

Glossary

Acacia tortilis

A tree prevalent in the southern wadis (valleys) of Israel.

Apocrypha

Books included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but excluded from Jewish and Protestant canons of the Old Testament.

Aramaic

A Semitic language known since the ninth century B.C.E.; official language of the Persian empire; used extensively in southwest Asia and by the Jews after the Babylonian exile; the cursive script replaced the ancient paleo-Hebrew script for secular writing as well as for holy scriptures.

B.C.E.

Before the Common Era; indicates that a time division falls before the Christian era; same as B.C.

C.E.

Common Era; indicates that a time division falls within the Christian era; same as A.D.

Canon

A collection of books accepted as holy scripture.

Carbon-14 dating

A heavy radioactive isotope of carbon of mass number 14 used in dating archaeological and geological materials

Denarii

Roman Republican coins, originally cast in silver and worth 10 asses; known as a "penny" in the New Testament. The Library of Congress exhibition includes coins from the mid-first century B.C.E.

Essenes ("Judah" in some Qumran writings)

One of the three orders of Jews during the Second Temple Period; a separatist group that formed an ascetic monastic community and, in response to apocalyptic visions, retreated to the wilderness.

First Temple Period

ca. 850 - 586 B.C.E.; ended with destruction of the First Temple and exile of the Hebrews.

Flavius Josephus ca. 37 - 100 C.E.

Jewish historian who defined and described the characteristics of the three existing Jewish orders: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes; for example, he reported that those Essene men who chose to marry were primarily concerned about their wives' morality.

Genizah

A storehouse for damaged or defective Hebrew writings and ritual articles.

Halakhah (pl. halakhot)

Corpus of Jewish religious law; disagreement on these matters caused the Judean Desert sect to secede from Israel.

Hasmonean

A family of Jewish patriots to which the Maccabees belonged; period of Jewish history from 167 - 30 B.C.E.

Herodian

Associated especially with Herod the Great's reign 37-4 B.C.E.; a period of Jewish history from 30 B.C.E - 70 C.E.

Judea

Southern region of ancient Palestine; the Qumran region was a barren area within the Judean desert which yielded the Dead Sea scrolls treasure.

Leviticus

Third book of Jewish and Christian scripture consisting mainly of priestly legislation. Scroll fragments are included in the Library of Congress exhibition.

Maccabees

A priestly Jewish family which ruled Palestine in the second and first centuries B.C.E. and wrested Judea from the rule of the Seleucids and their Greek practices. The Jewish holiday Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabees' recapture of Jerusalem and reconsecration of the Temple in December 164 B.C.E.

Masada

Jewish fortress of ancient Palestine situated on a butte west of the Dead Sea; last stronghold of the Zealots who committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans.

Masoretic

Relating to a body of notes on the textual traditions of the Hebrew Old Testament; compiled during the first millennium of the Christian era; traditional text of the Hebrew Bible.

Mishnah

Collection of Jewish traditions based on rabbinic traditions and compiled about 200 C.E.; part of the Talmud.

Paleographic

Relating to the study of ancient writings and inscriptions or to an ancient manner of writing.

Paleo-Hebrew

Ancient Hebrew script; one of the offshoots of the Phoenician script; used exclusively in the First Temple period and in priestly circles and as a symbol of nationalistic revival in the Second Temple Period. A version of this script is still used today by the Samaritans.

Parchment

Prepared animal skin on which text is written.

Pentateuch

The first five books of scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the first of three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible

Pharisees ("Ephraim" in some Qumran writings)

One of the three orders of Jews during the Second Temple period; noted for strict observance of rites and interpretation of the law; their teachings concerned the immortality of the soul, resurrection of the body, future retribution, and a coming Messiah.

Phylacteries (tefillin)

Two small leather boxes containing four scriptural passages in Hebrew and traditionally worn on the left arm and on the forehead by Jewish men during morning prayers.

Plaited baskets

Made of single coiled braid in which successive courses are joined around cords to form a ribbed texture; each basket had two arched handles.

Pliny the Elder ca. 23 - 79 C.E.

Upper class Roman historian who wrote about the Essenes and identified their location as the Dead Sea area.

Psalms (tehillim)

Collection of Biblical hymns, i.e. sacred songs or poems used in worship and non-canonical passages.

Pseudepigrapha

Pseudonymous or anonymous Jewish religious writings of the period 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., especially those attributed to biblical characters.

Qumran

Northern Dead Sea desert plain, part of Jordan (1949- 1967); region of the eleven caves yielding Hebrew biblical, sectarian, and literary scrolls. It is the habitation site where excavations have uncovered a complex of communal structures and generated numerous artifacts; the site was founded in the second century B.C.E. and abandoned about the time of the Roman offensive of 68 C.E. when the site was destroyed.

Sadducees ("Menasseh" in some Qumran writings)

One of the three orders of Jews during the Second Temple Period; priestly and aristocratic Jewish families who interpreted the law more literally than the Pharisees and were much less formal in the observance of rites and traditions; denied the concept of immortality and tended toward materialism.

Second Temple Period

520 B.C.E - 70 C.E.; a time of crucial development for monotheistic religions; ended with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Period in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were copied.

Sectarian

Characteristic of a sect, a religious group adhering to a distinctive doctrine.

Septuagint

The Greek version of the Old Testament (including the Apocrypha) translated by Jewish scholars in the third to second centuries B.C.E.; the first vernacular translation of the Bible and still used in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Seleucid Empire

Created out of part of Macedonian Empire after death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.E.) and, at its height, extended from southern coast of modern Turkey south through Palestine and east to India's border; spanned period 312 - 64 B.C.E.

Talmud

The authoritative body of Jewish law and tradition incorporating the Hebrew Mishnah and the Aramaic Gemara and supplementing the scriptural law; developed in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.

Tetradrachms

Ancient Greek silver coins. The Library of Congress exhibition includes coins minted in Tyre about 136 - 126 B.C.E.

Tetragrammaton

The four Hebrew letters that represent the divine name of God, usually transliterated YHWH or JHVH; out of reverence, Jews ceased to pronounce the word aloud about the third century B.C.E.

Yahad

The group within the Judean Desert sect who chose to live communally. The sect divided humanity between the righteous and the wicked and asserted that human nature and everything that happens in the world are irrevocably predestined.