

- aggadah:** literally, “account”; rabbinic elaborations of the covenant story (according to the traditions of the oral Torah)
- amoraim** (sing.: *amora*): literally, “sayers” or “commentators”; “sages” of the later generations (roughly 200-400 CE), who produced later Midrashim and commentaries on the Mishnah (*gemara*) that were eventually collected into the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds; active in Palestine and Babylon
- Avot:** a tractate of the Mishnah order Neziqin (“[Civil] Damages”), sometimes also called *Pirkei Avot* (“The Sayings of the Fathers”); includes more abstract principles of the transmission of Oral Torah and the ethical precepts of the *tannaim*
- baraitot** (sing. *baraita*): a saying attributed to the *tannaim*, but not included in the **Mishnah** (found in the Talmud, or in collections of tannaitic midrash)
- halakah:** literally, “procedure”; rabbinic elaborations of the covenant rules (according to the traditions of oral Torah)
- midrash:** a form of biblical interpretation that allows for a passage of the Bible to be understood in relation to other passages of the Bible
- mishnah:** a paragraph (the smallest unit) of the **Mishnah** (plural: *mishnayot*)
- Mishnah:** the codification of Oral Law produced by **Judah ha-Nasi** *circa* 200 CE; organized according to topics; divided into **six orders**, each containing a number of tractates (63 total), each of which is divided into chapters, each of which is divided into paragraphs (**mishnayot**), which give rulings and opinions on matters of halakah
- patriarch:** a hereditary title among aristocratic descendants of Hillel (sometimes also called *nasi*, or “prince”); while their role in the Inter-War period is unclear, from the third century onward they seem to act as a centralizing figure of Jewish identity in the Land and the Diaspora
- Rabbi (*Judah ha-Nasi [the Prince]*):** when used without a proper name, refers to **Judah the Prince**, a descendant of Hillel responsible for the ordering and compilation of the **Mishnah**; the term *Nasi* (“prince”) marks his status among the Jews of his time, and probably as one of the first real “**patriarchs**” (authoritative representative of Jews to the Romans)
- rabbi (*Rab/Rav, Rabban, Rabbenu*):** a respectful form of address, literally “My Master” apparently used among Jewish teachers by the tannaitic era; variations include “Rab” or “Rav” (“The Master”), “Rabban” (our master), and “Rabbenu” (also “our Master”); abbreviation, “R.” (ex.: “R. Akiba”)
- Rav Sherira Gaon:** a tenth-century rabbi in one of the Talmudic academies of (Islamic) Persia; his *Iggeret* (“Letter”) gives the first full exploration of the production of all of rabbinic literature
- sages:** (Hebrew, *hakamim*) an intellectual class of Jewish leaders who seem to draw on Pharisaic modes of Jewish interpretation after the First Jewish War, and eventually establish themselves as guardians of post-Temple Judaism
- tannaim** (sing.: *tanna*): literally, “repeaters” (same root as *Mishnah*), “sages” of the early generations (roughly 100 BCE to 200 CE, according to later rabbinic traditions), responsible for the material found in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and tannaitic midrashim; active in Palestine (Galilee) and Babylon
- “tannaitic midrash”:** various collections of interpretations (mainly of the books of the Torah) that present halakah and aggadah according to the order of biblical verses, not according to the orders and tractates of the Mishnah
- Tosefta:** an expansion and interpretation of the **Mishnah**, divided up according to the same orders, tractates, and chapters; probably circulating in some form by 250 or 300

### Literature of the Sages

Mishnah (circa 200): literally, "repetition"; collection of legalistic rulings based on the *Torah*  
Tosefta (circa 250): literally, "supplement"; an expanded version of the Mishnah that did not enjoy the same authority

Palestinian Talmud (*Yerushalmi* circa 450); Babylonian Talmud (*Bavli* circa 550): literally, "Teaching"; collections of commentaries on the Mishnah (*gemara*)

"Tannaitic midrashim" (*Mekhilta* of R. Ishmael [Exodus], *Sifra* [Leviticus], *Sifre* to Numbers, *Sifre* to Deuteronomy): commentaries of the *Torah* executed around (or soon after) the compilation of the Mishnah, primarily concerned with legal interpretations

Midrash Rabbah: rabbinic commentaries on Genesis and other books of the Bible, more concerned with *aggadah*, produced throughout amoraic period

Rabbinic literature can be distinguished according to **type** or according to **form**; any piece of rabbinic literature must therefore be analyzed according to its *type* as well as its *form*

### TYPES of Rabbinic Oral Torah

*halakah*: focused on covenantal procedure  
*rules, regulations, debates over ritual and civic laws*

*aggadah*: focused on covenantal history  
*stories, legends, elaborations of biblical stories*

### FORMS of Rabbinic Oral Torah

*mishnah*: a topical statement of halakic law  
*mishnayot are organized according to topic*

*midrash*: an interpretation of a biblical passage  
*midrashim are organized according to the order of biblical verses*

### Examples of Rabbinic Literature

- the Mishnah and the Tosefta are arranged topically (*mishnah*) and deal almost entirely with covenant procedure (*halakah*)
- the Sifra (*tannaitic commentary on Leviticus*) and the Mekhilta (*tannaitic commentary on Exodus*) are arranged biblically (*midrash*) and deal almost entirely with covenant procedure (*halakah*)
- the Bereshit Rabbah (*amoraic commentary on Genesis*) Eicha Rabbah (*amoraic commentary on Lamentations*) are arranged biblically (*midrash*) and deal almost entirely with covenant history (*aggadah*)
- the Babylonian Talmud (*amoraic commentary on the Mishnah*) is arranged topically (*mishnah*) and deals with both covenant procedure (*halakah*) and covenant history (*aggadah*)