

Haftarah

'Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with your God'



The Eternal has a case against our people, and will contend with Israel:

My people!

What [wrong] have I done to you?

Have I exhausted your patience?

Answer Me!

In fact, I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

redeemed you from the house of bondage, and sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you.

Micah 6:2-4

Connection

- In the Haftarah (6:5) Micah remembers the story told in Numbers 23-24 (which appears in this week's Torah portion) of how King Balak of Moab engaged Balaam the seer to curse Israel.

Background

The prophet Micah lived in the southern kingdom of Judah in the mid-8th century BCE. Like his predecessor Amos, Micah challenged the people of Judah to transform their lives according to principles of justice, love and true worship of God lest the disaster (of foreign invasion and conquest) faced by the northern kingdom of Israel destroy the southern kingdom as well.

Points to note

The Haftarah unfolds over five orations:

- 5:6 In the destruction of Israel some will survive. They will be *'like dewdrops'.. 'like showers'..* a refreshing presence among pagans.
- 5:7 The remnant shall be *'like a lion among animals.'* Israel will have power over its enemies.
- 5:8-14 God will do away with all that supports war and idolatry.
- 6:1-5 This is how God has confronted Israel in the past. The language resembles that of a lawsuit... *'My people! ... Answer me!'* (v.3)... The people must account for themselves before their God and in view of the history of their ancestors. Here Micah recalls the Exodus, the leadership trio of Moses, Aaron, Miriam (6:4), the story of Balak and Balaam, and the period of history described by reference to *'from Shittim to Gilgal'* (6:5) - i.e. from the crossing of the Jordan to the crowning of the first king of Israel at Gilgal.
- 6:6-8. What God now demands of the people: a well known verse presenting a three step program for righteous living; *do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God'* (6:8). 'Mercy' (Hebrew: *hesed*) can mean lovingkindness, goodness. 'Walk humbly': a Talmudic passage takes 'walk' in a literal sense, i.e., where a good deed requires you to walk somewhere or with someone, then walk! Verse 6: ritual worship ('burnt-offerings') must not eclipse what God desires most: an ethical lifestyle built on love of God and neighbor.

Ponder & pray

"Verse 8 has been called the most important utterance in the prophetic literature. It is in fact an epitome of the whole of Scripture" (Joseph Hertz).

Ponder verse 8 in light of the rest of the Haftarah. In what way does it speak to you? Let it influence your prayer and actions this week.

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarat* (Philadelphia, 2002). Scripture quotations: Plaut.