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BIBLICAL PROPHETIC PASSAGES - “HAFTAROTH” / “הפטרות” AND ITS GEORGIAN VERSION

abstract

After the massive “*aliyah*” (repatriation) of Georgian Jews to Israel, which began in the 1970s, numerous Georgian-language publications were released in Israel, including periodicals, fiction, scientific literature, and journalistic as well as genre-specific materials. These were processed within the framework of a three-year research project, resulting in the creation of an annotated bibliography of printed publications. The project included genre classification and literary-linguistic analysis.

Considering that the life of any Jew was always and everywhere regulated by religious customs, religion serves as the foundation for their survival and existence. Therefore, a significant emphasis was placed on discussing works of a religious nature within the study material.

Following repatriation, Georgian Jews, characterized by a high level of religious self-awareness, continued to show an interest in religious books while preserving their traditions. They published collections on various topics, including prophetic passages, information on basic Torah issues, profiles of prominent rabbis in the Georgian Jewish community, basic prayers in Hebrew, translations of prayers and mitzvot, the rules of Halakhah (שְׁלֵחַן עָרוּךְ) in Georgian, teachings on Judaism in modern conditions, its attributes and theology, and most importantly, new translations of the books of the Bible.

A significant contribution to the field of religious studies is made by the philosophical researcher and translator Shalom David, who has published works on Jewish-Kabbalist philosophy, translations of canonical prayers, books of the Bible, and the collection “Haftaroth” from Hebrew into Georgian.

Despite the substantial religious significance and practice, many Jewish communities do not have a translation of the “Haftaroth.” However, this collection by Shalom David stands out and occupies an honorable place among the publications of the Georgian-language religious literature in Israel. This article examines and characterizes the Georgian version of the “Haftaroth” and highlights its significance and substantial role in the religious life of Georgian Jews.

In Jewish liturgy, the “Haftara” is a ritual of great importance. To emphasize its significance, the article first discusses, in general terms, the nature, purpose, and history of this religious ritual, the relationship of the reading material to the Torah, the rules of reading, and other important issues related to this topic. It then explores how this essential ritual is reflected among Georgian Jews.

Keywords: *Religious, "Haftaroth", Prophetic passages, Georgian version.*

“Haftara” (Hebrew: הפטרה) comes from the Hebrew word meaning “completion” or “taking leave.” It is a prophetic passage that is read after the Torah reading on Sabbaths, holidays, and fast days. On Sabbaths and holidays, it is read during the morning service, while on fast days, it is read only during the evening prayer. The exceptions are Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and the Ninth of Av (the day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples and other tragic events in Jewish history), when the Haftarah is read after the Torah reading during both the morning and afternoon services. The Torah reading cycle begins with Genesis and ends with Deuteronomy, encompassing the five books of Moses; the Haftarah cycle includes only selected passages from the prophets. The Haftarah is followed by four blessings (berakhot). Their call to fulfill the prophecy and God's return of the Jewish people to Zion marks the conclusion of the full set of scriptures for the day—the Torah and the Haftarah. The word “Haftara” indicates that after the reading of the section, the synagogue worshippers are free.

Despite the universality and antiquity of the Haftarah, information about its origin and purpose is scarce, with no known names of the founders of the tradition or dates of the rituals involved. Although scholars have long attempted to explain this practice, there is no information regarding who decided which portion of the Prophets should be read after the High Priest reads a particular Torah section (Hebrew: Parashat ha-Shavua) or when the schedule that has been in effect to this day was established. There are also no early records detailing the reasons for pairing specific verses from the Prophets with certain Parashot. However, the historical fact that laid the foundation for the tradition of reading the Haftarah is widely accepted: in 168 BC, when the Jews were under the rule of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the reading of the Torah was prohibited. This decree was limited to the five books of Moses, leading the Jewish sages to establish the reading of parts of the Prophets, which were then read in place of the Torah so that it would not be forgotten. Since then, the reading of the Haftarah, accompanying the Prophets, has continued for centuries. Although the prohibition on reading the Torah was lifted shortly after the victory over the Greeks, and there was no longer any need for it, the tradition of reading the Haftarah has been preserved to this day. This historical fact seems quite convincing and is shared by most Jewish sages and researchers, although differing opinions on this issue exist, which are discussed in detail in the article.

The practical use of the Haftara in synagogues dates back centuries, both for Georgian Jews and for world Jewry, and it is an important part of religious services. Theoretical evidence on the subject was published in book form only after Shalom David, a researcher and translator of Jewish philosophy, returned to Israel and made significant contributions to the development of religious issues.

From the previous part of the article, it becomes clear that the selection of the portion of the Prophets to be read as the “Haftara” varies among Jewish communities. This list includes the portions of the “Haftara” according to the customs adopted by different communities and branches (Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi) and is constructed based on the various rules for reading the texts.

Considering that each “Parashat Ha-Shavua” (weekly reading) differs among communities, the “Haftaroth” (prophetic readings) also vary. The collection of “Haftaroth” translated and compiled by Shalom David is thematically versatile and tailored to the needs of the Georgian Jewish community, covering nearly all major topics. The “Haftaroth” is

presented in variations from different Jewish ethnic groups, indicating which customs are represented, including Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Mizrahi, and others.

The relationship between “Parashat Ha-Shavua” and “Haftaroth” in this collection creates an interesting picture. The Torah readings are illuminated by these prophetic passages. The Torah, in addition to outlining the rules of religious and moral life, provides an opportunity to know God and His will, which is foundational to prophetic literature. The prophetic doctrine allows for a renewed understanding of faith, divinity, and human essence; thus, by studying the connection between the weekly Torah portion and its accompanying “Haftarah,” the cause-and-effect basis of their pairing becomes clear.

As noted, the reading is accompanied by established rules. Concerning this matter, Shalom David states the following: “The reading of an excerpt from the book of the prophets is followed by four blessings. This structure is consistent with the essence of Jewish prayer: praise, request, and thanksgiving. The first blessing expresses gratitude to the Most High for the word given by Him, fulfilled through the prophets. The second and third blessings are requests for the gathering of the exiles and for the restoration of the throne of David. The fourth blessing is a thanksgiving dedicated to the granting of the Sabbath and the holidays.”

Shalom David’s “Haftaroth” presents “prophetic excerpts from the relevant books of the prophets.” According to the author, “the rabbis considered it necessary to preserve the tradition of reading from the books of the prophets because it enhances the perception of the Torah and provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the teachings contained in its texts. It also adapts the content of the Torah to the current time and envisions the future as a correction of the world—a striving for harmony, filling the essence and being of man with hope.” To emphasize the primacy and higher status of the Torah, the following sequence is observed when reading the “Haftaroth”: after reading the Torah, a half-Kaddish (a prayer praising the Creator) is recited, which separates the reading of the Torah from the reading of the “Haftaroth”.

Shalom David's collection of “Haftaroth” is imbued with a special charm and significance, enhanced by the author's insights on the prophets and prophetic literature. According to him, within the Tanakh literature, based on biblical sources, prophetic literature can be distinguished and attributed to specific historical eras. “... Unlike other writings found in the Tanakh, this literature is not anonymous. Its creators are historical figures whose names and actions are documented in records and chronicles. The activity and creativity of the prophets greatly influenced the spiritual life of their time and left a deep mark on the culture of subsequent eras. However, the importance of the prophets extends beyond this; they played a significant and decisive role in the socio-political events of their time”.

Shalom David categorizes the prophets into two groups: the “commonwealth of prophets”, exemplified by Elijah and Elisha (9th century BC), whose sermons have not survived, and “written prophecy”, represented by Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, whose thoughts are preserved in collections of great value. The author briefly analyzes the prophetic activities of these figures and concludes unequivocally: “Any prophecy must comply with the laws of the Torah. If a prophet contradicts the Torah, then he belongs to the category of false prophets...The doctrine of the prophets presents a new definition of divinity, a new understanding of human nature, and a new interpretation of faith... The

inseparability of religion and morality, as proclaimed by the prophets, is an inevitable conclusion of the Jewish concept of God...”.

The Georgian-language “Haftaroth” by Shalom David, an impeccable expert in Georgian and Hebrew languages with extensive experience in translating between Hebrew and Georgian, is not only a guide for the theological explanation and study of a complex religious issue. It can also be considered an artistic translation, where the artistic techniques and rich vocabulary characteristic of the Georgian language are abundantly employed to convey the meaning comprehensively. This is even though the primary purpose of such religious texts is to convey the meaning accurately and correctly, given that the text is created to explain and foster a deep understanding of religious tradition while serving the practical religious needs of the congregation.

According to Talmudic sources (Meg. 4:4; 21b), during public readings, the Haftarah, as well as the weekly Torah portion, was translated into the spoken language of each Jewish community region. However, the Haftarah translation did not need to be equally accurate, and it was not forbidden to minimize this translation to avoid burdening those present. In favor of Shalom David's translation, it is worth noting that it adheres closely to the original text and is not an abbreviated version.

Thus, the general discussion of the “Haftaroth” above, which highlights its great importance in Jewish religious culture, has made it even clearer how significant the existence of a similar collection in Georgian, published in Israel, is. Shalom David's “Haftaroth” is a collection compiled from a deep understanding of Jewish theological issues and is an essential publication for Georgian Jews (and not only) that provides information on prophetic passages of the Bible. It simplifies the correct understanding of one of the important religious traditions for members of the Georgian Jewish community and aids in the practical implementation of the rules related to it.