דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ בְּיָ אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצְנַע לְכַת 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>From this one can deduce: 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 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>

With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

¹ The text does not specify who “he” is. Rashi identifies “he” as God; Ibn Ezra identifies “he” as Micah. Alternatively, it refers to no specific man, but means, “It has been told to you.”