



Parashat Bere'shit
Ashkenazim: Isaiah 42:5-43:10
October 18, 2014 / 24 Tishrei 5775

Background:

This haftarah is taken from the second half of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah lived in the mid eighth century. I don't wish to take too much time explaining the structure of the book of Isaiah, but for our purposes it is important to understand that the first 39 chapters of the book were prophecies of exile and doom announced to King Hezekiah, who also lived in the eighth century. Beginning with Chapter 40 the prophecies shift to themes of consolation and reflect a period some two centuries later. Chapters 40-66 speak to a population that resides either in Exile in Babylonia or in Judea. They are concerned with reconciliation and hope.

The connection between the Torah portion and the Haftarah is obvious. The haftarah begins with the proclamation that God created heavens and the earth and this is the morning that we read of the creation of the world.

I assume that when this haftarah became part of our liturgy that those who listened to it were charmed by its poetry and stimulated by its many messages. But poetry is often hard to decipher and its messages can be lost or buried in too complex metaphors. I suggest that some of the messages that this haftarah attempts to convey challenge us to think about the following:

When you read the haftarah ask yourself is God speaking to or about a messenger and is that messenger an individual - the prophet- or is the messenger a people "plundered and despoiled with none (but God) to rescue them" (verse 22).

- **If we the people of Israel are the messenger, then how do we need to behave to have our eyes opened?** The text speaks of God allowing the deaf to hear and the blind to see; and it makes many references to light. While the Torah portion shares with us the sequence of God creating the world, this morning's haftarah challenges us to see beyond the obvious and the grandeur of creation. Consider the great miracles and opportunities to improve the world that human behavior offers.
- **How can we as messengers, as a people, make a difference if we saw the light?**
- **Could we be a light amongst nations?**

Continue the discussion of these questions (and others of concern for Jewish men - and women) at the FJMC's on-line blog, mentschen.org. Since the high holidays have just passed,

a recent post "Ten Ways to Engage Young Adults this High Holiday Season" gave some ideas to involve your young adults. Was there anything which the service you attended helped to engage those young adults, and if so, we would appreciate your sharing it with us on the mentschen.org.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one originally written for the Unraveller for October 17, 2009 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarah: An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership".