

Micah 7:16-20, Nahum 1:7 + 2:1-3 and Isaiah 60:5-22

Three different Haftarahs commenting on the blessing of Israel by Balaam in **Numbers 23**.

Micah 7:16-20

Micah talks about Balaam in a previous chapter (Not sure why it doesn't appear as a Haftarah for any of the passages about Balaam in Numbers.):

- **Micah 6:5** - "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD."

Really referring to two different things:

NET - "My people, recall how King Balak of Moab planned to harm you, how Balaam son of Beor responded to him. Recall how you journeyed from Shittim to Gilgal, so you might acknowledge that the LORD has treated you fairly."

"righteousness" here equals "fairness" as in the NET. God could have abandoned them because of their sin, but instead he led them into the Promised Land. He can't be accused of unfairness toward His people.

Balaam

Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel. The Jews say Balaam was first a prophet, and so the Apostle Peter calls him (2 Peter 2:16), and that afterwards he fell into sorcery and became a diviner. He was killed by Israel when they invaded Canaan (Joshua 13:22).

Balaam's story is found in **Number 22-24**.

God caused Balaam to bless Israel instead, and to even make a prophecy about the Messiah. He mixed divination with belief in the true God, and made it all a venue for gain. He became a "prophet for hire."

This is what he is condemned for in the New Testament:

"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (**Revelation 2:14**)

Jude condemns false prophets who "have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit" (**Jude 1:11**).

Mixing

The "stumbling block" was the allure of Midianite women who, according to the Talmud, tricked Jewish men into worshipping idols by offering sex. The rabbis were as much concerned about the idolatry as the sex, apparently. They warned that the allure of the senses is a pathway that leads to idolatry. The real enemy was the idolatrous customs that go along with the "mixing" of Israel with other peoples. In the Old Testament, Israel was to be a fortress, keeping them separate from the other nations, until Messiah came. Then Jesus opened the community of faith to everyone. But even in the Old Testament there are continual hints toward that future openness as a "light to the Gentiles." This incident is not one of them.

See <https://thetorah.com/balaam-the-seducer-of-jews-and-an-early-christian-polemic/>

- **Numbers 31:15-16** - "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD."

"from Shittim" - Shittim or "Valley of Acacias" is in the plains of Moab, where the Children of Israel were encamped just before crossing the Jordan. This is where the incident with Balaam happened.

A plague on the men of Israel killed 24,000 of them (**Numbers 25**).

But "from Shittim to Gilgal" was also the journey of the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan, which began in Shittim (**Joshua 3:1**) and ended in Gilgal (**4:19**).

The Haftarah in **Micah 7** for this week focuses on the blessing and promise God gave to the patriarchs.

Micah 7:19-20 - "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

The blessing has been "from days of old" and will continue.

Verse 19 is recited on Rosh Hashanah as part of the High Holy Days preparation for Yom Kippur.

Nahum 1:7 + 2:1-3

Nahum 1:7 - "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

Nahum 2:1-3 - "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the

munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily. For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches."

"For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob"

- Actually, the opposite - as in the NET and the Jewish translation and he Targum:

"For the Lord has restored the pride of Jacob as the pride of Israel."

It is in the "prophetic perfect" tense, meaning a future event so sure to happen that the prophet sees it as already accomplished.

"for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches."

- "Although" the emptiers... i.e. despite the fact that things look grim.

This emphasizes the blessing for Jacob and Israel continues despite the destruction of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon.

Isaiah 60:5-22

Haftarah commenting on Balaam's blessing - **Numbers 23:10** - "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?"

Isaiah 60:5 - "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee."

"wealth" of the Gentiles, but also better as the "possessions" of the Gentiles.

(see previous recent notes on **Obadiah 1:17**: "But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.")

Also see Balaam's blessing in **Numbers 24:17-19**: "...And Edom shall be a possession..."

Isaiah 60:13 - "The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious."

Another view of the victory of God's kingdom, compared to Solomon's building of the Temple.

"place of my feet" - The Temple is called God's footstool (**Psalms 99:5; Psalm 132:7**) or rather specifically the mercy seat on the Ark where the Shekinah glory rested.

Isaiah 60:14 - "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and

they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

- **Hebrews 12:22** - "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,"

- **Revelation 21:2** - "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Isaiah 60:16 - "Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob."

Targum: "and ye shall be satisfied with the substance of the people; in the spoil of kings ye shall delight yourselves"

The Gentile nations would support and nourish the church with their wealth and substance, referring to the conversion of the Gentiles, who are ingrafted into Israel.

Isaiah 60:17 - "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness."

Rashi - The officers who came upon you in your exile and the rulers who pressed you will be counted for you as peace and charity (Baba Bathra 9a). i.e. peace and charity will now be ruling over you for good rather than evil.

Isaiah 60:18 - "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise."

The Targum is, "and they shall proclaim salvation on thy walls, and on thy gates there shall be they that praise."

Compare **Isaiah 11:9** - "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

Isaiah 60:19-20 - "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Your sun shall no more go down; neither shall your moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended."

Targum: "and ye shall have no need any more of the light of the sun by day, nor even of the light of the moon by night, thy kingdom shall cease no more, and thy glory shall not be removed"

i.e. because of the light of the Shekinah

- **Revelation 21:23** - "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof"

Isaiah 60:21 - "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified."

branch = *netser* - sprout, shoot, branch, descendant. The Messiah is also called a *netser*

- **Isaiah 11:1** - "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:"

"the work of my hands"

- **Ephesians 2:10** - "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works..."

Isaiah 60:22 - "The smallest shall become a thousand and the least a mighty nation; I am the Lord, in its time I will hasten it."

This is a final comment on **Numbers 23:10** - "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?"