

SEVEN WEEKS OF CONSOLATION (I)

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I

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, we began the seven Shabbatot of consolation, known as Shiv'ah d'Nehemta, following Tish'ah b'Av and concluding just before Rosh haShanah. What marks these Shabbatot is the public recitation of a special Haftarah each week; the seven of them are all thematically related and taken from one section of T'nakh. The common theme which runs throughout all seven is the consolation of the nation in the shadow of the destruction of the Mikdash and the exile from Yehudah. All seven Haftarot are taken from the latter half of Yeshayah (Isaiah), beginning with chapter 40 (last week's Haftarah - "Nahamu"). Although much has been made of the possibility of a later prophet - or several - being the author of this second half of Yeshayah (see Ibn Ezra's esoteric comment at Yeshaya 40:1 as well as Abravanel's introduction to his commentary on Yeshayah) we will not explore that dispute in this essay. We will, rather, devote our analysis to understanding the establishment of the Shiv'ah d'Nehemta, including the various themes and the prescribed sequence.

In order to treat the subject with the necessary breadth and appropriate depth, we will divide the analysis into two issues. This first half will focus on the development of the practice of reading the Haftarah and then segue into an overview of the seven Haftarot of consolation and will conclude with a few general questions. In next week's conclusion, we will propose a theory as to the sequence and selection of these passages, demonstrate it with selections from each Haftarah, and explain the underlying rationale behind this sequence.

II

THE INSTITUTION OF THE HAFTARAH

Although there is little information in Rabbinic literature regarding the historic development of the public reading of the Torah, there is even less regarding the public reading of selections from the prophets at the conclusion of some public Torah readings, referred to as Haftarah (more on this sobriquet later). Three things become clear from the primary sources:

1) The Haftarah was instituted after the institution of K'riat haTorah.

2) The institution of the Haftarah was well-known and universally practiced (although not necessarily at the same occasions as we practice it today) by the early Mishnaic period (1st century CE).

3) For the most part, the public recitation of the Haftarah did not have a specific text assigned to each occasion; i.e. the Haftarah of a given Shabbat was not designated to be a particular passage from the N'vi'im. Even in those cases where the primary Rabbinic sources refer to such an assignation (e.g. the holidays - see BT Megillah 29a), it is clear that there were other customs extant, as prevalent custom does not always follow those dicta.

Haftarah literally means "conclusion", referring to the placement of this reading at the end of the reading of the Torah (some have posited that at some point it was the ending point of the worship service - see Rapaport, Erekh Milin, p. 167 ff. - this approach has little to recommend it and no basis whatsoever in any of the sources). [Some alternate meanings include, curiously, "opening" (as in Peter Rehem), meaning that at this point a member of the attending congregation may begin discussing certain matters otherwise forbidden during the K'riat haTorah [L'vush OC #282]. The alternate name found in Rabbinic and Geonic sources, Ashlamta, (completion) however, supports the first translation].

As mentioned above, there is little information as to the development of the Haftarah; we can't even be too sure as to when the practice was first ordained. That it was established after the institution of the public reading of the Torah is clear from several perspectives, not the least of which is its name, indicating that it was introduced as an "epilog" to the K'riat haTorah. In addition, the Halakhah that the Maftir must first read from the Torah before commencing the selection from the N'vi'im (on account of K'vod haTorah - respect for the supremacy of Torah - BT Megillah 23a, MT T'fillah 12:13). The fact that the selection must bear some similarity ("d'dami lei" - BT Megillah 29b) to the associated Torah reading further bolsters this notion. There are those who argue that the practice of reading a Haftarah pre-dates the canonization of T'nakh (somewhere between the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE).

Before presenting their arguments, one preface is necessary: The essential Halakhah demands that the Haftarah be read from a properly written scroll which includes the entire book from which the passage is being read (e.g. Yehoshua, Yeshayah, T'rei 'Asar). The contemporary custom in many congregations to read from a printed book (T'nakh or "Sefer Haftarot") is viewed by many Poskim as less than ideal and a concession to the poverty of the Jewish community that cannot afford to have these scrolls commissioned.

Those who claim that the establishment of the Haftarah pre-dates canonization (see Elbogen, haT'fillah b'Yisra'el, p. 132) argue as follows:

1. There is no demand that the Haftarah be read from a complete compilation of the N'vi'im, rather from a scroll including just the book in question (e.g. Yehoshua, Yeshayah);
2. Haftarot are not read in any sequential order,

3. nor is there a demand for sequential reading within one Haftarah - one may skip from section to section (albeit within certain strict parameters).

The conclusion is sound. As mentioned above, it is abundantly clear that the institution of the reading of the Haftarah predates the turn of the millenium; it is equally clear from the report in Massechet Shabbat that the Prophetic canon wasn't closed before that time; Rav (3rd century) relates:

In truth, that man, Hananiah son of Hezekiah by name, is to be remembered for blessing; but for him, the Book of Yehezqel would have been excluded from the canon, for its words contradicted the Torah. What did he do? Three hundred barrels of oil were taken up to him and he sat in an upper chamber and reconciled [the contradictions]. (BT Shabbat 13b)

Hananiah b. Hezekiah b. Gurion, the sage in question, lived during the early first century - and issues of inclusion in the canon were still being debated. Thus, Elbogen is correct in stating that the institution of the Haftarah predated the closing of the prophetic canon; yet, his arguments fail once we understand the reason for the original establishment of the public reading of a selection of the N'vi'im, one that will easily explain the three observations noted above.

III

POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS FOR THE INSTITUTION OF THE HAFTARAH

There are two major schools among the Rishonim as to the origins of the public reading of the Haftarah.

One maintains that it was the outgrowth of a more intense learning experience which took place in the synagogue. Here is the report of R. Tzidkiyah b. Avraham haRofe (1230-1300, Italy) in his classic Shibbolei haLeket (#44):

[quoting Rashi, who describes the common custom of studying Torah, N'vi'im and oral law immediately after morning T'fillah; evidently this custom was prevalent during the Second Commonwealth]...once poverty increased and the people needed to work, they could not engage so intensely in the study of Torah and they abandoned the Torah in its place save for the recital of Sh'ma which includes the acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Decalogue and the responsibility for fulfilling Mitzvot - this they didn't abandon. Nonetheless, they would read these two verses from the N'vi'im: uVa l'Tziyyon and va'Ani Zot B'riti...which is a sort of K'riat haTorah - and these are still recited by us every day. On Shabbat and Yom Tov, which have no hindrance from work and are leisurely days, they restored the crown to its former glory, instituting the reading and translating of the N'vi'im in matters relating to the day. Therefore, we do not recite uVa l'Tziyyon in the morning T'fillah of Shabbat and Yom Tov because they have already read from the N'vi'im...(the same explanation can be found in Rashi's name in Sefer haPardes. The explanation proffered here

for the recitation of uVa l'Tziyyon can be found as early as the Geonic period; cf. Teshuvot haGe'onim Sha'arei Teshuvah #55 and Teshuvot haGe'onim Lik #90. We will not analyze the implications of this approach for understanding the public K'riat haTorah - but it is quite intriguing and somewhat novel).

The other explanation suggested by the Rishonim shares one feature with the first - they both see the Haftarah as the result of less-than-ideal circumstances. The Abudraham (R. David Abudraham, 14th c. Spain) explains:

Why do we read from the N'vi'im? Since there was a decree against Yisra'el preventing them from reading from the Torah, corresponding to the seven who would come up to read from the Torah - and no one reads fewer than three verses per Aliyah - they ordained that 21 verses from the N'vi'im should be read... (this approach can also be found in Tosafot Yom Tov, Megillah 3:4 - he cites the Sefer haTishbi who maintains that the aforementioned decree was passed by the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes IV).

Note that Abudraham makes no mention of when this decree was promulgated - but, just as the vague mention of the onset of poverty in the first explanation, we must assume that it took place during the Second Commonwealth, likely before the end of the Hasmonean dynasty (37 BCE).

As we noted earlier, Elbogen's arguments in favor of a pre-canon date for the establishment of the Haftarah led him to an accurate conclusion. Nonetheless, the arguments themselves are wanting, as follows:

His second and third arguments (the lack of any demand of sequential integrity), are easily dismissed. Since the institution of the Haftarah was passed to "make up" for something missing in Torah engagement, it stands to reason that it would not have its own independent scheme of study, rather it would parallel the Torah reading which it was meant to amplify (first explanation) or for which it would substitute (second explanation). This response is, of course, much more persuasive if we accept the Abudraham's explanation; to wit, the weekly (and holiday) Haftarah were meant to "make up" for the missed Torah reading. As such there would be no reason to follow some serial or sequential reading instead of an independent reading each week. Although weaker, the same argument might be made for the first explanation. Since the Haftarah was intended to serve as a mini-restoration of the glory of studying after T'fillah, there would be no need for it to follow some serial format.

Elbogen's first argument, (since the Haftarah need not be read from an entire compilation of N'vi'im, rather it is sufficient to read from a proper scroll which includes that entire Sefer, thus proving that it was instituted before there was a canon of N'vi'im), rests on an assumption without support. His analogy purports to equate the five books of the Torah with the eight books of the N'vi'im (or perhaps he would be satisfied with the four literary N'vi'im and the four historic books of the N'vi'im as units). There is no reason to assume this equation; the five books of Torah are presented, within the Torah itself, as an integrated unit - Mosheh wrote a Sefer Torah at the end of his life and gave it

to the children of Levi (D'varim 31:9). Although the Torah covers a long time period (Creation through the end of the desert wanderings), it was given and completed during one short period and by one Navi - Mosheh. Contradistinctively, each book of the N'vi'im is its own work, by its own author (see BT Bava Batra 14b) and focused on its own unique theme and era. Why would there ever be a desideratum to have a scroll of all of the N'vi'im from which the reading must originate?

IV

ANALYZING THE ARGUMENTS

Since we have no hard evidence about the time and circumstances which led to the establishment of the public recitation of passages from N'vi'im, our only recourse is to investigate the framework of the institution to glean some clues as to its purpose.

As Abudraham points out, the minimum requirement for a reading of the Haftarah is 21 verses - although there are exceptions to this rule (generally, if the entire theme is exhausted in fewer than 21 verses). This does seem to suggest a correlation to the Torah reading (7 aliyot times 3 verses at minimum), although, following this logic, there should be a requirement of 18 verses on Yom haKippurim (when there are 6 Aliyot) and 15 for Yom Tov (when there are five). In addition, this does not explain why Haftarot are not recited at every occasion of the public reading of the Torah.

The first challenge is easy to defend against: Once the ordinance was established regarding the public reading of the N'vi'im, the standard limit of 21 verses was attached to the ordinance and didn't vary from holiday to Shabbat. It is the general rule of Takkanot (ordinances) of Haza"l not to establish varying norms for what is essentially one act.

The second challenge might be defended, if we suggest that a Haftarah is read on each occasion of K'riat haTorah that was in practice at the time of the decree. Although this is reasonable, it leaves us with isolating the Torah reading on weekdays, Rosh Chodesh, Purim, Hanukkah and fast days (except for Tish'ah b'Av) in the morning as being the latest stratum of enactment of Torah reading - after the decree and the subsequent ordinance of Haftarah. This is difficult, especially in light of the passage in Bava Kama 82b which assigns credit for the weekly readings on Monday and Thursday mornings to none other than Ezra (5th century BCE), who certainly predated the establishment of the Haftarah.

The Babylonian tradition (which we follow) of the annual cycle of Torah reading has a general principle which supports Abudraham's approach - although it might be marshaled on behalf of the explanation favored within the school of Rashi (as reported in Shibbolei haLeket above). That principle, succinctly summarized in two words, is "d'Dami Lei" (BT Megillah 29b). To wit, the Haftarah must have a thematic resemblance to the associated Torah reading. This would seem to suggest that the Haftarah was originally intended to substitute for the K'riat haTorah and, as such, must

communicate the same ideas or relate similar narratives.

The principle which governed the custom of Eretz Yisrael (the triennial cycle), conversely, focused on word-association. Any passage from the N'vi'im which began with the same word with which the associated Torah reading began could be used as the Haftarah for that Shabbat. This tradition, as well, supports Abudraham's explanation.

Both, however, could also fit within the scheme suggested by the school of Rashi. If the Haftarah was formulated in order to preserve some study of the N'vi'im, it would be reasonable that that study would be related, thematically or (at least) philologically, to the mandated Torah study which precedes it.

One feature of the Haftarah which is readily apparent from the two traditions related above - and which quickly emerges from even a casual perusal of the primary sources - is that there were no assigned texts for Haftarot at the time of the establishment of the practice. Indeed, the Mishnah makes no mention of designated readings for Haftarot; the only related codification is two passages, both from Yehezqel (1 & 16), which are deemed inappropriate to be used for a Haftarah. (Megillah 4:10) The Tosefta (Megillah 3:1) does list the appropriate Haftarot for the Four Shabbatot (from Shabbat before/on Rosh Chodesh Adar through the Shabbat before/on Rosh Chodesh Nisan). The Gemara (BT Megillah 31a) quotes a Baraita which lists the Haftarot for the various holidays, Shabbat Rosh Chodesh and, curiously, Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Av. The Gemara (31b) relates a dispute as to the proper Haftarah for Tish'ah b'Av itself; there is very little else discussed in the Gemara relating to specific Haftarot and absolutely nothing regarding the assignment of Haftarot for "regular" Shabbatot.

This is not to say that the rules regarding the regular Haftarah are not found in the Talmud - here are three examples:

One who reads the Torah (i.e. K'riat haTorah) should not read less than three verses and he should not read to the translator more than one verse [at a time]. In a Navi, however, [he may give him] three at a time. If the three verses constitute three separate Parashiot, he must read them [to the translator] one by one. The reader may skip [from place to place] in a Navi but not in the Torah...(Mishnah Megillah 4:4)

He who says the Haftarah from the Navi should read not less than twenty-one verses, (BT Megillah 23a)

The reader may not skip from one Navi to another. In the T'rei Asar, he may skip, provided only that he does not skip from the end of the book to the beginning. (ibid. 24a)

As can be seen, there were general rules covering the choice of material ("d'Dami Lei" or word-association), the length, the style of reading etc. all of which point to the obvious conclusion that there were no set Haftarot during the Talmudic period. To what extent was the selection the

"reader's choice" and how much input was given to the community to determine the appropriate reading is unclear. What is very clear is that, with the exception of the holiday readings, the choice of material for the Haftarah was not globally mandated nor made in a universal manner.

This explains why there are so many Shabbatot wherein there are multiple traditions (Russian, German, Yemenite, Italian etc.) as to where to begin and end the text or even which text to use. Evidently, over time, particular Haftarot became regional "favorites" and were the norm for a set of communities who shared other traditions, customs and interacted with each other on a regular basis.

...all of which brings us to the seven Shabbatot of consolation.

V

SEVEN SELECTIONS AND FOUR QUESTIONS

As mentioned above, the Gemara provides us with no list of Shabbat-Haftarot, and many of the Haftarot which we regularly read only became "fixed" in medieval times. The seven Haftarot of Nechamah, however, are clearly from an early period; this can be seen by their usage as headings in the P'sikta d'R. Kahana dating from the 5th century in Eretz Yisra'el. It can also be seen by the universal adoption of these Haftarot; there are no communities that do not read these seven Haftarot on these seven Shabbatot, using the same texts.

The texts used are all taken from the latter half of the book of Yeshayah, as per this chart:

1	Va'Et'hanan	40:1-26*	26	<i>Nahamu, nahamu 'ami</i>
2	Ekev	49:14-51:3	27	<i>Vatomer Tziyyon</i>
3	R'eh	54:11-55:5	12	<i>'Aniyah So'arah</i>
4	Shoftim	51:12-52:12	23	<i>Anokhi Anokhi</i>
5	Ki Tetze	54:1-54:10	10	<i>Roni 'Akarah</i>
6	Ki Tavo	60:1-22	22	<i>Kumi Ori</i>

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