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## TORAH [\(print this article\)](#)

By : [Joseph Jacobs](#) [Ludwig Blau](#)

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Name applied to the five books of Moses, [Genesis](#), [Exodus](#), [Leviticus](#), [Numbers](#), and [Deuteronomy](#). The contents of the **Torah** as a whole are discussed, from the point of view of modern Biblical criticism, under [Pentateuch](#), where a table gives the various sources; while its importance as a center of crystallization for the Hebrew canon is treated under [Bible Canon](#). The present article, therefore, is limited to the history of the Pentateuch in post-Biblical Judaism.

The **Torah** receives its title from its contents, the name itself connoting "doctrine." The Hellenistic Jews, however, translated it by  $\mu$  = "law" (e.g., LXX., prologue to Ecclus. [Sirach], Philo, Josephus, and the

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New Testament), whence came the term "law-book"; this gave rise to the erroneous impression that the Jewish religion is purely nomistic, so that it is still frequently designated as the religion of law. In reality, however, the **Torah** contains teachings as well as laws, even the latter being given in ethical form and contained in historical narratives of an ethical character.

Name.

In the books of the Bible the following names of the Pentateuch occur: **ספר תורת יהוה** in II Chron. xvii. 9, Neh. ix. 3, and, with the added epithet **ביר משה**, II Chron. xxxiv. 14; while **תורת יהוה** alone, without **ספר**, is found in II Kings x. 31, I Chron. xxii. 11, and II Chron. xii. 1, xxxi. 3, 4, and xxxv. 26. Sometimes **אלהים**, or a word of similar meaning, is added, as **ספר תורת אלהים**, Josh. xxiv. 26, Neh. viii. 18 (without **ספר**, ib. x. 29). Another designation is **תורת משה ספר**, Josh. viii. 31, xxiii. 6; II Kings xiv. 6; Neh. viii. 1; or **תורת משה**, I Kings ii. 3; II Kings xxiii. 25; Mal. iii. 22 (A. V. iv. 4), with the addition of **עברי**; Ezra iii. 2 (with the addition of **איש האלהים**), vii. 6; **ספר משה**, II Chron. xxv. 4 (preceded by **בתורה**), xxxv. 12. The oldest name doubtless is **ספר התורה** (Deut. i. 5; xxxi. 9, 11, 24; xxxii. 46; Neh. viii. 2), sometimes shortened to **התורה** (Deut. i. 5; xxxi. 9, 11, 24; xxxii. 46; Neh. viii. 2), or to **הספר** (Neh. viii. 5), or to **תורה** (Deut. xxxiii. 4). The last two names occur with great frequency in Jewish tradition, where the **Torah** becomes a living creature. The expression "the five books," which is the origin of the term "Pentateuch," occurs only in Jewish tradition, which has also been the source for "Genesis," etc., as the names of the books of the Pentateuch (see Blau, "Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift," pp. 40-43).

Quinary Division of the **Torah**.

According to all critics, regardless of the schools to which they belong, the **Torah** forms a single work, which is represented, even at the present day, by the synagogal [Scroll of the Law](#); nor does history know of any other **Torah** scroll. The fivefold division of the Pentateuch was due to purely external causes, and not to a diversity of content; for in volume the **Torah** forms more than a fourth of all the books of the Bible, and

contains, in round numbers, 300,000 letters of the 1,100,000 in the entire Bible. A work of such compass far exceeded the normal size of an individual scroll among the Jews; and the **Torah** accordingly became a Pentateuch, thus being analogous to the Homeric poems, which originally formed a single epic, but which were later split into twenty-four parts each.

### Division into Sections.

Like them, moreover, the Pentateuch was divided according to the sense and with an admirable knowledge of the subject (Blau, "Althebräisches Buchwesen," pp. 47-49), while subdivisions were also made into the so-called open and closed "parashiyot," whose exact interrelation is not yet clear. There are in all 669 sections, 290 open and 379 closed. Another class of parashiyot divides the weekly lessons, now called "sidrot," into seven parts. The **Torah** also falls, on the basis of the lessons for the Sabbath, into 54 sidrot according to the annual cycle, and into 155 according to the triennial cycle. The former division, which is now used almost universally, is the Babylonian; and the latter, which has recently been introduced into some Reform congregations, is the Palestinian. The latter class of sidrot, however, has no external marks of division in the scrolls of the synagogue; while the divisions in the former, like the parashiyot, are indicated by blank spaces of varying length ([see Sidra](#)).

This probably implies a greater antiquity for the sections which are thus designated, although the divisions into 5,845 verses, which seem to be still older, have no outward marks. The system of chapters was introduced into the editions of the Hebrew Bible, and hence into the **Torah**, from the Vulgate. This mode of division is not known to the Masorah, though it was incorporated in the final Masoretic notes, for individual books of the Pentateuch. It is given in modern editions of the Hebrew Bible simply on the basis of the stereotyped editions of the English Bible Society, which followed earlier examples.

### Jewish Tradition and the **Torah**.

The external form of the **Torah** is discussed in such

articles as [Manuscripts](#), [Scroll of the Law](#), and [Mantle of the Law](#); but so numerous are the assertions of tradition concerning its contents and its value that the repetition of even a very small part of them would far exceed the limits of this article. Every page of the Talmud and Midrash is filled with citations from the Pentateuch and with the most fulsome praise of it, united with super-human love and divine respect therefor. In the five volumes of Bacher's work on the Haggadah, the **Torah** and its study form a special rubric in the account of each "sofer," or scholar of the Law. In all probability there never was another people, except possibly the Brahmans, that surrounded its holy writings with such respect, transmitted them through the centuries with such self-sacrifice, and preserved them with so little change for more than 2,000 years. The very letters of the **Torah** were believed to have come from God Himself (B. B. 15a), and were counted carefully, the word "soferim" denoting, according to the Talmud ( id. 30a), "the counters of the letters." A special class of scholars devoted all their lives to the careful preservation of the text ("Masorah"), the only analogy in the literature of the world being found in India, where the Vedas were accurately preserved by similar means.

### Preexistence of the **Torah**.

The **Torah** is older than the world, for it existed either 947 generations (Zeb. 116a, and parallels) or 2,000 years (Gen. R. viii., and parallels; Weber, "Jüdische Theologie," p. 15) before the Creation. The original Pentateuch, therefore, like everything celestial, consisted of fire, being written in black letters of flame upon a white ground of fire (Yer. She . 49a, and parallels; Blau, "Althebräisches Buchwesen," p. 156). God held counsel with it at the creation of the world, since it was wisdom itself (Tan., Bereshit, passim), and it was God's first revelation, in which He Himself took part. It was given in completeness for all time and for all mankind, so that no further revelation can be expected. It was given in the languages of all peoples; for the voice of the divine revelation was seventyfold (Weber, l. c. pp. 16-20; Blau, "Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift," pp. 84-100). It shines forever, and was transcribed by the scribes of the seventy peoples (Bacher, "Ag. Tan."

ii. 203, 416), while everything found in the Prophets and the Hagiographa was already contained in the **Torah** (Ta'an. 9a), so that, if the Israelites had not sinned, only the five books of Moses would have been given them (Ned. 22b). As a matter of fact, the Prophets and the Hagiographa will be abrogated; but the **Torah** will remain forever (Yer. Meg. 70d). Every letter of it is a living creature. When Solomon took many wives, Deuteronomy threw himself before God and complained that Solomon wished to remove from the Pentateuch the yod of the word **יְרֵבָה** (Deut. xvii. 17), with which the prohibition of polygamy was spoken; and God replied: "Solomon and a thousand like him shall perish, but not one letter of the **Torah** shall be destroyed" (Lev. R. xix.; Yer. Sanh. 20c; Cant. R. 5, 11; comp. Bacher, l.c. ii. 123, note 5). The single letters were hypostatized, and were active even at the creation of the world (Bacher, l.c. i. 347), an idea which is probably derived from Gnostic speculation. The whole world is said to be only 1/3200 of the **Torah** ('Er. 21a).

Israel received this treasure only through suffering (Ber. 5a, and parallels), for the book and the sword came together from heaven, and Israel was obliged to choose between them (Sifre, Deut. 40, end; Bacher, l.c. ii. 402, note 5); and whosoever denies the heavenly origin of the **Torah** will lose the future life (Sanh. x. 1). This high esteem finds its expression in the rule that a copy of the Pentateuch is unlimited in value, and in the ordinance that the inhabitants of a city might oblige one another to procure scrolls of the Law (Tosef., B. M. iii. 24, xi. 23). The pious bequeathed a copy of the **Torah** to the synagogue (ib. B. . ii. 3); and it was the duty of each one to make one for himself, while the honor paid the Bible greatly influenced the distribution of copies and led to the foundation of libraries (Blau, "Althebräisches Buchwesen," pp. 84-97).

### Study of the **Torah**.

The highest ideal of young and old and of small and great was the study of the Law, thus forming a basis for that indomitable eagerness of the Jewish people for education and that unquenchable thirst for knowledge which still characterize them. "As the child must satisfy

its hunger day by day, so must the grown man busy himself with the **Torah** each hour" (Yer. Ber. ch. ix.). The mishnah (Pe'ah i.) incorporated in the daily prayer declares that the study of the Law transcends all things, being greater than the rescue of human life, than the building of the Temple, and than the honor of father and mother (Meg. 16b). It is of more value than the offering of daily sacrifice ('Er. 63b); a single day devoted to the **Torah** outweighs 1,000 sacrifices (Shab. 30a; comp. Men. 100a); while the fable of the Fish and the Fox, in which the latter seeks to entice the former to dry land, declares Israel can live only in the Law as fish can live only in the ocean. Whoever separates himself from the **Torah** dies forthwith ('Ab. Zarah 3b); for fire consumes him, and he falls into hell (B. B. 79a); while God weeps over one who might have occupied himself with it but neglected to do so (ag. 5b). The study must be unselfish: "One should study the **Torah** with self-denial, even at the sacrifice of one's life; and in the very hour before death one should devote himself to this duty" (So'ah 21b; Ber. 63b; Shab. 83b). "Whoever uses the crown of the **Torah** shall be destroyed" (Ned. 62a). All, even the lepers and the unclean, were required to study the Law (Ber. 22a), while it was the duty of every one to read the entire weekly lesson twice (Ber. 8a); and the oldest benediction was the one spoken over the **Torah** (ib. 11b). Prophylactic power also is ascribed to it: it gives protection against suffering (ib. 5a), against sickness ('Er. 54b), and against oppression in the Messianic time (Sanh. 98b); so that it may be said that "the **Torah** protects all the world" (Sanh. 99b; comp. Ber. 31a). The following sayings may be cited as particularly instructive in this respect: "A Gentile who studies the **Torah** is as great as the high priest" (B. . 38a). "The practise of all the laws of the Pentateuch is worth less than the study of the scriptures of it" (Yer. Pe'ah i.), a conclusive refutation of the current view of the **Nomism** of the Jewish faith. After these citations it becomes readily intelligible that, according to the Talmudic view, "God Himself sits and studies the **Torah**" ('Ab. Zarah 3b).

### Criticism of the **Torah** Among Jews.

The spirit of criticism naturally developed from this devotion to the Pentateuch, in spite of faith and

reverence. The very existence of the doctrine that the Law was of heavenly origin, and that whosoever denied this dogma had no share in the life to come (Sanh. x.), shows that there was a school which assumed a critical attitude toward the **Torah**. There is much evidence in proof of this; but here only the history of criticism within the orthodox synagogue will be discussed. It was a moot point whether the Law was given all at once or in smaller rolls at different times (Gi . 60a); and the further question was discussed, whether Moses or Joshua wrote the last eight verses of the Pentateuch (B. B. 14b-15a). It was definitely affirmed, on the other hand (ib.), that Moses composed the sections concerning Balaam (Num. xxii.-xxiv.), thus closing all discussions on that score. Many tacit doubts are scattered through the Talmud and Midrash, in addition to those which Einstein has collected. In the post-Talmudic period, in like manner, there was no lack of critics, some of them recognized as such again only in recent times, although Abraham ibn Ezra, who was joined by Spinoza, has long been recognized as belonging to this class.

### Composition.

The composition of the **Torah** should be discussed on the basis of the old Semitic concepts, which planned a work of literature practically rather than systematically. Repetitions, therefore, should not be eliminated, since things which are good and noble may and should be brought to remembrance many times. From the point of view of effective emphasis, moreover, a change of context may develop a new and independent application of a given doctrine, especially if it be repeated in other words. Thus tradition (The Thirty-two Rules of Eliezer b. Jose ha-Gelili) took "the repeated doctrine" as its rule of interpretation, and left large numbers of repetitions (parallel passages) in its collections of oral teachings. The framework of the Pentateuch is historical narrative bound together by the thread of chronology. There is no rigid adherence to the latter principle, however; and the Talmud itself accordingly postulates the rule: "There is no earlier and no later in the **Torah**" (Pes. 6b et passim). From a Masoretic point of view, the Mosaic code contains the history of a period of about 2,300 years. As has already been noted in regard to the names of the individual

books, the Talmud and the Masorah divided the **Torah** into smaller units according to its contents, so that Genesis includes the story of Creation and of the Patriarchs, Exodus the account of the departure from Egypt, the revelation, and so on.

### Style.

The style of the Pentateuch, in keeping with its content, differs widely from the diction of the Prophets and the Psalms. It is less lofty, although it is not lacking in dramatic force, and it is concrete rather than abstract. Most of the laws are formulated in the second person as a direct address, the Decalogue being the best example. In certain cases, however, the nature of the subject requires the third person; but the **Torah** reverts as quickly as possible to the second as being the more effective form of address (comp., for example, Deut. xix. 11-21). In the Pentateuch, temporal depiction is the usual method. The process of creation, rather than the universe as a whole, is described; and the account brings the world visibly into being in six main parts. In the creation of man, of plants, and of paradise God is seen at work, and the same process of coming into being may be traced in the ark of Noah and similar descriptions. A remarkable example of word-painting is the account of the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the high-priesthood (Lev. viii.). Here the reader watches while Moses washes the candidates, dresses them, etc. ("Magyar-Zsidó Szemle," ix. 565 et seq.). Naïve simplicity is a characteristic trait of Pentateuchal style, which understands also the art of silence. Thus, as in all great products of world-literature, feminine beauty is not described in detail; for Sarah, Rachel, and other heroines are merely said to be beautiful, while the completion of the picture is left to the imagination of the reader.

### Laws of the **Torah**.

The contents of the **Torah** fall into two main parts: historical and legal. The latter commences with Ex. xii.; so that the Tannaim maintained that the Law actually began there, proceeding on the correct principle that the word "Torah" could be applied only to teachings



which regulated the life of man, either leading him to perform certain acts (commands = מצוות עשה) or restraining him from them (prohibitions = מצוות לא תעשה). The Talmud enumerates a total of 613 rules, 248 being commands and 365 prohibitions (see Jew. Encyc. iv. 181, s.v. [Commandments, The 613](#)). In the post-Talmudic period many works were written on these 613 "mi wot," some even by Maimonides. The legal parts of the Pentateuch include all the relations of human life, although these are discussed with greater detail in the Talmud ([see Talmudic Laws](#)). The Torah recognizes no subdivisions of the commandments; for all alike are the ordinances of God, and a distinction may be drawn only according to modern ideas, as when Driver (in Hastings, "Dict. Bible," iii. 66) proposes a triple division, into juridical, ceremonial, and moral "torot."

#### Penal Law.

Montefiore was correct when, in laying emphasis on the ethical aspect of the Biblical concept of God, he declared that even the law of the Bible was permeated with morality, propounding his view in the following words ("Hibbert Lectures," p. 64): "Most original and characteristic was the moral influence of Jahveh in the domain of law. Jahveh, to the Israelite, was emphatically the God of the right. . . . From the earliest times onward, Jahveh's sanctuary was the depository of law, and the priest was His spokesman." The most prominent characteristic of the Pentateuchal law, as compared with the laws of ancient peoples and of medieval Europe, is mildness, a feature which is still further developed in the Talmud. The Torah is justly regarded as the source of humane law. Although such phrases occur as "that soul shall be cut off from his people" or "so shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee," it would be incorrect to take them literally, or to deduce from them certain theories of penal law, as Förster has recently done. On the contrary, these expressions prove that the Mosaic law was not a legal code in the strict sense of the term, but an ethical work. Although the Talmudists made it a penal code, instinctively reading that character into it, the penal law of the Torah is something theoretical which was never put into practise. This view is

supported by the fact that a commandment is stated sometimes without the threat of any penalty whatever for its violation, and sometimes with the assignment even of death as a punishment for its transgression. In like manner, tradition frequently substitutes such a phrase as "he forfeited his life" for "transgression worthy of death."

#### Civil Law.

On the other hand, the civil law of the **Torah**, which is more developed and bears a practical character, probably accords more closely with ancient Jewish legal procedure. It reflects the conditions of an agricultural state, since most of the laws relate to farming and cognate matters. There was no Hebrew word for "store," although "just measure" was mentioned. It must be borne in mind, however, that to satisfy the more advanced conditions of later times, the Talmudists both supplemented the Mosaic law and by means of analogy and similar expedients interpolated into the **Torah** much which it did not contain originally.

From the earliest times the Synagogue has proclaimed the divine origin of the Pentateuch, and has held that Moses wrote it down from dictation, while the religions based on Judaism have until very recently held the same view. Biblical criticism, however, denies the Mosaic authorship and ascribes only a portion of varying extent to so ancient an origin. A history of criticism in regard to this point is given by Winer ("B. R." ii. 419 et seq.) and by Driver (in Hastings, "Dict. Bible," iii. 66), while Montefiore expresses himself as follows (l. c.):

"The **Torah**—or teaching—of the priests, half judicial, half pædagogic, was a deep moral influence; and there was no element in the religion which was at once more genuinely Hebrew and more closely identified with the national God. There is good reason to believe that this priestly **Torah** is the one religious institution which can be correctly attributed to Moses. . . . Though Moses was not the author of the written law, he was unquestionably the founder of that oral teaching, or **Torah**, which preceded and became the basis of the

codes of the Pentateuch."

The legal parts of the **Torah** are found in Ex. xx.-xxiii., xxv.-xxxi., xxxiv.-xxxv.; Lev. i.-viii., xi.-xxv., xxvii.; Num. v.-x., xviii., xix., xxvii.-xxx., these laws being repeated in Deut. iv. et seq.

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For the criticism of the **Torah** compare the text-books of the history of Judaism and of Old Testament theology. [See also Pentateuch](#).

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