



Parasha Balak
Micah 5:6-6:8
July 5, 2014 / 7 Tammuz 5774

Background: Who was Micah?

According to the book of Micah, he lived and prophesied during the reigns of three Judean (Jerusalem) monarchs Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jotham's rise to power can be dated to 758, B.C.E. and Hezekiah ruled until 698, B.C.E. This makes him a contemporary of Isaiah who, if you remember, prophesied the birth of Hezekiah in Is. Chapter 9, (what I call the Handel Messiah haftarah, "Unto us a Child is born".) Micah is the sixth book of the twelve Minor Prophets and follows the book of Jonah. Aah! grasshopper connect the dots, the story of Jonah tells us that God can forgive Nineveh an Assyrian city. If God can forgive Assyria, can he also use Assyria as a tool to punish His own nation? Who would have thought that the books of Minor Prophets were organized for a possible reason?

In 722 B.C.E. Assyria conquered Samaria [the entire Northern Kingdom] and destroyed/dispersed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Under Sennacherib, a siege of Jerusalem began in 701.

The haftarah for Balak is connected to parshat Balak in a number of ways, the most obvious being in chapter 6:5 where it mentions Balak and the phrase from Shittim to Gilgal. Shittim was the place our ancestors were encamped when Balak called to Balaam to prophecy in the wilderness (Numbers 22:1, 25:1,33:48-49) and Gilgal is the site where Saul's kingship was renewed after defeating the Ammonites. Those Ammonites just won't go away: we discussed them and the Moabites last week!

The first two verses of the haftarah challenged me. It seems to me that Micah is speaking to the remnant, the survivors and exiles of Northern dispersion. They are a people in "the midst of many peoples" who "are like a lion among beasts of the wild." They are a people who are perceived to be powerful, successful, even though they, like many of us, lack a homeland. Does that resonate with you?

The prophet then asks: How should they/we behave if we wish to be restored and be returned to our land? Should we offer sacrifices? Should we continue to emulate the beliefs and practices of the majority culture or should we refocus our behaviors and strive to live ethical and moral lives, the way our God always desired.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one originally written for "The Unraveller" for June 26, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarah. An Everyperson's Guide".