

# Jewish Literacy #7 The Bible: Torah, Prophets & Writings

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## The Books of the Bible

- Bible as library rather than a single book
- Translations
  - Original written in Hebrew without vowels (these were added in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE).
  - *Septuagint*, translation of the Torah into Greek in the period 300-250 BCE. Remainder of Bible translated to Greek in the next 200 years.
  - Translation to Aramaic (the *Targum*) also in this period
  - Translation to Latin (the *Vulgate*) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE by St. Jerome.
  - King James version in 1604-11.
- Hebrew Bible = Protestant Old Testament = Catholic OT – Apocrypha (see list, last page)

## Tanach/Protestant OT/Catholic OT

Canons of the Old Testament

Hebrew Old Testament Jewish Bible (TaNaK)	Protestant Old Testament	Roman Catholic Old Testament	Greek Orthodox Old Testament
Torah	Pentateuch	Pentateuch	Pentateuch
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Nebim (Former Prophets)	Historical Books	Historical Books	Historical Books
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges
	Ruth		
Samuel	1 Samuel	1 Samuel	1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms)
	2 Samuel	2 Samuel	2 Samuel (2 Kingdoms)
Kings	1 Kings	1 Kings	1 Kings (3 Kingdoms)
	2 Kings	2 Kings	2 Kings (4 Kingdoms)
	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles
	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
		1 Esdras	1 Esdras
	Esra	Esra (2 Esdras)	Esra (2 Esdras)
	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah
		Tobit	Tobit
		Judith	Judith
	Esther	Esther	Esther
		1 Maccabees	1 Maccabees
		2 Maccabees	2 Maccabees
			3 Maccabees
			4 Maccabees

## Tanach/Protestant OT/Catholic OT

Canons of the Old Testament

Hebrew Old Testament Jewish Bible (TaNaK)	Protestant Old Testament	Roman Catholic Old Testament	Greek Orthodox Old Testament
	Wisdom	Wisdom	Wisdom
	Job	Job	Job
	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms
		Odes	Odes
	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs
	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
	Song of Solomon	Canticles	Song of Solomon
	Wisdom	Wisdom	Wisdom of Solomon
	Ecclesiasticus	Sirach	Sirach
Nebim (Latter Prophets)	Major Prophets	Major Prophets	Major Prophets
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah
	Lamentations	Lamentations	Lamentations
	Baruch	Baruch	Baruch/Letter of Jeremiah
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel
	Daniel	Daniel	Daniel
Book of the Twelve	Minor Prophets	Minor Prophets	Minor Prophets
Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea
Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah
Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi

## Tanach/Protestant OT/Catholic OT

Canons of the Old Testament

Hebrew Old Testament Jewish Bible (TaNaK)	Protestant Old Testament	Roman Catholic Old Testament	Greek Orthodox Old Testament
Kethubim (Writings)			
Psalms			
Job			
Proverbs			
Ruth			
Song of Songs			
Ecclesiastes			
Lamentations			
Esther			
Daniel			
Esra/Nehemiah			
Chronicles			

## We Can't Simply Translate the Bible & We Shouldn't Try!

- From Rabbi Johnathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p.207-8
  - “Every text needs interpretation.
  - Every interpretation needs wisdom.
  - Every wisdom needs careful negotiation between the timeless and time.
  - Fundamentalism reads texts as if God were as simple as we are. That is unlikely to be true”
- The Talmud says “One who translates a verse literally is a liar” [BT Kiddushin 49A]

## We Cannot Simply Translate the Bible

- The first two words of the bible present a grammatical problem: בראשית ברא אלהים “*B’raysheet bara Elohim*” – Often translated: “In the beginning, God created...”
- But if we wanted to say “in the beginning God created,” we would write בראשונה ברא אלהים - *B’reeshonah*...
- *B’raysheet* is half of an expression – Hebrew grammar requires the next word to be a noun – but the next word is a verb.
- Rashi teaches that God was teaching us that we can’t just translate – we must interpret.
- I think God put this lesson here (between word #1 & #2) so those of us with ADD wouldn’t miss it.

## The Torah

*Torah* תורה is derived from a root *yareh* ירה which in archery means to shoot (an arrow) to hit a mark.

*Chet* חטא, a common word for sin, means to miss the mark.

The word for teacher, *moreh/morah* מורה, derives from the same root.

*Torah* is understood to be meant broadly, as “instruction,” applying to all Jewish teaching.

*Torah* can mean the scroll, the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of the Bible, the entire Bible, all of Jewish sacred literature, or any teaching.

## Torah and Nomos

- When the Hebrew Bible was translated, by Jews, into Greek (a translation known as the Septuagint) the word *torah* was translated into the Greek word *nomos* (νόμος).
  - But *nomos* has the meaning of law in a narrow sense as in a code of laws.
  - Thus the Jews reading their Torah in Greek had the sense that all the laws were strictly binding and that we had to comply with them all.
  - This led the early Christians to see the law/Torah as an impossible standard or even a curse making another paths to God necessary.
    - "... those who rely on the keeping of the Law are under a curse..." (Galatians 3:10)
    - "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law..." (Galatians 3:13)
    - "... we conclude that a man is put right with God only through faith and not by doing what the Law command." (Romans 3:28)
- But Judaism never held that one must obey each and every commandment to be right with God.

## History of Torah

- Traditional: God dictated the Torah to Moses (1200 BCE) who wrote it down
- Scholarly understanding (called Biblical criticism) identifies at least 5 voices:
  - "J" who refers to God as YHVH from which (mistakenly) became *Jehovah* and is translated as "Lord". J is a storyteller whose characters are very human.
  - "E" who refers to God as *Elohim* translated as "God"
  - "P" the priestly author, concerned with ritual and religious observances, begettings, and genealogies and accounts, refers to God as *Elohim* and as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty).
  - "H" a subsource within P who wrote the Holiness Code of Lev. 19.
  - "D" the author of the Book of Deuteronomy
- The Bible opens with a P narrative and shifts to J in Gen. 2:4.
- In II Kings 22:10, the "discovery" of the book of Deuteronomy is reported.
- The Torah is canonized (the word *canon* meant originally a carpenter's rule, thus a standard of measurement) between 420 and 400 BCE.

## The Torah Scroll

- Written on the skin of a kosher animal using a quill of a kosher animal and special ink.
- Parchments are sewed with the dried sinews of a kosher animal.
- Takes a scribe about a year to write.
- Many scribes will immerse themselves in a *mikveh* each day they write. They recite special blessings before writing the name of God.
- The tradition of kissing the scroll is taken from the Song of Songs where Israel is a bride and God as represented by Torah her bridegroom.

## A Tour of the Bible

### Torah

- **Genesis:** Creation, Flood, Abraham, Joseph in Egypt
- **Exodus:** Moses, plagues, exodus, Sinai, laws and stories
- **Leviticus:** Ritual laws, sacrifice, dietary laws, the holiness code
- **Numbers:** Wandering and whining for 38 years
- **Deuteronomy:** Repetition of story, the Shema, death of Moses

## A Tour of the Bible

**Prophets (*Nevi'im*):** The prophets come to speak in the name of God (this is one reason Jews don't accept Jesus as prophet since he speaks in his own name) and remind the people of God's law. They don't reveal new truths but emphasize the old. In these writings the failings of the Jews are well documented (adding to their credibility).

- **Joshua:** Probably originally part of the Torah, it describes the conquest of Canaan
- **Judges:** More history, contains the folktale, Samson
- **Samuel 1&2** (originally one book, divided because the Greek translation took twice a much room as the Hebrew): Kingships of Saul and David
- **Kings 1&2** (also originally one book): Continues history until time of Babylonian captivity, split into two kingdoms (Judah and Israel), Elijah, destruction of the Temple and exile into Babylon
- **Isaiah:** First Isaiah (Ch. 1-39) pre-exile; Second Isaiah (40-55) during exile, and Third Isaiah (56-66) post exilic. Introduces concept of Messiah.
- **Jeremiah:** Condemnation of practices before exile combined with consolation that Israel will be rebuilt.
- **Ezekiel:** Vision of God's throne, vision of the dry bones,
- **12 Minor Prophets:** Minor only in the brevity of the books, not in their importance. Covers period from pre- to post-exile. Idea of social justice stressed, story of Jonah teaches God accepts repentance and gentiles are also God's children, Micah teaches that God requires "only to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)."

## A Tour of the Bible

**Holy Writings (*Ketuvim*) or *Hagiographa*:** Incorporated into the cannon in 90 CE

- **Psalms:** Lyric poetry, many attributed to David, many sung in the Temple by the Levites. 150 in all, longest book in the Bible. 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd..."
- **Proverbs:** Practical rules for living, attributed to Solomon. Not only directed to Israel.
- **Job:** Essay on theodicy (why is there evil and tragedy in the world, why do innocents suffer), rejects simplistic view of Torah. Bottom line, we can't completely understand God's ways.
- **Song of Songs:** Erotic love poetry understood as an allegory of God's love for Israel. Read at Passover. God not mentioned.
- **Ruth:** The prototypical conversion, the product of which will be King David and the Messiah. Read on *Shavuot*.
- **Lamentations:** Lament for Judea and Jerusalem after destruction of Temple. Hebrew name, *Echah*, means "how?" Read on *Tisha b'Av*
- **Ecclesiastes:** A search for life's meaning, attributed to King Solomon, called *Kohelet* in Hebrew. "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity (1:2). Bottom lines: enjoy life, work for something worthy, practice moderation, fear God and keep His commandments. Read on *Sukkot*.

## A Tour of the Bible

**Holy Writings (*Ketuvim*) or *Hagiographa*:** Incorporated into the cannon in 90 CE

- **Esther:** The Purim story told without mentioning the name of God. Read at *Purim*. Written on a scroll or *megillah* (origin of the expression "the whole *megillah*." – there are five *megillot* in the Bible.)
- **Daniel:** Story of exile, speaks of apocalyptic times (distant future, end of days) including immortality of the soul and resurrection of the dead. Only book in which angels have specific names (Michael and Gabriel) of angels. About a third of this book is written in Aramaic.
- **Ezra & Nehemiah:** Tells the story of the return to Jerusalem in 538 BCE and the adoption of religious reforms such as public reading of the Torah and prohibitions against intermarriage.
- **Chronicles 1&2:** A history written with religious and moral focus.

Note that Chanukah is not in the Bible!

## Some Interesting Readings in the Bible

- The story of David and Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:1 - 12:24)
- Solomon's wisdom (I Kings 3:5 - 28)
- Messianic prophesy (Isaiah 2:1-5)
- Virgin birth? -- Isaiah 7:14 (*ha-alma* as used in the text means "the young woman," *bethulah* is the Hebrew word for "virgin")
- A 'light unto the nations" (Isaiah 49:6)
- Justice and righteousness rather than sacrifices (Amos 5:21-27)
- 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Note the shift from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> person in verse 4 while in the valley of the shadow of death.
- Psalm 90:12 – "So teach us to number our days that we may get us a heart of wisdom."
- Overview of the Book of Job. Job's family destroyed, his response 1:20. Job's friends sit *shivah* with him (2:13). Job refuses to abandon his faith (13:15). He demands a trial with God as Judge, Witness and Jury (13:20-23). God finally responds (38 - 41). Job concedes (42:1-6). God wants to punish Job's friends but Job intervenes (42:7-9).

## Some Interesting Readings in the Bible

- On the 5 scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther):
  - We read the 5 books of Moses and the 5 scrolls throughout the year.
  - Of the story scrolls, the heroes are heroines.
  - These are the 10 books which the *Midrash Rabbah* addresses.
- Song of Songs: 1:1-4; 1:12-2:10; 4:1-7; 5:2-8. Arthur Waskow suggests that this may be the new model for sacred sexuality since we have accomplished our Genesis task of being fruitful and multiplying and subduing the earth.
- Ruth is a very short, very readable book. Most famous portion is 1:16-17
- Ecclesiastes – for me, the most difficult book in the bible. Bottom line is 9:7-10.

### Readings for Next Time

- Lotker: Chapter 3 (pp. 14-29)
- Handbook: 537-540

## Surprising Passages from the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning of \_\_\_\_\_, God created... **(note: grammatical error, impossible to literally translate).**

**(Did God make man and woman simultaneously or not?)** 1:27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them... 2:7 Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul... 2:22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man

**(Just before the flood story)** 6:1 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 6:2 that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives, whomsoever they chose. 6:3 And the Lord said: 'My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for that he also is flesh; therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years.' 6:4 The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

**(Can God see the future?)** 6:5 And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6:6 And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.

## Surprising Passages from the Hebrew Bible

**(Does God play fair with Pharaoh?)** Exodus 7:2 Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land. 7:3 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 7:4 But Pharaoh will not hearken unto you, and I will lay My hand upon Egypt, and bring forth My hosts, My people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt, by great judgments. 7:5 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth My hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

**(More Translation Fun)** Exodus 20:13 (Jewish Pub. Society Translation) Thou shalt not murder. (King James Translation) Thou shalt not kill. (Both are correct! The English word kill meant, in King James time, murder. Simple killing was called "slaying" then.)

**(Abortion not murder – but what's about "eye for an eye?")** Exodus 21:22 And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow, he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. 21:23 But if any harm follow, then thou shalt give life for life, 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 21:25 burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Lev. 24:19 And if a man maim his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him: 24:20 breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he hath maimed a man, so shall it be rendered unto him.

Deut. 19:21 And thine eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

## Surprising Passages from the Hebrew Bible

**(Do Jews sacrifice children?)** Judges 11:29 Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. 11:30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said: 'If Thou wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, 11:31 then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.' 11:32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord delivered them into his hand. 11:33 And he smote them from Aroer until thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto Abel-cheramim, with a very great slaughter. So the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. 11:34 And Jephthah came to Mizpah unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. 11:35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said: 'Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art become my troubler; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.' 11:36 And she said unto him: 'My father, thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord; do unto me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.' 11:37 And she said unto her father: 'Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may depart and go down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.' 11:38 And he said: 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months; and she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 11:39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed; and she had not known man. And it was a custom in Israel, 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

## Surprising Passages from the Hebrew Bible

**(Translation Fun)** Isaiah 7:14 (JPS correct version)

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign:  
behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a  
son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

(King James, incorrect, mistranslation-original error in  
the Greek) 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give  
you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a  
son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

**(How many Gods?)** Psalm 82:1 God stands in the  
divine assembly; among the divine beings He  
pronounces judgement.