

Tanakh versus Old Testament

What is the Tanakh?

The Tanakh (also known as the Hebrew Bible) was originally written in Hebrew with a few passages in Aramaic.

The Tanakh is divided into three sections – Torah (Five Books of Moshe), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

The Torah is made up of five books that were given to Moshe directly from God after the Exodus from Mitzrayim. The Torah was handed down through the successive generations from the time of Moshe.

The Torah includes the creation of the earth and the first humans, the Great Flood and the covenant with the gentiles, the Hebrew enslavement and Exodus of the Hebrews from Mitzrayim, giving of the Torah, renewal of Covenant given to Avraham, establishment of the festivals, wandering through the desert, the Mishkan, Ark, and Priestly duties, and the death of Moshe.

The Nevi'im covers the time period from the death of Moshe through the Babylonian exile and contains 19 books.

The Nevi'im includes the time of the Hebrews entering Eretz Yisrael, the conquest of Yericho, the conquest of Eretz Yisrael and its division among the tribes, the judicial system, Era of Shaul and David, Shlomo's wisdom and the construction of the First Beit HaMikdash, kings of Yisrael and Yehuda, prophecy, messianic prophecies, and the Babylonian exile.

The Ketuvim covers the period after the return from the Babylonian exile and contains 11 books. The Ketuvim is made up of various writings that do not have an overall theme.

This section of the Tanakh includes poems and songs, the stories of Iyov, Rut, and Ester, the writings and prophecies of Dani'el, and the history of the kings of Yisrael and Yehuda.

The Tanakh is also called Miqra (meaning "reading" or "that which is read"). The three-part division reflected in the acronym "Tanakh" is well attested to in documents from the Second Beit HaMikdash period. During that period, however, "Tanakh" was not used as a word or term. Instead, the proper title was Miqra, because the biblical texts were read publicly. Miqra continues to be used in Hebrew to this day alongside Tanakh to refer to the Hebrew scriptures. In modern spoken Hebrew both are used interchangeably.

According to Rabbinical Judaism after the destruction of Yerushalayim Rabbi Zakkai asked for permission from the Romans to set up a school in Yavneh (Gittin 56b).¹ It is at this place that the school at Yavneh canonized the Tanakh.² This teaching is rejected by Karaite Judaism because the Tanakh was already "codified" by the time the Second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. All

the books contained in the Tanakh were already well-known to the Yisraelites and were established as the authoritative and divine texts for the Yisraelites.

The Tanakh was not originally broken into chapter and verses. The idea of chapter and verses – as well as the breaking apart of Shmu’el, Melakhim, and Divrei Hayamim – is a leftover from Christians in the 13th century. The chapter divisions and verse numbers have no significance in the Jewish tradition. Nevertheless, they are noted in all modern editions of the Tanakh so that verses may be located and cited.

There are many various manuscripts of the original Hebrew Tanakh in the world today.

The Dead Sea scrolls consist of roughly 900 documents, including texts from the Tanakh, discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves in and around the Wadi Qumran near the ruins of the ancient settlement of Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

Targum Onkelos is the Babylonian Targum to the Torah. The work has been identified with Aquila of Sinope. Targum Yonatan is the Babylonian Targum to the Nevi’im section of the Tanakh.

The Aleppo Codex – also known as the Keter Aram Tzova (כֶּתֶר אֲרָם צֹבָא) – is a medieval bound manuscript of the Tanakh written in the tenth century CE.³

The Leningrad Codex (also known as the Cairo Codex) is the oldest complete Tanakh that is still preserved. The Leningrad Codex is a completely vowelized text.⁴ Since the Leningrad Codex is the oldest complete manuscript of the Tanakh within the Masoretic textual tradition of the Ben Asher family, it is used today as the basis for most of the modern-day printed editions of the Tanakh,⁵ including the Biblia Hebraica (1937) and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1967/1977).⁶

What is the Old Testament?

The Christian Old Testament is the collection of books that forms the first half of the two-part Christian canon. The term “Old Testament” is used in Christianity to refer to the religious writing of ancient Yisrael. The contents of the Old Testament vary between denominations. Protestants accept only the Tanakh’s canon but divide it into 39 books, while Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic and Ethiopian churches recognize a considerably larger collection.

The books of the Christian Old Testament can be broadly divided into the Pentateuch, which tells how God selected Yisrael to be His chosen people; the history books telling the history of the Yisraelites from their conquest of Kena’an to their defeat and exile in Babylon; the poetic and wisdom books dealing with questions of good and evil in the world; and the books of the biblical prophets, warning of the consequences of turning away from God.

The early Christian Church primarily used the Septuagint – the oldest Greek version of the Tanakh – until the mid-fourth century. The early Church cited the Septuagint’s antiquity and its use by the Evangelists and Apostles which helped it to essentially attain official status in the early Christian world.

At much the same time as the Septuagint was being produced, translations were being made into Aramaic. For Aramaic Christians there was a Syriac translation of the Tanakh called the Peshitta, as well as versions in Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Arabic.⁷

Around 400 CE, Jerome translated the Christian Old Testament from the original Hebrew Tanakh into Latin and this translation became known as the Vulgate. Initially, his rejection of translating directly from the Greek Septuagint was rejected but in time, his version came to be accepted and displaced the old Latin translations of the Septuagint.

Most modern translations of the Christian Old Testament are derived from the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Masoretic Texts.

What are the differences?

There are multiple differences in translation between the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Tanakh. There are some minor differences in the chapter and verse numbering between the Tanakh and the Old Testament. This is especially seen in Sefer Tehillim. However, this is not a major issue and the idea of chapter and verse is a Christian idea and did not originate with Judaism.

A major difference between the Tanakh and the Old Testament is the number and arrangement of the books. The Christian Old Testament contains books and additions that are considered apocryphal by Judaism.

The Tanakh is divided into three sections – Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuv'im (Writings) – and contains 35 books.

The Torah contains five books. The Nevi'im section is divided into three sections: 1) Nevi'im Rishonim (Former Prophets) containing four books; 2) Nevi'im Aharonim (Latter Prophets) containing three books; and, 3) Trei Asar (12 Prophets) containing twelve books. The Ketuvim contains twelve books.

The Orthodox Old Testament contains 51 books and is divided into four sections. Traditionally the Orthodox Old Testament is divided into the law books (the Pentateuch and historical books), the Psalms and other wisdom books, and the prophets based on Luke 24:44:⁸

Then He said to them, "These [are] the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and [the] Prophets and [the] Psalms concerning Me." (Luke 24:44)⁹

The Pentateuch contains five books which are the same books contained in the Torah. The Historical section contains eighteen books some of which are from the Nevi'im and Ketuv'im sections of the Tanakh. In addition, the Historical section of the Orthodox Old Testament contains apocryphal books including: First Esdras, Tobit, additions to Esther, and First, Second, and Third Maccabees. The Wisdom section contains eight books which include the remaining books of the Ketuv'im section of the Tanakh as well as the apocryphal additions of Psalm 151,

Prayer of Manasseh, Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach). The Prophets section is divided into Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. The Major Prophets include four books which are from the Nevi'im and Ketuv'im sections of the Tanakh and the Minor Prophets contain twelve books which are the same books contained in the Trei Asar section of the Tanakh.⁸

The Catholic Old Testament contains 46 books and is divided into four sections. The canon of the Roman Catholic Church was firmly established in the 16th-century Ecumenical Council of Trent. The Canon of Trent refers to the list of biblical books that were from that time on considered canonical.¹⁰ The Council of Trent confirmed the identical list already approved in 1442 by the Council of Florence.¹¹

The Pentateuch contains five books which are the same books contained in the Torah. The Historical section contains sixteen books some of which are from the Nevi'im and Ketuv'im sections of the Tanakh. In addition, the Historical section of the Catholic Old Testament contains apocryphal books including: Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, and First and Second Maccabees. The Wisdom section contains seven books which include the remaining books of the Ketuv'im section of the Tanakh as well as the apocryphal additions of the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach). The Prophets section contains eighteen books. This section of the Catholic Old Testament contains books from the Nevi'im and Ketuv'im sections of the Tanakh as well as the apocryphal books of Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah and additions to Daniel.¹²

The Protestant Old Testament contains 39 books and is not traditionally divided into sections as are the Tanakh, Orthodox Old Testament or Catholic Old Testament. The Protestant Reformation, which began in Germany in 1517 with the 95 Theses of Martin Luther, gave rise to a new canon of the Old Testament. The new Protestant canon did away with the apocryphal books of the Orthodox and Catholic canons and contains the same books as the Tanakh but in a different order.¹³

The Tanakh and the Old Testament have many similarities but they are not the same scripture. The number and arrangement of books and the inclusion of some apocryphal books is the major difference between the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament.

If you are interested in learning about the Hebrew text it is important to use a good Tanakh and not use a Christian Old Testament. If you are truly interested in learning from the Tanakh I would recommend learning Biblical Hebrew and not always relying on a translation.

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[<http://halakhah.com/pdf/nashim/Gittin.pdf>]

²Robert Newman. "The Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament Canon."
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[<http://www.ibri.org/RRs/RR013/13jamnia.html>]

³HaAretz, *Fragment of Ancient Parchment from Bible Given to Jerusalem Scholars* (11/6/07)
[<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/920915.html>]

⁴C. Leviant, *A Review of The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (1998)

[<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/reviews/codex.html>]

⁵West Semitic Research Project: *The Leningrad Codex*

[http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/biblical_manuscripts/LeningradCodex.shtml]

⁶D.N. Freedman, *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) [<http://books.google.com>]

⁷Ernst Würthwein & Erroll Rhodes (trans.), *The Text of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) [<http://books.google.com>]

⁸Orthodox Wiki. "Old Testament." *orthodoxwiki.org*. Orthodox Wiki, n.d.

[http://orthodoxwiki.org/Old_Testament]

⁹Blue Letter Bible. "Gospel of Luke 24 – (NKJV – New King James Version)."

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[<http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Luk&c=24&t=NKJV>]

¹⁰James Waterworth (trans.). "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: The Fourth Session."

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¹¹Papal Encyclicals Online. "Council of Basel 1431-45: Session 11 4 February 1442."

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¹²Henry Wansbrough (ed.), *The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*. (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

¹³Thomas Nelson, Inc., *The Holy Bible in the King James Version*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

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