

## Synopsis of the Contents of the TaNaKh (the Jewish Bible)

### PART ONE: TORAH (Instruction, Teaching)

*Genesis*: Chapters 1-11 relate God's creation of the world and the first humans, the stories of Adam, Eve Cain and Abel, the flood, the tower of Babel, and the invention of various human arts and industries. Chapters 12-50 contain the stories of the patriarchal and matriarchal ancestors of the Israelites: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel. The descent of the Jacob's son Joseph into Egypt, his rise to power and the eventual arrival of all of the Israelites in Egypt

*Exodus*: Contains the story of Moses who is charged by God with leading the Israelites from Egypt where they have been enslaved. At Mount Sinai in the wilderness, God enters into a covenantal relationship with Israel, imparting divine instructions which the Israelites promise to obey. Includes instructions for the construction of God's tabernacle.

*Leviticus*: Contains instructions concerning the sacrificial cult and other priestly rituals, the initiation of Aaron and his sons as priest, as well as laws concerning purity and impurity (both ritual and moral).

*Numbers*: Continues the narrative of the Israelites as they wander in the wilderness. Further instructions are given in this period.

*Deuteronomy*: A set of three speeches delivered by Moses on the plain of Moab on the eastern side of the Jordan river, as the Israelites are poised to enter the promised land. Moses reiterates the divine instruction delivered at Sinai and charges the people to be faithful to God so as not to incur his displeasure. Moses dies without entering the Promised Land.

### PART TWO: NEVI'IM (Prophets)

Subdivided into the books of the Former Prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings, consisting of historical narratives featuring kings and prophets and the books of the Latter Prophets (containing the oracles of the classical or literary prophets from the mid 8th to 5th century).

#### A. Former Prophets

*Joshua*: Relates the invasion of Canaan under Joshua and the distribution of the land to the Israelite tribes.

*Judges*: Stories that center around heroic "judges" who led the people in military victories over a variety of enemies.

*1 Samuel*: Samuel, the last judge and a prophet, reluctantly anoints a king at the behest of the people. Stories about the first king, Saul, and his rivalry with David.

*2 Samuel*: The story of King David. The rich Court History tells of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the revolt of his son Absalom.

*1 Kings*: Relates David's final years, and the reign of David's son Solomon who builds a Temple to God in Jerusalem. Succession of the ten northern tribes to form the kingdom of Israel, leaving 2 southern tribes as the kingdom of Judah. The prophet Elijah zealously promotes Yahwism in the north and comes into conflict with King Ahab.

*2 Kings*: Stories about Elijah and his disciple prophet Elisha. Relates the overthrow of Ahab, the succession of kings in Israel until the final destruction by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E.

Traces the history of the southern kingdom until the final destruction by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E.

## B. Latter Prophets

*Isaiah*: Oracles by and narratives about the late 8th century northern prophet Isaiah (chapters 1-39). Chapters 40-66 are from a later period.

*Jeremiah*: Oracles, poems and narratives of the late 7th early 6th century prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah witnessed the end of the southern kingdom.

*Ezekiel*: Oracles and narratives of the early 6th century prophet Ezekiel, delivered in Babylonia.

*The Book of the Twelve*: a collection of shorter prophetic books spanning 3 centuries.

1. *Hosea* -late 8th century northern prophet
2. *Joel*- postexilic oracles focusing on a day of divine retribution
3. *Amos* – mid-8th century northern prophet
4. *Obadiah* - post-destruction (post 587) prophet
5. *Jonah* - a short story about the prophet Jonah who is sent by God to Ninevah
6. *Micah* -late 8th century Judean prophet
7. *Nahum* - a poem on the fall of Ninevah (late 7th c)
8. *Habbakuk* - latter part of the 7th century
9. *Zephaniah* -- latter part of the 7th century
10. *Haggai* -late 6th century prophet, living at the time of the return from exile
11. *Zechariah* - combines late 6th century visions with later postexilic materials
12. *Malachi* - 5th century prophet.

## PART THREE: KETUVIM (Writings)

*Psalms*: 150 poetic writings of various types (praise, petition, lament, thanksgiving, etc.)

*Proverbs*: A collection of sayings and aphorisms, including tributes to wisdom

*Job*: The tale of a righteous man afflicted with suffering is the prose framework for a lengthy poetic dialogue on the question of divine justice, human suffering, and the value of righteousness.

### *The Five Scrolls*

1. *Song of Songs* - an erotic multi-voiced love poem
2. *Ruth* - story of a foreign woman's faithfulness to her Israelite family by marriage set in the period of the judges
3. *Lamentations* - Dirge on the destruction of Jerusalem
4. *Ecclesiastes* - Musings on the vanity of life
5. *Esther* - Story of a Mordechai and Esther who save the Jews of Persia from a planned slaughter.

*Daniel*- Written in the 2nd century B.C.E., this book contains the adventures of the Israelite Daniel and his friends residing in the royal court of 6th century Babylon. The latter part of

the book contains apocalyptic visions.

*Ezra* - Relates the return of the Babylonian exiles to Judea at the end of the 6th century and the reforms of Ezra, a Babylonian priest and scribe, in the 5th c.

*Nehemiah* - Relates the activities of Nehemiah, governor of Judah under Persian rule, in the mid-5th c.

*1 Chronicles* - A recapitulation of the history of Israel down to the reign of David, with different emphases and themes.

*2 Chronicles* - A continuation of I Chronicles relating the reigns of the kings of Judah down to the Babylonian exile.

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