

## Village Synagogues and Schools

### Synagogue Worship

A village could have a number of worship groups and schools. Worship was outdoors as was school. We think worship and school are indoor activities. They were not for a very long time. Jewish synagogues seem to have begun with groups in Babylon during the captivity when they could not go to the Temple. Over the years set patterns of prayers and organization became established. Many synagogues today maintain the ancient forms and words. Since they are memorized by a large number of people over a wide area, it is very difficult for them to change. The weight of well known tradition keeps them uniform. When everyone is using a book, it is easy to make changes in the book and the people follow.

The lessons from scripture were often chanted. Singing Psalms embellished the worship. Before the Destruction of 70 AD new Psalms were being written and could be accompanied by instruments. The music scholars think sounds the closest to the music of the Temple is from the MarThomast Churches of South India. There was a Jewish community and active trade from before Jesus' time. The church there claims to date from the disciple Thomas and has kept the Aramaic language and the most ancient forms of worship. <http://marthoma.in/musicgalleries> . What we have in old Jewish or other Christian music is known to date from later.

### Village Schools

There is little clear information of synagogues, schools and teachers at this time. What we have comes from hundreds of years later after major reorganization in the society. The later writings describe a highly organized structure that must have evolved from earlier diverse practices. What is described here is common across many early cultures and still today in Islamic third world villages. There was a wide diversity of local practice. I had a teacher who met a teen aged Jewish boy from Yemen in the 1950's. He had memorized the entire Old Testament. His local village was more primitive than Nazareth. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maktab>

The teacher, sometimes an older man who could no longer work, would chant a section of scripture in Hebrew. The boys would repeat it, until they had it memorized. The music of the chant helped. By the time the boys no longer came to school, most of them learned the Torah, the Prophets, Psalms and even other writings. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar and bat mitzvah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_and_bat_mitzvah) They did not use the same definition of Prophets later Christians use. Some books were not yet counted as authoritative - canon. They did not study mathematics, science, or the rest of the subjects taught in schools today.

Along the way, they learned the sounds for each letter and how to read. Since they already knew what the scripture said, it was not too hard to see how the letters made the sound of the words. The letters were only consonants without any breaks between the words. The vowels were not written. They had to figure out how to separate the letters into words and what vowels were needed. One thing that made it easier was that the whole scriptures only used about 800 different words. Since they spoke Aramaic, a related language, time in class had to be spent learning how to translate the Hebrew. The teacher was supported by the gifts from the parents. Classes were often outside under a tree, when no fieldwork needed to be done.

Scrolls were very expensive. A set for the whole scriptures took a year to copy and a year just to make that much leather or papyrus to write on. Small synagogues might own one small short scroll. They could trade them with neighboring synagogues for other scrolls. The men who knew the scriptures best were recognized and admired.

For the number of Hebrew words see [http://www.adath-shalom.ca/rab\\_ii.pdf](http://www.adath-shalom.ca/rab_ii.pdf) pages 10 and 11.

The following refer to scrolls from later times that had much more stringent rules that increased the cost and time needed to copy. The Torah, five books of Moses, is less than one third of the Old Testament - Tanach. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh> [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_does\\_a\\_Torah\\_scroll\\_cost](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_does_a_Torah_scroll_cost) <http://cranfordville.com/IBC%20Cologne/BibleSession12.pdf> [http://www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard\\_cdo/aid/351655/jewish/Torah-Scroll-Facts.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard_cdo/aid/351655/jewish/Torah-Scroll-Facts.htm)

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Psalms\\_Scroll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Psalms_Scroll)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Hebrew\\_Bible\\_canon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Hebrew_Bible_canon)