

Jewish Holy Books

Hebrew Bible: The Torah, Prophets (Nevi'im) and the Writings (Ketuvim) collectively make up what Christians refer to as the Old Testament.

Torah: The five volumes or Pentateuch, sometimes referred to as the Five Books of Moses.

Midrash: This is an interpretive act, seeking the answers to religious questions (both practical and theological) by plumbing the meaning of the words of the Torah. (In the Bible, the root d-r-sh [שָׁדַר] is used to mean inquiring into any matter, including occasionally to seek out God's word. Midrash responds to contemporary problems and crafts new stories, making connections between new Jewish realities and the unchanging biblical text. Midrash falls into two categories. When the subject is law and religious practice (halacha), it is called midrash halacha. Midrash aggadah, on the other hand, interprets biblical narrative, exploring questions of ethics or theology, or creating homilies and parables based on the text. (Aggadah means "telling"; any midrash which is not halakhic falls into this category.)

Mishnah: The oral law in Judaism, as opposed to the written Torah, or the Mosaic Law. The Mishnah was collected and committed to writing about AD 200 and forms part of the Talmud. A particular teaching within the Mishnah is called a midrash.

Talmud: The Talmud has two components; the Mishnah (משנה, c. 200), a written compendium of Rabbinic Judaism's Oral Torah; and the Gemara (גמרא, c. 500), an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Hebrew Bible. The term "Talmud" may refer to either the Gemara alone, or the Mishnah and Gemara together.