



# B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

## *Shabbat Shorts*

We are all familiar with it, but have we ever wondered how it started? Where did the practice to read the Haftarah come from?

Though the tradition varies, the most common answer is that during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Maccabees, the Jews were not allowed to read from the Torah or learn Torah in general. But the prohibition only applied to the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), and so the Jews developed an alternative reading.

They would read 21 verses from a section in Neviim that related to the parsha which would have been read. They chose 21 verses to correspond to the three pesukim required for each Torah aliyah, of which there are seven on Shabbat, coming to a minimum total of 21 pesukim (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 284:1). Very creative! Eventually, the prohibition was lifted, but the practice of reading the Haftarah lasted as a cherished part of our tradition.

It's interesting that a similar reason is given in our tradition as to why we say Shema in Chazarat HaShatz in the Musaf Kedusha. There was a time when we were not allowed to recite Shema, since the Persian king Yazdegerd took issue with it rejecting all other deities besides Hashem. Guards would come to the beginning of shul (since that is when Shema is said) to enforce this prohibition. But they would certainly be gone by Musaf. And so, the Jews put Shema into the chazan's repetition of the Musaf Kedusha in order to get around this oppressive law at the time. Eventually, the prohibition ended, but the liturgical practice continued.

Why have these liturgical elements remained in our tradition until this day?

I would argue that they are not just vestigial-- they have a profound purpose. Our Sages codified them to remind us that *there was a time when we could not safely daven or read Torah*. And that the readings we often take for granted-- or God forbid even zone out during-- were so important to our ancestors that they found workarounds to make sure they could celebrate Shabbat morning davening to its fullest-- even at the risk of their own peril.

This Shabbat, how will our kavanah change during the Haftarah reading and during Chazarat HaShatz of the Musaf Kedusha if we recall this history?

Join us next time on Shabbat Shorts as we delve deeper into the parameters around reading the Haftarah!

I love feedback!  
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