Temple Israel
Introduction to Judaism

TORAH & TANAKH
The Source of Basic Jewish Values
בראשית בראש אלכוה לא טפח והיה לילה ויום,
ולא פסק מימיו ויהו אלכוהまれה על פנים
של בני אנוש שדי אלכוה גררה על פנים
של בני אנוש שידי יאמור אלכוה דני העף.
ולא קודם אלכוה את נפשם ביצות, כי עור
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The Books of the Tanakh (The Hebrew Bible)

The Five Books of Moses (Torah)

• Genesis
• Exodus
• Leviticus
• Numbers
• Deuteronomy

The Eight Books of the Prophets (Neviim)

• Joshua
• Judges
• Samuel
• Kings
• Isaiah
• Jeremiah
• Ezekiel
• The Twelve (minor prophets)
  • Hosea
  • Joel
  • Amos
  • Obadiah
  • Jonah
  • Micah
  • Nahum
  • Habbakkuk
  • Zephaniah
  • Chaggai
  • Zechariah
  • Malakhi

The Eleven Books of the Writings (Ketuvim)

• Psalms
• Proverbs
• Job
• Song of Songs
• Ruth
• Lamentations
• Ecclesiastes
• Esther
• Daniel
• Ezra/Nehemia
• Chronicles I & II
TANACH: TORAH, PROPHETS AND WRITINGS

What's in a name?

Tanach is the Hebrew name for the Bible or Holy Scriptures. The word Tanach is an acronym, i.e. a word formed from first letters of three other words: Torah (the first five books of the Bible), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (the Writings). This is the Jewish name for the Bible. We do not call the Tanach the Old Testament, since this implies that there is something new and improved that comes after it.

These three sections of the Tanach, Torah, Prophets and Writings, are arranged in a descending order of holiness. Torah is considered most holy, then the Prophets and then the Writings. A book which contains only the Torah is sometimes called a Chumash, from the Hebrew word "five", or Pentateuch, derived from the Greek word for "five", for the five books it contains.

TORAH
The Names of the Books in the Torah

How did each book of the Torah get its name? The Hebrew name for each book in the Torah is the same as the first significant word in that book. For example, the first word of the Torah is Bereishit, which means, "In a beginning", and this is also the Hebrew name of the first book of the Torah.

CONTENTS OF THE FIVE BOOKS OF THE TORAH

Below is a very brief summary of the contents of each book of the Torah. (The English abbreviation of each book’s name is also provided.)

Bereishit/Genesis (Gen., Gn.): The creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah’s Ark, the Tower of Babel, stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers.

Shemot/Exodus (Ex.): Enslavement in Egypt; Moses and the burning bush; the ten plagues; the crossing of the Red Sea; the battle with Amalek; the ten commandments; the Golden Calf, details of building the tabernacle in the desert.

Vayikra/Leviticus (Lev. or Lv.): Laws regarding sacrifices, ritual purity and leprosy and the priesthood; "The Holiness Code" (a summary of the Ten Commandments; contains the verse "Love your neighbor as yourself" and ways laypersons observed Jewish practice).

Bemidbar/Numbers (Nu.): The wandering of the Children of Israel in the desert for forty years; the census of the Children of Israel; the priestly benediction; the sending of spies to look at the land of Israel and Korach’s rebellion against Moses.

Devarim/Deuteronomy (Dt.): Three speeches given to the children of Israel by Moses just before they enter the Land of Israel. Contains the Shema and V'ahavta and the Ten Commandments. The death of Moses.
PARSHIOT/TORAH PORTIONS
Each book of the Torah is divided into parshiot (portions; parshah, singular) that are read each week in synagogue. The parshah’s name is the first significant word of that parshah. The parshiot divide the Torah text into meaningful units. The system of parshiot is older than the system of numbered chapters and verses. Each parshah is further divided into seven portions called aliyot (“going up”, aliyah, singular). When a Jewish year does not have a leap-month (i.e. is shorter), some of the Torah portions are combined and read together on one Shabbat. Regardless of how long the year is, the whole Torah is read during it. We begin reading the Torah in the Autumn at Simchat Torah. We read it all year long and complete the reading of Deuteronomy in the Autumn.

The following is a list of the names of all the parshiot. (See below for a description of each Torah portion.)

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<th>VaYikra (Leviticus)</th>
<th>BaMidbar (Numbers)</th>
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PROPHETS/NEVI’IM
The Prophets were men and women who were privileged to transmit God’s word to the Jewish people. These words are called prophecies (prophecy, singular). A prophet in Hebrew is a Navi (plural: Nevi’im, the name of this section of the Tanach). Sometimes these prophets were also military leaders and were called Judges. This section of the Tanach covers the period from when Joshua entered the land of Israel, through the history of Saul, David and Solomon, the split of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel, the destruction of Israel in 721 B.C.E. the destruction of the Temple in Judea 586 B.C.E and the captivity of the Jews in Babylonia which followed, that is, the period from approximately 1190-520 B.C.E. The following is a listing of each of the books in this section and a brief summary of their contents. (* indicates Haftarah portion(s) are taken from this book.)

*Joshua (Jos.): The conquest of the land of Israel by Moses’ successor. Includes the tumbling of the walls of Jericho (Chapter 6).
**Judges (Ju.):** The conquest of the land of Israel; includes the stories of Samson, Deborah and others.

**Samuel (S. or Sam.)** *(two books):* The story of Hannah, her son, the prophet Samuel; Saul, the first king of Israel, and David, his successor. Approximately 1000 B.C.E.

**Kings (K.)** *(two books):* The death of David, the succession of his son Solomon to the throne, stories of Elijah and Elisha. Includes the "cut the baby in half" story (I Kings 3:15-28), and the "still small voice" story (I Kings 18:46-19:21).

**Isaiah (Is.):** A book of the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived in Jerusalem in the eighth century B.C.E. and/or in Babylonia during the 6th century B.C.E. This book contains some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible.

**Jeremiah (Je. or Jer.):** Jeremiah was the most inward of the prophets. He foresaw Jerusalem’s destruction and was jailed for predicting this. He was taken into exile in 586 B.C.E and died in Egypt.

**Ezekiel (Ezek.):** Ezekiel lived in Babylonia during the sixth century B.C.E (when the Jews were exiled there). A mystic and visionary, his prophecies include the vision of the dry bones coming to life (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

**THE TWELVE (MINOR) PROPHETS**

These Prophets are called minor not because they are unimportant, but because of the relatively short length of their prophecies. Consequently, they were written together on one scroll and thus were grouped together.

**Hosea (Ho., Hos.):** Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in the eighth century B.C.E. He characterized the Jewish people's relationship with God as that of a wife and husband.

**Joel (Jo.):** Joel prophesied about repentance and the End of Days.

**Amos (Am.):** Amos was a Judean shepherd and farmer in the eighth century B.C.E. He was an advocate of social justice.

**Ovadya (Ob.):** The shortest book in the *Tanach*, it may have been composed around 587 B.C.E. Ovadya talks of the evil fate that will overtake Edom.

**Jonah (Jon.):** This book contains the story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet who is to bring God’s word to Ninveh but resists. It is the Haftarah for Yom Kippur afternoon.

**Micah (Mi.):** Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesied in the late eight century B.C.E. He witnessed destruction of Northern Kingdom (Israel) and predicted a similar fate for Judah and Jerusalem unless they mended their ways. The verse “Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God” is Micah 6:8.

**Nachum (Na.):** Nachum prophesied after 663 B.C.E. The book was probably composed in 612 B.C.E. He was more a poet than a prophet.

**Habbakuk (Hab.or Hb.):** This book contains only three chapters. Habbakuk’s dictum (Habbakuk 2:4), "the righteous shall live by his faith,” is said to encompass all 613 commandments (Makkot 23b-24a).

**Zephaniah (Zp.):** A Judean prophet who was a distant relative of King Josiah, during whose reign he prophesied (640-609 B.C.E). Living and prophesying in Jerusalem, he urged Jewish people to turn away from foreign customs and religions.

**Haggai (Hg.):** A Prophet of the post-exilic period, his prophecies deal mainly with the construction of the Temple. Only 38 verses of his prophecies are in our hands. They date from 520 B.C.E.

**Zechariya (Ze.):** A Prophet in The Land of Israel after the Jewish exiles had returned from Babylonia, he urged the people to rebuild Temple.

**Malachai (Mal.):** Malachai was a contemporary of Nehemiah, who rebuilt the Temple after the Jewish people's return from exile in the middle of fifth century B.C.E.

Below are a list of books from Prophets. Check those that belong to the Twelve, or Minor, Prophets.
WHAT IS A HAFTARAH?
The word Haftarah comes from the root "dismiss, release" and is a reading from the Prophets which is recited on Shabbats and Festivals. Usually its contents parallel that of the Torah portion in some way or it is determined by a special date on the Jewish calendar. For example, on the Shabbat before Purim, a special Haftarah portion is read that does not correspond to the weekly Torah portion. These special Haftarah portions are listed in most Chumashim.

WRITINGS/KETUvim (HAGIOGRAPHA)
The Ketuvim, "Writings" (also called the Hagiographa) are the third portion of the Tanach and are considered to have a lower level of holiness than do the Torah and Prophets although they are still Holy Writings. Five of the books in this section are called The Five Scrolls, or Megillot. They are read on five different holidays throughout the year. The following is a listing of each of the books in this section of the Tanach and a brief summary of their contents. (Hagiographa comes from hagio/holy and grapha/writing.)

Tehillim/Psalms (Ps.): 150 hymns, laments, thanksgiving songs, poems, songs and prayers. This book is often divided into five smaller books (Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). Many psalms are recited during worship services. Seventy-three of the psalms are attributed to King David.

Mishlei/Proverbs (Pr. or Prov.): Proverbs, which is ascribed to Solomon, is a manual for the moral and religious instruction of the young. One of the three books of "Wisdom Literature" in the Tanach (Ecclesiastes and Job are the other two). Wisdom in this tradition means embracing an ethical lifestyle. It contains the poem "A Woman of Valor" (31:10-31).

Job (Jb.): The story of how a righteous man, Job, suffers. This book attempts to explain the suffering of the righteous. An example of Wisdom Literature, it contains some of the most beautiful poetry in the Tanach.

Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs (Ct.): One of the five scrolls. This book, also known as Canticles, is read on Pesach. It is a collection of love poems, and was interpreted as a love song between God and Israel.

Ruth (Ru.): One of the five scrolls. This book is read on Shavuot and tells how Ruth, a Moabite, became a Jew. It also provides a genealogy of King David, Ruth's descendant. Ruth 1:16 contains the famous speech which begins, "Whither thou goest, I will go..."

Eicha/Lamentations (La.): One of the five scrolls. Contains five poetic chapters lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. This book is read on Tisha B'Av, the Jewish Memorial Day.

Kohelet/Ecclesiastes (Ec.): One of the five scrolls. Its title means "Convoker" in Greek (the Hebrew root kuf-hey-lamed, the basis of this book's Hebrew name, means the same thing.) Attributed to Solomon, this book contains many famous passages such as, "A season is set for everything...a time to be born, and a time to die..." This book of Wisdom Literature teaches that human life is unpredictable and that there is no sure formula for success. It is read on Sukkot.

Esther (Est.): One of the five scrolls. Esther, which is read on Purim, tells the story of how Esther saved the Jews of the Persian empire.

Daniel (Dn. or Dan.): Daniel is a book of two parts: Part One (chapters 1-6, six stories of the trials and triumphs of Daniel, told in the third person) and Part Two (chapters 7-12, Daniel's apocalyptic revelations, told in the first person). This book contains such stories as Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6).

Ezra/Nehemiah (Ezr./Ne. or Neh.): Originally, these two books were a single work. Ezra, a priest and scribe, oversaw the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel from exile in Babylonia. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and set the ritual reading of the Torah and worship services (Neh. 7:72-9:37).

Divrei HaYamim/Chronicles (Ch. or Chron.) (two books): These books describe the history of Israel from the time of David until destruction of the Kingdom of Judah. They emphasize the role of the people in Jewish history more than do the books of Kings, which cover the same period.
A Summary of the Torah

A description of the highlights of the Torah, according to the divisions of the weekly portions.

By Ronald Isaacs

The Five Books of Moses begins with the creation of the world out of the void. It ends with the last days of Moses. Each week a different sidraḥ (Torah portion) is read on Saturday morning in traditional synagogues. Here is a list of the Torah portions for the entire year and a brief summary of their contents.

Genesis

The creation of the world. The patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob and his sons go down to Egypt. Jacob blesses his sons before his death.

Weekly Portions:

Bereshit (1:1-6:8) The world is created in six days.
Noah (6:9-11:32) A flood destroys the world. God’s rainbow promises that the world will never again be destroyed in its entirety.
Vayera (18:1-22:24) Abraham welcomes three angels into his tent and learns that his wife Sarah will give birth to a son.
Haye Sarah (23:1-25:18) Abraham’s servant finds a suitable wife, Rebecca, for Abraham’s son Isaac.
Vayetze (28:10-32:3) God appears to Jacob in a dream. Jacob works fourteen years and marries Leah and Rachel.
Vayishlah (32:4-36:43) Jacob and Esau reunite after twenty years. Rachel dies and is buried in Bethlehem.
Vayeshev (37:1-40:23) Joseph’s brothers strip him of his coat of many colors and throw him into a pit.
Vayigash (44:18-47:27) Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, who are dumbfounded.

Exodus

The Israelites are enslaved in Egypt. Moses receives the Ten Commandments. The Israelites build a tabernacle.

Weekly Portions:

Sh’mot (1:1-6:1) Moses is saved by Pharaoh’s daughter. God appears to Moses at the burning bush.
Vaera (6:2-9:35) God brings plagues upon the Egyptians. Pharaoh’s heart hardens and he refuses to let the Israelites go.
Bo (10:1-13:16) Egyptian firstborn children are slain by God. The Israelites hastily leave Egypt and bake matzah from unleavened dough.
B’shalah (13:17-17:16) The waters of the Red Sea divide to make a path for the Israelites.
Yitro (18:1-20:23) Jethro, Moses’ father-in law, advises him to appoint judges so as to ease his burden. Moses receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.
Tetzaveh (27:20-30:10) Aaron and his sons are put in charge of the menorah. The priestly garments are described in great detail.
Ki Tissa (30:11-34:35) The Israelites build a golden calf; when Moses sees it he shatters the tablets containing the Ten Commandments.
Vayakhel (35:1-38:20) The people bring an array of gifts for the tabernacle until they are told to stop.
Pekudei (38:21-40:38) The cloud of glory covers the completed tabernacle as the Israelites stand in the distance.

**Leviticus**
The priestly code; the rules pertaining to sacrifices, diet, and morality; and the Land of Israel and festivals are discussed.

**Weekly Portions:**
Vayikra (1:1-5:26) God reveals the sacrificial laws.
Tzav (6:1-8:36) Moses anoints Aaron and his sons as priests.
Shemini (9:1-11:47) Laws describing kosher and nonkosher animals are enumerated.
Tazria (12:1-13:59) Cleanliness and uncleanliness are defined in relation to childbirth and leprosy.
Metzora (14:1-15:33) The laws for the purification of the leper after he has healed are discussed.
Ahare Mot (16:1-18:30) Aaron's sons die. Aaron chooses by lot a goat and a scapegoat.
Kedoshim (19:1-20:27) More laws are set forth, including, "Love your neighbor as yourself."
Emor (21:1-24:23) Festival seasons are described in detail.
B'har (25:1-26:2) The sabbatical and jubilee years are discussed.
B'hukotai (26:3-27:34) The punishment for rejecting God’s covenant is discussed.

**Numbers**

**Weekly Portions:**
B'midbar (1:1-4:20) Description of the Israelites' encampments during their journeys through the desert.
Naso (4:21-7:89) Regulations concerning Nazirites and the threefold priestly benediction.
B'ha'alotekha (8:1-12:16) Kindling of the menorah. Seventy elders are delegated to serve under Moses.
Shelah (13:1-15:41) Twelve spies are dispatched to survey the land of Canaan. Two of the spies return with a positive report.
Korah (16:1-18:32) Korach refuses to accept the leadership of Moses and Aaron. He and his assembly are killed by an earthquake.
Hukkat (19:1-22:1) The laws regarding the red heifer are enumerated. Moses strikes the rock and water gushes forth.
Balak (22:2-25:9) Balak, king of Moab, sends Bilaam to curse the Israelites. Instead, Bilaam gives his blessing to them.
Pinhas (25:10-30:1) The daughters of Zelophechad are given their father's inheritance. Moses chooses Joshua as his successor.
Mattot (30:2-32:42) Moses informs the tribal heads regarding the laws of vowing.
Mase (33:1-36:13) The detailed account of the various way stations on the Israelites' route to the Promised Land. Reference is made to the cities of refuge.

**Deuteronomy**
A recapitulation of the laws with some additions. Moses addresses the children of Israel and presents them with some warnings.

**Weekly Portions:**
D'varim (1:1-3:22) Moses explains and interprets the law to the people.
Va'et'hanan (3:23-7:11) The Ten Commandments are repeated, with slight variations. The cities of refuge are mentioned. The first section of the Shema is begun with, "You shall love the Lord your God."
Ekev (7:12-11:25) The Shema continues with the second paragraph, which deals with the theme of reward and punishment.

Re'eh (11:26-16:17) Moses continues his address, telling the people that obedience will bring them blessing, whereas disobedience will bring them curses.

Shoftim (16:18-21:9) Moses warns the people against idolatry. He also reminds the people of the importance of pursuing justice.

Ki Tetze (21:10-25:19) Moses reviews a variety of laws intended to strengthen family life and human decency in Israel. Those laws refer to lost property, the educational responsibility of parents to their children, and kindness to animals, among other things.

Ki Tavo (26:1-29:8) The laws of tithing and first fruits are discussed.

Nitzavim (29:9-30:20) Moses continues his farewell speech and God tells the people to choose life.

Vayelekh (31:1-30) Joshua is appointed successor to Moses. Moses completes the writing of the Torah.

Ha'azinu (32:1-52) Moses' farewell song—a beautiful poem in which he calls upon heaven and earth to witness God's dependability.

V'zot HaBrakha (33:1-34:12) Moses' final blessing poem and the report of Moses' death on Mount Nebo. Israel now turns to Joshua for leadership.
**Documentary Hypothesis**

Literary analysis shows that the Pentateuch was not written by one person. Multiple strands of tradition were woven together to produce the Torah.

The view that is persuasive to most of the critical scholars of the Pentateuch is called the Documentary Hypothesis, or the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, after the names of the 19th-century scholars who put it in its classic form.

Briefly stated, the Documentary Hypothesis sees the Torah as having been composed by a series of editors out of four major strands of literary traditions. These traditions are known as J, E, D, and P. We can diagram their relationships as follows.

![Diagram of the Documentary Hypothesis]

J (the Jahwist or Jerusalem source) uses the Tetragrammaton as God's name. This source's interests indicate it was active in the southern Kingdom of Judah in the time of the divided Kingdom. J is responsible for most of Genesis.

E (the Elohist or Ephraimitic source) uses Elohim ("God") for the divine name until Exodus 3-6, where the Tetragrammaton is revealed to Moses and to Israel. This source seems to have lived in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the divided Kingdom. E wrote the Aqedah story (the binding of Isaac) and other parts of Genesis, and much of Exodus and Numbers.

J and E were joined fairly early, apparently after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. It is often difficult to separate J and E stories that have merged.

D (the Deuteronomist) wrote almost all of Deuteronomy (and probably also Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Scholars often associate Deuteronomy with the book found by King Josiah in 622 BCE (see 2 Kings 22).
P (the Priestly source) provided the first chapter of Genesis; the book of Leviticus; and other sections with genealogical information, the priesthood, and worship. According to Wellhausen, P was the latest source and the priestly editors put the Torah in its final form sometime after 539 BCE. Recent scholars (for example, James Milgrom) are more likely to see P as containing pre-exilic material.

Contemporary critical scholars disagree with Wellhausen and with one another on details and on whether D or P was added last. But they agree that the general approach of the Documentary Hypothesis best explains the doublets, contradictions, differences in terminology and theology, and the geographical and historical interests that we find in various parts of the Torah.

Here are some differences between the four strands of tradition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>J (Jahwist)</th>
<th>E (Elohist)</th>
<th>P (Priestly)</th>
<th>D (Deuteronomist)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>stress on northern Israel</td>
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<td>God speaks in dreams</td>
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<td>Sinai is &quot;Horeb&quot;</td>
<td>has genealogies and lists</td>
<td>has long sermons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further information about the Documentary Hypothesis and the reasons that scholars accept it, consult the article "Torah (Pentateuch)" in the Anchor Bible Dictionary.

Sources

- Friedman, "Torah (Pentateuch)" in the Anchor Bible Dictionary.