

Haftarah and the New Testament

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Introduction

This was pulled from [Isaiah-61-1-2-and-Luke-4-14-30-proclaim-liberty-and-the-acceptable-year-of-YHVH](#), article [#287](#)

Haftarah, Notes on

ToDo: Determine if this is really relevant

Here is relevant excerpts from Wikipedia^a. As I already wrote about, this isn't the key issue of my article, but the history of the Haftarah is interesting, so rather than write a new article on the subject I decided to append it to this article.

Introduction

“...Typically, the haftarah is thematically linked to the parasha (Torah portion) that precedes it.”

“The origin of haftarah reading is lost to history, and several theories have been proposed to explain its role in Jewish practice, suggesting it arose in response to the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes which preceded the Maccabean revolt, wherein Torah reading was prohibited,^{3 4} or that it was "instituted against the Samaritans, who denied the canonicity of the Prophets (except for Joshua), and later against the Sadducees." ³ Another theory is that it was instituted after some act of persecution or other disaster in which the synagogue Torah scrolls were destroyed or ruined - it was forbidden to read the Torah portion from any but a ritually fit parchment scroll, but there was no such requirement about a reading from Prophets, which was then "substituted as a temporary expedient and then remained."⁵ The Talmud mentions that a haftarah was read in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who lived c.70 CE,⁶ and that by the time of Rabbah (the 3rd century) there was a "Scroll of Haftarot", which is not further described,⁷ and in the Christian New Testament several references suggest this Jewish custom was in place during that era.[8]”

^a <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haftarah>

History

No one knows for certain the origins of reading the haftarah, but several theories have been put forth. The most common explanation, accepted by some traditional Jewish authorities is that in 168 BCE, when the Jews were under the rule of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, they were forbidden from reading the Torah and made do with a substitute. When they were again able to read the Torah, they kept reading the haftarah as well. However this theory was not articulated before the 14th century, when it was suggested by Rabbi David Abudirham,⁹ but this explanation has several weaknesses.¹⁰

An alternative explanation, offered by Rabbis Reuven Margolies and Samson Raphael Hirsch (except where otherwise identified, this is the Hirsch cited throughout this article), is that the haftarah reading was instituted to fight the influence of those sects in Judaism that viewed the Hebrew Bible as consisting only of the Torah.

However, all offered explanations for the origin of reading the haftarah have unanswered difficulties.

Certainly the haftarah was read — perhaps not obligatorily nor in all communities nor on every Sabbath — as far back as circa 70 CE: The Talmud mentions that a haftarah was read in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who lived at that time.¹¹ The New Testament indicates that readings from the Prophets - but not necessarily a fixed schedule - was a common part of the Sabbath service (Luke 4:16-17; Act 13:15 & 13:27) in Jerusalem synagogues even earlier than 70 CE.

³ Rabinowitz, Louis. "Haftarah." Encyclopaedia Judaica. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 198-200. 22 vols. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale.

⁴ Shlomo Katz, *The Haftarah: Laws, Customs & History* (2000, Silver Spring, Md.: Hamaayan/The Torah Spring) page 4.

⁵ Matthew B. Schwartz, *Torah Reading in the Ancient Synagogue*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State Univ., 1975, page 181.

⁶ Tosefta, Megillah, 4 (3): 1, gives the haftarot for the Four Special Sabbaths. A baraita in Megillah 31a, which has later additions by the Babylonian amoraim who add the haftarot for the second days of the festivals (and who sometimes change the order of the haftarot as a result) – gives the haftarot for every one of the festivals, including their intermediate Sabbaths, as well as a Sabbath which is also Rosh Hodesh, the Sabbath which immediately precedes Rosh Hodesh, and Hanukkah.

⁷ Talmud Babli, Gittin 60a.

⁸ Acts 13:15 states that "after the reading of the law and the prophets" Paul was invited to deliver an exhortation. Luke 4:17 states that during the Sabbath service in Nazareth the Book of Isaiah was handed to Jesus, "and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written," the passage being Isaiah 61:1–2. Unfortunately, the Greek word used there meaning "found" does not make it clear whether the passage read was fixed beforehand or whether it was chosen at random. See Rabinowitz, Louis. "Haftarah." Encyclopaedia Judaica. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 198-200. 22 vols. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale. Also Matthew B. Schwartz, *Torah Reading in the Ancient Synagogue*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State Univ., 1975, page 184, "In fact, the selection must have been made beforehand.", The earliest source for evidence of haftarah readings is the New

Testament, but it has been suggested that Jewish authorities following the New Testament period very deliberately avoided using as a haftarah any selection of the Prophets that had been mentioned in the New Testament. Hananel Mack, What happened to Jesus' haftarah? Haaretz, Aug. 12, 2005. But D. Monshouwer, The Reading of the Prophet in the Synagogue at Nazareth, *Biblica*, vol. 72, nr. 1 (1991) page 90-99, suggests that the quotation of Isaiah 61:1 is not a haftarah reading but the beginning of a sermon or homily, and suggests that the occasion was Yom Kippur.

⁹ Sol Scharfstein, *The Book of Haftarat for Shabbat, Festivals, and Fast Days* (2006, NJ, KTAV Publ.) page 14; Samuel N. Hoenig, "Haftarah-Sidrah: Mirror Images" in Michael A. Schmidman, ed., *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander* (2007, L.A., Touro College Press) vol.1, page 59.

¹⁰ Shlomo Katz, *The Haftarah: Laws, Customs & History* (2000, Silver Spring, Md.: Hamaayan/The Torah Spring) pages 4-5. Among the reasons for doubting, ancient sources list many oppressive acts by Antiochus but none mentions this, the reading of Haftarat also dates from antiquity in places that Antiochus never ruled, and it seems doubtful that any anti-Jewish villain would be so punctilious as to forbid only the Mosaic books but permit the Prophetic books. Stephen Gabriel Rosenberg, *The Haphtara Cycle* (2000, NJ. Jason Aronson) page xxi, "But this [attribution to the Seleucid era] is a doubtful proposition as the Book of Maccabees tells us that the Jews were not permitted to even keep the Sabbath (I Macc. 1:45-50 and II Macc. 6:11) and that all scrolls of the Law were burnt (I Macc. 1:56). So all forms of Sabbath worship would have been prohibited in the Temple or outside of it. Josephus in his version of the events adds that all sacred books of the Law were destroyed (Antiquities XII:256). There is no reason to think therefore that the books of the Nevi'im [Prophets] would be allowed any more than the scrolls of the Law (Torah) themselves, and in any case it is hardly likely that such manuscripts were available to ordinary people." (emphasis in original). Also, Jacob Mann, "Changes in the Divine Service of the Synagogue Due to Religious Persecutions", *Hebrew Union College Annual* vol. 4 (1927) pages 282-284.

¹¹ Shlomo Katz, *The Haftarah: Laws, Customs & History* (2000, Silver Spring, Md.: Hamaayan/The Torah Spring) pages 120-121, citing Megillah 25b. Oddly, the Talmudic story is that the Rabbi found fault with the choice of haftara - but that selection is still read as the haftara for another parsha. Moreover, a study of the writings of Philo Judaeus, who died circa 50 CE, shows extensive reliance ("an overwhelming degree of correlation") on the same prophetic passages read as the haftarat for various special Sabbaths and holidays, which indicates that those haftarat were part of the liturgy decades earlier than the Talmud suggests; see Naomi G. Cohen, *Philo's Scriptures: Citations from the Prophets and Writings, Evidence for a Haftarah Cycle in Second Temple Judaism* (2007, Leiden, NL: E.J. Brill, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 123) page 69. A fragment from the 11th or 12th century in Cairo lists a few haftarat not now in use -- but also shows that the Torah readings used were different from what is now virtually universal (e.g. one Torah portion is Numbers 25:1-10, but the ubiquitous practice for the past several centuries is that one Torah portion, Balak, ends with verse 9, and the next week's, Pinchas, begins with verse 10). E.N. Adler, "MS. of Haftaras of the Triennial Cycle", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 8, nr. 3 (April 1896) page 529.

New Testament verses suggesting the existence of the Haftarah

Act 13:13-15 KJV

¹³ Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. ¹⁵ And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Act 13:27 KJV

For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*.

Ahavta Notes

ToDo: determine if this is relevant

Luke 4:14-30 - Isaiah 61:1-3

The haftarah portion, Isaiah 61:1-3, was read by Yeshua as He attended a synagogue in Nazareth (v.15-20). We may assume from this that it was fall – late during the third year of the Temple Triennial Cycle – and He was reading the haftarah portion.

The reading concerned freeing captives and preaching good news to the poor – relating to the subject of the Torah portion. He concluded with, “*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (v.21). All were marveling at His gracious words, but apparently they had little real heart for His teaching.

<http://www.ahavta.org/Commentary%20Y-3/Y3-34.htm>

Yeshua then said (v.23), “*No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.’*” What followed seems to say that He would not be performing healings in Nazareth, because He was not honored in this His home town (paraphrased): “*There were many widows in Israel during the three-and-a-half year famine of Elijah’s time, but he only provided for a gentile widow in Sidon! There were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet, but only a gentile in Syria was cleansed!*”

They were so filled with rage that they cast Him out of the city and would have killed Him, though He only spoke what their prophets had said!