

Shabbat Nachamu – The Shabbat of Consolation

Last Shabbat was Shabbat Chazon, which is the Shabbat before Tishah b'Av (the 9th of Av), a day traditionally marked by fasting, mourning, and prayer as we remember the destruction that has come to our people on this day in history, including the destruction of the Temple. But now that day of mournful memories has past, and with hope and faith we look to the future, having repeated the words of Jeremiah's lament: "Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old." (Threni/Lamentations 5:21)

With this in mind, the Sages determined that the Shabbat following Tishah b'Av should be marked as Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of Consolation or Comfort. The additional haftarah reading assigned for this Shabbat is taken from Isaiah 40 which begins, "Comfort, O comfort My people" which retraces the theme of what has become known as Isaiah's "Book of Comfort" (chapters 30–33). It is instructive to see in these words of Isaiah the basis for Israel's comfort which he predicts:

"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

"Speak kindly to Jerusalem;

And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins." (Is 40:1–2)

The consolation of Israel comes at a time when the nation has repented and received from the LORD full forgiveness for their sins. But not only has their iniquity been removed, they will also receive from His hand double the blessings in proportion to their iniquity. In the Torah, one who has stolen is required not only to return what was wrongfully taken, but also to add to it a fifth of the value. In the case of their iniquities, however, Israel as a nation has robbed God. As Malachi states:

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! (Mal 3:8–9)

Here the prophet uses "tithes and offerings" to quantify how Israel is robbing God of His glory. But the word "offerings" (תרומה, *terumah*) can also carry the sense of "dedication" in the sense of "worship," thus including all aspects of "worship, obedience, etc." How has unbelieving Israel done this? They have sought to diminished the glory of Yeshua Himself in the eyes of all the nations. Moreover, no one is able to pay even the equal value of their sins, not to mention adding a fifth! But to all who, by faith, accept the person and work of the Messiah, Yeshua, in atoning for the sins of His people, the mercies of the Almighty are demonstrated in that He not only paid the price of our iniquities, but that He has returned to us double the value in blessings.

And how is that the Almighty paid for our sins? In the following chapters of Isaiah's prophecy he tells us:

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. (Is 53:3–5)

So in the additional reading for this Shabbat, Isaiah admonishes Israel:

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" (Is 40:9)

Thus, our consolation comes about through the willing and gracious dwelling of the Lord with us. The comfort we so much long for is the result of Immanuel, "God with us!" The Scriptures are clear, that even though Israel as a people-group/nation has rejected Yeshua, there has always been a remnant of the Jewish people who have been granted true, saving faith and who therefore confess that Yeshua is the promised Savior and seek to honor Him in spite of the fact that the majority of Israel has rejected Him and those who accept Him.

Moreover, the glorious and wonderful reality is that there is coming a time when Yeshua Himself will return to our world and there will be a massive and true confession by the people of Israel that He is, in fact, the promised Messiah and that it is by His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession that eternal salvation has been granted to all who, by faith, accept Him as the promised Savior and Redeemer. As the Scriptures testify:

And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED." (John 19:35-37, cf. Ex 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20)

and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Rev 1:6–7)

Note also Dan 7:13; 1Thess 4:17-18.

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. (Dan 7:13)

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess 4:17-18)