

Parashah

Parashah: The term **parashah** (Hebrew: meaning *portion*) is a set of verses that is written in the Torah Scroll without any break within the text. In most cases, a new **parashah** (phonetically pronounced paw-raw-shaw) begins where a new topic or a new thought is clearly indicated in the biblical text. In many places, however, the **parashah** divisions are used even in places where it is clear that no new topic begins, in order to highlight a special verse by creating a textual pause before it or after it.

Each Shabbat a passage from one of the five books of Moshe is read. This passage is referred to as a **parashah**. The first **parashah**, for example, is **Parashat Bereshit**, which covers from the beginning of **Genesis** to the story of Noah. There are 54 **parashahs**, one for each week of a leap year, so that in the course of a year **Genesis** to **Deuteronomy** is read. During non-leap years, there are 50 weeks, so some of the shorter portions are doubled up. The last portion of the Torah is read right before a holiday called Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Torah), which occurs in October, a few weeks after Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year). On Simchat Torah, the last **parashah** is read, and then immediately **Parashat Bereshit** in **Genesis** is read, showing that the Torah is a circle that never ends.

In the synagogue service, the weekly parashah is followed by a passage from the prophets that is referred to as a **haftarah** (which doesn't mean "half-Torah"). The word comes from a Hebrew root fei-teit-reish, which means concluding portion. Usually, the **haftarah** portion is no longer than one chapter, and has some relationship to the Torah portion of the week. Some of the scriptures have an **(A)** after them; and others have an **(S)**.

The (A) represents those scriptures read by the **Ashkenazim**, who originate from Jews who settled along the Rhine River, in Western Germany and Northern France, speak Yiddish, and are prominent today in Central and Eastern Europe. Most American Jews today are **Ashkenazim**, who descended from Jews who emigrated from Germany and Eastern Europe from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s.

The (S) represents those scriptures read by the **Sephardic** Jews, who originate from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective **Sephardic** and corresponding nouns **Sephardi** (singular) and **Sephardim** (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word "Sepharad," which refers to Spain. The beliefs of **Sephardic** Judaism are basically in accord with those of Orthodox Judaism, though **Sephardic** interpretations of halakhah (Jewish Law) are somewhat different than the Ashkenazic ones.

In messianic synagogues, after the **haftarah** is read, there are suggested readings from the B'rit Chadashah for that particular **parashah**.