

From: *JEWISH PEOPLE, JEWISH THOUGHT*

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Appendix: A Brief Synopsis of the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible

Part One: Torah (Instruction)

The Torah is the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses

Genesis. The creation of the universe and the origins of humanity (the "Primeval History"): stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the flood, the tower of Babel, genealogies and other traditions concerning the early history of humankind. Tales of the patriarchal ancestors of the people of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). How Jacob's son Joseph is brought to Egypt, rises to a high position, is reconciled with the other sons of Jacob, and arranges for his family to settle there.

Exodus. The birth and youth of Moses, who is consecrated as God's messenger to bring the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. After a prolonged confrontation with Pharaoh, the Israelites leave under Moses and his brother Aaron. Encamped at Mount Sinai, they receive divine instructions, which they promise to obey. Moses ascends the mountain to be given further ordinances.

Leviticus. Still at Mount Sinai, the Israelites receive additional commandments, many of which deal with priestly rituals and sacrificial offerings. Aaron and his children are consecrated as Israel's priesthood.

Numbers. The Israelites leave Mount Sinai for a period of wandering in the wilderness south of Canaan. Stories about this period are interspersed with the giving of other social and religious regulations.

Deuteronomy. At the end of forty years of wandering, Moses speaks to the Israelites on the plain of Moab across the Jordan River from Canaan, reiterating the divine instruction, reminding the people of its promise to be faithful, and supplementing previous ordinances with other laws and regulations. The Torah concludes with the death of Moses.

Part Two: Nevi'im (Prophets)

The *Nevi'im* are divided into Former Prophets, which are historical narratives, and Latter Prophets, which are oracles of the classical or literary prophets from the mid-eighth century BCE to the fifth century BCE.

FORMER PROPHETS:

Joshua. The invasion of Canaan under Joshua, Moses' successor, leading to the division of the promised land between the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judges. Stories of the period between the conquest and the rise of the monarchy, when the intertribal leadership consisted of heroic figures who led the people to victory over its enemies.

1 *Samuel.* How the prophet-seer Samuel reluctantly accedes to the people's wish for a king to repulse the Philistines. Stories about Saul, the first king of Israel, and his lieutenant and rival David.

2 *Samuel.* Events in the reign of David, who succeeds to the throne after Saul's death—especially David's adultery with Bathsheba, the revolt of his son Absalom, and David's renewed control of his kingdom and of the people of Israel.

1 *Kings.* The last years of David's reign and that of his son Solomon, who builds the Temple in Jerusalem. After Solomon's death, the ten northern tribes secede from the rule of Jerusalem. Information and stories about the southern kingdom (Judah), which remains loyal to the house of David, and about the northern kingdom (Israel), which is ruled by a series of dynasties. The conflict between king Ahab of Israel and the prophet Elijah in the mid-ninth century BCE over the sole worship of the God of Israel.

2 *Kings.* Further stories about Elijah, the prophet Elisha, and the overthrow of the house of Ahab. Information about the last kings of Israel down to the Assyrian conquest of 722 BCE and the subsequent history of Judah down to the Babylonian conquest of 587 BCE. (Later in this appendix we will describe the historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 Chronicles, and 2 Chronicles.)

LATTER PROPHETS:

Isaiah. Oracles and a few narratives of the prophet Isaiah (late eighth century BCE). The second half of this book, chapters 40–66, contains oracles of a prophet (known as Second or Deutero-Isaiah) who lived just before the end of the Babylonian exile. Isaiah also probably contains the utterances of other prophets who lived after the return to Zion in 534 BCE.

Jeremiah. Oracles, poems, and a few narratives of the prophet Jeremiah (last part of seventh century BCE and first part of sixth century CE).

Jeremiah lived during the last period of independent Judah, down to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

Ezekiel. Oracles and a few narratives of the prophet Ezekiel (first half of sixth century BCE). Ezekiel lived in exile in Babylonia where his prophecies were delivered.

The Book of the Twelve—a collection of shorter prophetic books from different periods.

1. Hosea (a northern prophet of the second half of the eighth century BCE, a younger contemporary of Amos).
2. Joel (oracles, perhaps postexilic, concerning a day of divine retribution).
3. Amos (the first of the classical prophets, mid-eighth century BCE).
4. Obadiah (probably dating soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE).
5. Jonah (unlike the other prophetic books, a tale about a prophetic figure, not a collection of oracles).
6. Micah (oracles of a Judean prophet of the late eighth century, a younger contemporary of Isaiah).
7. Nahum (an ode on the fall of the Assyrian capital at the end of the seventh century).
8. Habakkuk (probably from the last part of the seventh century).
9. Zephaniah (probably from the last part of the seventh century).
10. Haggai (narratives and oracles of a prophet who lived after the return from Babylonian exile, toward the end of sixth century BCE).
11. Zechariah (the first part contains allegorical visions of a prophet contemporary with Haggai; the last six chapters are probably from later in the postexilic period).
12. Malachi (usually considered the last prophet in the classical tradition, from the fifth century BCE).

Part Three: Ketuvim (Writings)

Works of various kinds that contain material from the earliest to the latest phases of biblical history.

Psalms. 150 poetical prayers and hymns.

Proverbs. Several collections of sayings and aphorisms, together with odes in praise of wisdom and related matters.

Job. A drama, mostly in poetry, on divine justice and human piety.

The five Megillot (scrolls)—short works of poetry or prose.

1. Song of Songs. A collection of love poetry.
2. Ruth. The story of a woman's faithfulness to the people and God of her adopted family, set during the period of the judges.
3. Lamentations. Dirges on the destruction of Jerusalem.

4. Ecclesiastes (*Kobeletb*). Observations and reflections on the ironies and perplexities of life.

5. Esther. The story of an attempted persecution of the Jews of Persia and the events that led to their salvation, set in the capital of the Persian empire.

Daniel. Tales about the sage Daniel and his friends in the royal court of Babylon during the sixth century BCE. Chapters 7–12 are apocalyptic visions dating from the second century BCE on the meaning and climax of history.

Ezra. Accounts of the return of the Babylonian exiles at the end of the sixth century BCE and of the reforms promulgated by the priest and scribe Ezra in Jerusalem in the fifth century BCE.

Nehemiah. Further narratives of the mid-fifth century BCE concerning the actions of Nehemiah, governor of Judah under the Persians, ending with the religious reconsecration of the people under the direction of Ezra.

1 Chronicles. A summary of Israelite history through the reign of David, with emphasis on genealogy, on the Levites, and on David's successful undertakings.

2 Chronicles. A continuation of 1 Chronicles; mainly the kings of Judah up to the Babylonian exile, based on the book of Kings but containing additional historical information not found there.