



The weekly Haftarah recited between the 17th of Tammuz and Sukkot relate not to the weekly Torah reading, but instead to the workings of the covenant between God, His people, His Land, and humanity. Following the past “Three of Affliction (Aramaic: תלת דפורענותא), the upcoming “**Seven of Comfort**” (Aramaic: **שבוע דנהמתא**) are recited until Rosh Hashanah. Taken from the final third of the book of Isaiah, they powerfully describe the exiles’ eventual redemptive return to God’s covenant and Land.

Seven of Comfort #1 (Va’etchanan-Nachamu): Isaiah 40:1-26

The Haftarah opens with God’s declaration that His harsh punishment of His exiled people is over: They are once again “My people.” Their sins are no more, so all must now comfort them from their afflictions. The call of prophecy resumes, though not always clearly. From Jerusalem’s peaks, it boldly proclaims that all must clear paths through varied landscapes so that God can powerfully and lovingly shepherd each and every one of the exiles home to Judah. Seeing this great redemption, even the most powerful individuals and nations will perceive God’s glory, His promises’ inviolability, and, by contrast, their own mortality.

The Haftarah then shows the folly of idolatry and, by contrast, God’s transcendent greatness. His power as Creator enables Him to fulfill His redemptive promise. From beyond, God created all without the slightest assistance. People neglect this basic truth, instead fabricating gilded idols. They forget God’s power over even the mightiest earthly powers, whom He can destroy just as He made them. Contemplating the heavens God created can return people to Him.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 40:1-2: God made Judah’s exiles serve as captives twice more intensely than their sins warranted. This punishment restored its relationship with God. All must now comfort them in their affliction.

Isaiah 40:2	ישעיהו מ:ב
Speak unto Jerusalem’s heart. Declare to her that she has completed her term of captivity, that her iniquity is expiated, and that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.	דַּבְּרוּ עַל־לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כִּי מָלְאָה צָבָאָה כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקְחָה מִיַּד ה' כְּפָלִים בְּכָל־חַטָּאתֶיהָ:

Verses 40:3-5: A voice declares that God is on a path through the wilderness. Every valley, hill, and obstacle will be straightened, flattened, and cleared. As God fulfills His word, unified humanity will see His glory.

Isaiah 40:3	ישעיהו מ:ג
A voice cries, “In the wilderness, prepare the Lord’s path. Straighten a highway in the desert for our God.”	קוֹל קוֹרֵא בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנּוּ דְרָגוֹ ה' יִשְׁרֹוּ בַּעֲרֻבָה מִסְלָה לְאֱלֹקֵינוּ:

Verses 40:6-8: Another voice is heard. After initially not being understood, its message is clarified: Like plants, humanity and its kindness last only as long as God permits, but God’s word endures forever.

Isaiah 40:8	ישעיהו מ:ח
The grass withers [and] the flower fades [but] our God’s word shall endure forever.	יָבֵשׁ חֲצִיר וְגַבַל צִיץ וְדִבְרֵי־אֱלֹקֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם:

Verses 40:9-11: A herald must ascend Zion's heights to fearlessly proclaim God's return, as a powerful ruler with his entourage, to Judah. Like a shepherd, God will ensure each individual's return from exile.

Isaiah 40:10	ישעיהו מ"י
Behold! The Lord God will come with might, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold! His reward is with Him, and his hire before Him.	הִנֵּה אֵלֹהֵי ה' בְּחִזּוֹק יָבֹוא וְזָרְעוּ מִשְׁלָה לְו הַגָּה שְׂכָרוֹ אִתּוֹ וּפְעֻלָּתוֹ לְפָנָיו:

Verses 40:12-14: With transcendent power and knowledge, God constructed the world as a master craftsman, measuring the sky, seas, land, and mountains. No entity assisted the Creator in any way.

Isaiah 40:12	ישעיהו מ"ב
Who measured the waters in his palm, meted out the heavens with a span, included earth's dust in a measure, weighed mountains in a scale, or hills in a balance?	מִי־מָדַד בְּשַׁעְלוֹ מַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם בְּזֶרֶת תִּפְּחֵן וְכָל בְּשָׁלֵשׁ עָפָר הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁקָל בְּפֶלֶס הָרִים וּגְבָעוֹת בְּמֵאזְנָיִם:

Verses 40:15-17: Even together, all nations are powerless. Their greatest burnt offerings are worthless to God.

Isaiah 40:17	ישעיהו מ"ז
All nations are as nothing before Him. They are considered to Him as less than nothing and vanity.	כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם כְּאֵין נִגְדוּ מֵאַפְס וְתֵהוּ נְחֻשְׁבוּ־לוֹ:

Verses 40:18-20: Idolaters craft materials they can afford into idols, but these images are incomparable to God.

Isaiah 40:19	ישעיהו מ"ט
The idol? A craftsman casts it, and a refiner plates it with gold, he forges silver chains.	הַפֶּסֶל נִסְדָּה תְרִשׁ וְצִרָף בְּזָהָב יִרְקָעֵנּוּ וִירְתִּיקוֹת כֶּסֶף צִנְרָף:

Verses 40:21-26: People fail to understand that God dwells beyond the heavens and earth He created. At His will, the Creator's power overwhelms even the most powerful among humanity. To recognize the Creator, all must contemplate the stars, all created and named by the powerful, incomparable Holy One.

Isaiah 40:22	ישעיהו מ"כ"ב
[God is the one who] dwells above earth's circle, its inhabitants like grasshoppers. The One who spreads the heaven like a thin curtain, stretching them out like a tent for dwelling.	הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל־תּוֹג הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁבְּיָהּ בְּחַגְבֵּי הַנוּטָה כְּדָק שָׁמַיִם וַיִּמְתְּנֵם כְּאַהֲל לְשָׁבֵת:

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