

Torah – Five Books of Moses / Written Law / Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Early Israel was tribal; parts of the Torah were certainly known orally for hundreds if not thousands of years. Authorship of both the oral and later the written versions were traditionally credited to Moses - “From the mouth of God to the ear of Moses.” Modern scholarly consensus is that the pieces that make up Torah were actually written over the course of centuries by multiple authors.

Tanach - Hebrew Bible / Jewish Bible / ~~Old Testament~~ – Torah, Prophets (e.g. Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah), and Writings (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth).

There is no scholarly consensus as to when the Hebrew Bible canon was fixed: dates range from 200 BCE to 200 CE.

Talmud – Oral Law – Rabbinic discussions, primarily about *Tanach*.

A concise version of *Talmud*, called the *Mishnah*, was written down in ~2nd century CE. Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries known as *Gemara*, elaborating on the *Mishnah*, were written down. The *Gemara* and the *Mishnah* together are known as *Talmud*. There are two versions of *Talmud*: Babylonian and Jerusalem; they were completed in the 5th century CE.

Midrash – An interpretation or commentary on a Biblical text. “Midrash” is from the Hebrew root meaning "to study," "to seek out" or "to investigate." A midrash aggada is a midrash that explores ethics and values in biblical texts, often through attempting to explain gaps in the text, giving “back story” to the content. "Aggadah" means "story" or "telling." Midrash aggadot can be found in Talmud and in collections such as Midrash Rabbah.

Midrash Rabbah - "Great Midrash," a collection of aggadatic midrashim (plural of midrash), was compiled in ~5th century CE, but includes material dating back centuries earlier. It is a collective term applying to ten unrelated volumes, including five volumes each relating to one of the books of the Torah. The midrashim contained in Midrash Rabbah are similar to those in Talmud.

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Midrash Devarim (Midrash on Deuteronomy): Rabbah 9

Simeon ben Chalafta went to a circumcision ceremony. The father of the child made a feast and gave those present seven-year-old wine to drink. He said to them, "Of this wine, I will store away a portion for my son's wedding feast. The feast continued until midnight.

Rabbi Simeon, who trusted in his own strength, left at midnight to return to his own city. On the road, the Angel of Death met him., and R. Simeon noticed he was laughing.

Rabbi Simeon asked the angel, "Who are you?" The latter answered, "I am God's messenger." Rabbi Simeon asked him, "Why are you laughing?" The angel replied, "On account of the talk of human beings. They say, 'This and that we will do,' and yet not one of them knows when he will be summoned to die. The man in whose feast you shared, and who said to you, 'Of this wine, I will store away a portion for my son's wedding feast,' lo, his child's time has come, he is to be snatched away after thirty days."

Rabbi Simeon said to him, "Show me my end." The angel replied, "Neither over you nor over the likes of you have I any dominion. Often God finds delight in your good deeds and grants you additional life."

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Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Moed, Taanit chapter 3, page 23a

Rabbi Yohanan said: "This righteous man [Honi] was troubled throughout the whole of his life concerning the meaning of the verse, 'When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers.' [Honi asked] Is it possible for seventy years to be like a dream? How could anyone sleep for seventy years?"

One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked, "How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?" The man replied: "Seventy years." Honi then further asked him: "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied: "I found [already grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted those for me so I too plant these for my children."

Honi sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed upon him which hid him from sight and he slept for seventy years. When he awoke he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Honi asked him, "Are you the man who planted the tree?" The man replied: "I am his grand-son." Thereupon Honi exclaimed: "It is clear that I have slept for seventy years." He then caught sight of his ass which had given birth to several generations of mules, and he returned home. There he inquired, "Is the son of Honi still alive?" The people answered him, "His son is no more, but his grandson is still living." Thereupon he said to them: "I am Honi," but no one would believe him.

He then repaired to the study hall and there he overheard the scholars say, "The law is as clear to us as in the days of Honi," for whenever he came to the study hall he would settle for the scholars any difficulty that they had. Whereupon he called out, "I am he!" But the scholars would not believe him nor did they give him the honor due to him. This hurt him greatly and he prayed for mercy, and he died. Raba said: "Hence the saying, 'Either companionship or death.'"

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Babylonia Talmud, Shabbat 153a

Rabbi Eliezer said: “Repent one day before your death.” His students asked him: “Does one know the day of one’s death?” He said to them: “That is all the more reason to repent today lest one dies tomorrow. Therefore, all one’s days shall be filled with repentance.”

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Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kama, 17b

Rabbah said, “If someone throws another’s vessel from a rooftop, and a second person comes along and shatters it with a stick [before it hits the ground], the second person is exempt [from all liability]. For we say, “The second one broke a broken vessel.”

Talmud, Bava Kama 10b (couldn’t verify)

Rabbah said, “If a person throws an infant from a rooftop, and another person comes along and kills the infant with a sword before it hits the ground – this issue is debated by Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira and the sages.

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Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 104a (image from <https://www.wikihow.com/Don-Tefillin>)



When Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was dying, the [other] rabbis declared a public fast and offered prayers that God have mercy on him [i.e., spare his life] [His] maid went up to the roof and prayed: “The angels want Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi to join them in heaven] and the people want him to remain with them. May it be the will of God that the people overpower the angels.” However, when she saw how often he had to use the bathroom, each time painfully taking off his *tefillin* (phylacteries) and putting them on again [for it was the custom at that time to wear *tefillin* throughout the day], she prayed: “May it be the will of God that the angels overpower the people.” As the rabbis continued to pray, she took a jar and threw it off the roof. They stopped praying [because they were startled by the noise], and the soul of Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] departed.

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Hassidic Midrash, from *Tales of the Hasidim* by Martin Buber

Once, the Hassidic rabbi Zusya came to his followers with tears in his eyes. They asked him: "Zusya, what's the matter?" And he told them about his vision; "I learned the question that the angels will one day ask me about my life."

The followers were puzzled. "Zusya, you are pious. You are scholarly and humble. You have helped so many of us. What question about your life could be so terrifying that you would be frightened to answer it?"

Zusya replied; "I have learned that the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Moses, leading your people out of slavery?' and that the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Joshua, leading your people into the promised land?'" Zusya sighed; "They will say to me, 'Zusya, why weren't you Zusya?'"