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TOWARD A REVISION OF BIBLICAL READINGS
IN REFORM JEWISH SERVICES

by

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Referees:

Professor Sheldon H. Blank and
Professor Sylvan D. Schwartzman

DIGEST OF THESIS

The title of this thesis suggests that there must be some need to revise biblical readings in Reform Jewish services (else they would be left as is). This implication is correct and so it is the burden of the first part of this thesis to establish the need for revision.

In "PART I" we trace and evaluate the objective of biblical readings in Jewish services in every age. We then show how these objectives are impeded by our present order of readings. This is shown theoretically and practically. Theoretically we compare some of the present biblical readings with our objectives and show just how these readings obstruct or fall short of our objectives. Practically, we present data compiled from a survey undertaken for this thesis. The data taken from responses of 330 rabbis shows, likewise, a need for revision of our present system of biblical readings.

After we have established a need for revision, "PART II", deals with precedents for liturgical revisions. We gather evidence proving a precedent within Judaism for both changing our liturgical structure and for revising specific readings. Along with precedents for change, we present variant types of systems of biblical readings from antiquity to 1958. These are then evaluated and we note how and why each system fails to meet the challenges of our generation. While some are more

DIGEST cont.

suitable to our needs than others, no one system fully meets all our needs. Consequently we find that a new system is necessary to meet our present needs most satisfactorily. This brings us to the third part of the thesis, our proposed revision.

Here we turn to the precedent of both changing our liturgical structure and revising individual readings to solve our problem. Fashioned by our objectives, a system evolves which attempts to meet our present day needs. This new system draws on past precedents and makes original changes also. Our hope is that this new system will be both constructive and practical for the modern Reform rabbinate. The basic criterion was that of instruction and specifically biblical history. The other basic criterion, inspiration, might have been used even more effectively, however, the former was chosen as a starting point.

The second portion of the solution deals with the proposed Haftarah readings. First criteria for selection are presented and finally the proposed readings themselves. In these selections inspiring passages are the keynote and so we have fulfilled, or attempted to fulfill our two basic criteria, instruction and inspiration.

This thesis evolved within the framework of a suggestive solution "Toward A Revision of Biblical Readings in Reform Jewish Services". While this does not claim to be "the" solution to our current needs, it is our hope that this thesis will serve as a stimulus to rethink this important problem today.

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DEDICATION

I gratefully dedicate
this thesis to those
three who made possible
its successful completion:

PHYLLIS
who gave me strength
and love;

Professor BLANK
and
Professor SCHWARTZMAN
who gave me their in-
terest and guidance.



PREFACE

We Jews have earned for ourselves the title, "The people of the Book". Knowing and appreciating this, we as student rabbis or as rabbis "in Israel" may often be tempted to enter the pulpit and encourage a return to regular reading of the "Book". If we subsequently evaluate our efforts in this respect, we may be disillusioned or frustrated when we find that even if our congregation initially acts upon our plea, the enthusiasm is short-lived and they soon give up after a short attempt, at best. They have tried to read the weekly portion but find too much detail and irrelevance -- too many genealogies and chronologies, too many chapters on sacrifices and priestly rituals. If this dilemma of the "people of the Book" who no longer know the Book is evident, then perhaps we might consider how to solve the problem. This thesis is an attempt to meet our current need for revision of biblical readings. It is an attempt to adapt our readings, in line with ancient precedents, to meet our current needs. We move "Toward A Revision of Biblical Readings in Reform Jewish Services" in this thesis that Jews may once again return to know, love, and become a "people of the Book".

CHAPTER I

The Objectives of

Biblical Readings in Services

Principal Objectives

PART I

THE NEED FOR REVISION

...and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest, and when thou standest, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

In the above quotation, the objective of instruction is so-
berly stated. Moses is commanded to "teach" or to "tell" of
the importance of knowing God's laws to the Hebrews that they
may "teach" future generations his laws.

...Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one:
The Lord is one: The Lord is one: The Lord is one:
The Lord is one: The Lord is one: The Lord is one:
The Lord is one: The Lord is one: The Lord is one:

CHAPTER I

The Objectives of

Biblical Readings in Services

Traditional Objectives

References in our ancient literature have been unanimous in their agreement as to the objectives of biblical readings. Such references agree that biblical readings were instituted for instruction and inspiration.

Our Torah speaks in a number of places of teaching the Lord's statutes and ordinances on specific holidays and in general for instruction and inspiration motivating toward keeping the laws.

Moses speaks to Israel saying:

...hearken unto the statutes and unto the ordinances which I teach you...make them known unto thy children and thy children's children...that they may teach their children...and the Lord commanded me...to teach you statutes and ordinances.

1

In the above quotation, the objective of instruction is apparent. Three times Moses is commanded to "teach" or told of the importance of teaching God's laws to the Hebrews that they may "teach" future generations His laws.

...Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances...that ye may learn them and observe to do them.

2

1. Deut. 4:1, 9 - 10, & 14.

2. Deut. 5:1

Here again we see the objective of instruction, "...that ye may learn..." God's laws. In this verse a new idea may also be noticed. That is the recognition that these laws are to motivate; they are to inspire the people to "...observe to do them." We have therefore found two objectives for biblical readings. They are to instruct and inspire.

And the king went up to the house
of the Lord...and all the people...
and he read in their ears all the
words of the book of the covenant...
to walk after the Lord, and to keep
His commandments, and His testi-
monies, and His statutes... 3

Also here do we find instruction combined with inspiration. The king instructs the people by reading to them from the book of the covenant. He places God's word "...in their ears..." that they might be motivated, inspired "to keep" His laws.

At the end of every seven years,
in the set time of the year of re-
lease, in the feast of tabernacles,
when all Israel is come to appear
before the Lord...thou shalt read
this law before all Israel...that
they may hear, and that they may
learn...to do all the words of
this law. 4

Instruction and inspiration appear again. Moses is to instruct Israel "that they may hear and...learn". He is to inspire them "to do all the words of..." God. These objectives of instruction and inspiration occur likewise in the Prophets

3. 2K 23:2-3

4. Deut. 31:10-12

and Writings.

In Ezekiel's time it was by the prophet's mouth that Israel was instructed and inspired to keep God's law.

...certain of the elders of
Israel came to inquire of the
Lord and sat before me. 5

Through the prophets came God's instruction and so Israel went to them "to inquire". We are told what the instruction was that the elders inquired "of the Lord" in the subsequent verses where God speaks through Ezekiel:

And I gave them My statutes, and
taught them Mine ordinances,
which if a man do, he shall live
by them. 6

...walk in My statutes, and
keep Mine ordinances, and do
them... 7

Here again we are specifically told that Scripture is to be "taught"; it is for the sake of instruction that it is read. We also see that the teaching is in order to inspire the people to "keep" and "do" God's word; another instance which recognizes the purpose of scriptural lessons as a means of instruction and inspiration.

The Writings also tell us the objective of biblical readings is instruction and inspiration leading to enlightenment.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; 8

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- 5. Ezek. 20:1
 - 6. Ezek. 20:11
 - 7. Ezek. 20:19
 - 8. Ps. 19:8

The precepts...(and) the command-
ment of the Lord are pure, en-
lightening the eyes. 9

This psalm tells us specifically that the "law of the Lord" enlightens and restores and is thus inspiring for the individual.

More to be desired are they (the
ordinances of God) than much fine
gold... 10
In keeping them there is great
reward. 11

It (the law of God) inspires the individual to keep the law and reap its reward. The "precepts" and "commandment"s are the instruction.

We find the purpose of instruction stated even more clearly in Nehemiah.

And when the seventh month was
come and the children of Israel...
gathered themselves together...
and they spoke unto Ezra...to
bring the book of the law of Moses
...that (all) could hear with
understanding...and they gave
the sense and caused them to
understand the reading... 12

The law then is read to give understanding; that is, for the sake of instruction is it read before the assembled people.

In all the above biblical references, we see the goals of scriptural readings are one or both of the objectives;

-
9. Ps. 19:9
 10. Ps. 19:11
 11. Ps. 19:12
 12. Neh. 7:73-8:2, 8:8.

instruction through teaching and giving the sense of the law and also inspiration to keep and do what the law requires. We also find inspiration apparent in the enlightening of the eyes and soul -- the lift toward God and the reward for keeping His law is the inspiration of which the psalm speaks.

In the Tanaaitic period we find biblical readings had become a regular part of weekly prayer.

13 גא' ובהמ' י' ובעת בחנוכה קורין
14 ... בתורה
בעת שבעה ... ומאמר' בנגיל

...on Monday and on Thursday and
on Sabbath afternoon three read...
in the Torah...
On Sabbath (morning) seven read...
and they conclude with the prophet
(ic portion).

From this reference we learn that Scripture was regularly read three times weekly by the Tanaaitic period. We also find references to the readings being for the purpose of instruction.

15 ויקבר מש אב מוצק' פ' א' ג' י' ראש
מחנה ספי' מש מוצק' ע' פ' י' ראש
פ' ע' כות פ' ס' ח' ר' פ' ח'

And Moses declared the appointed seasons of the Lord to the children of Israel, teaches that Moses declared to Israel the laws of Passover on Passover...

This passage points to the instruction of the people -- Moses "declared to Israel" their laws, that is, he instructed them at the appointed seasons.

13. Meg. 4:1

14. Meg. 4:2

15. Sifra, "Emor" 17:12, Weiss edition, p. 103

The following source likewise teaches instruction as the objective of biblical readings.

16
 ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א ד'א
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Another explanation (of) Keep the month of Abib, teaches you that Moses heard the order of the festivals from Sinai and declared it to Israel and turned and taught it to them at an appropriate time. Moses said, Be careful to teach in (this) matter that they expound it.

Holy Scripture was to be taught and expounded -- to be instruction for all of Israel. And so we find the objective of instruction advanced in the Tanaaitic period.

Josephus is even more explicit in commenting upon the objective of weekly biblical readings.

Moses...appointed the Law to be the most excellent and necessary form of instruction...every week...17

In this source from the Tanaaitic period instruction is referred to as the purpose for biblical readings. Philo also mentions this and senses inspiration as well; he writes during the same period.

...on the seventh day there...
 (is) instruction;...lessons
 by which...lives may be improved. 18

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16. Sifre, "R'eh", Friedman edition, p. 100b
 17. Josephus, Contra Apion, Loeb Classics, vol. II:175, p. 363
 18. Philo, On The Ten Festivals, Yonge trans., vol. 3, p. 270

Philo specifically states that biblical readings are for instruction; inspiration is also apparent here in that the instruction inspires the people to improve their lives. We find that the Tanaaitic period like the biblical period offers instruction and inspiration to lead better lives as the objectives for scriptural readings.

Maimonides restates the principle of instruction which we found in both biblical and rabbinic periods

19 מ'מחזקת ענין זה ונראה כי זהו ענין
הנמשך מן התורה והנמשך מן התורה
כד' ש'מחזקת ענין זה ונראה כי זהו ענין

From the days of Ezra they were accustomed there that a translator would translate for the people what the reader read in the Torah in order that they would understand the matter...

He speaks here of reading the Torah to instruct and give understanding to the people -- we equate reading and explanation with instruction.

We have found instruction expressed as the objective of biblical readings; this in the biblical, rabbinic and medieval period. Inspiration likewise we have found as one of the significant objectives of such readings over the course of Jewish history. With the advent of the modern age and Reform Judaism, we want to know if these objectives are retained and if any others are added to those of instruction and inspiration.

Reform Objectives

We find Reform Judaism reaffirming the objectives already uncovered in earlier generations. Following we have a concise statement by Dr. Kohler, an eminent leader of American Reform in the United States.

...our aim and endeavor in our divine service should be to transform the Torah Reading...into a real and genuine source of instruction and inspiration, as it was at the outset intended to be. 20

We find restatements of these objectives of instruction and inspiration from Reform's beginnings to the present reappearing continually. In Germany in 1844 at the Brunswick Rabbinical Conference, Joseph Maier, president-elect of the Conference, presented this question, among others, to be reported upon at the subsequent conference -- "In what manner the תורה...could be arranged...to further congregational devotion and edification?"²¹ Both content and form seem to be a concern of this question. "Edification" seems to refer to both instruction and inspiration to deed, in short to the content of the scriptural readings. "Congregational devotion", on the other hand, seems to refer to the form of the service. We seem to find here an interest in the aesthetic appeal of the readings. Let us look further for clarification.

The following year, the question asked by Joseph Maier

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20. Kohler, K., CCAR Yearbook, vol. 23, pp. 169-70, 1913
21. Philipson, D., The Reform Movement in Judaism, N.Y., MacMillan Co., 1907, p. 214

was discussed at the Frankfort Conference. B. Wechsler stated, "The chief reason for the reading from the law was that the people learn its contents;²²". Nothing new here in the reexpression of instruction as an objective of biblical readings. However at this same conference, L. Herzfeld introduced two hitherto unstated objectives when he declared:

...the Reading of the Law must be in Hebrew. There is a mystical element in this that seems to me to be important...Were we to relinquish the *קריאת התורה* this...would call forth a universal cry of horror.

23

With this statement, Herzfeld specifically introduced the objectives of "form" as well as "content" into Reform's evaluation of biblical readings. We should now concern ourselves with the form of the service, he tells us; we should be certain it has a "mystical element" in it. According to Herzfeld, the formal reading of Hebrew brings this element into the service; this might be equated with the above stated devotional aspect -- both refer to the aesthetic appeal of the readings.

The second new element introduced above is the importance of a link with tradition. This too may be included in the category of formal criteria. Thus far, then, we have found Reform reaffirming the objectives of instruction and inspiration and introducing the objectives of aesthetic appeal and importance

22. Philipson, D., p. 245

23. Idem.

of tradition; the former are concerned with content of the readings while the latter deal with the form of the service of biblical readings.

Biblical readings in the liturgy were again being discussed half a century later, in the United States this time. At the CCAR Conference of 1904 in Louisville, Ky. there was almost unanimous agreement in favor of Rabbi Harris' proposal to return to the regular weekly Sabbath order for the sake of unity with "Klal Yisroel"²⁴ -- for the sake of tradition.

The statement of Dr. Kohler cited above (p. 9) was made at the CCAR Conference of 1913 at Atlantic City, N.J.. In the same report of the Responsa committee, Dr. Kohler goes on to point out the "impressiveness" of the Torah reading in Jewish services as well as the instructive and inspirational values. Here again is a recognition of the aesthetic appeal as a formal criterion of such readings.

There is one final criterion and that is brevity. This criterion falls into the category of form also. Brevity is apparent upon study of the biblical readings proposed either by the 1895 selection or by subsequent selections adopted by the CCAR. The 1895 selection of readings was limited to portions of a chapter at most. While the later conference (spoken of above) reverted to the annual cycle in accordance with trad-

24. CCAR Yearbook, vol. 14, pp. 74-80 & 203-206. The call to return to the annual cycle showed a preference over the readings adopted previously and appended to the Union Prayerbook of 1895; there some 20 parashiyot were omitted.

ition, they retained the brevity of the earlier selections by offering alternative selections within each weekly portion. Thus in our age brevity has become an important criterion in selecting biblical readings for Reform Jewish services.

Having now surveyed our past and recent traditions, we have found that in all cases instruction and inspiration have been the primary objectives of biblical readings. More recently we noted the growing importance of the formal criteria of aesthetic appeal, tradition, and brevity of readings. Let us now evaluate these objectives.

Evaluating Our Objectives

We have that two major categories have emerged from our investigation of the objectives sought by having biblical readings in Jewish services. The categories are those of content and form.

The two aspects of content and the primary objectives are instruction and inspiration. We found that the laws of God were taught and the people were motivated or inspired to keep and do God's will. These two objectives have been advanced from antiquity to the present and we consider them to be primary objectives of our readings.

The fundamental premise of our religion, and all religions, is that we understand and obey Divine will. Our fundamental purpose is that we bring people to know this will -- this means instruction; and that we motivate people to do God's will --

this means inspiring them. Therefore we feel that both instruction and inspiration are primary objectives to be sought from any system of biblical readings.

The modern criteria which shape the implementation of these objectives are aesthetic appeal, tradition, and brevity.

Knowledge of our present day culture teaches us that brevity is in the forefront of these criteria. We know empirically that present day needs are for a shortening of the full Sabbath readings. In a recent survey of the American Reform Rabbinate, 100% of the rabbis in Reform congregations (330 rabbis represented by the survey's figures) shorten the traditional readings. Of these 330 rabbis, only four read the full Union Prayerbook selection -- less than two per cent read even the shortened sections in full.²⁵ This evidence indicates a universal need in Reform for abbreviated readings and so this factor will ^{be} quite important in fashioning our objectives.

who responded to the questionnaire

While aesthetic appeal and tradition certainly are criteria also in fashioning our solution to the problem of a need for revision of biblical readings, we lack evidence of the striking nature available for the need for brevity and consequently these will be considerations but of a secondary nature to us.

25. This survey was drawn up by the author under the skilled and sensitive guidance of Dr. Sylvan Schwartzman, primarily. His experience in this area as well as the importance and timeliness of this subject (revision of biblical readings) are evidenced by the surprisingly great response to this survey -- 625 questionnaires were sent and 330 valid responses were received with no "follow-up", a 53% return. Actually we had an amazing 58% response but 5% were invalid.

CHAPTER II

Failure of Present Biblical

Readings to Meet Objectives

Failure in Theory

To prove that the present biblical readings fail to meet our objectives, we shall employ both hypothetic and empiric proofs. We shall begin by placing the present readings alongside the measuring stick of objectives. This will show that even in theory our readings do not succeed in fulfilling our objectives.

Let us proceed by examining a partial selection from the Union Prayerbook (UPB).¹ The reading is the selection for Sabbath Terumo.

And thou shalt make the altar of acadia-wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be four square and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof; the horns thereof shall be of one piece with it; and thou shalt overlay it with brass...²

Will this passage instruct? Can it inspire our congregations? Is this God's law which needs teaching and preaching

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1. The Union Prayerbook, Cincinnati, CCAR, vol. I, 1954, p. 389
 2. Ex. 27:1-2

to bring mankind to a better world? For most of our present generation, this passage would have no inherent value and would merely be useless information. In this case, the objective of instruction is not fulfilled, much less inspiration.

Let us, however, give the benefit of the doubt and say that a gifted preacher might be able to develop and draw an inspiring sermon from this passage; that he might even be able to find a kernel of Divine truth within the blueprint of the altar and even be able to inspire his congregation with the truth of the passage; even granting this, would he be able to do this successfully each successive week when such passages occur? For some of us, such passages as these directions for constructing the altar have little material for instruction and consequently it cannot inspire our congregations to do and keep that law. This passage was meant for another generation, not one freed from the knowledge that God needs a standardized altar of the above specifications. We are not in the Wilderness of Sinai but in the United States.

Not only are instruction and inspiration lacking but this and other sacrificial passages interfere with our criterion of aesthetic appeal. The blood and gore of sacrifices and burnt offerings certainly are not even in line with our secondary criterion, much less the primary objectives of instruction and inspiration. Apparently the only criterion satisfied at all by such readings is secondary -- that of tradition.

Not only do these and similar passages interfere with the attainment of our primary objectives but they weaken Reform theology through inconsistency as well.

In the early 19th reformers had removed sacrificial prayers from our prayerbook. Even a conservative rabbi, Mannheimer of Germany, defends Reform principles in this regard with respect to the Hamburg prayerbook of 1841.

...I cannot but agree with the stand taken by the authors of the book in the matter of the omission of the prayers for the reinstitution of the sacrifices...

3

Yet while Reform principles have removed sacrificial material from our prayerbook, it has not consistently followed through and so we have today biblical readings of sacrifices, the wilderness tabernacle, and so forth. This is no place for a call to reevaluate Reform theology, however it is the place to call for a consistent approach and to apply to our biblical readings those principles long applied to our prayerbook. Thus there is a theoretical need to revise our biblical readings for Reform Jewish services.

In further support of the theoretical need to revise our readings, we cite the fifth principle adopted in the platform of the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885 by the CCAR.

...We...expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron.

4

We contrast this principle in application again to the prayer-

3. Philipson, D., p. 118

4. Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 4, p. 215

book and to our UPB selection of biblical readings. Having removed sacrificial prayers and principles from our prayer-book, we move in direct opposition to this principle as applied by such readings as the following, a passage teaching of the duties of the priests, the sons of Aaron.

This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: he shall be brought unto the priest. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp, and the priest shall look, and behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two living clean birds and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop.

5

This is clearly in opposition to the fifth principle of the Pittsburgh platform which negates "sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron". Theoretically, therefore, we have need for revision of biblical readings for there is conflict here with our theological principles; so too the conflict with our objectives for biblical readings theoretically requires a revision of readings.

Measured once again against our yardstick of objectives and criteria for biblical readings, we ask, "Is the above passage, and similar ones, instructive?" Even if we say "yes" in one sense, it certainly is not instructive in the real sense of learning what God requires of us. "Is this the living word of God to be applied to our daily lives in 20th America?" Objectively we must conclude that these and similar passages neither

5. Lev. 14:2-4. This is a selection for Sabbath Sazria-Mezoro as suggested by our UPB, vol. I, p. 391

instruct us in God's will nor inspire us to do or keep anything specifically. If they do not advance but even retard achievement of our major objectives theoretically, then why keep them? Further, if they weaken our theology through inconsistency, then there is need to take steps toward revision of these readings. Revision is necessary to strengthen our theology, and even more important revision is necessary to achieve our objectives. Seeing this need for revision theoretically, let us look at reality and see how our present readings serve in modern practice -- serve to advance our objectives.

Failure in Practice

As noted earlier, this survey of the CCAR utilizes 330 valid returns of the 360 received.⁶ Upon compilation of the data in this survey, we found that 128 rabbis (38%) have no biblical readings whatsoever at their major service each week. This indicates either that the biblical readings have so little significance that they are not felt to be necessary weekly at the major service or that the system itself is out of balance and the readings fall at the time of a less important service. In either case we see that a change is necessary -- either for more significant passages or a change in the liturgical structure permitting biblical readings at the major service. Since our

6. The thirty returns not used were from other than Reform congregations or from Rabbis Emeriti who did not participate at their suggestion.

prayerbook is permissive in utilizing biblical readings at other than the traditional times, i.e. may be read Friday nights and since the major service in 92% of the responses is Friday night, we may conclude that the revision necessary lies in the reading themselves.

The next result strengthens this conclusion. Of those rabbis using regular weekly biblical readings at their major service, only 69 of the 330 (or 21%) felt their readings could be evaluated as "good" or better in achieving their objectives. From this we see that it is the readings themselves which seem to be ineffective. This is our conclusion because the rabbis in this statistic were using a system which permitted them the reading of biblical portions weekly at their major services and still only 21% of them could rate the effectiveness as good or better. Hence we conclude that the biblical readings themselves are failing to advance the objectives of such readings in Jewish services and consequently there is where revision is needed.

Our final point proves this conclusively. Of the 330 rabbis surveyed, 223 of them (68%) stated that either they feel the need for revision of the biblical readings or else they themselves deviate from the regular prescribed readings according to their own needs.

This survey, then, proves the following.⁷ First, either the readings or the system of readings does not meet the needs

7. The statistics and totals to the various parts of the survey are found summarized in Appendix "C" of this thesis.

of our congregations since 38% of the rabbis do not utilize biblical readings weekly at their major service.

Of those who do utilize weekly biblical readings at their major service, only 21% rate the effectiveness as good or better. This shows that failure to achieve the stated objectives is basically within the readings themselves (for the system has provided for the readings).

Finally, this conclusion is clinched by the statements of 68% of the rabbis who either want the readings revised or have themselves gone ahead to revise some of the readings.

Conclusion

We have attempted to show in Part I the objectives which biblical readings have attempted to achieve in the past and into our own age. Having found the objectives, we used them to measure the biblical readings of our present system. We evaluated our present readings both theoretically (on the basis of these objectives) and then empirically through a survey participated in by more than 50% of the Reform rabbis in America today.

Our conclusion is that the biblical readings used in Reform synagogues neither theoretically nor empirically advance the objectives for which they are instituted. Therefore we conclude that there is a definite need for revision.

CHAPTER III

Changes Within Tradition

PART II

PRECEDENTS FOR REVISION

Our approach to the material of the past will first of all demonstrate how the rabbis were cognizant of a development within the liturgy itself and consequently how they themselves did not hesitate to adjust to their own needs.

We shall now attempt to point to evidence which clearly indicates that the rabbis were cognizant of the evolutionary character of the liturgy and its development. There is abundant evidence that the rabbis were cognizant of the fact that the liturgy had undergone change and growth more evident than in relation to the institution of biblical readings.

In rabbinic literature we find the following statement:

CHAPTER III

Changes Within Tradition

We explored the objectives of biblical readings in the first chapter. We then contrasted these objectives both theoretically and empirically with the present biblical readings. Our conclusion in the second chapter was that if we wish to advance our objectives for biblical readings, we must revise our present readings. To do this and yet remain within Judaism, we must look into the past once again to see how these same types of problems were met formerly. Then by remaining within these methods of adjustment as much as possible, we shall be able to remain Reform Jews.

Our approach to the material of the past and present will be to demonstrate how the rabbis were cognizant of a development within the liturgy itself and consequently how they themselves did not hesitate to adjust to their own needs.

We shall now attempt to point to evidence which clearly indicates that the rabbis were conscious of the manipulations of preceeding generations on the liturgy and its development. Nowhere is the evidence of their conscious realization that the liturgy had undergone change and growth more evident than in relation to the institution of biblical readings.

In rabbinic literature we find the following statement:

וזה פתקן של ארסל שיפור קורין
בתורה בארבות... עזרא פתקין
של ארסל שיפור קורין בתורה בשן
ובחמ'א'...

1

Moses established that Israel would read in the Torah on Sabbaths... Ezra established that Israel would read in the Torah on Monday and Thursday...

2

From this reference and its parallels we can observe that the rabbis credited Moses with establishing certain of the biblical readings and simultaneously they credited Ezra who lived generations later with establishing additional times of reading Scripture. Thus were they aware that the liturgy was the result of at least two fashioners at different periods of time.

Even more convincing of this observation (that the rabbis were aware of an evolving liturgy) is a parallel reference from the Mechilta.

עביכך פתקין של קורין ושל ארסל שיפור קורין
בתורה בארבות... ובחמ'א'...

3

Therefore the elders and prophets established that they would read in the Torah on the Sabbath, on Monday, and on Thursday...

In this passage the establishment of the institution of Torah readings is attributed to the "elders and prophets" alone

1. J. Meg. 4:1
2. Parallel sources: B. Baba K. 82a; Tractate Sophrim 10:1; Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Halakot Tefillah, 13:1
3. Mechilta, B'Shallach, Vayaas 1, Freedman edition, p. 45

without mention of Moses. Consequently these passages clearly demonstrate that the rabbis were aware that the liturgy was a product of many hands at different times whether from Moses or a later period. The very fact that they could in the same paragraph attribute part to Moses and part of the liturgy to another man generations later proves conclusively that the rabbis were aware of growth and change in the structure of the liturgy.

Since they were aware that the liturgy was an evolving institution growing with each successive age, it must have been a sign to them that they too could modify the liturgical structure and help fashion it for their age and needs. This we shall see is exactly what happened.

Let us first consider the biblical command of Moses which was cited above (p. 3). There we find that Moses ordained that "all the words of this law" should be read septennially on Succos in the year of release. The only place we find a possible reference to the fulfillment of this ordinance is in the book of Nehemiah likewise cited above (p. 5). There the whole of the law of Moses was read to the people by Ezra during the days of Succos. It seems likely that this reading is in fulfillment of the Mosaic ordinance. If it is, this is the only reference we have to carrying out that ordinance. If not, then we have no evidence at all that this ordinance was ever practised. Nor does it make any difference whether the "year of release" was ever practised nor whether Simchas Torah is a remnant of this

ordinance. If the year of release was never practised, the reading of the law could have been, nevertheless, carried out septennially. Also, if Simchas⁴ Torah is a vestige of the fulfillment of this command, the reading of the last portion of Deuteronomy and the first portion of Genesis is only a token of the reading of "all the words of this law"! In any case, here we have a biblical commandment which is not carried out today. Since it was commanded and it no longer is followed as commanded it is obvious that the structure of biblical readings must have been changed (either consciously or otherwise). So much for the first example of structural changes in the scriptural readings.

Our next group of examples illustrate conscious alterations of the ancient liturgical structure and also revision of biblical readings. The structural changes were made to meet the new needs of a new generation, e.g. the institution of the second day of the festival to enable all the diaspora to celebrate together with Palestine. The revision of specific readings were made to better suit the day, e.g. alteration of Mishnaic laws calling for one reading which is changed or exchanged for another.

We look first at structural changes to meet a new need of the age⁴ -- the institution of the second day festival reading. Our Mishnah reads as follows:

4. Actually this will be the second example of "structural change" in the system of biblical readings. The first change was the rejection or neglect of the septennial reading.

גמרא קטין בברית חורקות של
... תורת כופניק

5

On the Passover they read in
the portion "Appointed Seasons"
in Leviticus...

From this we see that the Mishnah provided for the reading
of "Appointed Seasons" (Lev. 23) at Passover -- no more and
no less. Yet what does the Gemara say?

6

... ופ' קנא קא'א תר' ו'...

...and now that there are two
days (of the festivals)...

To the mishnaic law we find that the Gemara has added a second
day of the festival. Upon this Rashi comments:

7

ג' גמרא נא'א נא'א נא'א נא'א
... ופ' קנא קא'א תר' ו'...

...because the Baraitha (like
our Mishnah) was taught in the
land of Israel where they only
observed one day of the festival.

Since the festivals were decreed by the rabbis of Palestine,
it took some time to transmit the news of new moon and festivals
to the diaspora and so to avoid celebrating the wrong day, the
Jews outside Palestine celebrated both possible days of the
new moon festival and thus were certain of proper observance
of the correct day. This is an example of the decree of the
rabbis to meet a current problem; they restructured the law to

5. Meg. 3:5

6. B. Meg. 31a

7. Rashi to Gemara of B. Meg. 31a

to fit new needs; and with the decree of two days of each festival in the diaspora, the rabbis added a second scriptural reading to accomodate the new needs of their people in that generation. They now had two days of the festivals instead of the former one day. The rabbis had met the new needs of their generation by restructuring the festival and its biblical readings.

Beside changing the structure, the Amoraim had no hesitation in revising scriptural portions assigned by the Tannaim:

8 כנסים אדם קריא "ה' יום
... כנס פני מ'נס

...Abaya said, Nowadays the world('s communities) are accustomed to read "Draw" (Ex. 12:21 on the first day of Passover and) "Bullock" (Lev. 22:26 the second day)...

This statement tells us that Ex. 12:21 is read the first day of Passover (not Lev. 23 commanded in the Mishnah). The second day's reading is Lev. 22:26 (an expansion of the portion prescribed in the Mishnah). The Amoraim have thereby accomodated the new need of their age by adding a second day's reading (the structural change in the liturgy) but they have also gone beyond and revised the mishnaic reading; they made an amoraic reading that for the first day of the festival and revised the original tannaitic reading and adopted it for the second day. Consequently we have seen how the Amoraim changed ancient laws

of scriptural readings by supplanting them with their own or by modifying the readings.

Again, with respect to Shabu'ot this time, we see another example of the Amoraim modifying tannaitic law. The Gemara quotes a Baraitha which gives two alternative traditions for this festival. The Amoraim decide to keep both readings but reverse their order so that the original mishnaic reading (quoted in the Baraitha) is read on the second day.

וּפְסָלֵנוּ קָא' כִּי תִּי' יוֹם' שְׁבִיעִי
כְּתוּבָה יִפְסֹל וְאִיכְנָא :

9

...and now that there are two days, we use both of them but in reverse.

Here we could expect the addition of a second day's reading as formerly, but why is the mishnaic reading placed on the second day? Whatever the answer to this question, we see again that the later rabbis are not hesitant to change an older tradition.

Consider now the example of the Torah readings found in the Mishnah for Rosh Hashona:

10 גִּרְשָׁהּ פֶּסַח בְּחֹדֶשׁ שִׁבְעִי הָאֵלֶּיךָ יִקְרָא...

...on Rosh Hashona (they read)
"In the seventh month on the first of the month"...

Here we have the mishnaic law giving us Lev. 23:23 as our Rosh Hashona reading. We may now logically expect as before

that the rabbis will add a second day's reading. In this case, like the preceeding case of Shabu'ot, the Tannaim give two alternative readings for Rosh Hashona^a. On this festival, however, the Amoraim altogether ignore the mishnaic reading (the first alternative) and add a third selection which they ordain to be used on the second day (rather than just adopting both of the older readings).

11 גרסא פארם ברוך צאצ'... וי' אמרי' וי'
פרק אב שרפ... ופא'קום קאיכא חר' יו'י
יו'א קמא כ'י' אמרי' ופא'קום ופא'קום
אב ארמק...
11

On Rosh Hashona (they read) "In the seventh month"...and there are those who say, "And the Lord remembered Sarah"...and now that there are two days, the first day is according to "those who say" and the next day "And God tried Abraham"...

As mentioned above, the mishnaic text calls for Lev. 23:23. This is entirely supplanted by a different amoraic and tannaitic reading. And so again we see the ancient law revised and the venerable Mishnah entirely disregarded.¹²

Thus we have attempted to demonstrate two major points. The rabbis were conscious of the mark of various generations upon the liturgy and that thus aware they were not hesitant to change either the liturgical structure nor the specific readings within that structure. These changes establish a precedent for modern changes to meet contemporary needs.

11. B. Meg. 31a

12. Though the Torah section is changed the Haftarah remains.

CHAPTER IV

Variant Traditions

Beside the possibility of changing our present structure of biblical readings or revising them, we might do well to evaluate the advantages of substituting a variant precedent already in our tradition.

Nowadays, the annual cycle of Torah readings is the predominant tradition followed by Jews the world over. This system prescribes the division of the Torah into sections according to the number of Sabbaths of the lunar-solar year. Thus the first Sabbath of the cyclical year begins with the first words of Genesis. Each week thereafter has its ~~own~~ section and the number of sections is such that the year ends with the last verses of Deuteronomy.¹ This cycle developed in Babylonia and spread throughout the diaspora to supplant the triennial cycle used in Palestine. The Talmud evidences the older tradition:

2 לְבַנֵּי מִצְרָאִימַת קִרְבָּן לְבַנֵּי מִצְרָאִימַת קִרְבָּן

...for the westerners (Palestinians)
complete the Torah in three years.

This reference calls to our attention the existence of a variant triennial system. Though this might have been predominant at

1. There are also seven elastic pairs of readings provided by the system to compensate for variations in the length of the year.
2. B. Meg. 29b

one time as the sytem of biblical readings, it was displaced by the Babylonian one year cycle.

Though not predominant in the 12th, the triennial system is referred tottwice in that century. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela in his travels comes upon an Egyptian synagogue which uses the triennial cycle.

ופי' ע'ר ג'ולד פ'ושרת ע'ל דפת נ'לם ...
 וק' ע'ג'ת' נ'ס'יות ... וז'נ'ק נ'ופ'ק' מ'נ'פ'ל א'ח'ק
 ד'כ'ר'ט'יות ו'ב'ס'ק'ר'ק' ע'ל ת'ור'ת ... ו'א'ג'ל א'ר'ג' י'א'א'ל
 3 מ'ס'נ'ן א'ח פ'ת'ור'ת ע'ל ס'ג' ע'ל ע'ג'ל

And a great city was sitting on the bank of the Nile...and there were two synagogues there...and they were not accustomed to the same tradition regarding the sections and paragraphs of the Torah...but the Palestinians... completed the Torah at the end of three years.

Thus we see that the triennial custom has a definite place in our tradition and will be evaluated as a possiblity even though at present it is not a predominant custom; not even in Rambam's time was it predominant.

ו'י ע'ל מ' ע'נ'ה ק' א'ת פ'ת'ור'ת ד'ע'ל ע'ג'ל ו'א'ג'ל
 4 מ'נ'פ'ל ע'ל ע'ג'ל

And there are those who complete the Torah in three years, but this is not the predominant custom.

Let us now consider this precedent as an alternative in place of our present system of readings.

3. Maasot shel Rabbi Benjamin, Asher edition, p. 98
4. Mishneh Torah, Halakot Terillah 13:1

The problem of a revision of biblical readings arose during the childhood years of Reform Judaism. At the Frankfort (Germany) Conference of 1845, the commission on liturgy recommended the following of the triennial cycle by a vote of 25 to 5.⁵ Twenty-three years later at the Cassel Conference this was again recommended followed by the request that the commission on liturgy make a new selection of Haftarat arranged for the triennial cycle and utilizing the Writings.⁶

By this time a number of congregations had introduced the triennial cycle. It was hence quite disconcerting when the Leipzig synod of 1869 recommended the annual cycle once again.⁷ The synod did reaffirm the validity of using the triennial cycle, however, and did reaffirm the use of the Writings for Haftarat. Why was this apparently valid tradition negated, for all practical purposes, after its readoption?

In 1912 the problem of revision of biblical readings arose once again. This time, as well as earlier, the solution to the problem of need for revision seemed to be in the use of the triennial cycle. A committee was appointed, therefore, to consider the adoption of the cycle in the New West End Synagogue, London. The committee found the triennial cycle more desirable because of shorter readings, because of the fact that the whole of the Torah is heard by the congregation, and because the service would be more appealing to the young.⁸

5. Philipson, D., p. 256.

6. Ibid, p. 405

7. Ibid, p. 426, n. 1

8. Reported without source, CCAR Journal, 19:43f, Oct. 1957

The portions would be approximately one-third the length of the readings from the annual cycle, of course. This ^{meets} validates the criterion of brevity. Instruction is as valid in this system as in the annual cycle but what of inspiration? The advantage of the triennial system becomes its drawback. While the system decreases the length of the portions ^{to} by one-third, it multiplies the number of portions by three and so with three times as many weekly portions on sacrifices, the tabernacle, and priestly detail we find that inspiration is further stifled and our major objectives are frustrated even more than by the annual cycle. Therefore we must bare in mind this disadvantage/as offsetting the claim of brevity.

Another advantage the committee of the New West End Synagogue found in investigating the triennial cycle was that the majority of the congregation would learn the passages from Deuteronomy. "Formerly this important book was read in the synagogue during the summer months at which time there was sparse attendance. Consequently with the triennial cycle, many would now hear these portions which they formerly missed. This is significant and advances our objective of instruction. Yet in spite of this, the committee followed the long established custom of the annual cycle in its recommendation.

Within the American Reform movement too, there are variant traditions which have been introduced at one time or another to solve the problem of necessary revisions.

The earliest attempt to meet the new needs of Reform was in 1824. The Reformed Society of Israelites of Charleston, South Carolina divided the Torah-Haftarah readings assigned each week. Thus the Torah was read as usual on the Sabbath morning each week while the Haftarah was read Friday night.⁹ This precedent has much to recommend it. It approaches the criterion of brevity without multiplying unwanted portions. The brevity while a formal factor nevertheless is important and brings us nearer a satisfactory solution to our overall problem of revision.

For 71 years there were no more changes. Then in 1895 the CCAR published the Union Prayerbook (UPB) with an appendix (pp. 295-416 of volume one). This appendix contained a selection of scriptural readings arbitrarily chosen by Dr. Gottheil.¹⁰ The selections made were 54 in number for an annual cycle of readings. In this arbitrary selection there were omitted twenty weekly portions entirely. Three others were placed in a different position from the traditional one.

But nine years later at the 1904 conference at Louisville, Kentucky the CCAR carried Dr. Harris' motion to return to the traditional readings (with minor modification).¹¹ The rejection of that novel order of some years earlier was brought about through a plea on behalf of tradition and continuity of ideas (which had been somewhat broken by the modified readings).

9. Philipson, D, p. 466

10. CCAR Yearbook, 14:77, 1904

11. Ibid., p. 79f

In spite of its rejection, this systemless set of readings had fulfilled both major criteria, i.e. instruction and inspiration. Furthermore with the elimination of sacrificial, priestly, genealogical and chronologic material the readings became more aesthetically appealing and the shortened passages made for brevity as well. From this it is evident that all our criteria for a modern system has been met but tradition, and so one might be inclined to readopt Dr. Gottheil's system. There is one weakness, however, and that is his lack of system -- his arbitrary selections which do not make for any pattern of instruction, e.g. historical instruction. If we can improve the instructive aspect of readings, then we shall reach our objective. Aside from this we shall keep in mind that the 1895 readings were brief, of interest, and free of objectionable material not in keeping with our theology or sensitivities.

Recent Revisions of Biblical Readings

A "Letter to the Editor" of the CCAR Journal (April 1957) recently advised us of a new system adopted by Dr. Robert Kahn of Houston, Tex. The letter told us of his publication of a volume of 142 biblical readings selected and edited by Dr. Kahn. A subsequent response to the above mentioned survey revealed his system uses regular Torah readings Sabbath morning and the selected readings on Friday night. This follows the Charleston,

South Carolina tradition of division of readings for brevity's sake and again can be commended. Furthermore the objective of inspiration is forwarded by the use of arbitrary inspirational selections on Friday night.

The publication of the above letter was prompted by a short "innovation" in our readings by Rabbi Eli Pilchik of Newark, N.J.¹² Three issues later Rabbi Pilchik published a lengthier article dealing with not one but all the readings in our system. "Toward More Relevant Torah-Reading" is a valuable contribution to the Reform rabbinate.¹³

In the latter article Rabbi Pilchik successfully attempts to present a solution to the problem of the need for revision. His system of normal readings through Vairo followed by selected readings from Leviticus and Numbers and concluding with Deuteronomy is appealing. The system takes the congregation through Shabu'ot at which time the prophetic readings are suggested in place of the completed Torah readings or a return to the omitted portions.

This suggested revision achieves the objectives of instruction (with more continuity than Dr. Gottheil's) and inspiration (by removing the objectionable passages or those contradictory to our theology); this likewise achieves greater aesthetic appeal. Even tradition is satisfied at least during

12. CCAR Journal, January 1957

13. Ibid., 19:43ff, October 1957

the first third of the year. Finally, though selections from each Parashah are not offered, it is expected that the individual readers will select short passages from each section and so brevity is provided for (though not as explicitly as in the UPB selections, for example).

Thus we find once again both major objectives met and also two of the formal criteria. There seems to be a minor weakness in his system which the cycles do not present and that is continuity of readings, structurally. In the above system after Yisro we begin skipping around the books of Leviticus and Numbers and practically speaking this makes the system somewhat bulky with its intricacies. The intermediate passages would necessitate constant reference to the prescribed readings rather than utilizing a consecutive order easily followed.

If somehow an order of readings could be arranged that would permit consecutive readings and still retain the inspirational sections, it would seem that the ideal solution had been achieved. Is such an ideal system possible, we might ask? The proposal presented by this thesis attempts to achieve exactly that. We have set up a system of biblical readings which will meet both our major objectives and most of our formal criteria; only tradition is not fully met and yet that is in part. Finally the system herein proposed has the advantage of simplicity through consecutive sections (with but one jump) easily followed during the year.

PART III

PROPOSED REVISION

CHAPTER V

Proposed Revision

Torah Readings

Let us once again review our objectives for biblical readings in the service; our major objectives are instruction and inspiration while our formal criteria are aesthetic appeal, brevity, and tradition (to a greater or lesser degree).

With respect to our major objectives we have found that they are not being achieved either theoretically or realistically. The basic reason for this failure was in the readings themselves as presently prescribed. Both Rabbis Gottheil and Pilchik by their systems eliminated the objectionable passages. We concur with these efforts but there is still more to be desired.

In his recent article, Rabbi Pilchik's system has chosen the following passages for inclusion, among others: Kedoshim, Behar, Bechukosai, Noso, B'Haale'scho, Sh'lack L'cho, Korach, Chukas, Bolok, Pinkos, Matos, Masey and then Deuteronomy.

Because these portions are scattered throughout Leviticus and Numbers, as pointed out previously, the system becomes unwieldy though the content is good. While we pay respect to Rabbi Pilchik's excellent contribution toward solving our problem of necessary revision, we feel we can achieve the same ends more simply through this proposed revision.

Like Dr. Gottheil¹⁵, our proposed revision contains within each section inspirational material. Like Rabbi Pilchik¹⁵, our proposed revision^{provides?} contains within each section a continuity of instruction (lacking in the former system). Achieving this we have achieved aesthetic appeal as well. Brevity is also part of our system for within each portion it is expected that each rabbi will select that portion each week which seems most inspiring (although the numerous alternative selections have not been elaborated upon within each section). Finally tradition is also satisfied during the first third of the year before our system varies from the annual cycle; all this and simplicity is an inherent part of the system for with but one jump, the sections are consecutive in the Torah readings.

Our proposal, then, is this. That the order of Torah readings follow the traditional pattern through Ex. 24 or Mishpatim. This takes us through the giving of the law at Sinai. From here we jump to Deuteronomy omitting the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (the major part of the material contained in those chapters being sacrificial, priestly, and of little modern relevance). We continue through all of Deuteronomy consecutively taking us approximately to Shabu'ot.

But what of all the important material (beside the above stated irrelevant passages) over which our leap has carried us? First, with regard to historical development we have missed nothing but the material on the desert tabernacle. Our leap

began at Sinai in chapter 23 of Exodus and it ends at Sinai in chapter one of Deuteronomy -- we are at the same moment in history. Subsequently Deuteronomy begins to reiterate the history found in the preceeding books which we skipped. Thus we are taken from Sinai through the wilderness years all the way to the Jordan and the death of Moses without a break in the thread of history and without repetition. So much for the chain of history which has been strengthened by our readings through elimination of repetitive material and obstacles in the path of continuous and connected history; we have not missed history by our leap then.

What about missing ethical material over which our leap carried us? The most obvious omission would be Kedoshim, Lev. 19. This of course is not omitted for it is provided for Reform congregations during the afternoon service for Yom Kippur.¹ Thus this important section is included in our cycle and we can say as the Talmud is wont, כִּי קִרְבָּן הוּא, "there is no problem".

In Masey the cities of refuge are discussed along with definitions of blood-guiltiness and the ethics of the "avenger of blood" as well as a short discussion on conviction by testimony of witnesses. Both of these subjects, blood-guiltiness and witnesses are provided for in our proposed system. A parallel source dealing with the testimony of witnesses is read in Deut. 17:6 as part of our system. With respect to blood-

1. Union Prayerbook, Cincinnati, 1954, vol. II, p. 290ff

guiltiness and cities of refuge, they too are read elsewhere in our system as we shall shortly point out.

With respect to the other important passages we skipped over, they too are provided for in our system of readings. In Bechukosai God promises rewards for keeping His statutes and punishment for their neglect. Parallel passages of even greater beauty are found throughout Deuteronomy, e.g. chapters 8 and 30.

In Behar we read of the Sabbatical year. Though our system skips Behar the reading is paralleled within our system of readings, specifically in Exodus, chapter 23:10-13.

The priestly benediction of Noso is found and read in our liturgy not once but at least five times each year; it is read the mornings of the festivals and High Holidays.²

Beside the parallels or actual passages provided for, we have omitted the remaining priestly material and censures. The one section in Behar we have not provided for is the passage of the Jubilee year and its ethics, if any rabbi desires to utilize this portion. Though it is not specifically provided for, unlike the other sections, our system is elastic and it can be admitted after Mishpatim or after Deuteronomy, if desired.

Thus we have shown how the proposed system is composed of the normal consecutive readings with but one jump during the entire Torah without missing significant historical or ethical

2. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 60 & 230; vol. I, p. 240

portions. The one jump is from Ex. 23 to Deut. one.

This system, like the triennial readings, has the advantage that we read the book of Deuteronomy during the year when the synagogues are best attended and so this important book will no longer be relegated "to the months of July and August, when the synagogue is sparsely attended".³

One may now ask, "Well what about the summer months? What do you propose for this period?" Our proposal in this respect is somewhat novel. We could utilize either major objective or both in ordering our readings for the remaining weeks of the year. We have chosen as our most important criterion for these readings a combination of the two with the instruction determining the material and the inspiration determining its division.

Beside a place of meeting and prayer, the synagogue is essentially a place of study and so we have decided to implement the objective of historical perspective into our biblical readings. We shall also try to include passages which offer inspiring events and thus try to fulfill both major objectives.

Our congregations are sadly weak in their knowledge and understanding of biblical history, especially post-Mosaic history. We could have chosen any other criterion which would fulfill our major objectives but because of this lack of knowledge and understanding of our history within most of our congregations,

partially It is our hope that the people will not only be

3. Quoted from Pilchik, CCAR Journal, 19:44, October 1957.

we have chosen this as the guide in fashioning these readings. We anticipate summarizing each weekly portion and relating it to what has already been read and to what is to come (in addition to reading a specifically selected inspirational portion within the section).

Up to this point our Torah readings have consecutively taken us from creation to the death of Moses at the entrance to Canaan. As weak as our congregations' understanding of this period is, it is even more debilitated when they get to post-Mosaic times. Our people are no longer "The people of the Book" unfortunately and because of this we have utilized "instruction" interpreting it as "historical" instruction to be the determining factor (along with inspiring material in each section) in selecting the historical books in place of the skipped Torah readings for the remainder of each year. The determining factor could just as well have been another, e.g. poetic instruction and inspiration yet we have selected this factor.

Upon completion of the Torah, we go immediately into Joshua and continue consecutively through Judges, Samuel, Kings, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. We have divided these readings up so that they will be completed by the New Year. Most of the readings are of the length of the weekly Parashah and some are longer covering duller stretches of material till we read another inspiring portion (which we have tried to include within each portion). It is our hope that our people will not only be in-

spired by these readings but that they will grasp the historical perspective and so begin to return and reclaim their ancient title of the "People of the Book". This is one need of our age.

Just as the rabbis of old were faced with meeting the needs of their age and so modified the structure of their readings and the readings themselves, so do we follow in their tradition to meet our present needs. We have modified our structure to include all of our Scripture and we have modified our readings to be consistent with our Reform theology and have eliminated those sacrificial and priestly passages which are no longer applicable nor have significance for us. We have found the two fundamental objectives of such readings in every age have been instruction and inspiration and so we have attempted to arrange instructive yet inspiring portions. Our proposal substitutes instructive-historical perspective of the biblical period for the omitted sacrificial and priestly portions. During the last part of the year, the historical readings are read in lieu of the completed Torah readings. The historical readings may be in Hebrew or English as each rabbi desires, just as the Scripture to be read from may be on the pulpit or rest in the ark (in order to retain the pageantry of Torah ceremony) as the individual rabbi desires.

This system utilizing the historical books has another important advantage. It enable us to assign the most inspiring Haftarah passages the year around from the prophets and

Writings (yet without neglecting the formerly assigned historical readings which have already been provided for); this may be the especially "inspiring" portion -- the Haftarah. All this while getting a consecutive, historical perspective of biblical Judaism. Once again, let us note that for our purposes the summaries are essential in linking each week's reading with the last and the subsequent reading. Now what about the Haftarot?

Haftarah Readings

The chief objective of our Torah readings we have set as historical instruction along with inspiration. In our Haftarah readings, we shall place the chief emphasis upon inspiration along with instruction; we retain the two major objectives of Torah readings as also valid for our Haftarot. We also conceive of the "Charleston plan" by which the Haftarot are read on Friday night and are strongly inspirational while the instructive Torah readings we envisage as being expounded on Saturday morning. In congregations having only Sabbath eve services, we suggest a short portion from both selections.

Beside the normal criteria and objectives established earlier, we might do well to consider here any other criterion which may influence our selection of Haftarot.

These criteria as sifted from our past are not definite because, like the development of Haftarot readings themselves the whole of their evolution is veiled in obscurity.

Regular Haftarat were instituted between the time of Ezra and the final ordering of the Mishnah at the end of the second century of this era. The earlier date is established because Ezra is often referred to as one who ordained Torah readings (p. 22) yet nothing is mentioned about Haftarah readings either as being established by him nor read by him.⁴ Consequently it seems logical to suggest that Haftarat were instituted after the time of Ezra (5th BCE)

The later limit is established by references within the Mishnah itself⁵ which speak of regular readings of the Haftarat and specific times of its reading and how it is read, i.e. it follows the Torah reading on Sabbath and festival mornings and one may omit verses from the readings of the prophets (under certain conditions) but no omission is permitted in the Torah.⁶ Since the Mishnah was completed in the second century and the prophetic readings are already well established, this is the later limit. We see therefore that the readings were regularly established within a seven century span. Further exactitude becomes increasingly more difficult. From references in the New Testament, it seems reasonable that Haftarat were already well established by the first century. Luke recounts Jesus standing up to read from the prophet Isaiah during regular Sabbath worship in the synagogue.⁷

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4. Cf. Neh. 7:73ff
 5. Meg. 4
 6. Meg. 4:1 & 4:4
 7. Luke 4:16-17

The book of Acts more clearly refers to the institution of Torah and Prophetic readings:

(Paul's band)...went into the
synagogue on the sabbath day...
And after reading of the law
and the prophets... 8
...the prophets which are read
every sabbath day... 9

These references indicate that the readings of Haftaret seem to have been well established within Jesus' day and Paul's.

The date then is generally felt to be before the destruction of the Temple about the time of Jesus, perhaps.

¹⁰
Buchler and Mann deal at greater length with this problem but there is still no certainty. As to the purpose, Buchler states:

...the Haftara had no significance in and for itself, and was, indeed, only instituted for the purpose of endorsing the Pentateuchal lesson of the day... 11

This purpose of endorsing the "lesson of the day" explains some of the weakness of the present Haftaret. To many rabbis and laymen alike the normally assigned Haftarah readings are quite disappointing. Often times we find the selection made not on the basis of real relevance or direct relationship to the Torah reading but too often a passing reference suffices to establish that reading as a Haftarah. One criterion then

8. Acts 13:14-15

9. Ibid 13:27

10. V. bibliography

11. Buchler, A., Vol. 6, p. 7

might be relevance. Relevance however we shall evaluate as secondary to the primary criterion of seeking an inspiring¹² passage. Thus any Haftarah we shall choose must meet the criterion of inspiration and then if it can be related to the Torah portion we shall do this; this of course is less important in our system because we anticipate the Haftarah reading separate (Friday night) from the Torah reading in many cases.

An example of an inspiring Haftarah of majesty and beauty and yet intimately related in content to a Torah reading is our first selection -- the 19th Psalm. This Psalm deals with the wonders of nature and the primacy of the Torah. What more fitting way to recommence our Torah each year than by reading of the creation of the heaven and the earth and of the primacy of Torah.

Other selections are likewise directly related to our Torah readings yet the majority have been selected for their nobility of thought or poetic beauty. The Haftarot are included with the Torah readings in Appendix "A".

Conclusion

Our thesis has been that the present biblical readings

12. Dr. Blank, my advisor, friend, scholar and one of the referees of this thesis made the suggestion that perhaps if there was no direct relevance, then a completely unrelated reading might be chosen for contrast and change.

in Reform Jewish services impede rather than advance the objectives sought by such readings. This has been shown by contrasting our objectives with what is taking place in the synagogue with respect to biblical readings both theoretically and realistically. The disparity between objectives and achievements established the need for revision.

Once having shown the need for revision, we surveyed our tradition to see how similar situations had been dealt with in the past and we emerged with precedents for change of both structure and specific readings. We also evaluated precedent traditions which varied from the norm as possible solutions to our problem of a need for revision of readings.

Our final solution incorporates many aspects of past precedents along with original ideas which we hope will best meet our current needs for a more instructive and inspiring system of readings.

Ideally our system utilizes Friday night Haftarah readings of an especially inspiring nature (as well as being instructive) and Saturday morning Torah readings instructive particularly in historic terms (as well as inspiring).

Our Torah readings follow the traditional readings from Genesis through Exodus 23 (selections within each portion being made by each individual rabbi). It is recommended that a summary of each portion be given along with the selection to relate that week's reading to what has gone before and to what

is yet to come.

From Exodus 23 we jump to Deuteronomy one and continue consecutively through the remainder of the Torah. For the remaining weeks of the year (23), we utilize the historical books of the Bible in place of the completed Torah (its relevant portions) in order to include and conclude a consecutive presentation of biblical history from creation through the return from Babylonian exile.

We have attempted by this system to eliminate those sacrificial and priestly portions of no relevance to our age; portions which not only weaken the foundations of Reform theology but portions which also thwart instruction and destroy inspiration growing out of the Scriptures. This material we replace with truly instructive historical material which paints the whole picture of our biblical development as a people and serves likewise as inspiring passages from our past.

By our system we have also eliminated much repetition, provided for the reading of Deuteronomy during the best attended part of the year, and shown that the important parts skipped over have been provided for within our readings.

...our aim and endeavor in our divine service should be to transform the Torah Reading from the mechanical and meaningless function into which it has lapsed during the past ages, into a real and genuine source of instruction and inspiration as it was at the outset intended

to be...(also) well to be considered is, whether such chapters as Tazria-Metzora and similar portions offensive to our taste and devoid of all religious meaning for us ought not to be omitted altogether and replaced by those beautiful and inspiring portions of Deuteronomy which according to our Calendar, are assigned to the hot season of the year when the synagogues are empty and which ought by all means to be read before larger assemblies, being of such highly educational, ethical, and prophetic character. Of course, at present this must be left to individual discretion. 13

These words of Dr. Kohler express clearly the basic attempt of this thesis. If we have helped to any degree in meeting our present need for revision then some degree of achievement has been attained. It is our hope that the ideal expressed above by Dr. Kohler has been brought closer.

13. Kohler, K., CCAR Yearbook, 23:169-70, 1913

APPENDIX OF BIBLICAL READINGS

Birashis	Ps. 19, Ps. 48
Noah	Ps. 24, Ps. 29
Lech Lcha	Is. 51:1-6, Ps. 105
Vayero	Ps. 113, Ez. 18, Mi. 6:1-8
Haye Sarah	Pr. 31:10-30
Toldos	S.S. 8:6-7
Vayetze	Ps. 121, Ps. 27
Vayishlach	Is. 2:1-4, Mal. 2:10, Ps. 7
Vayeshev	Ps. 23, Ps. 86
Miketz	S.S. 2:10-17
Vayigash	Ps. 71
Vayechi	Ps. 127
Shmos	Jer. 1:4-10, Is. 6:1-8
Voere	Is. 42:5-17
Bo	Ps. 118
Behallach	Ps. 33, Ps. 66
Yisro	Ps. 105, Ps. 119:9-16, 33-40, 97-106
Mishpatim	Ps. 82
***	***
Devarim	Pr. 1:1-8
Veshanem	Ps. 24, Ps. 105
Akev	Ez. 18, Mi. 6:1-8
Reh	Job 19:1-25
Shoftim	Ru. 1:1-17
Ki Saytza	Ps. 8
Ki Dovo	Ps. 42
Nitzavin	Ps. 112
Wayelach	Job 13:1-15
Haaninu	Job 1:1-21
Vzos	Ps. 62
***	***
Joshua 1:1-6:27	Pr. 16:18
" 7:1-12:24	Pr. 17:1
" 13:1-24:33	Ps. 145
Ju. 1:1-5:32	Pr. 3:3
6:1-12:15	Pr. 27:21
13:1-16:31	Ps. 42
17:1-21:25	Ps. 139
Is 1:1-7:17	Amos 5:18-24
8:1-12:25	Mi. 4:1-4
13:1-17:58	Pr. 31:10-30
18:1-24:23	Ps. 139
25:1-31:13	Ps. 90
Is 1:1-10:19	Ps. 118
11:1-24:25	Ps. 3

CONT.

Hebrew Union College - 52 - Jewish Institute of Religion

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE UNION OF AMERICAN JEWISH CONGREGATIONS

CINCINNATI

APR 1957

TELSON AVENUE 2, CINCINNATI, OH 45202

IK 1:1-11:43
12:1-22:54
IIK 1:1-8:29
9:1-17:41
18:1-25:30
Dan. 1:1-5:30
6:1-12:13
Ez. 1:1-6:22
7:1-10:44
Neh. 1:1-6:19
7:1-13:31

Ps. 65, Ps. 72, Ps. 127 *repetition*
Ps. 63:1-9
Ps. 84
Hos. 11:1-6 *repetition*
Ps. 26, Ps. 48, Is. 36-39
Ps. 60, Ez. 37
Ps. 82 *repetition*
Ps. 90
Ps. 62
Ps. 74
Ps. 85

1. (a) Check the times you regularly read congregational religious services (see

N.B. THE HAFOTROT ARE MERELY THIS INDIVIDUAL'S SELECTION
WHICH OTHERS MAY WISH TO REVISE OR REPLACE WITH THEIR
OWN FAVORITE PASSAGES OF INSPIRATIONAL MATERIAL.

(b) Enclose the check above that represents your best attended service.

2. (a) Check regularly with which the Torah is read in your synagogue.

Weekly? More than once a month? Occasionally? Never?

(b) When is Torah read in Hebrew? When in English?

3. (a) Check regularly with which the Torah is read in your synagogue.

English? Hebrew? Both?

(b) When is Torah read in Hebrew? When in English?

4. (a) Check the language in which you read the Torah (Hebrew, English, or both).

Hebrew? English? Both?

(b) When is Torah read in Hebrew? When in English?

5. (a) Check which system of prayer you use in your synagogue.

Torah

- Union Prayerbook (1935)
- Annual Cycle (1935)
- Triennial Cycle
- Arbitrary
- Other system

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

CINCINNATI
NEW YORK
LOS ANGELES

CLIFTON AVENUE · CINCINNATI 20, OHIO

APPENDIX "B"

12/4/57

Dear Rabbi

For my senior thesis at HUC, I am making a study of Biblical readings in Reform Jewish services under the guidance of Doctors Blank and Schwartzman. By checking and returning this five minute questionnaire, you will be of great help to me in the completion of my studies; I shall be most grateful for your cooperation.

Thank you,

Stephen S. Goldrich

1. (a) Check the times you regularly hold congregational religious services (excluding religious school services). Morning Evening

Mon-Thur

—

—

Shabbos

—

—

Sunday

—

—

- (b) Encircle the check above that represents your best attended service (✓).

2. (a) Check regularity with which the Torah is read in Hebrew during services.

Weekly? — More than once a month? — About once a month? —

Occasionally? — Never? —

- (b) When is Torah read in Hebrew? (e.g. Sat. morn.) _____

3. (a) Check regularity of use of explanation, translation, or synopsis in English of the Torah portion.

Weekly? — More than once a month? — About once a month? —

Occasionally? — Never? —

- (b) When is this done? (e.g. Sat. morn.) _____

4. (a) Check the regularity of Haftarah reading (either Hebrew and/or English).

Weekly? — More than once a month? — About once a month? —

Occasionally? — Never? —

- (b) When is this done? (e.g. Sat. morn.) _____

5. (a) Check which general system you use in selecting Biblical portions.

Torah

Haftarah

—

Union Prayerbook selections

—

—

Annual cycle (full parasha)

—

—

Triennial cycle

—

—

Arbitrary selections

—

—

Other system

—

—

—

5. cont.

- (b) Do you normally read the complete Torah portion assigned by system you checked in "5(a)"? Yes? ☐ No? ☐
- (c) Do you normally read the complete Haftarah portion assigned by system you checked in "5(a)"? Yes? ☐ No? ☐
- (d) How often in the system you use do you deviate from the assigned Torah portion? Weekly? ☐ More than once a month? ☐ About once a month? ☐ Occasionally? ☐ Never? ☐
- (e) How often in the system you use do you deviate from the assigned Haftarah portion? Weekly? ☐ More than once a month? ☐ About once a month? ☐ Occasionally? ☐ Never? ☐
6. (a) Check the frequency with which the weekly Torah portion serves as a text for your sermon or the basis of a Biblical lesson during services.
Weekly? ☐ More than once a month? ☐ About once a month? ☐ Occasionally? ☐ Never? ☐
- (b) Check the frequency with which the weekly Haftarah portion serves as a text for your sermon or the basis of a Biblical lesson during services.
Weekly? ☐ More than once a month? ☐ About once a month? ☐ Occasionally? ☐ Never? ☐
- (c) Check the frequency with which you use Biblical texts other than the weekly portion as the basis of your sermon or lesson.
Weekly? ☐ More than once a month? ☐ About once a month? ☐ Occasionally? ☐ Never? ☐
7. (a) What are the objectives sought (by you and/or your congregation) in following this system of Biblical readings during your services?

(if necessary, please continue on back)

- (b) How effective would you say this system is in achieving these objectives?

APPENDIX C

Results of Survey

Number sent	625
Number returned	360
Gross return	58%

Valid returns	330
Per cent valid	53%

1.A. Time of Services

Friday night	329	100%-
Saturday morn	201	61%
Sunday morn	38	12%

B. Major Service

Friday night	303	92%
Saturday morn	14	4%
Sunday morn	9	3%

2. A. Regularity of Torah Reading

Weekly	243	76%
More than monthly	11	3%
Monthly	34	11%
Occasionally	28	9%
Never	2	-

B. When Torah is Read Weekly

Friday night	127	40%
Saturday morn	182	60%

3. A. Regularity of Haftarah Reading

Weekly	170	54%
More than monthly	6	2%
Monthly	40	13%
Occasionally	89	28%
Never	11	3%

(Suprising that nearly 50% of rabbis do NOT regularly use a weekly Haft.)

B. When Haftarah is Read Weekly

Friday night	46	24%
Saturday morn	150	76%

(Of all rabbis, only 14% have Haft. on Fri/pm weekly and only 45% on Sat/am)

4. A. System

Union PB Selections	184	57%
Annual cycle	96	30%
Triennial cycle	8	2%
Arbitrary system	30	9%
Pentennial system	2	-
Other	1	-

B. Deviations from Torah Selection

Occasionally	125	40%
Monthly	20	6%
Weekly	15	5%
"Never"	160	50%

(There was a general tendency to check "never deviate" here; some surveys however would then proceed to say they do omit some sections, e.g. leprosy.)

C. Deviations from Haftarah Selection

Occasionally	151	47%
Monthly	23	7%
Weekly	17	5%
"Never"	109	41%

5. A. Objectives of Biblical Readings

Tradition	126	24%
Instruction	239	46%
Inspiration	120	23%
Pageantry	17	3%
Participation	11	2%

(of those answering this question)

B. Effectiveness of System

Good or better	68	21%
Fair	205	64%
Poor	15	5%
Non-committal	32	10%

(There was a natural tendency not to be little one's own efforts; it took strength to classify one's efforts "poor")

General Observation

Quite a few surveys spoke favorably of the recent Pilchik article (CCAR Journal, October 1957) as a step in the right direction. One rabbi said he wanted to change the readings but did not feel each rabbi should revise according to his own plan but rather the conference should revise the readings.

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