



Handout for week of 1/7/19 [Lk. 3: 15-16, 21-22](#) & Is: 40: 1-5, 9-11

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Is.1 Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your G-d. 2 Bid Jerusalem take heart, and proclaim unto her, that her time of service is accomplished, that her guilt is paid off; that she hath received of HaShem'S hand double for all her sins. 3 Hark! one calleth: 'Clear ye in the wilderness the way of HaShem, make plain in the desert a highway for our G-d. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the rugged shall be made level, and the rough places a plain; 5 And the glory of HaShem shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of HaShem hath spoken it.'

9 O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah: 'Behold your G-d!' 10 Behold, the L-rd GOD will come as a Mighty One, and His arm will rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. 11 Even as a shepherd that feedeth his flock, that gathereth the lambs in his arm,

and carrieth them in his bosom, and gently leadeth those that give suck.

COMMENTARY:

For the prophet, the unthinkable was happening. He lived at the end of Israel's exile in Babylon.

They thought that the deportation into Babylon, to the camp at Tel Abib, was the end of their history.

They thought that this dispersion of the kingdom of Judah was definitive, as had been the earlier dispersion of the northern kingdom of their people, when the northern capital of Samaria was destroyed.

Now Jerusalem was gone, along with the temple, and their day had ended. Darkness descended on the sacred history of the once-chosen people, and they languished in various places in a foreign land. Their ancient ancestral homeland was now in the hands of strangers, and life, apparently, was moving on. But now they have a reprieve. A new emperor, Cyrus the Great, from a new empire, Persia, had taken control, and they were being encouraged to return to their old land, their old home.

The prophet, the anonymous Second-Isaiah, is chosen to announce the news. They have a second chance. The nation once resplendent in its pride, is now beginning again. There has been nothing like this before, says the prophet. We have been given a reprieve. We are being given a second Exodus, a new Passover. We are going to relive the original events of Moses' time, and establish this people for a second time. He imagines God on his throne—for God is certainly a mighty emperor, mightier than Cyrus, or Nebuchadnezzar—and God issues an edict from his throne:

Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Proclaim her time of servitude is ended. Her guilt is expiated. Israel has suffered enough. She can return home now. The dispersion is over.

What was thought a permanent banishment, is now seen to be a temporary exile. The exile has ended.

The edict goes out, and the commands are given: The exiles are coming home. Build a road in the desert for them to travel on in their journey. Make it a swift and smooth road: Fill in the valleys, level the hills and mountains.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2005-6. Pgs. 6-7.