

About

BecomingJewish.Org

This site offers information about Conversion to Judaism, the Basics of Judaism, Jewish Texts, Jewish Law, Religious Life, Jewish Life, Jewish History, Israel, Righteous Gentiles, and References (including Recommended Readings and Additional Links). My goal is to make available a wide variety of plain, basic information about Judaism, written from a traditional perspective.



Beit HaMikdash—Holy Temple in Jerusalem



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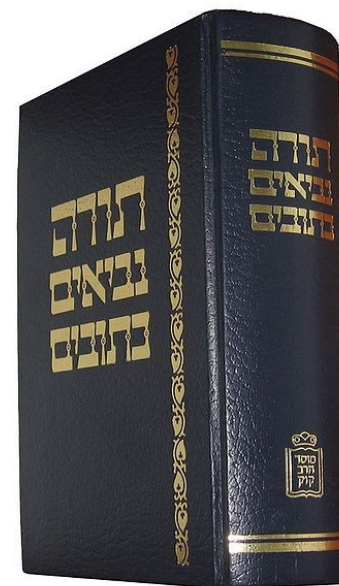
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Jewish Information
& Education

What is the
Tanach (Hebrew
Bible)?

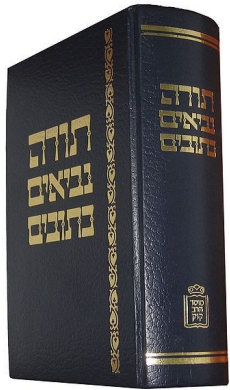


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What is the Tanach?



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The Tanach (mistakenly known as the "Old Testament") is made up of the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim. Before the study of Torah a brocha (blessing) is said in which the person thanks G-d for giving the Jews Torah. There have been many rabbis who have written

commentaries on the Torah. Any complete study of the Torah needs to include some commentary from these sages. The Tanach is the basis of understanding the laws, philosophy, and history of Judaism. As such, studying the Tanach is the first step to understanding the whole of Judaism.

In the Jewish community, the classical approach is religious study of the Bible, where it is assumed that the Bible has a divine origin. Some classical rabbinic commentators, such as Abraham Ibn Ezra, Gersonides and Maimonides, used many elements of modern day biblical criticism, including their then-current knowledge of history, science and philol-

ogy. Their use of historical and scientific analysis of the Bible was considered kosher by historic Judaism due to the author's faith commitment to the idea that God revealed the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.

According to the Talmud (Bava Basra 14b-15a, Rashi to Megillah 3a, 14a), much of the contents of the Tanach were compiled by the Men of the Great Assembly ("Anshei K'nesset HaGedolah") a task completed in 450 BCE, and have remained unchanged since that date. Formal closure of the canon has often been ascribed to Rabbinic Judaism in 70 CE. The twenty-four books are also mentioned in the Midrash Koheleth 12:12. A slightly different accounting can be found in the book Against Apion, by the 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus, who describes 22 sacred books. Some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth part of Judges and Lamentations part of Jeremiah.... Other scholars suggest that at the time Josephus wrote, such books as Esther and Ecclesiastes were not yet considered canonical.



Ezra was the first to initially gather together the Men of the Great Assembly

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

The Tanach was not originally broken into chapter and verses. The idea of chapter and verses - as well as the breaking apart of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles - 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 Tanach so that verses may be located and cited.

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