



**Shabbat Nachamu
Parashat Vaetchanan
Isaiah 40:1-26
August 9, 2014 / 13 Av 5774**

Introduction:

This week's haftarah is named Shabbat Nachamu because it begins with the phrase Comfort, Comfort, My people, (nachamu, nachamu ami). It is the first of seven haftarot of consolation. Each of these haftarot was selected from the book of Isaiah chapter 40-66 and should be understood as a unit even though they are not in a sequential order. During the Middle Ages our sages suggested a number of reasons for this order but it is only conjectural. Modern scholarship suggests that this haftarah unit was developed in Palestine and was brought to Babylonia by Rav. In a collection of Books called the Apocrypha, (books written during the time of the Bible but not included in it) there is a book called Baruch. Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe and his book was most likely published around the time of the early Hasmoneans that is the mid 2nd century B.C.E. The style of Baruch's speeches is similar to those of Isaiah's big seven. Similar literary parallelism exists up until the 7th century C.E. Today the general consensus is that these special haftarot were standardized in Israel by the 5th Century.

The Setting:

Consider that there might have been a number of people named Isaiah or who published under that name. The first thirty-nine chapters chronicle the life of a man who lived prior to the birth of King Hezekiah, (remember the reference to Handel's messiah mentioned in parshat Yitro, Isaiah chapter 6 where I mentioned that Isaiah was predicting the birth of Hezekiah, a king who ruled for forty years?) One of the highlights of this Isaiah's life took place in 701 B.C.E., when the Assyrians surprisingly decided not to conquer Jerusalem and Jerusalem was saved. These incidents are recorded in chapters 36-39.

The seven weeks begins with Chapter 40, this morning's haftarah, and reflects a different world and a different time.

Yes, grasshopper that is why it is referred to as Second Isaiah. This morning's haftarah is one of consolation and comfort being delivered to the Judeans who were exiled to Babylon between 597 B.C.E. and 586 and to the destroyed city of Jerusalem. The haftarah also suggests that exile from Jerusalem will shortly come to an end and a return would be possible. This leads us to believe that the author lived after 538. 538 B.C.E. was the year that Cyrus, the Mede,

conquered and usurped the Babylonian empire. Cyrus was the ruler who authorized the rebuilding of the Temple.

It is time to let the dialogue found in the seven haftarot of 2nd Isaiah begin. Don't despair my ancestors, "follow the road in the desert" Have faith, move on.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller on July 24, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarat. An Everyperson's Guide".