

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS: Haftarah Chukat-Balak

by Mark Huey posted 04 July, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Micah 5:6-6:8

“What the Lord Requires”

This week, two smaller Torah portions of *Chukat* and *Balak* are being considered. When the double portion is read, Micah 5:6-6:8 is studied as the complimentary Haftarah. By reading Numbers 19:1-25:9, there is a sense that a number of years are passing during the Israelites' wilderness journey. The early traumas caused by people like Korah and his cohorts, who challenged the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam—are seemingly in the distant past. Now, perplexing ordinances like the purification rites of the red heifer are being communicated. Then, in what appears to be a return to Kadesh, after having been there years before when the twelve spies returned with their negative report (Numbers 13:26), the death of Miriam is announced. A lack of water once again incites complaints from the Israelites, no doubt weary from the lengthy sojourn:

“Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there. There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, ‘If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why then have you brought the LORD’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink.’ Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them” (Numbers 20:1-6).

Once again, Moses and Aaron resort to falling on their faces before the Lord, and appeal to Him for guidance on how to handle another insurrection. Specific instructions are given to Moses to “speak” to the rock so that it will release its water. Lamentably, whether it was his age or frustration with the people of Israel—in what appears to be a fit of anger, Moses first rebukes the Israelite “rebels,” and then strikes the rock twice. This was in violation of the Lord’s command:

“Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and **speak to the rock** before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.’ So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘**Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?**’ Then Moses **lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod**; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. **But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’**” (Numbers 20:8-12).

Moses, one noted earlier to be the most humble man who had lived (Numbers 12:3), is told what his punishment will be by the Holy One. The one chosen to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, will not even be able to enter in himself.

From this point forward, the trials of the Israelites with the neighboring people groups begin to exacerbate. Permission to travel through foreign territories is denied as skirmishes break out. Eventually as the sojourn proceeds, even the beloved Aaron dies, with the priestly garments being passed on to his eldest son. Finally, the Israelites make it to the plains of Moab, overlooking the Promised Land, but still surrounded by hostile peoples. It is here that Balak, the king of Moab, solicits Balaam to proclaim curses upon this chosen people of the Almighty.

The oracles of Balaam are interesting, and even wonderful to contemplate—as it becomes clear that those who God has blessed will not be cursed. Two poignant passages that describe this reality, state the truth as follows:

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received *a command* to bless; when He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it. He has not observed misfortune in Jacob; nor has He seen trouble in Israel; the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them” (Numbers 23:19-21).

“The oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered, **how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens beside the river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters.** Water will flow from his buckets, and his seed *will be* by many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt, he is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations *who are* his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter *them* with his arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you” (Numbers 24:4-9).

Here in these two passages, the prophet for hire Balaam, actually describes some of the attributes of God that will be elaborated upon much later by the legitimate Prophet Micah. If His people’s tents truly are “fair,” then they will be men and women who demonstrate justice, lovingkindness, and they will walk humbly before Him. We have just had to read about how a lack of humility, on the part of Moses, resulted in a severe punishment. The verses that immediately precede the often quoted Micah 6:8 are important to review, because a recollection of what goes on between Balak and Balaam, and how God used Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to deliver the Exodus generation, is to be considered:

“Hear now what the LORD is saying, ‘Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Listen, you mountains, to the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, because the LORD has a case against His people; even with Israel He will dispute. My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Answer Me. Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered him, *and* from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you might know the righteous acts of the LORD. With what shall I come to the LORD *and* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? **He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**” (Micah 6:1-8).

The direct link in the passage above from Micah to our Torah portion, is found in the statement, “My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted against you, and how Balaam son of Beor Responded to him” (NJPS). As ironic as it may sound, Balak’s prophetic word “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!” (Numbers 24:5, NIV), is a part of the traditional liturgy in the Synagogue, which opens up the morning *Shabbat* service.¹ (Sadly, this liturgy is noticeably absent from many Messianic *Shabbat* services.) Originally commissioned to curse Israel, Balaam had no choice but to deliver a word of blessing! Balaam’s words opened up with *mah-tovu* (מַה־טוֹבִים), and are only intensified by Micah’s *higgid lekha adam mah-tov* (הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם

The Lord is not impressed with the sacrificial offerings of calves or rams, or oil and grain offerings, and certainly not a sacrifice of children—an abominable practice of pagans. Instead, for

¹ J.H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), pp 4-5; Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2007), 61.

the chosen nation of Israel, the requirement *as a light to the other nations* is to exhibit justice, lovingkindness, and to walk humbly before the Lord. Have you considered your personal attainment of these attributes? Do you seek justice, and as a corollary, honor your word? Are your eyes, eye, and your nays, nay? Do you honor your word like the great example of the Lord not being able to lie?

How about your pursuit of lovingkindness? Are you compassionate and full of mercy? Do you readily extend grace and forgiveness when offended? Are you motivated by a love that is unconditional above all else?

How about your humility before God and people? Are you sincerely humble with others? Do you put others' needs above your own? Are you able to receive constructive criticism without being offended?

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Messiah, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:1-4).

Part of a Believer's spiritual responsibility is to be a witness of the Lord's goodness to the world in which we live. To our immediate family and extended family, we are to walk in a manner that is worthy of the call that is upon our lives. To our friends and neighbors, we are to be exemplifying godly very attributes that remind them that we are followers of Messiah Yeshua. To our co-workers and those we interact with in the marketplace, we are to again be an example of what it means to be a part of the family of God.

Remember this basic truth from the words of Balaam: those that the Lord has blessed cannot be cursed. Think about the blessings He has bestowed upon you. While you are at it—remind yourself to constantly seek justice, lovingkindness, and to always walk humbly. After all, this is what the Lord requires!

Until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.