

## 1-תנ"ך IN קריאת התורה

Two great personalities of Jewish history played major roles in the development of the מצוה of קריאת התורה; משה רבינו and עזרא הסופר. That the גמרא singled out the contribution of each one is evidence that the manner in which קריאת התורה took place and the purpose of קריאת התורה may have been altered by עזרא הסופר. The references in תנ"ך to קריאת התורה that predate the era of עזרא הסופר may also validate that claim. It appears that prior to the era of עזרא הסופר, קריאת התורה served a different function than it does today. Then, קריאת התורה served a utilitarian function: לימוד תורה. We already reviewed two of those references:

מסכת מגילה דף לב' עמ' א'-(ויקרא כ"ג) וידבר משה את מעדי ה' אל בני ישראל, מצותן שיהיו קורין אותן כל אחד ואחד בזמנו. תנו רבנן: משה תיקן להם לישראל שיהו שואלין ודורשין בענינו של יום, הלכות פסח בפסח, הלכות עצרת בעצרת, הלכות חג בחג.

שאלתות דרב אחאי פרשת נצבים שאלתא קסא ד"ה שאלתא דמחייבין- תינח כשבית המקדש קיים, ואם גרם העון ובית המקדש חרב מה תהא עליהן? אמר לו אני מודיע להם סדר קרבנות, בשעה שקוראין לפני, מעלה אני עליהם כאלו מקריבין אותם לפני ואמחול להם עונותיהם.

Further references that predate the era of עזרא הסופר also portray קריאת התורה as involving לימוד תורה:

דברי הימים ב' פרק יז, א) וימלך יהושפט' בנו תחתיו ויתחזק על-ישראל: ב) ויתן-חיל בכל-ערי יהודה הבערות ויתן נציבים בארץ יהודה ובערי אפרים אשר לכד אסא אביו: ג) ויהי ה' עם-יהושפט כי הלך בדרכי דויד אביו הראשנים ולא דרש לבעלים: ד) כי לא-להי אביו דרש ובמצותיו הלך ולא כמעשה ישראל: ה) ויכן ה' את-הממלכה בידו ויתנו כל-יהודה מנחה ליהושפט ויהי-לו עשר-וכבוד לרב: ו) ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה' ועוד הסיר את-הבמות ואת-האשרים מיהודה: ז) ובשנת שלוש למלכו שלח לשריו לבן-חיל ולעבדיה ולזכריה ולנתנאל ולמיכיהו ללמד בערי יהודה: ח) ועמהם הלויים שמעיהו ונתניהו וזבדיהו ועשהאל ושמירמות ויהונתן ואדניהו וטוביהו וטוב אדוניה הלויים ועמהם אלישמע ויהורם הכהנים: ט) וילמדו ביהודה ועמהם ספר תורת ה' ויסבו בכל-ערי יהודה וילמדו בעם: י) ויהי פחד ה' על כל-ממלכות הארצות אשר סביבות יהודה ולא נלחמו עם-יהושפט:

דברי הימים ב', לד', יד) ובהוציאם את-הכסף המובא בית ה' מצא חלקיהו הכהן את-ספר תורת-ה' ביד-משה: טו) ויען חלקיהו ויאמר אל-שפן הסופר ספר התורה מצאתי בבית ה' ויתן

1. שלמה המלך Great Grandson of.

חלקיהו את־הספר אל־שפן: טז) ויבא שפן את־הספר אל־המלך<sup>2</sup> וישב עוד את־המלך דבר לאמר כל אשר־נתן ביד־עבדיך הם עשים: יז) ויתיכו את־הכסף הנמצא בבית־ה' ויתנוהו על־יד המפקדים ועל־יד עושי המלאכה: יח) ויגד שפן הסופר למלך לאמר ספר נתן לי חלקיהו הכהן ויקרא־בו שפן לפני המלך: יט) ויהי כשמע המלך את דברי התורה ויקרע את־בגדיו: כ) ויצו המלך את־חלקיהו ואת־אחיקם בן־שפן ואת־עבדון בן־מיכה ואת שפן הסופר ואת עשיה עבד־המלך לאמר: כא) לכו דרשו את־ה' בעדי ובעד הנשאר בישראל וביהודה על־דברי הספר אשר נמצא כי־גדולה חמת־ה' אשר נתכה בנו על אשר לא־שמרו אבותינו את־דבר ה' לעשות ככל־הכתוב על־הספר הזה: כב) וילך חלקיהו ואשר המלך אל־חלדה הנביאה אשת שלם בן־תקתה בן־חסרה שומר הבגדים והיא יושבת בירושלם במשנה וידברו אליה כזאת: כג) ותאמר להם כה־אמר ה' א־להי ישראל אמרו לאיש אשר־שלח אתכם אלי: כד) כה אמר ה' הנני מביא רעה על־המקום הזה ועל־יושביו את כל־האלות הכתובות על־הספר אשר קראו לפני מלך יהודה: כה) תחת אשר עזבוני ויקטרו לא־להים אחרים למען הכעיסני בכל מעשי ידיהם ותתך חמתי במקום הזה ולא תכבה: כו) ואל־מלך יהודה השלח אתכם לדרוש בה' כה תאמרו אליו כה־אמר ה' א־להי ישראל הדברים אשר שמעת: כז) יען רך־לבבך ותכנע מלפני א־להים בשמעך את־דבריו על־המקום הזה ועל־יושביו ותכנע לפני ותקרע את־בגדיך ותבך לפני וגם־אני שמעתי נא־ס־ה': כח) הנני אספך אל־אבתיך ונאספת אל־קברתיך בשלום ולא־תראינה עיניך בכל הרעה אשר אני מביא על־המקום הזה ועל־יושביו וישבו את־המלך דבר: כט) וישלח המלך ויאסף את־כל־זקני יהודה וירושלם: ל) ויעל המלך בית־ה' וכל־איש יהודה וישבי ירושלם והכהנים והלויים וכל־העם מגדול ועד־קטן ויקרא באזניהם את־כל־דברי ספר הברית הנמצא בית ה': לא) ויעמד המלך על־עמדו ויכרת את־הברית לפני ה' ללכת אחרי ה' ולשמור את־מצותיו ועדותיו וחקיו בכל־לבבו ובכל־נפשו לעשות את־דברי הברית הכתובים על־הספר הזה: לב) ויעמד את כל־הנמצא בירושלם ובנימן ויעשו יושבי ירושלם כברית א־להים א־להי אבותיהם: לג) ויסר יאשיהו את־כל־התועבות מכל־הארצות אשר לבני ישראל ויעבד את־כל־הנמצא בישראל לעבוד את־ה' א־להיהם כל־ימיו לא סרו מאחרי ה' א־להי אבותיהם:

We do not find any references in the portions of תנ"ך that predate the destruction of the first המקדש בית התורה to the type of קריאת התורה in which individuals read from the תורה. In the example from the era of יהושפט, the תורה was not read publicly. It was used purely as an educational tool. In the example from the era of יאשיהו, it was read publicly but in the manner of הקהל; it was read by the king. The purpose of the reading was also educational. מלך יאשיהו read the ספר הברית. That portion was chosen in response to the rebuke of חלדה הנביאה who refers to כל־האלות הכתובות על־הספר. When we examine the references to קריאת התורה in ספר נחמיה, we will see a change in the manner in which קריאת התורה takes place. We will see the roots of the procedure that we follow. What needs to be explored is why the change occurred.

2. מלך יאשיהו. His reign ended twenty years before the destruction of the First המקדש.

## TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

1. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and strengthened himself against Israel.
2. And he placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken.
3. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and did not seek the Baalim;
4. But sought the Lord G-d of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not according to the doings of Israel.
5. And the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honor in abundance.
6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord; moreover he took away the high places and the Asherim from Judah.
7. And in the third year of his reign he sent his princes, Benhail, Obadiah, Zechariah, and Nethaneel, and Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.
8. And with them he sent the Levites Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobiahu, and Tob-Adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests.
9. And they taught in Judah, and had the Book of the Torah of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.
10. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.
14. And when they brought out the money that was brought to the house of the Lord, Hilkiyah the priest found a Book of the Torah of the Lord given by Moses.
15. And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the Book of the Torah in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan.
16. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back, saying, All that was committed to your servants, they are doing it.
17. And they have poured out the money that was found in the house of the Lord, and have delivered it into the hand of the supervisors, and into the hand of the workmen.
18. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.
19. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Torah, that he tore his clothes.
20. And the king commanded Hilkiyah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying,
21. Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah,

concerning the words of the book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book.

22. And Hilkiyah, and those whom the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Toqhat, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; and she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter; and they spoke to her to that effect.

23. And she answered them, Thus said the Lord G-d of Israel, Tell the man who sent you to me,

24. Thus said the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah;

25. Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

26. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall you say to him, Thus said the Lord G-d of Israel concerning the words which you have heard;

27. Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before G-d, when you heard his words against this place, and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before me, and have torn your clothes, and have wept before me; I have heard you also, said the Lord.

28. Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon its inhabitants. So they brought back word to the king.

29. And the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

30. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, old and young; and he read in their ears all the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the Lord.

31. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book.

32. And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of G-d, the G-d of their fathers.

33. And Josiah removed all the abominations from all the territories that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their G-d. And all his days they did not depart from following the Lord, the G-d of their fathers.

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## SUPPLEMENT

### *A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SYNAGOGUE*

The study of the history of קריאת התורה inevitably leads to a study of the history of synagogues since one of the earliest uses of the synagogue was for קריאת התורה. The following is an excerpt from one source on the evolution of the synagogue. The best and most comprehensive review of the subject is the book: *The Ancient Synagogue* by Lee I. Levine, Yale University Press: 2000<sup>3</sup>.

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Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches

by Douglas R. Edwards; Routledge, 2004.

**page 93**

#### **Defining the first-century synagogue: a communal institution with a religious dimension**

The fundamental nature and function of the first-century synagogue that I propose is at variance with many of the notions advanced above. The first-century synagogue was primarily a communal institution serving the many and varied needs of the local community, including the religious ones (Levine 2000:19-41). First-century sources - Josephus, the New Testament, rabbinic literature, and epigraphy - note a wide range of activities and services that took place there: political and social gatherings, judicial proceedings (including meting out punishment), a hostel, collecting monies for both local and Temple needs, a local archive, communal meals, religious instruction, and worship - be it prayer or Torah-reading (Levine 2000:124-59).

Given the wide scope of activity in first-century synagogues, it has been opined that the biblical antecedent of the synagogue was the biblical citygate<sup>4</sup>, where almost all of the above activities once transpired. However, we are unable to trace satisfactorily the evolution of this communal setting through the ensuing centuries of the Persian and Hellenistic periods; the evidence, be it archeological or literary, is simply inadequate. Nevertheless, we suggest that the transition from the city-gate to an actual synagogue setting took place some time in the late Persian or, more probably, Hellenistic period, when the gate area underwent a radical physical change owing to the introduction of new and more effective offensive weaponry. Instead of being a large open area with adjacent rooms housing various activities, the city-gate area became strictly functional for entry into and

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3. A paperback version of the book is available for purchase at the SOY Sefoim sale at Yeshiva University.

4. See Note that follows excerpt.

exit from the city. As a result, a new venue had to be found for many of the activities formerly conducted there, and what evolved eventually became known as the synagogue. This process coincided with the predilection of the Hellenistic world to house activities in separate and often elaborate buildings, and took place over time, undoubtedly at a different pace from one community to the next. In the many villages and towns of Jewish Palestine that had no gates, an open plaza or square would have served such purposes, and eventually these places evolved into a synagogue building. No precise date can be given for the emergence of the synagogue, and there is no way to trace systematically this process owing to the dearth of information from Hellenistic Palestine generally and from Jewish Palestine in particular.

Origins aside, the implications of this emphasis on the synagogue's communal dimension are far-reaching and affect most of the issues raised above. The first-century synagogue should not be viewed as a quintessentially religious institution - certainly not in Judaea, and perhaps not even in much of the Diaspora - as was to become the case in Late Antiquity. The search for a Jerusalem orientation, religious symbols, and other appurtenances in these buildings that are typical of a later age (such as a niche or chest for Torah scrolls) is fundamentally misguided, and any attempt to disqualify buildings as synagogues because they did not bear distinctively religious signs is unwarranted.

Similarly unjustified are efforts to define the early synagogue building as sacred. If the synagogue evolved in some fashion from the local city-gate, it was intended to meet very different needs from those addressed by the Temple. It did acquire a new religious component at some point during the Second Temple period (i.e. Scriptural reading), but when and how is unknown; in any case, this component seems to have played a role in synagogue affairs only on Sabbaths and holidays. While it is true that a few Diaspora synagogues acquired a sacred dimension, this was not necessarily because sacredness was inherent in the synagogue setting, but rather because some Diaspora communities felt the need for a more pronounced religious designation and profile, whether for purely religious reasons or for social and political considerations as well.

By viewing the synagogue as having evolved from an earlier city-gate or village-square setting, other aspects of the early history of the institution also become clearer. Thus, the issue of precisely where and when the synagogue first emerged becomes somewhat superfluous. In Palestine, the evolution of the synagogue extended over the course of the Hellenistic period (third to first centuries BCE); during this period, the synagogue or proto-synagogue framework was not singled out in literary sources such as 1 and 2 Maccabees because the functions it fulfilled and the status it enjoyed were not exceptional. Moreover, the newly developing Diaspora at this time had no specific model to emulate for its communal framework. Obviously, the city-gate or village-square setting was irrelevant for a small Jewish community living in a pagan city. Thus, each Diaspora community fended for itself, adopting and adapting indigenous local institutional frameworks to answer

its communal needs. This would account for the diversity of architecture, titles of communal officials, names, and types of communal activities between one Diaspora community and the next. It would also account for the different terms used by Romans and Jews alike in referring to the synagogue (e.g. amphitheater, *didaskaleion*, *sabbateion*, *prosenche*, and *synagoge*). Both local and Roman Imperial usage influenced the choice of terminology.

The implications of this suggested understanding of the synagogue reach beyond the first-century institution and characterize the synagogue for centuries to come. The synagogue remained first and foremost a communal framework down to the end of antiquity. It is the only Jewish public building we know of from this period, both in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and in the Diaspora. While it is true that the synagogue's religious profile grew dramatically in Late Antiquity, particularly as expressed in its main hall, which had become - in the words of one sage - a "diminished sanctuary" (B Megillah 29a), the synagogue complex as a whole continued to function as a community center. It remained a multifunctional institution, answering the needs of an often multifaceted community. The synagogue belonged to the local community that built and maintained it. There was never a higher authority that determined its policies - how it should be built, decorated, or administered, what activities would take place there, or even what sort of liturgy was to be used. This local focus of the synagogue guaranteed that the diversity so evident in the first century remained a hallmark of the institution.

The last years of the twentieth century have presented us with a rich trove of stimulating studies regarding the first-century synagogue. Despite the relative paucity of sources and other methodological issues, this topic has proven, and undoubtedly will continue, to be a source of creative scholarship. If the vibrancy of a field is measured by the rich, contrasting, and often conflicting theories proposed, and by the vigorous debate they fostered, then the first century and its synagogues are in a healthy state indeed.

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## NOTE

### *Biblical City Gates*

Here are some references from תנ"ך concerning city gates (שער העיר):

בראשית פרק כג פסוק י-וּעֲפְרוֹן יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי חֵת וַיַּעַן עֲפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי חֵת לְכָל בְּאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר:

בראשית פרק כג פסוק יח-לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי חֵת בְּכָל בְּאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ:

רמב"ן בראשית פרק כג פסוק יא – וטעם לעיני בני עמי – לאמר הנה כל העם הנה, והם היודעים ועדים ואל תחוש לכפירה או לחזרה, וקבור מתך שם מעתה כי שלך היא ולא אוכל לשוב. ואברהם לא עשה כן כי גם אחרי שפרע הכסף מלא החזיק תחלה בשדה ובמערה והקימם ברשותו לעיני בני העיר וכל באי שער העיר, הסותרים והגרים הנמצאים שם, ואחר כן קבר אותה:

בראשית פרק לד פסוק כד – וישמעו אל חמור ואל שכם בנו כל יצאי שער עירו וימלוו כל זכר כל יצאי שער עירו:

דברים פרק כב (כד) והוצאתם את שניהם אל שער העיר ההוא וסקלתם אתם באבנים ומתו את הנער על דבר אשר לא צעקה בעיר ואת האיש על דבר אשר ענה את אשת רעהו ובערת הרע מקרבך:

יהושע פרק כ (ד) ונס אל אחת מהערים האלה ועמד פתח שער העיר ודבר באזני זקני העיר והיא את דבריו ואספו את העירה אליהם ונתנו לו מקום וישב עמם:

מלכים ב פרק ז (י) ויבאו ויקראו אל שער העיר ויגידו להם לאמר באנו אל מחנה ארם והנה אין שם איש וקול אדם כי אם הסוס אסור והחמור אסור ואהלים באשר המה:

דברי הימים ב פרק לב (ו) ויתן שרי מלחמות על העם ויקבצם אליו אל רחוב שער העיר וידבר על לבבם לאמר: