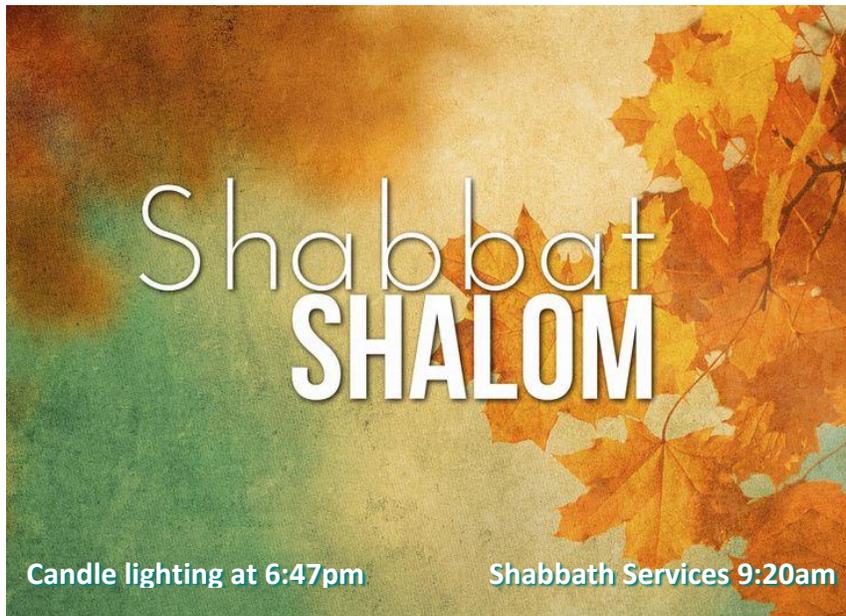




# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## October 25, 2017



## Wisdom of the Prophets

When a young boy approaching Bar Mitzvah starts thinking ahead to the big day, his first thought (aside from how much money he will receive in gifts) is often how long his haftorah will be. And every week, at the conclusion of the Torah service, the maftir chants the haftorah. So what, exactly is a haftorah and why is it included in every Shabbas service?

The simple answer to the question of what is a haftorah is that it is a reading from the prophets. But there is a lot more to it than that. Below are two articles, one from [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com) and one from Congregation Shaara Tefille in Sarasota Springs, New York, with a more in-depth explanation of haftorah. Interestingly, the two articles differ greatly on how haftorahs became a part of the Shabbas service.

### What Is the Haftorah, and Why Do We Read It?

Each Torah portion is paired with a passage from the Prophets.

By Rabbi Peretz Rodman (from [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com))

*Traditionally, on Shabbat and holiday mornings, a selection from one of the biblical books of the Prophets is read after the Torah reading. The portion is known as the (hahf-tah-RAH, or in Ashkenazic Hebrew: hahf-TOH-rah). On two fast days, Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av, a haftorah is recited at both morning and afternoon services.*

## Celebrate!

Did you go trick or treating on Halloween?

I did, and all of my Jewish friends did too, but we were always disappointed when we got to the rabbi's house and his lights were off. We couldn't understand why he wasn't giving out candy, and some of our Gentile friends probably said that he was just a "cheap Jew." Why else would he not give us candy?

Well, it turns out that there is a religious reason why the rabbi didn't give out candy and why many Orthodox families do not give out candy. First, Halloween was originally a pagan holiday, and we, as Jews, do not celebrate pagan rituals. Second, Halloween eventually evolved out of Christianity's All Saints Day, and we Jews do not, of course, believe in Christian saints. Here is what [chabad.com](http://chabad.com) has to say about Halloween:

*Let me tell you about a wonderful Jewish holiday: once a year, our children dress up as sages, princesses, heroes and clowns. They drop by the homes of our community, visit the infirm and the aged, spreading joy and laughter. They bring gifts of food and drink and collect tzedakah (charity) for the needy.*

*You guessed it — it's called Purim, when it's customary to send mishloach manot — gifts of food — to one's friends and even more gifts to those in hard times.*

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*While the Torah reading cycle proceeds from Genesis through Deuteronomy, covering the entire Five Books of Moses, only selected passages from the Prophets make it into the haftorah cycle. A cluster of three or four berakhot (blessings), depending on the occasion, follows the haftorah. Their call for prophecy to be fulfilled and for God to restore the Jewish people to Zion serve as a finale to the full set of the day's scriptural readings, Torah and Haftorah together.*

## Prophets of Truth and Justice

*Rabbinic literature does not discuss the origin of the practice of reading publicly from the Prophets in a formal cycle. We might look to the liturgical setting of the haftorah, then, for some clue about its intended function. In addition to berakhot (blessings) recited after the portion, every haftorah is introduced with a berakhah (blessing) praising God for having "chosen good prophets and accepted their words, spoken in truth."*



*The formula goes on to note that God shows favor to "the Torah, Moses His servant, Israel His people, and the prophets of truth and justice." This focus on the reliability of the Israelite prophets has led some scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Adolf Büchler and Abraham Zevi Idelsohn, to speculate that the institution of the haftorah originated in bitter polemics among competing religious groups in Ancient Israel — the Jews and the Samaritans.*

## The Samaritans

*The Samaritans were then an ethnic group rivaling the Jews in numbers, power, and influence. The Samaritans insisted on the exclusive truth of the Torah (their version differs somewhat from the Jewish Torah) and rejected all prophets after Moses. That rejection could well have formed the background for the practice of reading from the Prophets in synagogues. By declaring the prophetic books authoritative and their origin divinely inspired, the Jews may have sought to exclude Samaritans from local communities and offer a statement of opposition to a major tenet of Samaritan theology. This view is now accepted widely, but not universally, among scholars of Jewish liturgy.*

*Whatever the origin of the haftorah, it became, as Professor Michael Fishbane notes in the introduction to his Haftarot commentary volume (Jewish Publication Society, 2002), one of the three components of the*

*Flip it over (October instead of March, demanding instead of giving, scaring instead of rejoicing, demons instead of sages, etc.) and you have Halloween. There you have it: a choice of one of two messages you can give to your children. I call that a choice, because one of the beautiful things about kids is that, unlike adults, they don't do too well receiving two conflicting messages at once.*

*I know how hard it is to be different, but as Jews, we have been doing just that for most of our 3,800 years. Since Abraham and Sarah broke away from the Sumerian cult of gods and demons, we have lived amongst other peoples while being very different from them. And we dramatically changed the world by being that way.*

*That's a proud and nurturing role for any child: To be a leader and not a follower, to be a model of what should be rather than of what is.*

*Make your kids feel that they are the vanguard. They belong to a people who have been entrusted with the mission to be a light to the nations — not an ominous light inside a pumpkin, but a light that stands out and above and shows everyone where to go. Forget about Halloween and wait for Purim to turn the neighborhood upside down!*



public recitation of scripture in the ancient synagogue. This public reading reflected three sources of authority: the Torah, which is the ultimate source of law; the haftorah, which presents the words of the Prophets, who provided moral instruction and uplift; and the sermon or homily, which drew on the authority of the Rabbis to interpret and legislate.

## How Were Haftorah Passages Selected?

*It may be that haftorah passages were originally selected arbitrarily, by randomly opening a scroll of one of the prophetic books and reading whatever one happened to find, or at least the choice was not predetermined by tradition. So it would appear from a story in the Gospel of Luke (4:16ff.), in which Jesus, visiting a synagogue in Nazareth on a Shabbat, is handed a scroll of Isaiah and asked to open it and read from it. Jesus is reading a haftorah, it seems, and some scholars interpret the verses to mean that the place at which the reader was to begin and end was not indicated to him. (Büchler disagrees, and Ismar Elbogen, in his authoritative history of Jewish liturgy, despairs of ever answering the question definitively.)*



*Later, traditions developed of reading a particular passage with each weekly Torah portion. The Babylonian Talmud (Megillah 29b) suggests that a haftorah should “resemble” the Torah reading of the day. The haftorah is, in fact, usually linked to a theme or genre from the Torah reading. For example, on the week when the Torah reading features the song sung by the Israelites when they witnessed the parting of the sea at the Exodus (Exodus 15), the haftorah includes the Song of Deborah sung in response to the military victory of the chieftain Deborah and her commanding general, Barak (Judges 5). When the Torah reading relates the story of the 12 scouts sent by Moses*

*to spy out Canaan, the haftorah (from Joshua 2) focuses on the two spies sent by Joshua to Jericho in advance of his campaign to conquer that city.*

*The haftorah for a given holiday is either linked closely to a core theme of the holiday’s observance or captures something of its later echoes in the Bible. Thus, the theme of God’s readiness to forgive sin underlies the choice of Jonah for the afternoon of Yom Kippur, and the observance of Sukkot in the idyllic future, as related by Zechariah, serves as the haftorah for the first day of that holiday.*

*Spotting the connection, sometimes very subtle, between the Torah reading and haftorah is part of appreciating the artistry of Jewish liturgy. Identifying that correlation can be a source of intellectual and aesthetic enjoyment for synagogue-goers, and is the subject of considerable commentary.*

*Many weeks, though, the Shabbat morning haftorah bears no relationship to that day’s Torah reading, but is instead a haftorah (or one of a series of haftarot) geared to nearby events on the Jewish calendar. On the Shabbat before Purim, for example, when the Torah reading ends with an extra passage on the destruction of Amalek, the haftorah (from 1 Samuel) recounts the tale of the Amalekite king spared by Samuel. The first word of that haftorah, “Zakhor” (“Remember”) lends its name to the day: Shabbat Zakhor.*

*Such is the practice on other occasions as well. The haftorah on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (the first word of which, “Shuvah,” lends its name to Shabbat Shuvah) issues a call for repentance appropriate to the 10-day period in which it falls. The haftarot of the three Shabbatot that precede Tisha b’Av sound a warning of impending disaster appropriate to the upcoming observance of*

*the anniversary of the Temple's destruction. For fully seven Shabbatot afterward, the haftarot offer consolation and encouragement, as if the destruction were a current event.*

*Not all Jewish communities share the same selections of haftorah for each Shabbat or holiday. The customs of major Jewish ethnic groups vary from each other, and even within a given group — Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Yemenite, etc. — there are local variations.*

## Different Literature, Different Music

*Just as the Torah is traditionally chanted, not merely recited, haftarot are sung according to the traditional notation system for biblical books, called ta'amei ha-mikra or, among Ashkenazim, trope. A haftorah, unlike a Torah reading, is chanted with a separate trope in a minor key that yields a more plaintive, nuanced melody.*

*The person who is to read the haftorah is called to the Torah for a last, additional aliyah called “maftir.” The term (of which “haftorah” is a noun form) is related to the verb “to depart” and stems from the fact that this is an addendum to the Torah reading. Several verses at the end of the last aliyah of that day's Torah reading are repeated in the aliyah read by or for the maftir.*

*Although there is no essential link between bar/bat mitzvah and the haftorah, it has become common practice for an adolescent becoming bar/bat mitzvah to take on the task of chanting the haftorah and associated blessings. In this way, perhaps, the haftorah has emerged from the shadows, where it formed merely an addendum to the “main event” of Torah reading, into the liturgical spotlight, where it is given the full attention that, one might argue, it deserves.*

## From Congregation Shaara Tefille

Recently, I had an inquiry from one of our congregants who wanted to know what the difference was between the Torah and the Haftorah. It's an excellent question and invites an informed response to appreciate the difference between the two.

Both the Torah and the Haftorah readings are part of the Torah service, and each week a different selection is chanted out loud during the service. Torah readings are performed on Shabbat morning and afternoon services, Monday and Thursday mornings, and on festival days and fast days during the morning service. The word "haftorah," which means "taking leave" or "departing," is chanted immediately after the Torah reading. It is usually not read during the weekday morning service, although an exception may be made if there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah occurring on a Monday or Thursday morning.

Both the Torah and the Haftorah texts derive from the Hebrew Scriptures or Hebrew Bible, but there is a difference. The Torah consists wholly of the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and covers the vast period of time from the creation of the world until the death of Moses. The Torah is considered the written law because, according to Jewish tradition, it was given by God to Moses at Mt. Sinai.



The Haftarat are compilations of writings that derive from a group of men and women identified in the Hebrew scriptures as "prophets," or "nevi'im." These individuals were chosen by God to speak to the people, on God's behalf, and convey a message or teaching. Prophets were role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to God. They set the standards for the entire community.

Although fifty-five prophets are named in Hebrew scripture, including Moses, not all of them have a book of the Bible attributed to them or have their writings included in the Haftarah readings.

Who selected the passages from the writings of the prophets and compiled the Haftarat is not known, nor do we know when the tradition of publicly reading the Haftarah began. However, theories abound.

We know that the public readings of the Torah date back to the time of Ezra, approximately 444 BCE. Eventually, these readings were established as custom on Shabbat, and Monday and Thursday mornings to coincide with the busy market days in ancient Jerusalem. It is believed by many scholars that the Haftarat readings began around the time of, or perhaps prior to, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. This custom probably derived from the ban on public reading of the Torah by the Syrian-Greek monarch, Antiochus Epiphanes, during the second century BCE. In response, the rabbinic sages instituted the reading of passages from the books of the prophets that had a thematic relationship to that week's Torah portion.

The Haftarat have continued to hold a prominent place in the modern Jewish service because they are traditionally read by those boys and girls who are called up to the Torah as a Bar or Bat-Mitzvah (son or daughter of the law or commandment). The custom of celebrating the attainment of the religious rites of adulthood dates back to the late Middle Ages (13th Century) and is marked by being called up to the Torah for an aliyah, chanting the Torah blessings, reading the Haftarah for that week, perhaps reading the additional or maftir Torah portion and leading the additional or musaf service.

For those individuals who choose to have an adult Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the chanting of the Haftarah represents the satisfactory completion of an intense period of study, the fulfillment of a long held, cherished goal, and a spiritual triumph.

## Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one's yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).