
The Muse

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THE HISTORY OF THE TORAH SCROLL

Tradition holds that Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai at the same time G-d handed down the Ten Commandments. *Torah* means teaching, or instruction. The Torah contains the Law, which G-d required His people to follow and obey because of their rebellion at Sinai. It holds the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which is called the Tanakh, containing the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the

century AD), when the script was changed from ancient Hebrew to the square Aramaic script used in Babylon during the Exile of the Jewish People. Since the Torah is the word of G-d, only a trained scribe, a *sofer*, is allowed to copy it. These scribes are trained by requiring them to copy an existing scroll so that each letter, word, and line are exactly the same as the scroll before it. Different scribal

decorated with beautiful breastplates and crowns, often made of silver.

The history of the Torah Scroll is more than just the history of how they are written or how they changed over time and space. The history of the scrolls is the history of the Jewish people, and subsequently a part of the history of Christianity. The burnt remains of scrolls reveal the history of the persecution of the Jewish people,



Writings. The Hebrew Bible is not in the same order as the Christian Old Testament. The Pentateuch includes the first five books of the Christian Bible, in the same order: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Torah Scroll is the holiest object in Judaism, because it is understood literally as the Word of God. Each synagogue is required to have at least two handwritten Torah Scrolls, which must be read every week, according to an order set by the rabbis following the destruction of the Second Temple.

Torah Scrolls have remained relatively unchanged since the Second Temple Period (6th century BC - 1st

centuries, because of the geographical dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world. The Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions make up the main two scribal traditions, but readers of Hebrew can easily read each other's Hebrew texts. Ashkenazi Jews come from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe, whereas Sephardic Jews are primarily from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East. The most visible difference between an Ashkenazi scroll and a Sephardic one is the way it is covered. Sephardic scrolls are kept in hard cases, while Ashkenazi scrolls are kept in cloth cases,

while the continued scribal practice is testament to their enduring devotion to the preservation and study of G-d's Word. The decoration of the Torah scroll took on characteristics of the places where the Jewish people settled, and it was in those places that the first Christians would appear. The movement, change, and preservation marks the living presence of the Jewish people in the world to this day. For many Christians, the presence of the Jewish people anchors them to the reality of Jesus Christ, a Jewish man who studied and taught the Torah in synagogues throughout ancient Israel and in the precincts of the Second Temple.

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