



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

BEREISHIT • בראשית • THE HAFTARAH CYCLE

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צא

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah. An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." – Rabbi Sacks

Introduction to The Haftara Cycle

by Rabbi Barry Kleinberg

The aim of this new project is to explore the weekly Haftara utilising Rabbi Sacks' writings and ideas. Developed by one of the first cohort of Sacks' Scholars – Rabbi Barry Kleinberg. Each week we will explore a brief overview of the book of the Prophets from which the Haftara is taken. We will then investigate the link between the Parasha and the Haftara.

Whilst Rabbi Sacks did not write a series of essays specifically on the Haftarat, he did write the Forewords to two volumes of Haftarat. *A Haftara Companion* by Julian G. Jacobs (1998) and the *Haphtara Cycle* by Stephen Gabriel Rosenberg (2000). In *Haftara Companion* Rabbi Sacks wrote "The Torah is timeless; the prophets apply its message to our time." He noted that "the prophets were among the earliest interpreters of Torah." In the *Foreword* to the *Haftara Cycle*, Rabbi Sacks quotes the first Mishna in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, Joshua handed it on to the elders, the elders to the prophets, and the prophets handed it on to the men of the Great Assembly." He then goes on to say, "The institution of the haphtara between the Torah reading and the rabbinic homily (drasha) was therefore an expression of the unbroken sequence between Moses and the Sages of the Mishnah, whose connecting

link was the prophets, the great public interpreters, and exponents of the Divine word."

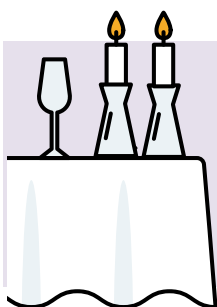
For Rabbi Sacks, the Haftarat represent two important things, 1) one of the earliest examples of interpretation of the Bible, and 2) a link in the unbroken chain from Sinai to us today!

Why study the Haftarat?

Rabbi Sacks does not regularly mention the Haftarat in his essays on the weekly parasha, but here is a key passage in his essay on Parshat Tzav (the I Believe series, 5780):

"I believe that this fugue between Torah and Haftarah, Priestly and Prophetic voices, is one of Judaism's great glories. We hear both how to act and why. Without the how, action is lame; without the why, behaviour is blind. Combine Priestly detail and Prophetic vision and you have spiritual greatness."

Much has been written on the origin of the Haftara cycle. Both the cycle itself and its content have been debated by Rabbis and Scholars. However, it is clear that, it is an ancient custom from the Rabbinic sources designed to highlight the connection between the Torah and the Prophets. Even after the revelation at Sinai, God's word is still heard by the Jewish people.



Discussion Questions



1. Have you studied the *Haftarat* before?
2. If so, why? If not, why not?



The Parsha in a Nutshell

In this week's *parsha* we learn the story of how the world was created, including all the animals and humans who live in it. God creates the world in six days and gives the world Shabbat, a day of holiness and rest, on the seventh day.

One of God's creations is Adam, the first human. God tells us that "it is not good for man to be alone,"

and so he creates Chava. They live together in the Garden of Eden and are allowed to eat from all of the trees and plants, except the Tree of Knowledge. Then a serpent convinces them to sin by eating from it, so God punishes them by making them leave the perfect world of the Garden of Eden.

The rest of the stories in our

parasha are tales of sadness and tragedy. In reading the stories of these first humans, we see how we are all prone to making mistakes. For example, Kayin, Adam and Chava's son, becomes the first person to kill another human being when he kills his brother, Hevel. By the end of the *parsha*, the later generations have become very familiar with bad behaviour, and God notes how wicked people can become.



The Haftara in a Nutshell

Isaiah 42:5 – 43:11 (Ashkenazi)

Isaiah 42:5 – 42:21 (Sefardi)

The focus of the Haftara for parshat Bereishit is on God's chosen servant (the Jewish people) who are described as a light to the nations, bringing justice and hope. The Haftara emphasises God's power, creativity, and authority over all things. Despite

Israel's disobedience and idolatry, God promises redemption and restoration, emphasising His love and faithfulness.

The imagery of God as the Creator and Redeemer highlights His unique relationship with Israel

and His ultimate plan for their salvation. The Haftara deals with both a universal, and a particular message, taking an overview of the world, and then zooming in on the Jewish People. This is a central theme in the writings of Rabbi Sacks.

- Why do you think the Sefardi tradition is to finish the Haftara at 42:21?



Context: the Book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is filled with prophecies, warnings, and messages of hope. The book is divided into two main parts. The first focuses on Isaiah's prophecies of coming judgment on Israel and other nations due to their sins. The second part contains messages of

comfort and restoration. Isaiah often speaks of a future messianic figure who will bring salvation and establish a kingdom of peace. The book emphasises the importance of faithfulness to God, social justice, and the ultimate sovereignty and mercy of God.



“ ” Quote of the Week

“The relationship between God and the universe is creation: the work of God. Between God and humanity it is revelation: the word of God. When we apply revelation to creation, the word of God to the work of God, the result is redemption.”

Rabbi Sacks, *Future Tense*, p. 217

? Points to Ponder

1. Have you ever made something and then left it for other people to complete?
2. How did you feel about other people completing your work?
3. How did it work out in the end?



Parsha and Haftara Links

Link between the parsha (Bereishit 1:1 – 6:8) and Haftara will be found here.

This section will seek to examine the thematic and linguistic links

between the Haftara and Parasha and/or the Haftara and the special Shabbat or holiday it is linked with.

This week's themes are tzimtzum, Creation and then Absence, Exile and Redemption. This is

the placeholder text. This is the placeholder text. This is the placeholder text.

This is the placeholder text. This is the placeholder text. This is the placeholder text.

- Can you think of any other books of Tanach which deal with God's absence?
- What is the message of God's absence?



Parsha Parable

The Trapeze

I grew up in the circus and I've lived there all my life. There's a lot to learn if you want to be a member of our troupe, and everybody helps out. I've set up and taken down the tents thousands of times. I've worked at the ticket office. And I've sold plenty of snacks to the audience members. But the most magical thing I learnt at the circus, the thing that taught me about hope, and bravery, and faith itself, was training as a trapeze artist.

As a small child I trained with my father, who then became both my teacher and my trapeze partner. I was famous for my

acrobatics. I would swing and flip and somersault in the air, to great applause, and then my partner would catch me and swing me onto the next rung.



When everybody gasps and applauds, they're showing how impressed they are by my flips.

But the wonder they should pay attention to is not the acrobat spinning in the air, but the partner who makes the catch. My father had unparalleled skill and pin-point precise timing, and that's the secret. He's the one who made our trapeze act a success. For without my partner I would surely fall.

It's a dangerous game of trust, swinging on the trapeze, but I learnt how to take giant great leaps and know that another would be always be there to catch me. I'm older now, and I have a new partner. I work with my daughter. And I am the one who catches her.



Parsha Ponderings

What Would You Do...

...if you were chosen to bring a group of people to an island, and lead them in creating a new society from scratch?

The Covenant & Conversation Family Edition Haftara Cycle is a Sacks Scholars project created by Rabbi Barry Kleinberg
© The Rabbi Sacks Legacy 2024



The Rabbi Sacks Legacy perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders, and a moral voice.

Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts, and speeches, or support the Legacy's work, at www.RabbiSacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.

This Week's Haftara Translation

Thus says God the Lord, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; He that gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations;

to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

I am the Lord: that is my name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to carved idols.

Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, you that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and their inhabitants.

Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Qedar inhabits: let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands.

The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up ardour like a man of war: He shall cry, indeed, roar; He shall show Himself mighty against his foes.

I have a long time held My peace; I have been still and restrained myself: now will I cry like a woman in travail; I will gasp and pant together.

I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These are the things which I have done, and I have not forsaken them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in carved idols, that say to the molten images, You are our gods.

Hear, O deaf; and look, O blind, that you may see. Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is deaf, as My messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?

Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he hears not.

The Lord was well pleased for His righteousness' sake, to magnify Torah, and to make it glorious.

Therefore this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivers; for a spoil, and none says "Restore".

Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Yaakov for a spoil, and Yisrael to the robbers? Did not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, and unto whose Torah they were not obedient?

Therefore He has poured upon him the fury of His anger, and the strength of battle: and it has set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.

But now thus says the Lord that created thee, O Yaakov, and He that formed thee, O Yisrael, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Yisrael, thy deliverer: I gave Mitzrayim for thy ransom, Kush and Seva instead of thee.

Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou wast honoured, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west;

I will say to the north, "Give up!" and to the south, "Keep not back: bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth!" Every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory; I have formed him; yea, I have made him. Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.

Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled: who among them can declare this, and announce to us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth.

You are My witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He: before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me.

I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no deliverer.

The Covenant & Conversation Family Edition Haftara Cycle is a Sacks Scholars project created by Rabbi Barry Kleinberg
© The Rabbi Sacks Legacy 2024



The Rabbi Sacks Legacy perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders, and a moral voice.

Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts, and speeches, or support the Legacy's work, at www.RabbiSacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.