

עקב

Isaiah, chapter 49, verse 14 to chapter 51, verse 3

Introduction

Connection of haftarah and sidra:

The weekly portion is read on the second Shabbat after Tisha b'Av and is the second of the *sheva de-nechamta*, the "seven [haftarot] of consolation," which are read until the arrival of Rosh Hashanah (see the Introduction to the previous haftarah).

The setting:

The Second Isaiah, author of this prophecy, lived among his people in Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.E.). The Israelites had begun to doubt that God would ever free them from the yoke of exile, and the first verse of the haftarah expresses this theme:

*Zion says,
The Eternal has forsaken me,
My Sovereign has forgotten me.*

Isaiah comforts the people, prophesying that their present misery will turn to glory.

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.

For more on Second Isaiah, see our *General Introduction*.¹

The message:

The haftarah is unusually long and consists of a number of subthemes:

1. God can no more forget Israel than a mother can abandon her child. (49:14-21)
2. God will bring about a reversal of fortunes, and the oppressors will suffer a ghastly fate, which is set forth in extreme images. (49:22-26)
3. Not God but Israel itself is the author of its misfortune. (50:1-3)
4. Isaiah uses his own life as an example of how he was vindicated by God. (50:4-11)
5. A final trumpet blast of hope and encouragement, cast in memorable poetry. (51:1-4)