

נַחֲמוּ

(Shabbat Nachamu)

Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 1 to 26

Introduction

This haftarah is the first of seven that are called *sheva de-nechamta*, “the seven [haftarot] of consolation.” Six others will follow, all from the Second Isaiah, the last one to be recited on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. (See the essay below.)

As most modern scholars see it, chapter 40 opens the prophecies of the Second Isaiah. This unknown preacher-poet lived among the exiles in Babylon (6th century B.C.E.), and at some later time his writings were attached to those of the First Isaiah, who lived well over a century earlier. (See our *General Introduction*.)¹

Connection of haftarah and Shabbat:

The weekly portion is read on the Shabbat after Tisha b'Av, the traditional fast that commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. The haftarah begins with words of comfort: the term of Israel's exile is over, for God not only desires to liberate them but can and will do so.

The setting:

Undoubtedly there were many among the exiles who doubted that God could redeem them, the promises of the prophets notwithstanding. But with Cyrus about to conquer Babylon and (so the Prophet hoped) willing to let the exiles return to their native land, Isaiah preaches that God will surely proceed to make good on the divine promise.

For more on Isaiah and his time, see our *General Introduction*.

The message:

The haftarah may be divided into three parts:

1. A brief general introduction setting out Isaiah's theme: he has been charged by God to deliver a message of hope. (43:1-2)
2. God's might is unbounded, and this power will now be demonstrated in the redemption of Israel. (40:1-20)
3. Conclusion. God's might is such that Israel's oppressors will crumble, “bringing princes to naught, making earth's rulers as nothing.” (40: 21-26)