

Holy Jewish Texts and Teachings About Peace

By Rabbi Pam Frydman

© copyright 2019. All rights reserved.

To request permission to reprint any part of this paper,
please email rabbipam.be@gmail

Peace is an elusive phenomenon that is, or may be, desired by those who have no appetite for armed conflict. Peace is especially desirable by people for whom the world is better when they are not in danger of armed conflict. However, even soldiers and sailors on active duty may wish for peace.

One of the important paths to peace is through understanding. This purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to core Jewish texts and examples of some of the Jewish views found in these texts on the subject of peace and understanding.

TANAKH – HEBREW BIBLE – JEWISH HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Hebrew Bible is called Tanakh.¹ Tanakh is an acronym.

“T” stands for Torah, meaning “Teachings”, and refers to the first five books of the Tanakh, which contain the stories of creation, the founders of the Jewish faith, the exodus from slavery, and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Interspersed among the stories in the Torah are 613 commandments called mitzvot that formed the original basis of Judaism.

“N” stands for Nevi-im, meaning “Prophets”, and contains eight books of prophecy, stories and legends.

“K” stands for Ketuvim, meaning “Writings”, and contains eleven books that include history, parables, philosophy and poetry.

Each of the books in the Tanakh are described in the final section of this chapter, entitled, “Books of the Tanakh”.

¹ Tanakh is also spelled Tanach.

TALMUD

The Talmud consists of two separate works: the Mishna and the Gemara. The Mishna was written in approximately 200 C.E. and is attributed to Yehudah HaNasi.² Two commentaries on the Mishna were written over the centuries. Both commentaries are called Gemara. One Gemara was written in Tiberias, near the Sea of Galilee and is called the Jerusalem Gemara, which was published in the fourth century C.E.

The other Gemara was written and compiled in the Academies at Sura and Pumpedita in Babylonia,³ and is called the Babylonian Gemara, which was published toward the end of the sixth century C.E.⁴

Over the centuries, additional commentaries by prominent knowledgeable rabbis have been also been added to the Babylonian Gemara, including the teachings of Rashi, his son, grandson and great grandson; and Maimonides and Adin Steinsaltz.

MYSTICISM AND KABALLAH

A number of Jewish mystical texts have appeared over the centuries. A small book, entitled ***Sefer Yetzirah*** (meaning “Book of Formation” or “Book of Creation”), is attributed by some to Abraham, the father of Judaism, and by some to Rabbi Akiva. The *Sefer Yetzirah* pairs the letters of the Hebrew alphabet with names of God, planets, constellations and parts of the human body.⁵

The ***Sefer HaBahir*** (meaning “Book of the Clarity” or “Book of the Illumination”) is a short mystical text either written by Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana, or by others, or by Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana and others, *Sefer HaBahir* includes one of the earliest — if not *the* earliest — Jewish written references to the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation.⁶

² Yehudah HaNasi means Judah the Prince.

³ Ancient Babylonia was in the area of modern Republic of Iraq.

⁴ *Calling on God: Sacred Jewish Teachings for Seekers of All Faiths*. By Pamela Frydman. Arcata, California: Wild Earth Press, 2011 and 2012.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *The HaBahir*. By Aryeh Kaplan. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1989. Pages 70-72, 77-78. (The foregoing page numbers from Rabbi Kaplan’s book are references to *Sefer HaBahir*, Part One, paragraphs 184 and 195.)

Another Jewish mystical text is the **Zohar** (translated as the “Book of Splendor”), a multi-volume mystical commentary on the Torah and other parts of the Bible. The authorship of the *Zohar* is subject to debate. There are many who believe that the Zohar was written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his contemporaries who lived during the second century C.E. under Roman occupation. Others believe that the *Zohar* was written by Moshe de León who lived in Spain in the 13th century C.E.⁷

RABBINIC LITERATURE

Jewish scholars, mystics and sages have also transmitted, and continue to transmit, both traditional and new and innovative teachings based on the Tanakh, Talmud, Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, Jewish practice, current events and everyday life. Over the centuries, some scholars have written down their teachings, while others transmitted their teachings verbally, deferring to a capable student to commit the teachings to writing. In modern times, teachings are also sometimes recorded electronically.

TANAKH AND OLD TESTAMENT

Christian theologians generally refer to the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) as the Old Testament or Elder Testament. The Old Testament contains the same text as the Tanakh. However, the Tanakh is divided into twenty-four books, whereas in the Old Testament, the same text is divided into thirty-nine books.

The difference in count is that the Tanakh contains one book each for Samuel I and II, Kings I and II, Isaiah I and II, and Chronicles I and II. However, the Old Testaments counts Samuel I and Samuel II as two separate books, and the same with Kings I and Kings II, Isaiah I and Isaiah II, and Chronicles I and Chronicles II. In addition, the Tanakh also includes a Book called the Trey Asar, meaning the twelve. The Trey Asar includes the prophecies of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. However, the Old Testament counts each of these twelve prophecies as separate books.

In addition to dividing the text of the Tanakh into a different number of books, the location of the books sequentially is different in the Tanakh and the Old Testament.

⁷ *The Zohar*, Pritzker Edition, Volume 1, Daniel Matt, editor (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004-2018).

In addition, some branches of the Christian faith also include the Books of the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament. However, according to Judaism, the Apocrypha is a separate set of sacred books that are not part of the Tanakh. For example, the Books of the Maccabees contains stories and teachings based upon which the Jewish community celebrates the holiday of Chanukah. The Books of the Maccabees are found in the Apocrypha and are also discussed in the Talmud and other rabbinic literature. Thus, the Books of the Maccabees, and the teachings contained within these books, are important in Judaism, even though they are not in the Tanakh.

Understanding the differences in how these same sacred texts are viewed by Jewish theologians and Christian theologians can hopefully provide a basis for demonstrating our mutual respect for all of the diverse versions of the Bible that are sacred to Judaism and the Christian faiths.

A KISS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE

The Tanakh includes the Book of Psalms. Psalms are spiritual poems. The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters with each chapter containing a separate spiritual poem. Here is Psalm 85, which speaks about righteousness and peace kissing one another:

To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.
Lord, you have been favorable to your land;
You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.

You have forgiven the iniquity of your people;
You have pardoned all their sin. Selah.

You have withdrawn all your wrath;
You have turned from the fierceness of your anger.

Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cease your anger toward us.
Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you draw out your anger to all generations?
Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your loving kindness, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.
I will hear what God the Lord will speak;
For He will speak peace to his people, and to his pious ones;

But let them not turn back to folly.

Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him;
That glory may dwell in our land.

Loving kindness and truth meet together;
Righteousness and peace kiss each other.
Truth shall spring from the earth;
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Also, the Lord shall give that which is good;
And our land shall yield her produce.
Righteousness shall go before him;
And walk in the way of his steps.⁸

Psalm 85 provides us with an opportunity to see through the psalmist's eyes into the relationship between truth and righteous, and between righteous and peace. There is a Jewish understanding that we can be more peaceful when we are honest and righteous. When we have erred, there is more reason for stress. My father, of blessed memory, used to say, "it is better to tell the truth, because there is less to remember." If I tell the truth, then I can rely on my memory to remember what happened, or what I think happened. If I am dishonest, then I must remember the dishonest story that I told and I will also have my memory of what actually happened. Even for a person who seems to be good at balancing both, having a guilty conscience might still be a source of stress. Telling the truth might be less stressful in terms of having less to remember. However, telling the truth can also sometimes place us in danger if we are in a situation where it is not safe to tell the truth. What then?

One way to consider this difficulty is to think about righteousness. The psalmist says, "Loving kindness and truth meet together". Perhaps this is meant to indicate that we would do well to filter our understanding of truth through loving kindness, and we would also do well to filter our loving kindness through truth. Perhaps we might see someone wearing an outfit and perhaps that outfit includes lovely colors, but perhaps the person is quite poor and the outfit is torn and tattered, or perhaps it was previously torn and tattered and has now been stitched back together in a way that reveals the owner's poverty.

⁸ Psalms, chapter 85

How might one greet such a person wearing such an outfit? If one were to address the situation in a manner that is mean spirited, it might be that the communication would be truthful. However, it might also be that the mean spirited truthful response would hurt the person's feelings and damage the relationship between the two people. The hurt suffered might also cause the owner of tattered, or formerly tattered outfit, to feel more poorly about himself or herself than s/he had already felt prior to this interaction.

By filtering the truth through one's sense of lovingkindness, one might perhaps develop the ability to comment on the person's outfit in a way that instills confidence and hopefulness instead of increased suffering and hurt. Perhaps a person who has repaired a tattered outfit will be filled with courage to repair another outfit in an even nicer way. Perhaps in doing so, the person's improved outfit will help the person to be hired for a job that will pay sufficiently to purchase new clothes.

When one's sense of loving kindness and one's sense of truth mingle together, then there is potential for righteousness and there is also potential for peace. When that happens, it is then that righteousness and peace kiss each other.

The actual permutations of righteousness and peace kissing are endless, provided that we develop techniques for walking through life with a willingness to take the time necessary to act righteously even when additional effort is required to do as is true in so many circumstances in our lives.

ISAIAH'S VISIONS

These are teachings and prophecies of the Prophet Isaiah. This teaching about peace is from chapter 2 of the Book of Isaiah:

The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and God will teach us of God's ways, and we will walk in God's paths; for from Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall decide for many people; **and they shall beat their swords into**

plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more.⁹

This teaching about peace is from chapter 11 of the Book of Isaiah:

The wolf shall also live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day, there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand for a banner of the people; to it shall the nations seek; and his resting place shall be glorious.¹⁰

This teaching about peace is from chapter 56 of the Book of Isaiah:

For so says the Lord to the eunuchs who will keep My Sabbaths and will choose what I desire and hold fast to My covenant, "I will give them in My house and in My walls a place and a name, better than sons and daughters; an everlasting name I will give him, which will not be discontinued. And the foreigners who join with the Lord to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who observes the Sabbath from profaning it and who holds fast to My covenant.

So, says the Lord, "Keep justice and practice righteousness, for My salvation is near to come, and My benevolence to be revealed." Fortunate is the person who will do this and the person who will hold fast to it, he who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it and guards his hand from doing any evil. Now let not the foreigner who joined the Lord, say, "The Lord will surely separate me from His people," and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

I will bring them to My holy mount, and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be

⁹ Isaiah 2:1-4. This refers to the Book of Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 1.

¹⁰ Isaiah 11:6-10

acceptable upon My altar, for **My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**¹¹

The above teachings about peace from the Book of Isaiah are central to the Jewish understanding of peace and a messianic age. The notion of weapons being molded into farming tools, of children and animals living together peacefully, of carnivorous animals becoming vegetarians, and of God's house being called a house of prayer for all people; the notions are miraculous and sidestep the limitations of society that seem to prevent us from reaching harmony and interdependence.

At the same time, these teachings and prophecies are surrounded by images and stories of violence elsewhere in the Book of Isaiah. This titrating between visions of war and visions of peace also appears elsewhere in the Tanakh.

In order to be true pursuers of peace, it may be necessary for us to accept and understand that it is natural for human beings to cherish their own people and possessions over that which belongs to others, and to place the importance of their own survival over the survival of others, which leads to images of violence in our scriptures, our imaginations and our governmental infrastructures. If we can perhaps accept these realities without acting upon them in order to cause harm to others, we may perhaps be able to make our own inroads toward peace within our respective societies, and ultimately within the world as a whole.

Peaceful coexistence also implies tolerance of the other, the one who is different than we are in our dress, our profession, our outlook, our preferences and our faith.

TEACHINGS IN THE TALMUD

This is a teaching from the Mishna:

The Bible relates that God created Adam as a single human being, as the ancestor of all humanity. This teaches us that to destroy a single life is to destroy a whole world, even as to save a single life is to save a whole world. That all people have a common ancestor should make for peace, since no one can say to anyone else, "My ancestor was greater than your ancestor." That humanity began with a single human being is an answer to heretics who could claim the existence of more than one Creator. That

¹¹ Isaiah 56:4-7

humanity began with a single human being proclaims forever the greatness of the Holy One. For humans stamp many coins with one die and they all look alike, but the Holy One stamped every human being with the die of Adam, yet no person is like any other. Therefore, every human being must declare, “It is for my sake that the world was created.”

The above teaching from the Mishna highlights a religious understanding that peace is a goal of creation. The notion that all human beings are interconnected by having been created from a common ancestor creates the impression that the author and arbiter of creation is peace loving, and has planted within us the capacity to recognize that we have a common ancestor from whom all humanity has descended. Whether or not this is true scientifically may be subject to debate as of this writing. However, the religious incentive to see the world through this lens brings hopefulness to those who subscribe to the ideal that there will be a time when all of humanity imagines itself as part of the human family in which there is room for everyone to live together in peace.

Envisioning all human beings as being created in the image of God is also a Jewish notion that helps to bring our consciousness toward peace in the sense that it helps us to grasp that we are all part of the human family, who are all created in the same divine image, even though we are each unique, and even though all human beings who ever lived, and who ever will live, are also created in the same divine image even though they are each unique.

This is a teaching from the Jerusalem Talmud:

Rabban Shimon be Gamliel taught: The world rests on three principles: On justice, on truth, and on peace. And all three are intertwined. When justice is done, truth is served and peace ensues.¹²

This is a teaching from the Babylonian Talmud:

The Rabbis taught: One supports the poor of those who are not Jewish as one does the poor of the Jewish people; one visits the sick among those who are not Jewish as one does the sick of the Jewish people; one mourns and buries the dead of those who are not Jewish as one does the dead of the Jewish people; one comforts the mourners among those who are not Jewish as one does those who are Jewish – for the sake of peace.¹³

¹² Jerusalem Talmud, Ta’anit 4:2

¹³ Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 61a with Tosafot 3:18

DAILY PRAYERS FOR PEACE

Traditionally, there are three Jewish worship services each day, with extra prayers added on the Sabbath, festivals and holy days. Each worship service throughout the year includes an Amidah, which is a compilation of devotional prayers that we recite in silence. Each Amidah concludes with a prayer for peace called **O-seh Sha-lom**. The traditional words are,

O-seh sha-lom beem-ro-mav hu ya-ah-seh sha-lom
ah-lay-nu ve-al-kol yis-ra-el, ve-eem-ru Amen.

The One who makes peace in the high heights, may that One make peace upon us and upon all the Jewish people. And we say, Amen.”

In many prayer books and many congregations, there is also an addition that says, “ve'al kol yosh-vay tay-vel”, which means “and upon all who live on the earth”. With this addition, it becomes a prayer for peace for the Jewish people and all people everywhere on the earth.

In Israel, there is also a prayer book that adds, ““ve'al kol yosh-vay tay-vel ve'al kol ba-ay ha-o-lam”, which means “and upon all who live on the earth and all who come to the world”. With this addition, it becomes a prayer for peace for the Jewish people and all people on earth and all plants and animals. So may it be!

During Maariv, Jewish evening worship, there is also a prayer for a good night's sleep that includes this prayer for peace,

U-fros ah-lay-nu su-kat sheh-lo-meh-cha,
Spread over us the canopy of Your peace,

The expression “Your peace” refers to the peace of God.

There are also two Jewish prayers for those who have died, which include prayers for peace. El Ma-lay Ra-cha-meem is a prayer for the soul of the deceased that is recited at funerals and certain other times. El Ma-lay Ra-cha-meem includes praying that the soul of the deceased will be at peace.

The second prayer is the Mourner's Kaddish which is recited in the synagogue during almost every worship service so that anyone in mourning may recite it for their loved one. The Mourner's Kaddish does not speak about death, but is considered to be a prayer that is beneficial for the soul of the deceased. The

content of the Mourner's Kaddish is declaring the glory of God and the wish for peace. The wish for peace at the end of the Mourner's Kaddish is the same **O-seh Sha-lom** prayer that appears at the end of the Amidah (silent devotion) described above.

INNER PEACE

During the silent Amidah, in addition to concluding with **O-seh Sha-lom**, there is also an additional prayer for peace called Sim Sha-lom or Shalom Rav. The Sim Sha-lom prayer asks God to place peace, goodness, blessing, grace, love and mercy upon us and upon the entire Jewish people. In some prayer books, Sim Sha-lom also includes praying for peace for the whole world.

The Shalom Rav prayer asks God to bestow peace on the Jewish people. In some prayer books, the Shalom Rav prayer also includes praying for peace for everyone in the whole world.

Jewish prayers for peace may be understood as referring to peace between individuals, or among peoples, or as praying for inner peace, and there may be additional understandings as well.

The Sim Sha-lom prayer seems particularly conducive to praying for inner peace because it also includes asking for the inner qualities of goodness, grace and love.

The same prayer might also carry a different understanding or intention for different people, or even for the same person at different times.

SABBATH PEACE

In Judaism, the beginning of the evening is considered to be the beginning of a new day in accordance with the description of creation in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, where it says, "and it was evening and it was morning, the first day..." "and it was evening and it was morning, the second day..." and so on through the description of six mythic days of creation. Thus, according to the Jewish calendar, Sunday begins on Saturday evening. Monday begins on Sunday evening, and so on.

Because of this, Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, extends from Friday evening until Saturday night. As part of our Friday evening prayers, we welcome Shabbat by saying, "bo-ee beh-sha-lom," which means "come in peace."

When we greet each other on Shabbat, we also say, "Shabbat shalom," meaning that we wish each other "Sabbath peace."

On Friday night, there is also a Jewish hymn called Sha-lom A-lay-chem that is sung at home before the Sabbath meal and in some communities, it is also sung in the synagogue. Sha-lom A-lay-chem means "peace upon you" and it is a song to the angels. According to Jewish tradition, we each have two angels who accompany us. One angel is leading us toward goodness and wholesomeness and the other angel is leading us off the path. We have free will in choosing which angel we will heed. This is true in life in general. On Friday night, it is also considered to be a time when the angels have an opportunity to rivet us in our pattern of choice.

If a person finds himself or herself at home on Friday night, or in someone else's home, or in another special place, and there is a nice meal and the rituals of Shabbat that include candles and wine or juice and special bread, then the angel who leads toward goodness says, "may it also be so next Shabbat" and the cantankerous angel is obliged to say, "Amen". On the other hand, if a person is in a place on Friday night where there are no candles, no wine or juice, no special bread and no meal or not much of a meal, then the cantankerous angel says, "may it also be so next Shabbat" and the angel who leads toward goodness is obliged to say, "Amen".

Part of this tradition is the singing of Sha-lom A-lay-chem. Sha-lom A-lay-chem means "peace upon you". During the four verses of Sha-lom A-lay-chem, we wish the angels peace, we welcome the angels, we ask the angels to bless us and we invite the angels to go. We cannot prove whether angels exist. If angels do exist, we cannot prove whether they accompany a person. However, the notion of angels and spirits seems to be widespread in the human family.

In addition to our prayers for peace on Friday night, we also recite prayers for peace on Saturday morning during the silent Amidah and the Mourner's Kaddish. In addition, we also recite an additional prayer for peace both on Saturday mornings and in the morning on all holy days and festivals.

Here is a version of the Prayer for Peace:

May we see the day when war and bloodshed cease,
When a great peace will embrace the whole world.

*Then nation will not threaten nation,
and mankind will not again know war.*

For all who live on earth shall realize
We have not come into being to hate or to destroy,
We have come into being to praise, to labor, and to love.

*Compassion God, bless the leaders of all nations
With the power of compassion.*

Fulfill the promise conveyed in Scripture:
I will bring peace to the land,
And you shall lie down and no one shall terrify you.

*I will rid the land of viscous beasts
And it shall not be ravaged by war.*

Let love and justice flow like a mighty stream.
Let peace fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.
And let us say: Amen.¹⁴

HEBREW WORD SHALOM - PEACE

Each language has different ways to express the notion of peace. In English, we might speak about peace of mind, meaning that we feel quiet inside and not agitated. We also might speak about a peaceful atmosphere or about making peace between people.

The Hebrew word for peace is “sha-lom,” which has the same root “sha-laym”, meaning “whole” and “shlay-moot”, meaning “wholeness”. From these root cognates, we can see that the Hebrew word “shalom” includes a sense of “wholeness”.

¹⁴“A Prayer for Peace” appears in these three prayer books, among others: *Siddur Sim Shalom* for Shabbat and Festivals. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1985, p. 149. *Machzor Lev Shalem for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2010, p. 289. *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays*. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2002, p. 75.

MESSIAH

Judaism includes teachings about the coming of a Messiah. There are many different Jewish views about Messiah. Some believe in a messianic age when human beings will have an elevated level of consciousness, and as a result of the collective elevated consciousness, there will be peace in the world.

There are also more traditional Jewish views, including that the Messiah will be a person who is in the lineage of King David, and the Messiah will be announced by the Prophet Elijah. Stories of Elijah the Prophet are contained in the Book of Kings. Stories of King David are contained in the Books of Samuel and Kings. King David's ancestors are also described in the closing verses of the Book of Ruth.¹⁵ King David is also credited with many of the chapters in the Book of Psalms.

Among those who believe that the Messiah will be in the lineage of King David and will be announced by the Prophet Elijah, there is also the view that the coming of the Messiah is the fulfillment of the divine purpose for creation. Here is an example of a teaching that embodies these views:

One of the principles of Jewish faith enumerated by Maimonides¹⁶ is that one day there will arise a dynamic Jewish leader, a direct descendant of the Davidic dynasty, who will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and gather Jews from all over the world and bring them back to the Land of Israel. All the nations of the world will recognize Moshiach [the Messiah] to be a world leader, and will accept his dominion. In the messianic era there will be world peace, no more wars nor famine, and, in general, a high standard of living.

All mankind will worship one G-d, and live a more spiritual and moral way of life. The Jewish nation will be preoccupied with learning Torah and fathoming its secrets.

¹⁵ Ruth 4:18-22

¹⁶ For a brief biography of Maimonides, see "Moses Maimonides (Rambam) (1135-1204)". *Jewish Virtual Library*. <www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/moses-maimonides-rambam> 1998-2019. Copyrighted by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.

The coming of Moshiach [the Messiah] will complete G-d's purpose in creation: [which is] for man to make an abode for G-d in the lower worlds—that is, to reveal the inherent spirituality in the material world.¹⁷

Amid the teachings about the coming of a Messiah, there is a discussion about when the Messiah will arrive during the week.

In the Babylonian Talmud, it says that the Messiah, “will not arrive on the Sabbath, since that would require people to violate the Sabbath while welcoming the Messiah.”¹⁸

In the Jerusalem Talmud, it says that the prophet Elijah “will arrive no later in the week than Thursday, leaving room for the Messiah to arrive by Friday.” Then it says that, “Elijah will announce the arrival of the Messiah from Mount Carmel in the Land of Israel.”¹⁹

There is also a teach that the Messiah will arrive suddenly on the eve of Passover. According to Rabbi Ishmael, the Messiah will arrive suddenly on the eve of Passover because Passover is the first redemption when the Israelites received their freedom from enslavement; and the redemption that the Jewish community celebrates on Passover, serves as a model of the final redemption at the time of the Messiah.²⁰

BOOKS OF THE TANAKH

This section provides the names of each of the Books of the Tanakh together with a brief description of what is contained in each. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Tanakh is an acronym. “T” stands for “Torah” meaning “Teaching”, “N” stands for “Nevi'im” meaning “Prophets”, and “K” stands for “Ketuvim” meaning “Writings”.

¹⁷ “What is the Jewish Belief about Moshiach (Messiah)? By Nissan Dovid Dubov. Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center 1993-2019.

<www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/108400/jewish/The-End-of-Days.htm>

¹⁸ Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 13a. Cited in “Afterlife: The Messianic Age in Judaism.” By David S. Ariel. *My Jewish Learning*. <www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-messianic-age-in-judaism/>. 2012-2019.

¹⁹ Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 3:6. Mount Carmel is in the modern city of Haifa in Israel. Also cited in “Afterlife: The Messianic Age in Judaism”, *Ibid*.

²⁰ Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Pischea 14. Also cited in “Afterlife: The Messianic Age in Judaism”, *Ibid*.

TORAH - TEACHINGS

- **Genesis** – The Hebrew name is Sefer Bereishit, meaning “Book of in the beginning”. Genesis contains the Jewish creation myth and stories of the founding fathers and mothers of the Jewish people and many other peoples, together with a few of the 613 commandments. The Book of Genesis opens with the words, “In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Rashi, a famous rabbi and scholar who lived in France in the eleventh century, wrote a commentary on the Torah and the Talmud. Regarding the opening words of the Book of Genesis, Rashi writes, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. This is the story of creation; the rest is commentary.”
- **Exodus** – The Hebrew name is Sefer Shmot, meaning the “Book of Names”, which refers to a list of names of the Israelites who went from the land of Canaan to the land of Egypt to dwell during the time of Joseph. Exodus contains the stories of Israelite slavery in Egypt, God’s call to Moses at the burning bush, the exodus from slavery, the parting and crossing of the Sea of Reeds, receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, instructions for building a portable sanctuary in the wilderness, and the receiving of many of the 613 commandments.
- **Leviticus** – The Hebrew name is Sefer Vayikra, meaning “Book of He called”. “He” refers to God, who called Moses from the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness. Leviticus contains many laws that are instructions about the sacrifice of animals, grain and other offerings, as well as instructions for anointing and installing Israelite priests, and a host of other priestly commandments, as well as agricultural commandments and commandments for living a holy life. The many commandments given in Leviticus are part of the 613 commandments.
- **Numbers** – The Hebrew name is Sefer BaMidbar, meaning “Book of in the wilderness” and refers to the wilderness where the Israelites dwelled and wandered for forty years following slavery in Egypt and before entering the Promised Land. The book’s English name “Numbers” refers to the census of the Israelites that is described at the beginning of the book. The Book of Numbers contains stories about the adventures, successes, challenges and defeats of the Israelites during the years they were wandering in the wilderness, together with a summary of the places where the Israelites camped during their wandering. The Book of Numbers also contains many of the 613 commandments.
- **Deuteronomy** – The Hebrew name is Sefer Devarim, meaning “Book of Words” and refers to the words that Moses spoke to the people as they were assembled on the eastern shore of the Jordan River at the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Moses spoke to the Israelites for thirty-seven days, recounting events of their history and giving them many laws and teachings. Moses then blessed each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and then he went up onto a mountain and passed from this world. God buried Moses, the Israelites

mourned his passing, and thus the Torah ends. In addition to these stories, Deuteronomy also contains many of the 613 commandments (called mitzvot in Hebrew) that are contained in the Torah.

NEVI'IM - PROPHETS

- **Joshua** – This Book, which bears the name of the successor of Moses, describes the conquests of the Israelites in the Promised Land, which we now call the Land of Israel.
- **Judges** – When the Israelites first settled in the Land of Israel, their leaders were called judges. The Book of Judges includes stories of the judges and the Israelites during that period.
- **Samuel** – Samuel was a prophet. The Book of Samuel opens with the story of his mother, Hannah, a barren wife who prays for a son and promises to give her son over to divine service. Samuel responds to the insistence of the Israelites that they have a king. Following divine guidance, Samuel anoints Saul as King of Israel, and later anoints David and brings Saul the message that he is no longer king.
- **Kings** – The Book of Kings²¹ includes stories from the latter years of the reign of King David through King Solomon as well as the following: After the death of King Solomon, Israel became divided into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom was called Judea, which included Jerusalem and the Temple. The Book of Kings also includes stories about the kings of Israel and Judea from the separation of the two kingdoms through the destruction of each realm. The Book of Kings also includes stories of numerous prophets, including Nathan, Elijah and Elisha.
- **Isaiah** – The Book of Isaiah contains Isaiah's prophecies concerning Judea and Jerusalem during the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judea.

21 The Kingdom of Israel was founded in approximately 1046 B.C.E. at the beginning of the reign of King Saul, the son of Kish of the Tribe of Benjamin. In approximately 930, the Kingdom of Israel became divided into two kingdoms: Israel and Judea. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. and most of its population was taken into captivity. The captives of the Northern Kingdom of Israel are known as the lost tribes. The Southern Kingdom of Judea included Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. The Kingdom of Judea was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and its population was taken into captivity. In 538 B.C.E., the Persians conquered the Babylonians and subsequently allowed the Judeans to return to rebuild the Temple and live on the land. The Second Temple stood for approximately five hundred years and was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, there has always been a small continuous presence of Jews—from the word Yehudim, meaning Judeans—living on the land that is now modern Israel. However, Jews were not allowed to live on the land in large numbers until after the birth of the modern State of Israel in 1948.

- **Jeremiah** – The Book of Jeremiah contains Jeremiah’s prophecies concerning Kings Josiah, Jehoiachim and Zedekiah of Judea. This is before and during Babylonian captivity of Judea and the destruction of the Kingdom of Judea.
- **Ezekiel** – The Book of Ezekiel contains Ezekiel’s prophecies during the Babylonian occupation and destruction of Judea. Ezekiel prophesied concerning the Jewish homeland and other regions.
- **Tray Asar** – The Twelve.²² Tray Asar is a single Book containing the booklets of twelve prophets, including:
 - ^**Hosea**, who prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel and Kings Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judea;
 - ^**Joel**, who prophesied regarding the Kingdom of Judea and Jerusalem;
 - ^**Amos**, who prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel, and King Uzziah of Judea;
 - ^**Obadiah**, who prophesied after the destruction of Judea by the Babylonians, to whom he refers as the children of Esau;
 - ^**Jonah**, who prophesied to Nineveh. It is believed that Jonah may have lived in the Kingdom of Israel;
 - ^**Micah**, who prophesied during the reigns of Kings Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judea;
 - ^**Nahum**, who prophesied about Nineveh;
 - ^**Habakkuk**, who likely lived in Judea and was a contemporary of Nahum and Jeremiah. He predicts the coming Babylonian invasion;
 - ^**Zephaniah**, who prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judea;
 - ^**Haggai**, who prophesied during the reign of King Darius of Persia. The Persians conquered Babylonia at a time when the Judeans were in exile in Babylonia;
 - ^**Zechariah**, who also prophesied during the reign of King Darius of Persia. Zechariah received prophecy from an angel. One of the angel’s teachings was, “Not by might; not by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.” This prophecy is read in modern times on the Sabbath during the holiday of Chanukah; and
 - ^**Malachi**, who prophesied at the time of Nehemiah (whose story is in the

22 According to Jewish scholars, the Hebrew Bible contains twenty-four books. Christian scholars refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament and to the stories and teachings of Jesus as the New Testament. According to Christian scholars, the Old Testament contains thirty-nine books. The difference in counting is due to the following: In the Christian Scriptures, each of the twelve booklets of the Trey Asar are considered to be a separate book; whereas, in the Jewish scriptures, all twelve are considered to be part of the one book called Trey Asar. Also, in the Jewish scriptures, first and second Kings, first and second Samuel, and first and second Chronicles are considered to be one book, whereas in the Christian scriptures each of these are counted as two books.

Writings section of the Hebrew Bible). This was during the time of Persian rule in Babylonia and Judeans were welcome to return to Judea and Jerusalem. Malachi prophesizes that Elijah will return and turn the hearts of parents to children, and children to parents.

KETUVIM - WRITINGS

- **Psalms** - This Book of Psalms contains one hundred fifty spiritual poems, called psalms. Many of the psalms are attributed to King David, while some are attributed to King Solomon, to Asaph, and also to the children of Korach, whose difficult story is told in chapter 16 of the Book of Numbers in the Torah.
- **Proverbs** - The Book of Proverbs contains thirty-one proverbs, each containing wisdom teachings.
- **Job** - The Book of Job includes the story of Job. After much pain and suffering, hopelessness and faith, Job is blessed with prosperity, and is surrounded by family and friends.
- **Song of Songs** - The Song of Songs is love poetry attributed to King Solomon. There was a great deal of controversy about whether Song of Songs would make it into the Bible, and in the end, it did. The imagery in Song of Songs is explicit about human love and is also said to refer to the love between God and the Jewish people, or love between God and humanity. Song of Songs is quoted in the Talmud and other rabbinic literature. The *Zohar* and other mystical texts also focus considerably on the imagery of Song of Songs.
- **Ruth** - The Book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite woman married to an Israelite who dies at a young age. Ruth follows her husband's mother, Naomi, from the land of Moab to Naomi's homeland in the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve ancestral tribes of Israel. Ruth marries Boaz, a relative of her late husband, and they have a son together. Four generations later, David is born into their lineage, and becomes king of Israel, a nation forged from the twelve tribes.
- **Lamentations** - The Book of Lamentations is attributed to the Prophet Jeremiah, and contains a lament of the destruction of Judea and Jerusalem.
- **Ecclesiastes** - The Book of Ecclesiastes is a brief philosophical treatise attributed to King Solomon. It begins, "Futility, futility, all is futile," and ends, "The sum of the matter, when all is said and done; revere God and observe God's commandments, for this applies to all humankind."
- **Esther** - The Book of Esther contains the story of Esther, a Jewish woman, who is chosen by King Ahashuerus of Persia to be his queen. Queen Esther saves the Jewish people from the tyrannical Haman, a chief advisor to the king who wants to annihilate the Jews.
- **Daniel** - The Book of Daniel takes place during the Babylonian exile and contains stories of miracles, courage and prophecy. The early verses of chapter 12 also contain teachings on resurrection.

- **Ezra** - The Book of Ezra describes some of the events that took place in Persia during the reign of Cyrus who gave freedom to the Judeans, who had been living in captivity in Babylon.
- **Nehemiah** - The Book of Nehemiah describes the return to Jerusalem.
- **Chronicles** - This book chronicles the lineages from Adam to King Cyrus who receives word from God to encourage the Judeans to return to Judea and Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple. It also contains stories that take place during certain of these periods.