



The Torah

Detail from *Day of Atonement* (1878) by Maurycy Gottlieb.



The Torah/תורה

1. Meaning
2. Authorship
3. Date(s)
4. Significance in Judaism

1. In the Septuagint, Torah is translated as *nomos* or law but it is better translated as teaching or instruction.

2. The Torah is also known as the Pentateuch (from *pentateuchoi*, “five cases”, referring to the cases or boxes in which the five scrolls of the Torah were kept. Also known as the “books of Moses.” Trad. Moses was regarded as the author. Mark 12.26: And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?

In fact, the idea of authorship as we know it did not exist in the ancient world. It wasn’t until the Jewish people came into contact with the Hellenistic world that they began to attribute the Torah to Moses. The first ref. to Moses as the author of the Torah is in the Babylonian Talmud (200-500 CE). 12th-13th c. Jewish theologian Maimonides declared in the 8th of his 13 principles that Moses was the author of the Torah.

3. The Torah is composed of materials assembled over a long period of time, but it is likely that the Torah as we know it was completed in the Persian period, ie, ca. 450-350 BCE. (Persian period begins in 538 BCE when the Persian ruler Cyrus allowed the Judean exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem.)

4. "The unanimity of traditions and the initial placement of these five book reflect their significant place within religious life. In Judaism, the Torah is accorded the highest level of sanctity, above that of the other books of the Bible." (Jewish Study Bible, p. 1) The Torah can mean just the first 5 books of the Bible, the entire Tanakh, or all of the Tanakh, plus its interpretation (the oral Torah), ie, the Talmud. It is all regarded as having been given to Moses on Sinai.



Documentary hypothesis

- Jahwist (J)
- Elohist (E)
- Priestly writer (P)
- Deuteronomist (D)

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918)

Starting in the 18th c. Biblical scholars began to question the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. (Spinoza was excommunicated in the 17th c for doubting it.) Wellhausen was not the first scholar to speculate about the integrity of the Torah, but he formulated the “documentary hypothesis” that prevailed for decades. Any reader of Genesis will see that there are 2 completely different accounts of creation. One is in 1.1 to 2.3; the other is in 2.4 to 2.25. The first is attributed to the Priestly writer, and the other to the Elohist. The Elohist uses the Heb word *Elohim* to refer to God. The Jahwist, obviously, uses the divine name YHWH revealed to Moses. And the Deuteronomist focuses on the story of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants that God would give them land and offspring. The Deuteronomist is responsible for most of the material from Deuteronomy to the end of Ruth. However, since the 1970s, the Wellhausen hypothesis has come under increasing scrutiny. Today it is recognized that the Torah is far more fragmented than Wellhausen realized.

Names of the books of the Torah

| Current Title and translation | Original Hebrew Title and translation | Greek-Latin-English Title |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| B'reshit ("In the beginning") | Ma'aseh B'reshit (the account of the beginning) | Genesis |
| Sh'mot ("the names of") | Yesi'at Misrayim (the going out from Egypt) | Exodus |
| Vayyikra ("...called") | Torat Kohanim (the law of the priests; the priestly code) | Leviticus |
| Bemidbar ("in the wilderness") | Pekuddim (counting, census) | Numbers |
| D'varim ("the words") | Mishneh Torah (the repeated/second law [see Deuteronomy 17:18: "a copy of this law"]) | Deuteronomy |



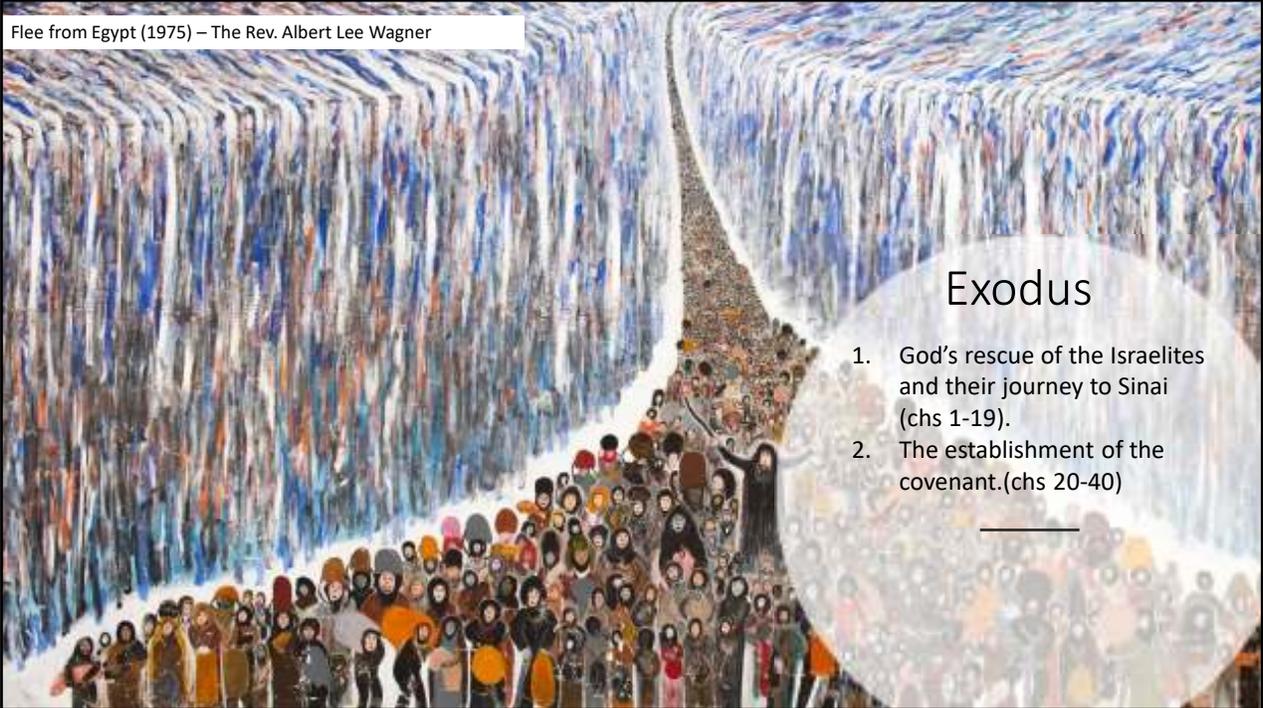
The Ancient of Days (1794) by William Blake

Genesis

Outline

1. Pre-history
 - a) Creation (1.1-2.25)
 - b) Eating of the tree of knowledge (3.1-24)
 - c) Murder of Abel (4.1-5.32)
 - d) Flood narrative (6.1-10.32)
 - e) Tower of Babel (11.1-32)
2. Sagas of the patriarchs/matriarchs
 - a) Abraham (12.1-25.18)
 - b) Isaac (25.19-28.5)
 - c) Jacob (28.6-35.29)
 - d) Esau (36.1-43)
 - e) Joseph (37.1-50.26)

Genesis, a Greek word meaning birth or creation. The overall story of the Torah is the history of Israel. However, the first 11 chapters of Genesis are, in a sense, NOT the history of Israel. Most national origin stories begin with creation, but Israel's history begins with Abraham, not Adam. Israel's history begins with God's call to Abraham and Abraham's obedient and faithful response. The first 11 chapters are not just the story of creation; they are also the story of the rise and progress of sin. Sin starts with Adam and Eve's disobedience of eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but it continues until it has infected the whole earth (Gen. 11.9: "Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.")



Exodus (Grk meaning “way out”) Exodus introduces us to Moses, and in a sense, he is the main character of the rest of the Torah. Exodus tells the story of the Hebrew (or Israelite) slaves in Egypt. The story cannot be historically proved or disproved. Remember, though, that Judaism and Christianity believe that God is primarily revealed in history (not creation). The creed of Judaism is “I am the LORD your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (Ex. 20.2) The story of Moses is complicated. Ex. tells us that he was raised in the house of Pharaoh. The name Moses is prob an Egyptian name. Ramses means “son of Ra”. Moses is prob an Egyptian name meaning “son of”, but the god’s name has been deliberately omitted. Exodus 20.2-17 gives us the first of 2 versions of the Ten Commandments. The second version is in Deut. 5.6-21.



Leviticus

An artist's rendering of the tabernacle.

Leviticus – book of the Levites or priests. Leviticus is about sacrifice and the priesthood; ritual cleanliness; and personal behavior. Most Christians find Leviticus incomprehensible and pointless. As far as the rules concerning sacrifice and the priesthood are concerned, Leviticus doesn't have any application to Christianity. However, I like to think of Leviticus in this way: Read Lev. 6.8-13. Compare this to the instructions regarding dealing with nuclear power. Modern Christians think of God as their buddy. We should certainly keep in mind that God loves us, but we should also remember that when we invoke God, we are invoking a power that can destroy as well as create. When Lev speaks of a person or thing becoming "holy", we should think of it as like becoming radioactive. The OT constantly reminds us that to see God is to die. In the presence of God we are to remove our shoes and avert our eyes. We are to bow down before God. It makes perfect sense that the Israelite priests would wear special garments and perform special procedures when approaching God.



Numbers

The Brazen Serpent (1618-20) – Anthony van Dyck

The story of Israel's journey from Sinai to the outskirts of Canaan. Contains familiar stories such as Balaam and his ass, the brazen serpent, Korah's rebellion, reports of the scouts Caleb and Joshua.



Deuteronomy

Death of Moses (1850) – Alexandre Cabanel

Contains 3 sermons or discourses by Moses. Includes a second version of the Ten Commandments. Israel's preparations for entering Canaan. The appointment of Joshua to replace Moses. Above all, this is the story of Moses' death on Mt Horeb before entering Canaan. Poignant.

The message of the prophets and the Torah

- Ex. 22.21: ““You shall not wrong a **stranger** or oppress him, for you were **strangers** in the land of Egypt.”
- Lev. 19.33: “When a **stranger** sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.”
- Lev. 19.18: “**You shall** not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of **your** own people, but **you shall love your neighbor** as **yourself**: I am the LORD.”
- Ex. 22.22: “You shall not afflict any **widow** or orphan.”

Torah and the prophets, cont.

- Lev. 19.10: “And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the **poor** and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”