

The Messiah משיח

2. The Books of Judaism



Figure 1 The Book of Isaiah, from the Dead Sea Scrolls

To better understand Judaism's response to the Yeshua, its important to understand the source of inspiration. All three branches of Christianity, *Catholic*, *Protestant* and *Orthodox*, look to the *Bible* as their source of authority, both *Old* and *New Testaments*.

Where does Judaism look for its authority, the source of revelation? The written words of Jewish authority are complex and involve both a *Written Law* and an *Oral Law*, accompanied by traditions and rabbinical rulings.

There are several books in Judaism not all with an equal weight as far as authority is concerned. Judaism's view of the Messiah's identity filters through the authoritative books of Judaism. With some sects putting greater weight on some books then others. For example, Orthodox Jews

put more weight on the *Talmud* then Reform Jews. Hasidic Orthodox followers might emphasize portions of the *Zohar*.

Tradition plays an important role in Judaism, a Jew investigating the Messiah, might want to know what a 2nd or 10th century Rabbi thought about a particular verse. Through these filters, scripture, tradition and commentary, views of the Messiah identity, are defined in Judaism.

By far, the most important Jewish text is the *Torah*, the books of Moses, also known as the *Pentateuch*. The Torah is the first five books of the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible.

The Tanakh

The word *Tanakh* is an acronym, combining the words *Torah* (Books of Moses), *Nebiim* (The Prophets) and *Ketubim* (The Writings). The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament are essentially the same book. The main difference is the order the books are arranged. The Hebrew Bible is ordered by category, while the Christian Old Testament has mainly a chronological order modeled after the *Septuagint*¹

Prophets revealed the Tanakh over a 1000-year period. From the books of Moses revealed about 1400 B.C. to the book of Malachi revealed about 425 B.C.

The Hebrew Bible has been preserved and transmitted by Jewish scribes, in Babylon and Palestine; these scribes in Palestine were known as the *Masorites*. The manuscript source for the *King James Bible* is the *Masoretic Text*, as copied from the *St. Petersburg Manuscript* dated about 916 A.D.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, a portion of every book of the Tanakh was found, except for the book of Ester, including two complete versions of the book of Isaiah. When compared to the oldest existing Masoretic manuscripts, the much older Dead Sea scrolls, dated from 100-200 B.C., demonstrated a virtually flawless *manuscript transmission* over the eleven hundred-years, which separated the two copies.

¹ The Septuagint is the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. The early church used the Septuagint as its source for the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. This order was continued in future versions and translations of the Old Testament.

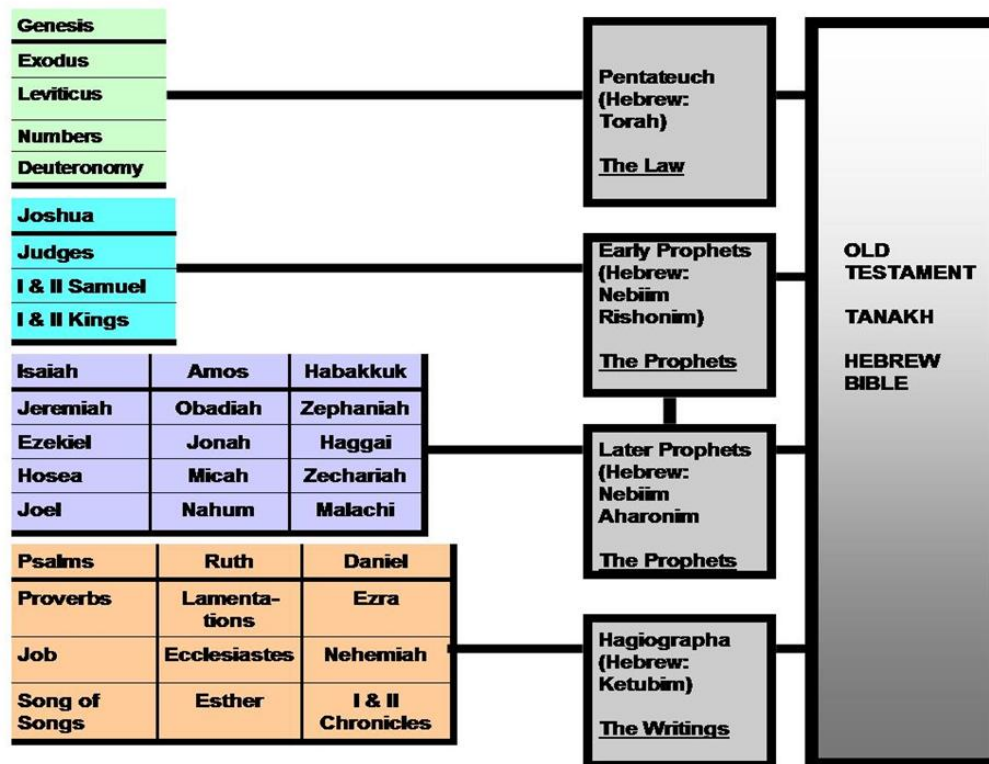


Figure 2 The books of the Hebrew Bible

The Mishna (“Repeated Study”)

Before the fall of the Temple, about A.D. 70, *Johanan ben Zakkai*, a leader of one of the major *Pharisaical* schools was given permission by the Romans to set up an academy in the city of *Jamnia* on the Judean coast, before the fall of Jerusalem. His academy would become a driving force shaping *Rabbinic Judaism*. This resulted in the survival of Jewish traditions and customs maintained by the Pharisees, with the establishment of the *Mishna* and *Talmud*.

Not long after the fall of the Temple, 62-years later, in A.D. 132 the *Emperor Hadrian* set up a Temple to Jupiter on the Temple mount, and attempted to interfere with Jewish tradition of circumcision. This caused a Jewish revolt, and the rising of Bar Kochba who was proclaimed messiah. In the end, 580,000 Jews were killed by the Romans, and Hadrian attempted to erase the memory of the Jews by renaming the city of Jerusalem, *Capitolina Aelia* and the area of Judea, *Palestine*. He prevented Jews from entering the new city. Jewish captives were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, some sought refuge in the Persian Kingdom, in the city of Babylon.

<p>The Mishna (Repeated Study) <i>6 Orders and 63 Tractates</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Zeraim (Seeds) 11 Tractates Moed (Festivals) 12 Tractates Nashim (Women) 7 Tractates Nezikim (Damages) 10 Tractates Kodashim (Holy Things) 11 Tractates Tohorot (Purifications) 12 Tractates



With the fall of the Temple and Jerusalem, the major emphasis of Judaism shifted to teaching and prayer. This period became known as the *tannaim*—“teachers”, the fragmentary Oral Law passed down from generation to generation was assembled in a collection known as the *Mishna*. The codification was given final form early in the 3rd century AD by *Judah ha-Nasi* (135-220 A.D).

Judah ha-Nasi (The Prince) assembled the Mishna into six major sections, or orders (*sedarim*), that contain 63 tractates (*massekhtot*) in all, each of which is further divided into chapters. The Mishna supplements laws found in the Pentateuch, presenting legal traditions kept as early as the time of Ezra (450

BC).

*Six Orders of the Mishna*²

1. *Zera'im* (“Seeds”), the first order of the Mishna, has 11 tractates. It begins by discussing daily prayer and then devotes 10 tractates to religious laws involving agriculture. *Zera'im* discusses the prescription that fields must periodically lie fallow, the prohibition on plant hybridization, and regulations governing what portion of a harvest is to be given to priests, to Levites (a priestly clan), and to the poor.

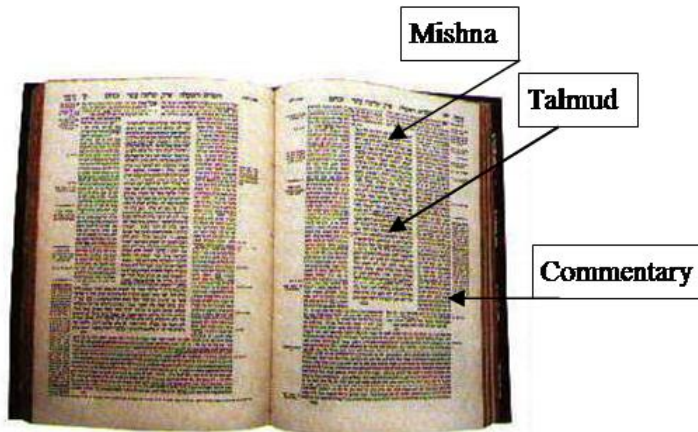
2. *The second order, Mo'ed* (“Festival”), consists of 12 tractates that deal with ceremonies, rituals, observances, and prohibitions related to the Sabbath, to religious festivals, to fast days, and to such other days as are marked by regular religious observance—e.g., periodic contributions to the Temple of Jerusalem.

3. *Nashim* (“Women”), the third order of the Mishna, discusses married life in seven tractates. It thus explains religious laws concerning betrothals, marriage contracts, divorce, bills of divorce, and certain ascetic vows that affect married life.

4. *Neziqin* (“Damages”), has 10 tractates covering civil and criminal law as related to damages, theft, labour relations, usury, real estate, partnerships, tenant relations, inheritance, court composition, jurisdiction and testimony, erroneous decisions of the Sanhedrin (high court), and physical punishments, including death. Idolatry, which is punishable by death, is also discussed. The tractate *Avot* (“Fathers”) seems to have been included in the fourth order to teach a moral way of life that would preclude serious transgressions of the law and thereby diminish the necessity of punishment. It became one of the most popular pieces of Talmudic literature; in English translations it is usually called *The Ethics of the Fathers*.

5. *Qodashim* (“Holy Things”), the fifth order, provides a detailed description of the Temple of Jerusalem complex and discusses laws regulating Temple sacrifices, other offerings, and donations. It has 11 tractates.

6. *The last of the Mishna orders is Tohorot* (“Purifications”), divided into 12 tractates. It considers laws regarding the ritual purity of vessels, dwellings, foods, and persons and deals with various rituals of purification. The text also provides considerable information on ritual objects.



The Talmud

The Mishna resulted in the creation of the *Talmud*, which is a commentary on the *Mishna*. The words of scholars (*amoraim*) who studied the Mishna, made comments explaining the *Oral Law*, this became known as the *Gemara* or *Talmud*. Two separate collections developed, one in Babylon the other in Palestine, hence their names, *Babylonian Talmud* and the *Palestinian Talmud*. Today, in a broad sense the collection of the Mishna and

² Encyclopaedia Britannica 2004 Edition, Mishna

the Talmud is known as the *Talmud*. In a technical sense the Talmud is a separate work from the Mishna, with two distinct collections, the Babylonian Talmud and the *Palestinian Talmud* (*Talmud Yerushalmi* or *Jerusalem Talmud*).

The Palestine Talmud

From the time of the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, Jews were able to establish an academy in the north of Israel in *Jamniah* and Tiberius regions. This area would become a center of leaning instruction for the *Diaspora*³. The *amoraim* (Scholars who studied Mishna) would write down their interpretations and comments on the *Oral Law*. As Christianity took hold in the Roman Empire, the region of Palestine became unstable, and at times unsafe for the remaining Jews. For this reason, the *Palestinian Talmud* was much shorter and hastily collected by its close.

The Palestinian Talmud is about 1/3 the length of the Babylonian Talmud. The material was supposedly be edited by *Johanan ben Nappaha* (A.D. 270), but material from later dates is included, so the closing date has been set at A.D. 425, when the Tiberian school ended.

The Babylonian Talmud



To the east of Palestine was the Jewish community of Babylonia. Their history could be traced back to Daniel's time in 605 B.C., when Jews were taken captive by the Babylonians. The Jews were allowed to return to Palestine, after the Persian, *Cyrus the Great* defeated Babylonia in 539 B.C. Many Jews, remained in Babylonia and a

thriving community continued even during Roman times. When Jerusalem fell, many Jews fled back to the land of Babylonia, establishing a center of Rabbinical learning for the centuries to come.

Persecution of Jews in Babylonia, under the Sassanids (Persians) was more tolerable than in Palestine. The Sassanids were Zoroastrians and looked favorable upon the Jews under their dominion. The Babylonian Talmud was completed during the time of *Rabina bar Huna* (died A.D. 499), and the editing was finished towards the end of the 5th century lasting 75-years.



The Targums (Translation)

(Aramaic: "Translation," or "Interpretation"), any of several translations of the Hebrew Bible or portions of it into the Aramaic language. The word originally indicated a translation of the Old Testament in any language but later came to refer specifically to an Aramaic

Figure 3 Aramaic Targum, a paraphrase translation

Hebrew square book script. Iraq, 1st half of 11th c.

after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

translation. This can be traced to the time of Nehemiah (444 B.C.)

In Nehemiah 8, we see a great gathering of Jews, listening to Ezra read the Law, he then gives an explanation of what he reads.

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. Nehemiah 8:8

Why would Ezra have to explain what he just read? Many of the returning exiles, and younger generation might not have been able to understand the reading. While in exile, Aramaic became the language of use for many Jews in Babylon, and Hebrew would not be easy for them to understand. Aramaic was the language of the Babylonians, and the area of Mesopotamia.

We see the influence of Aramaic, in the Hebrew lettering system, which uses the *Aramaic Square Script*, rather than the *Hebrew-Paleo Script* which would have been in use before the Babylonian exile. The book of Daniel and Ezra both contain Aramaic portions, Daniel chapters 2:4b to 7:28, is written in Aramaic. All the books of the Hebrew Bible have corresponding Targums (Aramaic translations) except Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah.

Before the time of the Roman period, Aramaic had become the common language of the Jewish community. It had become customary, in each Sabbath synagogue service, when reading a portion of the law, to read one verse of the Hebrew, and then have someone translate into Aramaic with a certain amount of explanation of the passage's meaning.

It also became customary in the synagogue service to read a verse from the Torah and then to have an explanation given orally in Aramaic. For many centuries, it was not considered proper to read in synagogue service anything except the actual Scripture, translations were given extemporaneously, from memory, in the years to follow, Aramaic translations became fixed. Aramaic translations were written down to be used in the home for study. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., many synagogues used the Aramaic translation in the service, which terrified some rabbis.

In the course of time, Jews began to speak other languages and the Targums were no longer used in synagogues. The Targums became a source of interpretation. The Hebrew Bible has a three-part division, Torah, Prophets and Writings. Each of these divisions had accompanying Targums.

Targums of the Pentateuch

The best known Pentateuch Targum was considered the *Targum of Onkelos*, being one of the earliest written down, it was carried to Babylon from Palestine. *Onkelos*, expresses Messianic interpretations for Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17. A large number of Onkelos copies have been preserved.

Other Targums of the Pentateuch are longer such as the *Pseudo-Jonathan Targum*, called pseudo because it was thought to be a translation of *Jonathan Ben Uzziel* a pupil of the great *Rabbi Hillel*.

Targums of the Prophets

The best known Targum of the prophets is the *Targum of Jonathan (Jonathan Ben Uzziel)*, which was carried into Babylon after the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70.

In the translation of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the servant of the Lord is designated as the Messiah, except for one verse, all verses referring to his suffering are either dropped out or applied to the nation of Israel or its enemies rather than the Servant.

Targums of the Hagiographa (Writings)

The latest preserved Targums are those of the *Hagiographa*, earlier ones have seemed to disappear. In the Talmud there is reference to the Targum of Job used by rabbis of the 1st century, and a portion has been found at the Dead Sea Scroll site.

Uses of Targums

Targums allow us to see rabbinic interpretations in the centuries following the fall of Jerusalem. Targums are less literal and more paraphrased, helping the reader understand the meaning behind the translation, from a rabbinical perspective.

Although, some of the targums have gone through editing, for example the *Palestinian Targum* contains a specific reference to Constantinople, which was not founded until A.D. 325, and gives Ishmael a wife and a daughter with the same name as Mohammed's wife and daughter, in the 7th century.

The Midrash (To Search)

The Hebrew word "Midrash" occurs only two times in the Hebrew Bible. First in 2 Chronicles 13:22, regarding the prophet Iddo, second in 2 Chronicles 24:27. The RSV translates the first as story and the second as commentary.

Now concerning his sons, and the many oracles about him, and the repairing of the house of God, indeed they are written in the annals (Midrash) of the book of the kings. Then Amaziah his son reigned in his place. 2 Chronicles 24:27

Rabbinic Midrash is material, which sought to explain and shed light on material found in the Bible. The earliest type of explanation of biblical literature can be traced back to Ezra, who "had set his heart to study and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). When the Jews returned from Babylon, the Torah was the sole authority, but the people needed to understand and apply the meanings to the new situations following the fall of Babylon. The Midrash and Targums helped them to apply the Torah to their lives. The Pharisees used (Midrash) to explain the Oral Law, which the Sadducees denied.

There are two types of *Midrashim* (plural for Midrash) , *Halakhic* (Law) and *Haggidic* (Commentary). *Halakhic Midrash* explains the Law making application to the principles of biblical law. The second, Haggidic, sought to interpret the Bible in terms of ethics and devotion. Midrashim were transmitted orally for generations before being written down. The earliest collection of Halakhic Midrash written down was in the 2nd century, and the earliest of Haggidic was written down in the 3rd century

The most important Halakhic Midrashim are *Mechilata* (Aram. "Treatise") to Exodus, the *Sifra* (book) to *Leviticus*, and the *Sifra to Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*. The most important *Haggidic Midrashim* are *Midrash Rabbah* to the whole Pentateuch and the five scrolls (S. of Sol, Ruth, Lamentations, Eccl, Esth), *Tanhuma* (homilies to the whole Pentateuch) and the *Pesikta de-Rav Kanana* (homilies concerning the holy days and other special occasions). These writings became a source of preaching for the rabbis, rivaling the Mishnah.



The Zohar (Splendor)

This book was added in the 13th century to the collection of important Jewish works, this book has been a major influence on the Jewish understanding of Messiah. In fact, the Zohar had a major role in at least two false Messiah's in Judaism, *Shabbetai Zvei* (1626-1676) and *Jacob Frank* (1726-1791). Both appealed to the *Zohar*, to justify their actions. Today, the Hasidic branch of Orthodox Judaism and *Kabbala* both look to this book for instruction and guidance.

The word Zohar means, “splendor”, taken from Daniel 12:3, regarding the appearance of the resurrected ones. Mystical Judaism dates back to the first century; however, this book gave new life to mystical Judaism. Many *Kabbalists*, accord the *Zohar* with equal authority of the *Torah* and *Talmud*.

The Zohar makes appeal to the inner meaning of the biblical texts, referring to the literal understanding as outward clothing, hiding the deeper inner meaning. The homilies of the Zohar center around *Simeon ben Yohai* (2nd century AD)⁴ and his disciples. However, research has shown *Moses de León* (1250–1305) of Spain as the most likely author, not ruling out the incorporation of earlier material.

The Zohar consists of several units, the largest of which—usually called the Zohar proper—deals with the “inner” (mystical, symbolic) meaning of biblical texts, especially those taken from the first five books of the Bible (Torah), from the Book of Ruth, and from the Song of Solomon. The lengthy homilies of the Zohar are mixed with short discourses and parables, all centered on *Simeon ben Yoḥai* (2nd century AD) and his disciples. Though the text names Simeon as the author, modern scholars are convinced that the major portion of the Zohar should be credited to *Moses de León* (1250–1305) of Spain. They do not rule out the possibility, however, that earlier mystic materials were also incorporated into the present text.

After Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, Jews turned to the Zohar for hope, looking for the coming of the Messiah and Jewish eschatology. Leading the way for several false messiahs to be accepted within Judaism.

⁴ Galilean tanna (i.e., one of a select group of Palestinian rabbinic teachers), one of the most eminent disciples of the martyred Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph and, traditionally, author of the Zohar (see *Sefer ha-zohar*), the most important work of Jewish mysticism. Little is known of Simeon's life, and what is recorded of it in the Talmud is enmeshed with legend. Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph proclaimed Bar Kochba as the Messiah in A.D. 132

Books of Judaism

