

Torah, Jewish Teachings on

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This teaching from the Jewish point of view is presented by Grace Notes to provide context and comparison of Jewish ideas with Christian, in particular in relation to expositional teaching of the book of Acts and the life and epistles of Paul the Apostle. [Warren Doud]

The Torah

The word “Torah” is a tricky one, because it can mean different things in different contexts. In its most limited sense, “Torah” refers to the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. But the word “torah” can also be used to refer to the entire Jewish bible (the body of scripture known to non-Jews as the Old Testament and to Jews as the Tanakh or Written Torah), or in its broadest sense, to the whole body of Jewish law and teachings.

Written Torah (Tanakh ¹)

¹Written Torah is often referred to as the **Tanakh**, which is an acrostic of Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

To Jews, there is no “Old Testament.” The books that Christians call the New Testament are not part of Jewish scripture. The so-called Old Testament is known to us as Written Torah or the Tanakh. This is a list of the books of Written Torah, in the order in which they appear in Jewish translations, with the Hebrew name of the book, a translation of the Hebrew name (where it is not the same as the English name), and English names of the books (where it is not the same as the Hebrew name). The Hebrew names of the first five books are derived from the first few words of the book. The text of each book is more or less the same in Jewish translations as what you see in Christian bibles, although there are some occasional, slight differences in the numbering of verses and there are a few significant differences in the translations.

TORAH (The Law)

Bereishith (In the beginning...) (Genesis)
 Shemoth (The names...) (Exodus)
 Vayiqra (And He called...) (Leviticus)
 Bamidbar (In the wilderness...) (Numbers)
 Devarim (The words...) (Deuteronomy)

NEVI'IM (The Prophets)

Yehoshua (Joshua)
 Shoftim (Judges)
 Shmuel (I & II Samuel)
 Melakhim (I & II Kings)
 Yeshayah (Isaiah)
 Yirmyah (Jeremiah)
 Yechezqel (Ezekiel)

The Twelve (treated as one book)

Hoshea (Hosea)
 Yoel (Joel)
 Amos
 Ovadyah (Obadiah)
 Yonah (Jonah)
 Mikhah (Micah)
 Nachum
 Chavaquq (Habbakkuk)
 Tzefanyah (Zephaniah)
 Chaggai
 Zekharyah (Zechariah)
 Malakhi

KETHUVIM (The Writings)

Tehillim (Psalms)
 Mishlei (Proverbs)
 Iyov (Job)
 Shir Ha-Shirim (Song of Songs)
 Ruth
 Eikhah (Lamentations)
 Qoheleth (the author's name) (Ecclesiastes)
 Esther
 Daniel
 Ezra & Nechemyah (Nehemiah) (treated as one book)
 Divrei Ha-Yamim (The words of the days) (Chronicles)

Torah Scrolls

The scriptures used in services are written on parchment scrolls. They are always hand-written, in attractive Hebrew calligraphy with “crowns” (crow-foot-like marks coming up from the upper points) on many of the letters.

You are not supposed to touch the parchment on these scrolls; some say because they are too holy; some say because the parchment, made from animal skins, is a source of ritual defilement; others say because your fingers' sweat has acids that will damage the parchment over time. Instead, you follow the text with a pointer, called a Yad. “Yad” means “hand” in Hebrew, and the pointer usually is in the shape of a hand with a pointing index finger (I always find this incredibly amusing).

The scrolls are kept covered with fabric, and often ornamented with silver crowns on the handles of the scrolls and a silver breastplate on the front. The scrolls are kept in a cabinet in the synagogue called an “ark,” as in Ark of the Covenant, not as in Noah's Ark. The words are different and unrelated in Hebrew. The former is an acrostic of “aron kodesh,” meaning “holy cabinet,” while the latter is an English translation of the Hebrew word “teyvat” meaning “ship”.

The Torah scrolls that we read from in synagogue are unpointed text, with no vowels or musical notes, so the ability to read a passage from a scroll is a

valuable skill, and usually requires substantial advance preparation (reviewing the passage in a text with points). See Hebrew Alphabet for more on pointed and unpointed texts.

Chumash

Jewish scriptures are sometimes bound in a form that corresponds to the division into weekly readings (called parshiyot in Hebrew). Scriptures

bound in this way are generally referred to as a **chumash**. The word “chumash” comes from the Hebrew word meaning five, and refers to the five books of the Torah. Sometimes, a chumash is simply refers to a collection of the five books of the Torah. But often, a chumash contains the entire first five books, divided up by the weekly parshiyot, with the haftarah portion inserted after each week’s parshah.

From the website **Judaism 101**²

²<http://www.jewfaq.org> . The site is created, written and maintained by Tracey Rich. Tracey says “I do not claim to be a rabbi or an expert on Judaism; I’m just a traditional, observant Jew who has put in a lot of research. I work as the Educational Director for LegalEdge Software, a company that develops, markets and supports case management software for lawyers. I am also the co-author of several legal reference texts, including Pennsylvania Damages: Personal Injury Verdicts and Settlements. I am a member of Congregation Or Shalom, a Conservative synagogue in Chester County, PA.