
PART IV
THE HAFTARAH
TEXT

CHAPTER 16

Choosing A Haftarah

No early source identifies which portion of the *Nevi'im* should be read as the haftarah for each *parashah*. The *Gemara*¹ lists the *haftarot* for the *Yamim Tovim*, *Chanukah* and *Rosh Chodesh*, though the prevailing custom today does not follow the *Gemara*'s suggestions in all cases.² As for most *Shabbatot* of the year, the custom is to read a selection from one of the *Nevi'im* which relates to the subject matter of the *parashah*.³ If a haftarah was read which has no relationship to the *parashah*, some say that the correct haftarah should be read even after *Mussaf* and that it may be read with its *berachot* even without reading from the Torah again.⁴

The degree of connection between each *parashah* and its haftarah varies widely. On the one hand, the *haftarah* which many *Sephardic* communities read for *Parashat Vayetze* (i.e., *Hoshea* 11:7-12:12) contains explicit references to events in the *parashah*; for example, the *parashah* speaks of the birth of Yaakov and Esav, and the haftarah states, “בבטן עקב את אחיו” / “In the womb he held his

¹ *Megillah* 31a-b.

² See for example *Tosfot, Megillah* 31a למחר דייה and *Tosfot, Megillah* 31b דייה ראש ב.

³ *O.C.* 284:1; *Mishnah Berurah* 144:1.

⁴ See *Darchoi Chaim Veshalom* § 440, in the Appendix.

brother's heel.” The *Ashkenazic* haftarah for the same *parashah* (*Hoshea* 12:13-14:10), relates: “ויברח יעקב שדה ארם” / “Yaakov fled to the field of Aram,” again a reference to the *parashah*.

On the other hand, the haftarah for *Parashat Vayeishev* (i.e. *Amos* 2:6-3:8) has no apparent relationship to the *parashah*; one commentator describes the connection as “fleeting.”⁵ R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik claimed that there were a number of *haftarot* which he could not relate to their *parashot* (though one assumes that he was looking for more than a casual connection).⁶

On the *Shabbatot* which fall between the Fast of the Seventeenth of *Tamuz* and *Yom Kippur*, the *haftarot* are not chosen for their relationship to the *parashah*.⁷ Rather, the *haftarot* that are read address timely themes such as the destruction of the Temple, the eventual redemption, and repentance.⁸

Why do different *chumashim* list different haftarot for some *parashot*?

There are many different regional customs regarding *haftarot*. *Chumashim* that are popular in the United States commonly show one or more of the following: *Ashkenazim*, *Sephardim*, Italian, and Frankfurt am-Main.

⁵ R' Yissachar Yaakovson, *Chazon Hamikra*. One possible connection is the accusation in the haftarah that the Jewish people sold “a *tzaddik* for money and a pauper for a pair of shoes.” According to the *midrash*, Yosef's brothers used the money they received from selling him to buy shoes.

⁶ *Divrei Hashkafah* p.88.

⁷ In fact, *Rambam* does list a haftarah related to each of the *parashot* during this period (*Seder Tefilot L'chol Hashanah* printed at the end of *Sefer Ahavah*). However, I have not found any *chumash* or any authority that mentions these *haftarot*.

⁸ *Tosfot*, *Megillah* 31ב ראש ד"ה (citing the *midrash Pesikta*). See further Chapters 24 and 26.

*Kessef Mishneh*⁹ explains that in the time of the *Gemara*, there were not fixed *haftarot*. Rather, any person who was called to read the haftarah could choose a passage which he felt was related to the *parashah*. Eventually, different customs developed in different communities.

This idea allows us to understand a difficult passage in Tractate *Megillah* (25a & b), writes *Kessef Mishneh*. There the *Mishnah* and *Gemara* list certain portions of the Prophets which may not be read in public, portions which may be read but not translated, and portions which may be read and translated. Why are these instructions necessary, since we can look in a *chumash* and see what the proper haftarah is?

The answer is that these instructions were necessary in the era before the *haftarot* were set. The *Mishnah* is teaching which portions a person who was called upon to read the haftarah was permitted to choose.¹⁰

Today, we may not choose new haftarot.¹¹

In addition to *Kessef Mishneh's* explanation, there may be additional reasons that different customs developed regarding the choice of a haftarah. Firstly, the custom of reading a haftarah probably did not begin simultaneously throughout the Jewish world. Although Antiochus banned the public reading of the Torah, thus inspiring the public reading of the *Navi*, his realm did not include the Jewish communities of Bavel, Italy, Spain, and northern Africa. It is reasonable to assume that these communities established the haftarah at different times, and thus may have chosen different sections of the *Nevi'im*.

⁹ *Hilchot Tefilah* 12:12.

¹⁰ This explanation is also found in the earlier work, *Sefer Ha'eshkol* (*Hil. Kriat Ha'Torah* [Albeck ed.] p. 65b).

¹¹ *Igrot Moshe, O.C.* Vol. I, No. 103.

Also, the Jews of *Eretz Yisrael* and their cousins in Bavel did not read the same *parashah* on any given *Shabbat*. In Bavel, the custom developed to read 54 *parashot* and to complete one cycle of Torah readings every year on *Simchat Torah*. In *Eretz Yisrael*, however, the Torah was, for many centuries, divided into a Triennial Cycle of approximately 150 *parashot* and completed every three years (or 175 *parashot*, completed every three-and-one-half years). Out of necessity, the communities of *Eretz Yisrael* had approximately three times as many, and therefore different, *haftarot*.¹² *Rambam*¹³ and the renowned traveler, Binyamin of Tudela (who visited most of the Jewish world between 1165 and 1173) both report that this difference in custom still existed in their time, i.e. the 12th century.

Even in recent times, some communities had more *parashot* than others. For example, the communities of Algiers and Tunis would divide *Parashat Mishpatim* in two in certain years, and naturally they had a *haftarah* corresponding to the second half. This was the custom of Barcelona in the 14th century as well.¹⁴

What is meant by “Sephardim”?

Many *chumashim* list separate *haftarot* for “*Sephardim*” or have instructions such as, “*Sephardim* begin/conclude here.” This refers to Spanish and some North African and Middle Eastern communities. R' Chaim Elazar Shapira (the *Munkatcher Rebbe*) points out that although the *chassidim* in Europe (particularly Hungary) were commonly referred to as “*Sephardim*” because they *davened Nusach Sephard*, the designation in the *chumash* that a *haftarah* is for “*Sephardim*,” does not refer to *chassidim*. He instructs that wherever the *kabbalistic* writings of *Arizal* are silent, as they are on the choice

¹² See *Maharitz Chayes, Minchat Kenaot* p. 985.

¹³ *Hilchot Tefilah* 13:1.

¹⁴ See *Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvah* 61, and note “*aleph*” in the *Machon Yerushalayim* edition; *Rabbenu Bachya, Shemot* 22:24, and Rabbi Chavel's notes there.

of *haftarot*, the *chassidim* should follow the customs of all other *Ashkenazic* Jews.¹⁵

On the other hand, the nineteenth century *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, R' Shmuel, used to follow the *Sephardic* custom regarding the choice of *haftarot*.¹⁶

Reading the same haftarah two weeks in a row

There is no inherent problem in reading the same haftarah two weeks in a row, as we see from the fact that the haftarah for a bridegroom theoretically can be read many weeks running. Similarly, *Chida* states that it was the custom in Yerushalayim that the haftarah when *Purim* fell on *Shabbat* was the same one that was read for *Parashat Zachor* on the previous *Shabbat*.¹⁷ Also, as will be discussed in Chapter 35, it was the custom in some communities to read the same haftarah for the consecutive *parashot* of *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim*.

R' Moshe Feinstein once was asked whether the haftarah “ה' עזי” (the haftarah for *Parashat Bechukotai*) may be read for *Parashat Behar* as well (i.e., one week earlier) in order to avoid a situation where two *bar mitzvah* boys wish to read the haftarah on the week of *Bechukotai*. He responded that, although we do not have the authority to select new *haftarot*, since *Rambam* holds that “ה' עזי” is in fact the haftarah for *Behar*, we may rely on his opinion in this emergency situation.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Darhei Chaim Veshalom* § 440. See also *Sha'arei Rachamim* 9:7.

¹⁶ See Notes following *Ketzot Hashulchan* Part II.

¹⁷ *Minhagei Chida* citing *L'David Emet*.

¹⁸ *Igrot Moshe*, O.C. Vol. I, No. 103.

CHAPTER 17

Prophecies That May Not Be Haftarah

The *Mishnah* lists certain sections of *Tanach* which may not be read in public and certain portions which may be read but not translated.¹ For example, we do not read the story of King David's son, Amnon.² Some say we do not read the first chapter of *Yechezkel*, although others disagree.³

The same *Mishnah* records the view of Rabbi Eliezer that one may not publicly read the verse, “בן אדם הודע את ירושלים את” / “תועבותיה” / “Son of man, inform Yerushalayim of her abominations.”⁴ The *Gemara* elaborates on Rabbi Eliezer's opinion and relates:

Someone once read this verse as the haftarah in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer.[⁵] Rabbi Eliezer told him, “Before you go checking into the abominations of

¹ *Megillah* 25a.

² *Shmuel II*, chapter 13.

³ The *halachah* follows the latter view. The first chapter of *Yechezkel* is the haftarah for the first day of *Shavuot*.

⁴ *Yechezkel* 16:2.

⁵ Incidentally, this event may be the earliest recorded reading of a haftarah. See above in the Introduction.

Yerushalayim, check into the abominations of your mother.” Sure enough, it turned out that the man was of non-kosher descent.⁶

Notwithstanding this story, the *Gemara* implies that Rabbi Eliezer's view is not accepted as the *halachah*. Indeed, *Rambam* lists “הודע את ירושלים” as the haftarah for *Parashat Shemot*.⁷

Despite the fact that the *halachah* does not follow Rabbi Eliezer's view, there is considerable discussion among the *poskim* regarding the reason for, and the extent of, his opinion. Most of this discussion revolves around the haftarah which in some *chumashim* follows *Parashat Acharei Mot*, and in others follows *Parashat Kedoshim*, and which contains the verse: “ואתה בן אדם התשפט התשפט את עירך: / “Now you, son of man, won't you rebuke? Won't you rebuke the city of bloodshed, and inform her of all her abominations?”⁸

As noted above,⁹ the haftarah which is read on a *Shabbat* when two *sidrot* are joined, is the one established for the second *sidrah*. For example, when *Tazria* and *Metzora* are joined, we read the haftarah for *Metzora*. One of two exceptions to this rule is that when *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* are read together, most *Ashkenazic* congregations read “הלא כבני כושיים” / “Behold, you are like the children of the Cushites to Me,” which is the haftarah for *Acharei Mot*.

Why? *Mateh Moshe* explains that it is in deference to Rabbi Eliezer's opinion. Just as Rabbi Eliezer prohibited reading *Yechezkel*

⁶ *Megillah* 25b. Commentaries explain that when a person gratuitously speaks evil of others -- after all, he could have chosen some other chapter to read -- it is a sign of a blemish on that person's soul.

⁷ *Seder Tefilot L'chol Hashanah* printed at the end of *Sefer Ahavah*.

⁸ *Yechezkel* 22:1-16.

⁹ Chapter 1, paragraph 17.

16:2 because it degrades Yerushalayim, so he would have prohibited reading *Yechezkel* 22:2. Although we reject Rabbi Eliezer's view when *Parashat Kedoshim* is read alone, we honor his view when we can, i.e., when *Kedoshim* is combined with another *parashah*, and we read the haftarah of that other *parashah*.¹⁰

Levush rejects this view in very strong terms, “for it implies that there is a shortage of sections in the Prophets that would make fitting *haftarot* for *Parashat Kedoshim*!”¹¹ Proof that this is not the case is the fact that *Sephardim* do have a different haftarah for *Parashat Kedoshim*. Moreover, writes *Levush*, Rabbi Eliezer's opinion is not based at all on the supposed insult to Yerushalayim (or its people); after all, there are many *haftarot* which rebuke the Jewish people for their sins. Rather, Rabbi Eliezer's concern was with the end of verse 16:3, which appears to insult Avraham and Sarah¹² (a concern that does not apply at all to chapter 22 of *Yechezkel*, the haftarah for *Kedoshim*). Proof that this was Rabbi Eliezer's true concern is his rebuke to the *maftir*, “check into the abominations of your mother.”¹³

R' Moshe Feinstein was asked which haftarah should be read on a *Shabbat* when *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* were joined if the *maftir* inadvertently opened to chapter 22 of *Yechezkel*. In his response, R' Feinstein notes that *Levush's* explanation of the *Gemara's* story is a minority opinion. Among those who understand Rabbi Eliezer's concern as referring to the insult to Yerushalayim are the *Mishnah*

¹⁰ *Mateh Moshe* § 454.

¹¹ For *Levush's* explanation of why we read the haftarah of *Acharei Mot* when *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* are joined, see Chapter 35 below.

¹² That offending phrase says, “אביך האמרי ואמך החתית” / “your father, the Emorite, and your mother, the Hitite.”

¹³ Why then did Rabbi Eliezer say, “Before you go checking into the abominations of Yerushalayim,” if he was not concerned at all about Yerushalayim's honor? *Levush* answers that Rabbi Eliezer was so offended by the implied insult to Avraham and Sarah that he did not even wish to allude to it.

commentaries of *Rambam* and R' Ovadiah of Bartenura. Accordingly, it is preferable that we not read “התשפט,” but rather read, “הלא כבני כושיים.” Thus, if the *maftir* can turn to the haftarah for *Acharei Mot* without delaying the congregation, i.e., if he is reading from a *chumash*, he should do so. However, if he is reading from a *klaf*, he should continue with the haftarah for *Kedoshim*.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Igrot Moshe, O.C.* 36. See further the journal *Moriah*, Second Year, No. 5-6 (5730) p.63.

CHAPTER 18

Skipping in the Nevi'im

One is permitted to skip when reading publicly from the Prophets, but one is not permitted to skip in the Torah, i.e., from one paragraph to another. This refers to skipping between two subjects, for we fear that those listening may become confused. However, in the Prophets, one may skip even from one subject to another, provided that the second selection can be found quickly enough that the congregation is not forced to sit idly and wait.¹

Why would one want to skip from one Prophet to another? One reason, *Mishnah Berurah* explains, is that at one time there were no fixed *haftarot*. Thus, if the person who was reading felt that two sections in different Books were particularly relevant to the *parashah*, he might have wished to skip.

The possibility of skipping also arises on *Shabbat Shuvah*,² *Rosh Chodesh*,³ and when a bridegroom is present.⁴

¹ *Shulchan Aruch* 144:1.

² See Chapter 27.

³ See Chapter 33.

⁴ See Chapter 6.

When Skipping Is Permitted

As noted above, one may skip even from one subject to another (in the Prophets), provided that the second selection can be found quickly enough that the congregation is not forced to sit idly and wait. *Magen Avraham*⁵ explains that this was possible in the era when it was customary to translate the *parashah* and the haftarah as they were read because the second part of the haftarah could be found in the haftarah book or scroll while the translator was translating. Alternatively, in places where the haftarah is read from a book rather than a scroll, the second selection could have been marked with a bookmark beforehand.

Magen Avraham's first explanation is derived from the *Mishnah*⁶ which states that the distance that one is permitted to skip in the Prophets is that distance which can be skipped while the translator is still translating. *Rashi* gives as the reason for this that it is not respectful to make the congregation wait idly.

According to *Terumat Hadeshen*,⁷ the prohibition on skipping is to avoid confusing the listeners. Therefore, the restriction on skipping applies only in a time and place where there is a translator, as we see from the fact that the *Gemara* uses the translator's speaking as the measure of how much may be skipped. However, *Terumat Hadeshen* writes, if there is no translator, then any amount may be skipped.⁸

⁵ *O.C.* 144:3.

⁶ *Megillah* 24a.

⁷ Part I, No. 20.

⁸ *Terumat Hadeshen* apparently means that if there is no translator, the typical person will not understand anyway and therefore will not become more confused by skipping.

CHAPTER 19

The Length of the Haftarah

The *Shulchan Aruch*¹ writes: We do not read fewer than 21 verses, unless an entire subject is completed in fewer verses. An example of the latter case is the haftarah for *Parashat Tzav*: “על זבחיכם עלותכם ספו” / “Pile your burnt-offerings upon your peace-offerings.”² *Rema*³ elaborates: Specifically on Shabbat we require 21 verses— three corresponding to each of the people who read from the Torah. However, on *Yom Tov*, when only five people read from the Torah, fifteen verses is enough.

The *halachah* stated by the *Shulchan Aruch* is found in the *Gemara*,⁴ which states that the 21 verses represent three verses for each of the seven people who reads from the Torah. The simplest way to understand this is that the original decree to read the haftarah was made this way; because the haftarah commemorated the outlawed

¹ 284:1.

² *Yirmiyah* 7:21. This is the example of a short haftarah mentioned in the *Gemara* (*Megillah* 23b). Ironically, this haftarah is rarely read; in non-leap years, *Parashat Tzav* always coincides with *Shabbat Hagadol*. In leap years, *Parashat Tzav* frequently coincides with either *Parashat Zachor* or *Parashat Parah*. (Each of these three occasions has its own special haftarah.) See further Chapter 32.

³ 284:1

⁴ *Megillah* 23a & b.

Torah reading, which requires at least three verses per person, *Chazal* established the haftarah in a way which would parallel the Torah reading. In fact, some say that the haftarah was originally divided among seven people, each of whom read three verses.⁵

The *Gemara* adds a caveat, however. If an entire subject can be covered in fewer than 21 verses, then the full 21 verses need not be read.

Why should this be? Perhaps this is also meant to parallel the Torah reading. *Bach*⁶ infers from *Rambam* that one person is not permitted to read two unrelated sections of the Torah, for doing so might confuse him. Since adjacent sections of the Prophets are even more likely to be unrelated than are adjacent sections of the Torah, *Chazal* said that the *maftir* should stop reading where a subject ends, even if he has read fewer than 21 verses.

One objection to *Bach*'s explanation is that we have seen a number of times that we are not as concerned about people's understanding the haftarah as we are the Torah reading. Thus, for example, we allow two haftarah-translators to speak at once, although we do not allow two Torah translators to do so. The question returns, therefore: Why do we allow fewer than 21 verses to be read?

My *rebbe*, R' Shlomo Naiman, suggested that the original decree may not have specified how many verses should be read. Perhaps even the original custom was to read fewer than 21 verses if a lesser number of verses covered an entire subject. This would answer another question as well. In attempting to prove whether or not the *maftir* counts as one of the seven *aliyot*, the *Gemara* states: If the *maftir* did not count, the haftarah would have to have 24, not 21 verses. At first glance, this question is based on circular reasoning —

⁵ The source for the last sentence of this paragraph is *Mishnah Berurah* 284:2.

⁶ *Siman* 144.

the haftarah was established to commemorate the seven *aliyot* that could not be read because of an anti-Jewish decree. At that time, there was not yet a haftarah (and therefore no eighth *aliyah*), so why would the decree to read a haftarah have called for 24 verses?

However, if we assume that the haftarah was established without specifying a minimum number of verses, and only later, the number 21 was chosen to parallel the seven *aliyot*, then we can consider this a proof that the *maftir* counts as one of the seven *aliyot*, even according to the letter of the law.

*Masechet Soferim*⁷ states that the haftarah should have 22 verses — 21 for the reasons discussed above, plus one corresponding to the *gabbai*.

⁷ 14:1. (In some editions, it is 13:15.)

CHAPTER 20

The Ketuvim

The haftarah is never drawn from the third part of *Tanach* — the *Ketuvim*. Some say that this is because the *Ketuvim* do not contain subject matter that parallels the *parashot*.¹ R' Yitzchak Falagi² explains that the reason the haftarah is not drawn from the *Ketuvim* is that the custom of reading a haftarah dates from the time of the *Nevi'im* themselves, before most of the *Ketuvim* were canonized. Alternatively, he says, the obligation to study the *Nevi'im* is greater than the obligation to study the *Ketuvim*, and we cannot trouble the congregation to read both.³

Perhaps another possible reason that the haftarah is not drawn from the *Ketuvim* may be based on *Megillah* 3a which says that Yehonatan ben Uziel, the translator of the *Nevi'im* into Aramaic, was prevented by Divine decree from translating the *Ketuvim*. Since so many people did not understand Hebrew and it was customary to translate the *haftarah* into Aramaic, it would be less practical to read a haftarah from the *Ketuvim*.

¹ *Be'er Heitev* 284:1.

² *Yafeh La'lev, Kuntres Acharon* 284:1.

³ The last answer appears to be most acceptable for a variety of reasons. Regarding parallelism between the *parashot* and the *Ketuvim*, see the *ArtScroll Tehilim* (p.1746) which contains a table of chapters of *Tehilim* that correspond to each *parashah*.

Shabbat 116b cites a custom in the city of Nehardea to read from *Ketuvim* at *Shabbat minchah*. According to *Rabbenu Tam*,⁴ this reading was a haftarah. However, not everyone agrees with this interpretation. The *Otzar Hageonim* interprets *Shabbat* 116b at length as follows:

The order of Shabbat afternoon is that they read whatever they please in the Ketuvim and the Nevi'im. When they finish, the shliach tzibbur says the last verse and they repeat after him, then he says the verse, "וְאֵתָהּ קְדוּשָׁה" [Yishayah 6:3], and they repeat it, and then they say kaddish. For those who do not have the practice of reading from the Nevi'im before minchah, the shliach tzibbur begins with Ashrei.

The *Otzar Hageonim* then continues to describe what is, in fact, the prevalent custom regarding the order of the *Shabbat minchah* service. In any case, it appears from the above excerpt that the reading of the *Ketuvim* took place *before minchah*, not after the Torah reading.

Some say that reading from the *Ketuvim* on *Shabbat* afternoon is prohibited. The *Mishnah* states:

*All kitvei kodesh [literally: holy writings] may be saved from a fire [on Shabbat], whether they are read from or are not read from.*⁵

R' Ovadiah of Bartenura explains that clearly a *sefer Torah* may be saved from a fire in a place where Torah law does not require an *eruv* (even though rabbinic law may require one). The *Mishnah* teaches, however, that even *Ketuvim* — which are not read from *and which one is forbidden to study on Shabbat even in private* — may be saved.

⁴ *Megillah* 21a, ד"ה הקורא. Regarding a haftarah in *minchah*, see Chapter 21.

⁵ *Shabbat* 16:1.

Why would one be forbidden to study *Ketuvim* on *Shabbat*? Because one can become absorbed in them and miss the rabbi's *derashah*.⁶

According to the opinion that there was a haftarah for *minchah* and that it was chosen from the *Ketuvim* — why? R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains as follows:

As just noted, *Rashi* writes that even the individual may not read from the *Ketuvim* on *Shabbat* because he will become absorbed in them and fail to attend the *bet midrash* where important *halachot* are being taught.⁷ R' Soloveitchik suggests that this prohibition ended when *minchah* started, for by then the rabbi's lecture had ended. In order to publicize this, the entire congregation would read from the *Ketuvim* at *minchah*.⁸

Psalm 111

A custom is found in some *Nusach Sefard siddurim* to read Psalm 111 during the *gelilah* which follows the *minchah* Torah reading. According to R' Reuven Margalio,⁹ this derives from the old practice of reading *Ketuvim* on *Shabbat* afternoon. This recitation is in place of a haftarah.

The reason that this chapter was selected is that the *Zohar*¹⁰ finds an allusion to the three parts of *Tanach* (Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*) in the last verse of the psalm. Thus, over the course of *Shabbat*, we

⁶ *Rashi* to *Shabbat* 115a

⁷ *Shabbat* 115a, בן שאין קורין, ד"ה. Why are the *Ketuvim* more absorbing than the *Nevi'im*? Perhaps it is because the date of the final redemption is alluded to there (see *Megillah* 3a). On *Shabbat*, when people are somewhat more relaxed, they have time to think about such matters (compare *Shemot* 5:9)

⁸ *Nefesh HaRav* p. 165.

⁹ *Sha'arei Zohar, Shabbat* 116b.

¹⁰ *Yitro* 68a.

not only read from all three parts of *Tanach*, but we specifically conclude those readings with an allusion to all that we have read.

Note that the reading of *Tehilim* 111 is not a haftarah; no *berachot* are recited, nor does the reading relate to the *parashah*. In addition, the psalm is recited *during gelilah*, whereas the haftarah may not be read until after *gelilah*.¹¹

¹¹ See Chapter 1, paragraph 9, above.

CHAPTER 21

A Haftarah in Minchah

The *Shulchan Aruch*¹ writes: On Monday and Thursday and at *Shabbat minchah* three *aliyot* are read from the Torah. One may not subtract from this number nor add to it, and no haftarah is read.

This *halachah* derives from the *Mishnah* at *Megillah* 21a. *Rashi*² explains that it is *forbidden* to read a haftarah in *minchah* or to lengthen the Torah reading due to the lateness of the hour, while on Monday and Thursday, it is forbidden because people must go to work. R' Yaakov Emden³ notes that the concern for people's work could apply to *Shabbat* afternoon also, for a haftarah in *minchah* might delay one who must return to work the moment *Shabbat* ends (i.e., one who is "מחשיך על התחום").

*Rabbenu Tam*⁴ notes an apparent conflict between this *halachah* and *Shabbat* 24a, which states,

When Yom Tov falls on Shabbat, the maftir in minchah does not mention Yom Tov in the berachah, for were it only Yom Tov and not Shabbat, there would be no haftarah [in minchah].

¹ O.C. 135:1.

² *Megillah* 21a ד"ה ואין מפטירין

³ *Lechem Shamayim*.

⁴ *Megilah* 21a ד"ה הקורא

The clear implication of this statement is that a haftarah is read at *Shabbat minchah*.

Many of the *rishonim* deal with this question, and there are a number of answers given:

Meiri writes that an error crept into the text of the *Gemara* in *Shabbat*, and the *Gemara* should say:

When Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat, the maftir in minchah does not mention Shabbat in the berachah, for were it only Shabbat and not Yom Kippur, there would be no haftarah [in minchah].

This interpretation is consistent with the prevalent custom, because there is no question that a haftarah, i.e. the book of *Yonah*, is read on Yom Kippur afternoon, while we do not read a haftarah on *Shabbat* afternoon. Nevertheless, commentators are always wary of emending the text of the Talmud unnecessarily, and R' Zerachiah *Halevi* (the "*Ba'al Hamaor*") disagrees sharply with *Meiri* and those who follow his view, saying, "May *Hashem* forgive them."⁵

A Voluntary Haftarah

Rashba to *Megillah* 21a writes that the *Mishnah* from which this *halachah* derives does not *prohibit* a haftarah from being read on *Shabbat* afternoon. Rather, it states only that a haftarah is not required. Thus, congregations that wish to read a haftarah may do so. In fact, many *Rishonim* quote R' Hai Gaon to the effect that there was a custom to read a haftarah in *Shabbat minchah*. This custom was originally prevalent in many places, but was abolished in most communities because of Persian persecution. R' Sherira Gaon (died 1006) speaks of such persecution occurring in the sixth century (coinciding with the beginning of the *geonic* era).

⁵ *Hamaor Hakattan* to *Shabbat* 24a.

Some communities in Persia continued to read a haftarah on *Shabbat* afternoon as late as R' Hai Gaon's own time (939-1038). What did they read? According to R' Hai, they read verses from the consolations in the books of *Yishayah* and *Yirmiyahu*. R' Natronai Gaon writes that they read ten verses from *Yishayah*.⁶

Accommodating A Haftarah in Minchah

Rashi to *Shabbat* 24a cites the custom mentioned by the above *geonim* of reading a haftarah in *minchah*. How can he reconcile this custom with his interpretation that the *Mishnah* in *Megillah* constitutes a *prohibition* on reading a haftarah in *minchah*? *Rashi* writes, in explaining the *Mishnah* in *Megillah* that the lateness of the hour was due to the fact that the congregation was learning Torah all afternoon. Perhaps then, suggests R' Gedaliah Felder, if the custom of learning all afternoon was not practiced, and especially if *minchah* was recited at the earliest possible time, there would be time for a haftarah to be read.⁷

The Custom in Nehardea

Rabbenu Tam himself resolves the contradiction between the *Mishnah* in *Megillah* and the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* by writing that there was indeed a haftarah in *minchah*, but not from the Prophets. Rather, it was from the third section of *Tanach*, the *Ketuvim*. This answer is based on a third source--*Shabbat* 116b, which states explicitly that in the city of Nehardea they used to read from the *Ketuvim* on *Shabbat* afternoon. As for the prohibition found in the *Mishnah* in *Megillah*, *Rabbenu Tam* would put the emphasis on the phrase, "No haftarah is read *from the Prophets*" rather than on "No haftarah is read . . ."

However, as explained in the previous chapter, it appears from the writings of the *Geonim* that the selection from the *Ketuvim* which was

⁶ Both of these sages are quoted in *Otzar Hageonim* to *Shabbat* 24a.

⁷ *Siddur Yesodei Yeshurun*, Vol II, p. 444.

read was not read as a haftarah.⁸ Thus, *Rabbenu Tam's* interpretation of the two *gemarot* in Shabbat is called into question.

In short, it appears that there is no absolute prohibition to read a haftarah in *minchah*. According to *Rashba*, all that is required is the congregation's consent. According to *Rashi*, *minchah* would have to be held earlier in the day than usual. R' David Zvi Hoffman (see below) adds that any haftarah for *minchah* should not be more than ten verses long. Since the minimum allowable length for the *Shabbat minchah* Torah reading is ten verses, to have a haftarah which is longer would be an insult to the Torah. Indeed, according to R' Natronai Gaon, the custom in Persia was to read precisely ten verses.

The Practice in Berlin

Around the turn of the 20th century, R' Ezriel Hildesheimer of Berlin enacted the practice of re-reading the morning's Torah reading and haftarah two or three hours before *Shabbat minchah*. This reading included all of the *berachot* (blessings), both before and after the reading. All of this was done for the benefit of Jewish youth who were required to attend public school classes on *Shabbat* morning, and would otherwise never hear the *parashah* or haftarah.

R' Hildesheimer's successor, R' David Zvi Hoffman, upholds this custom, but only reluctantly.⁹ Although this is not precisely the same issue discussed above in connection with the *Mishnah* in *Megillah*, the concern for not lengthening the service would be the same. Based on the preceding discussion, it appears that it would be permitted for the *minchah* service to be lengthened by re-reading the morning's Torah reading and haftarah because the congregation started two or three hours early and presumably agreed to the practice.

⁸ Some versions of *Rashi's* commentary to *Shabbat* 116b concur with the *Geonim's* interpretation.

⁹ *Melamed Leho'il* I:51