

בראשית

Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 5 to chapter 43, verse 11

Introduction

Connection of haftarah and sidra:

The weekly Torah portion opens the annual cycle of biblical readings. It begins with God's creation of the world, climaxing in the creation of humanity. The haftarah too opens with this theme. It reminds us that the same God who brought heaven and earth into being is also the One who created the people of Israel, to be a "covenant people, a light to the nations."

The setting:

The Prophet and his people had for decades been exiles in Babylon (6th century B.C.E.). They desperately wanted to return to their homeland and wondered whether it would ever happen. With the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians and Medes, there was new hope among the exiles that their release might be at hand, and the Prophet strongly reinforced this hope and gave it a theological frame.

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

The message:

1. By linking Israel's birth to that of the universe, Isaiah stresses Israel's importance to the world. Being God's partner means special responsibilities as well as opportunities. At all times the people must testify to God's greatness and be ready to "sing a new song to the Eternal." (42:5-12)
2. But because Israel was not true to the Covenant, it suffered exile from its land. The Prophet challenges his people by asking whether they are ready to change: "Who among you will listen to this?" (42:13-25)
3. God is our hope, and this hope will not be disappointed. Therefore, "have no fear, for I will redeem you." (43:1-10)