

Why don't we use the Hebrew names for the first five books of the Bible?

The Rabbi in my Hebrew class said that the Hebrew names of the books of the Torah have an entirely different meaning than in the English, with the exception of Genesis. WHO and more importantly WHY would the original Hebrew names of these books be changed to titles that have totally different meaning than the original form? I don't understand. Please help me to shed some light on this . . .

Regarding titles given to the five books of the Torah, there is not a strictly uniform tradition in Judaism, at least not historically speaking. **Rabbinic Judaism**, which preserved the patrimony of the Hebrew language, named the books of Moses after a word or expression that appears in the first verse of each book. Thus, Genesis is titled *bere'shit* ("In the beginning"), Exodus is *ve'elleh shemot* ("And these are the names"), Leviticus is *vayyiqra'* ("And he [the LORD] spoke"), Numbers is *bemidbar* ("in the wilderness of"), and Deuteronomy is *'elleh ha-debarim* ("These are the words").

Other titles are attested in ancient times as well, designating Genesis, e.g., as *sefer ha-Beriah* ("The Book of Creation"), among other titles, and Leviticus as *torat ha-kohanim* ("The Law of the Priests").

We are generally more familiar with the tradition of **Diaspora Judaism** as expressed in the Greek titles that appear in the LXX/Septuagint, where Genesis is *genesis* ("origin"), Exodus is *exodos* ("departure"), Leviticus is *leitikon* ("pertaining to the Levites"), Numbers is *arithmoi* ("numbers"), and Deuteronomy is *deuteronomion* ("second lawgiving").

The popularity of these latter titles was guaranteed when the early Christian Church adopted the Greek headings of the LXX in transliterated form. The bottom line is that Judaism had more than one tradition from which to choose headings for the books of the Torah when the torch was passed to the new and universal ("catholic") Israel, the Church.

For more on the Church's use of the LXX, click [here](#).