

Jewish Scriptures & Commentaries

Jewish literature has developed and been modified over time making contemporary collections very complex. The first phase of development from the 1st through 2nd centuries produced Tannaitic literature most of which constitutes the Mishna. The second phase of development from the 3rd through 5th centuries produced the Talmud and was known as the Amoraic period.

Gemara

- During what's known as the Amoraic period of rabbinic Judaism, following the Tannaitic period, the Mishnah (which was produced in the Tannaitic period) was commented upon in documents known as the Gemaras.
- There are two gemara: the Palestinian gemara which is shorter and less authoritative & the Babylonian gemara which is larger and more authoritative.
- The gemara also include materials omitted from the Mishnah called baraita and is frequently referred to with phrases like, "it is taught" or "the rabbis have taught"
- The gemara also include other traditions in a section called the Tosefta (lit. 'additions').
- The Gemaras & Mishna together are known as the Talmud. The Palestinian Talmud was assembled c.350 AD and the Babylonian Talmud c.500 AD

Masoretic Text (abbreviated MT)

- The Masorettes (lit. transmitters of tradition) were Jewish scholars (c. 500-1000 AD) responsible to preserving the text of the Hebrew Bible and creating a system of vowel signs to provide a pronunciation guide for the consonantal text of Hebrew scripture
- They relied on older received manuscripts.
- The Masoretic text is the product of that effort.

Megilloth

- *Megilla* - scroll; from *galal* - to roll up
- The five megilloth are Ruth, Canticles (Song of Solomon), *Ecclesiastes*, Lamentations and Esther.

Midrash

- Heb. - *midras*, "to seek, examine, investigate"
- Refers both to a method of exposition and application of the Torah as well as a collection of these expositions and applications.
- Ezra practiced this style b/c of his efforts to study and apply the Torah
- *Haggadah midras* - interpreted non-legal materials in an ethical and expository style; a distillation of principles from the Torah.
- *Halakah midras* - applied the general principles of OT laws to specific situations; an application of the Torah in a kind of 'case law' format.
- Midrash material was preserved orally for a long time
- AD 100's the halakic midrashim were written down
 - Mekilta - treatise on Exodus
 - Sifra - treatise on Leviticus
 - Sifre – treatise on Numbers and Deuteronomy
- AD 200's the haggadic midrashim were written down
 - Treatise on Genesis followed later by Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy as well as the Megilloth
 - These were known as the Midrash Rabbah

Mishnah

- From Hebrew *shana*, "to repeat"
- Refers both to a teaching technique emphasizing memory work through continuous repetition and a commentary on the Torah that contained few direct references to the Torah.

- Developed by the scribal school of the Hasidim.
- After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem the only surviving group, the Pharisees, organized a rabbinical center at Jamnia under Yohanan ben Zakkai where they collected their legal traditions going back to the 1st century BC (NT refers to it as the tradition of the elders). Rabbi's Meir & Akiba organized the traditions into categories and c.200 AD Rabbi Judah (a.k.a. the Prince) supervised its collation into the Mishnah.
- Midrash study was not supplanted by the Mishnah approach...both were used for halakic and haggadic areas
- The Mishnah is a sort of collection of the works of Soph^erim, Hasidim, Zugot and Tannaim periods assembled and written down by Judah HaNasi c. AD 200.
- Judah HaNasi did not compile all the Mishnah or Midrash material into the document called the Mishnah
- Subsequent scholars pulled together the unpublished Mishnah and Midrash material with their own commentaries in a document called the **Gemara** (Aramaic *g^emara* meaning "completion") which serves as a commentary on the Judah HaNasi Mishnah
- The Gemara and Mishnah is together called the Targum or Talmud

Scribes

- *soph^erim* - scribal tradition running from Ezra (c.450 BC to 180 BC) which produced the Midrashim
- *hasidim* - scribal tradition running through the Maccabean age which produced the Mishnah
- through the period of the hasidim, there were 5 pairs of leaders known as the *Zugot* who developed instructional methods w/o direct reference to the Law

Septuagint (abbreviated LXX meaning 'of the seventy')

- The name derives from the apocryphal story found in a 2nd century BC letter, *Letter of Aristeas*, who claimed it was the work of 72 scholars, 6 from each tribe of Israel.
- A Greek translation of the Torah prepared 3 centuries before the birth of Christ

Talmud (a.k.a. Oral Torah)

- From *lamad*, "to study," "to learn"
- It's a commentary on the Tenach (i.e. Jewish Bible; Christians call it the Old Testament).
- It includes devotional literature, Law interpretations and application, wise sayings with references to philosophy, history, medicine and practical living.
- There are many views contained in it, many are contradictory.
- Developed in Alexandria after Babylon and Jerusalem were no longer Jewish intellectual centers; comprised of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Targum with additional commentaries
- Talmud is sometimes used interchangeably with Targum
- The Talmud consists of two parts: the Mishnah (a compilation of oral laws) and the Gemara (a compilation of discussions).
- Circa 450 BC to AD 500
- See the notes on Mishnah, Midrash and Targum

Targum

- from *targumim*, interpretations
- Interpretations or paraphrases of the Pentateuch
- The Gemara and Mishnah is together called the Targum or Talmud
- There are two versions of the Targum: the Jerusalem (a.k.a. Jonathan, AD 425?) and the Babylonian (AD 500); the latter is 3x as long

Tenach (a.k.a. Tanakh)

- The Jewish Bible (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible)
- It includes the Torah (Pentateuch), Prophets & Writings

Torah

- The 1st 5 books of the Tenach (a.k.a. Pentateuch or the books of Moses)
- Some Jewish scholars refer to the Talmud as the Oral Torah.
 - Some traditionally hold that the Oral Torah and Haggadah were given by God to Moses on Sinai but only the Pentateuch was written down.
 - The Talmud indicates that the Oral Torah ought to be more studiously followed than even the Torah.
"The sayings of the elders have more weight than those of the prophets" (Berakoth 1:7);
"An offense against the saying of the scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture" (Sanhedrin 11:3)

Literary Structure

Often OT prophets delivered their message in verse. This made the message more interesting and easier to remember. Below are some terms used to describe attributes of these styles:

Acrostic Poetry

The first letter of each new line forms a recognizable pattern (e.g. Ps.119, each new line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet; see also Ps.9/10,25,34,37,111,112,145).

Alliteration

Repetition of the same sound at the beginning of two or more words in a series (e.g. "Fields ever fresh and groves ever green"). Obviously, this style is only present in the language in which the text was initially written. Once translated, the impact of alliteration is lost. Ps.22:4 *b^eka bat^ehu... bat^ehu* ("in you...put their trust; they trusted")

Allegory

An allegory is a sort of extended metaphor where two different things are being compared for their similarities in an effort to clarify something about the object of the allegory. In an allegory, each element of an account represents a feature of the object of the allegory. "Thus says the Lord my God, 'Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished, and each of those who sell them says, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich.' And their own shepherds have no pity on them'" is an allegory from Zechariah.11:4. The objects of this allegory are those who participate in the destruction of Israel...that they treat Israel like a sheep herd and each element of the allegory directly applies to these people.

Antiphony

An antiphonal psalm is a responsive psalm. The cantor recites a line and the group responds (e.g. the great Hallel, Psalm 136)

Aphorism

A short pithy sentence (e.g. he's as good as dead). In Isaiah 7:8, "The head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin."

Apostrophe

An address directed toward a personification (e.g. Ps.68:15-16).

Assonance

A partial rhyme in which the stressed vowel sounds are alike but the consonant sounds are not (e.g. bike and light). In Micah 7:4 the word 'hedge', *m^esuka*, and the word 'confusion', *m^ebuka* are assonant words used to change perspective from description to prediction. Isaiah describes the day of the Lord as a day of 'tumult', *m^ehuma*; 'trampling', *m^ebusa* and 'terror', *m^ebuka* (22:5) using assonance & alliteration to make the prophecy tense and memorable to his listeners. According

to VanGemenen,¹ Psalm 44:7 displays assonance. Although he focuses upon the consonant sounds, sh, ts or s, which occur in every word: *hosatanu missarenu um^esanenu h^ebisota*.

Chiasm (a.k.a. chiasmus)

An inversion of the second of two parallel phrases (e.g. do not live to eat but eat to live). Isaiah 1:19-20, "you will eat the best...but if you resist, you will be devoured," carries the chiasmus, 'eat or be eaten.' Psalm 51:1a, 'have mercy...according to your love' forms a chiasm with 51:1b, 'according to your compassion...blot out transgressions'. Psalm 6:9a, 'heard...my cry for mercy' forms a chiasm with 6:9b, 'my prayer...accepts'.

Scholars often analyze & demonstrate chiasmic or parallel prose using letter designations for each line with the corresponding line tagged with the corresponding letter & an added ' mark (e.g. ABC A'B'C').

Ellipsis

This involves incomplete parallelism. The second phrase in a parallel line silently includes a clause from the previous line (e.g. Ps.88:6). Psalm 12:3, 'may the Lord cut off' belongs with both clauses but is only associated with the first clause.

Hendiadys

A figure of speech wherein two sequential expressions make the same point (Ps.107:10 – darkness {*hosek*} and deepest gloom {*salmawet*} intensify the experience of anguish) OR (Ps.27:1 'the Lord is my light {*or*} and my salvation {*yasa*} intensify the joy of God's loving actions).

Hyperbole

An exaggeration meant to emphasize a point rather than to be taken literally (e.g. The whole world is in an uproar over this teaching. This is as old as time) (e.g. Ps.40:12). Some people take "the lion shall lie down with the lamb ..." prophecy in Isaiah 11:3-16 to be an hyperbole intended to emphasize the peace and safety of the millennial kingdom. Others take it literally.

Imagery

The use of simile, metaphor mythic allusions or other literary devices that conjure up mental images as they are read and pondered. These images support the point the author is trying to make. The 1st Psalm is full of such images (e.g. sitting in the seat of mockers v.1; like a tree planted by the waters v. 3; like the chaff v.4).

Parallelism and imagery are standard features of Hebrew poetry. Meter and rhyme, while important in Western poetry, are not characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

Inclusion (a.k.a. inclusio)

The opening and closing of a passage is the same or similar. Inclusio serves as bookends to the entire passage between. It sets the mood for the passage and brings it to a close (e.g. Ps. 8:1 & 9; *Hallelu Yah, Praise Yaweh* begins and ends Ps.106).²

Merismus

A use of words that are meant to represent the whole population (e.g. Ps.105:14 *adam* (man) and *m^elakim* (kings) are used to mean anyone/everyone). Ps. 121:2 'heaven & earth' are meant to represent every created thing.

Metaphor

When unlike things are compared with each other to clarify the meaning of one of those things. A metaphor is an extended simile without the clue "like" or "as."

¹ In *Psalms* from the *Expositors Bible Commentary*.

² These examples are from Longman, p.107

"A mighty fortress is our God," is a metaphor intended to communicate the protection available to all that put their trust in God.

"I am the door," is a metaphor intended to show that Christ is the access point to God and to eternal life.

"Its teeth are the teeth of a lion and it has the fangs of a lioness," is a metaphor in Joel 1:6 intended to show the ferocity of Judah's judgment.

A **metonymy** is a simile or metaphor intended to represent something (e.g. Ps.7:10 shield; Ps.22:15-16 potsherd, dogs).

Onomatopoeia

The formation of a word from the sound the object makes (e.g. barking of a dog; hissing of a snake; roaring of an engine). In Isaiah 17:12, "...the uproar of the peoples - they roar like the roaring of great waters," the 'm' and 'n' sounds in *hamon* (uproar) and *seon* (roaring) sound like waves when read aloud in Hebrew. In Isaiah 42:14, "like a woman in childbirth, I cry out (*pa'ah*), I gasp (*nawsham*) and pant (*sha'af*)," are grunting, guttural words reminiscent of sounds made by a woman during childbirth.

Parable

A parable is a fictional short story intended to communicate some truth. Formal names are not part of parabolic writing; parables are short and followed by an explanation (e.g. In 2 Sam.12:1ff Nathan tells David a parable about an unjust rich man exploiting a poor man. David does not know it is a parable until Nathan reveals that it is a parable about David's treatment of Uriah).

Parallelism

We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow these grounds...

Abraham Lincoln

Parallelism and imagery are typical features of Hebrew prose and poetry although parallelism is more typical of poetry.³ It involves the repetition and extension of the ideas in one line by subsequent line(s). Parallelism runs over us like a series of waves driving the message home. Scholars often analyze & demonstrate chiasmic or parallel prose using letter designations for each line with the corresponding line tagged with the corresponding letter & an added ' mark (e.g. ABC A'B'C').

There are different kinds of parallelism:

- **Semantic parallelism** involves the repetition and extension of the ideas in one line by the next line. The categories of this kind of parallelism include:
 - Synonymous parallelism (e.g. Ps. 2)
 - › Identical - Ps.24:1
 - › Similar - Ps.19:2
 - Antithetic parallelism - Ps.1:6; Prov.10:1
The thesis & antithesis are making the same point by focusing on different elements.
 - Synthetic/Constructive parallelism (everything that doesn't fit the other patterns)
 - › Completion (a parallelism of rhythm rather than of meaning) - Ps.2:6
 - › Comparison - Prov.15:17
 - › Reason - Prov.26:4
 - Climactic or repetitive parallelism - Ps.29:1
 - Emblematic parallelism - Prov. 25:25, 11:22, Ps. 26:2, 42:1
The use of imagery in conjunction with parallelism.
 - Pivot pattern - Ps. 98:2
A clause is shared between two lines.
 - Chiasm (e.g. Ps1:1,6)
The entire 2nd Psalm is a chiasmic form (1-3 & 10-12)

³ Most of the examples used below are from the Psalms. Meter and rhyme, while important in Western poetry, are not characteristic of Hebrew poetry

EARTH	X	HEAVEN
HEAVEN		EARTH

- **Grammatical parallelism** involves the repetition of the parts of speech from one line to the next, although not necessarily in the same order (e.g. *He rebukes them in his anger* {verb-direct object-prepositional phrase} *and in his wrath he terrifies them* {prepositional phrase-verb-direct object}. This serves to tie one line with another.

Personification

The presentation of an idea or value through its expression as a person (e.g. 'the wine he dries up, the field he mourns' Joel 1:10)

Recapitulation

A short summary of points previously made. "Awake drunkards and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth," from Joel 1:5 is a recapitulation intended to emphasize the nature of the audience.

Simile

When two unlike things are compared (e.g. she is like a summer day). The terms, 'like' or 'as' are often used in such sentences. "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses," is a simile from Joel 2:4 intended to communicate the swiftness of Israel's destruction.

Strophe

A stanza that is answered by another stanza - twist on the first.

Wordplay

This is a clever exchange of words, a malapropism⁴ or a pun. In Isaiah 13:6, "...it will come like destruction from the Almighty," both words derive from the same root *sod*. The blow will be such that only God could have delivered it. Micah has an entire series of puns in his prophecy about the destruction of several cities of Judah (see Micah 1:8-15).

- **Paronomasia** is a form of wordplay where homonyms with different nuances are used (Ps.44:15-17 *kol* (all) and *qol* (sound or taunts)).
- **Antanaclosis** is a form of wordplay where homonyms are used that have contrasting meanings (e.g. Ps.69:30-31 a song {*sir*} is better than a bull {*sor*})

⁴ A deliberate misuse of words, particularly words that sound like the words substituted (e.g. He is a legend in his own **mind** (substitution of mind for the correct word - time))