

# TANACH

The Tanach is the main book upon which all the others are based, the text to which all later works relate either directly or indirectly. There are thirty-five books in the Tanach and they are divided into three categories: Torah, Neviim (Prophets), and Ketubim (Writings). The division of books into Torah, Neviim and Ketubim is not along clear categories of content or literary style. Rather it is a categorization which developed historically and has become the accepted norm.<sup>1</sup>

## TORAH תורה

The word "Torah" itself is used in two ways :

1. As the 5 books of Moses

2. In a more general sense, Torah means "teaching". It's root - ל.ר.ה - is also found in the words מורה (teacher) and הוראה (teaching). As such, "Torah" refers to the whole body of Jewish literature which teaches us the Jewish way.

Here we use the more specific meaning of the term (1.) and relate to the five books of Moses which are : בראשית - Genesis, שמות - Exodus, ויקרא - Leviticus, במדבר - Numbers and דברים - Deuteronomy

The Torah is also called "חומש" the Chumash (the five) and the "מקרא" the Mikra (connected to the root 'to read').

The various books have different styles. Some are narrative (telling a story), some legal, and others poetic. The Torah takes us from creation, through the tales of the patriarchs and patriarchs, to the Jewish People's sojourn in Egypt, their exodus, the wanderings through the desert including the climactic giving of the Torah at Sinai and up to the Israelites on the verge of entering into Eretz Yisrael. Included are countless episodes and many laws upon which the Jewish People are told to base their lives.

<sup>1</sup> A wonderful translation of and commentary on the Torah is Gunther Plaut's 'The Torah, A Modern Commentary'. The J.P.S translation of the Tanach is very clear as well.

## NEVIIM (PROPHETS) נביאים

The prophetic books are divided into two categories: the former prophets and the latter prophets.

Former Prophets : Joshua, Judges, Samuel I, Samuel II, Kings I, Kings II.

Latter Prophets : Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve Minor Prophets (much smaller works, although no less important): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The books that we call the former prophets are historical. They focus on the historical story of the Jewish People from the coming into the land (Joshua) till the destruction of the Second Temple (Kings II). They also contain some stories about the early prophets like Elijah and Elisha. The books of the latter prophets focus entirely on the prophets' words and experiences. The overall time period in which almost all the prophets lived and prophesied is from a few generations after the Israelites entered Eretz Yisrael until the beginning of the second Temple period (approximately 1050 BCE - 500 BCE).

The messages of the prophets differ. Some are more nationalistically inclined, while other prophets speak of universal themes. As we move chronologically through the prophetic writings, we see moral values taking center stage. While not minimizing the importance of ritual life, the latter prophets stress the idea that ritual and morality are absolutely intertwined; either on its own is empty and meaningless. The latter prophets in particular teach that the fate of the Jewish People is bound up with its moral behavior. It is no wonder that the early Reform movement adopted the prophetic writings (especially the latter prophets) as their central texts, as they spoke about a fleshed out vision of ethical monotheism. The name "Netzer" is taken from the prophet Isaiah's words and reflects a familiar prophetic theme (see Book Book I, p.130).

"...ונצר משרשיו יפרה. ונחה עליו רוח יהוה רוח חכמה ובינה רוח עצה וגבורה רוח דעת ויראת יהוה."

"...and a new shoot shall grow forth from his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

## KETUBIM (WRITINGS) כתובים

Ketubim is a collection of different types of literature, including poetry (for example, Psalms), philosophical works (for example, Job and Ecclesiastes), historical works (for example, Ezra and Nehemiah) and the five megillot (scrolls).

Megillot : Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentation, Ecclesiastes, Esther

The other books are : Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles I, Chronicles II.