

Torah and the translation of the word Torah are greatly misunderstood by Christians.

The word Torah appears over two hundred times in the Hebrew Scriptures. The word Nomos, the Greek word for Torah, is used over two hundred times in the Greek New Testament. Nomos is the word that was used by the translators of the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word Torah into Greek. Our Christian translators nearly always translate both Torah and Nomos as Law, even though that is not the meaning for either the Hebrew or the Greek.

Torah means teaching or instruction, not law. Please make a conscious effort to erase what you have heard about “LAW” in biblical teachings. In the Jewish Bible the first five books are referred to as Torah, but that name is sometimes loosely applied to all Scripture and even the rabbinic teachings. The emphasis is on the teachings in Genesis through Deuteronomy so that we can live the kind of lives that God wants us to live.

Nomos, the Greek word for Torah, frequently translated LAW, refers to anything that has been established and can mean law, but would more accurately be translated Torah ninety percent of the time in the New Testament. That it can mean either teaching or law seems baffling to us, but there is a valid reason.

Rabbi Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1) wrote, “Jewish religious law is based upon morality, and deals with every aspect of human life. A Jew's contemplations, abstractions, reflections, intentions, private conduct, even when they have no social consequences-all are included, or in our religious law one is always seen as standing under God's watchful eye. In our creed, all law is an attempt to make us better servants of the Lord - and since the world is His - we must act in concert with the needs of this world. God acts in grace out of love for His world - can we, dare we do anything less?

(1) These four paragraphs written by Rabbi Ben-Yehuda are copyrighted and printed with his permission.

“Thus, the law is concerned not with protecting society, nor even with defending the rights of people, but rather with the basic question of what a person's duty is. The Hebrew word ‘Mitzvah’ - which has no exact translation, and is rendered in different contexts as ‘good deed’, ‘law’ or ‘command’, can also be taken to mean ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’ - a concept which becomes the key to Jewish law. So Jewish law concerns itself not with what is ‘legal’, but with what it is that God wants us to do, what is our duty. The Torah judge does not sit on the bench as an inquisitor, nor as a symbol of governmental powers, he sits on his tribunal as a teacher, as one to whom has been given the privilege of interpreting in human terms God's will and God's word.

“Another characteristic of Jewish law is that it is community-oriented. While the origin of Jewish law is in the Torah, its details come from the Mishna and then go well the Gemara - texts that were written and edited outside of Eretz Yisrael, after the Jewish homeland had been destroyed, and the Jewish people no longer had any sovereignty or independence. The great code of Maimonides, written in the twelfth century, and the code of Juda Caro, written in the sixteenth century, were produced on ‘foreign’ soil, where this “law,” mitzvot, became the only guardian of Jewish integrity. In a chaotic world deprived of order and civility, the

Jews had an established code that allowed them to travel and to conduct business - which made possible their survival. Mitsvot also kept the Jews united in all their far-flung lands of exile. East and West, North and South were united in respect of Misvot.

"The Jewish legal system functioned without any coercion; it could not exercise any physical or penal sanctions. There were no prisons alongside the academies or the synagogues where the Jewish tribunal would convene. There were neither policemen nor bailiffs prepared to carry out the orders of the court. The judge sat completely disarmed. He had nothing, not any powers - except for the reverence of Torah and the conscience of the people. Jewish law addressed itself to developing the character of a people, to refining individuals as human personalities, to replacing the lack of external force with the presence of inner sanctity. The law was obeyed not because there were jails, but because a people inwardly accepted it and its decisions. Consequently, its decisions and decrees were carried out with a fidelity and dispatch that no penal system ever inspired. Further, I believe that the law was observed because the people realized and accepted that it was righteous, humane, considerate, and motivated by love of God and total surrender of vanity and self-interest to the principles of His teaching of the inviolate nature of Tzedek-true teaching of God's justice."

The Christian concept of Biblical LAW is not at all close to the meaning of Torah, so if you use another translation please mark your other Bibles, changing the word LAW to Torah.

There are three metaphors for Torah:

1. Water, based on Isaiah 55:1 *Ho, everyone who thirsts, Go to the waters! (Rev. 21:6; 22:17) He who has no money, Go! Buy food! Eat! Yes, Go! Buy wine and milk without money and without price! (2) and on Exod. 14:22. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.* This gives added meaning to many verses such as Eph. 5:26 so that He (Y'shua) would sanctify His wife (congregation), making her pure by washing with the Word of the Torah.
(2) (Isa. 55:1) The wine and milk are metaphor for the teachings of God.
2. Light, based on Proverbs 6:23 *For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah (Teaching) is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.* The Talmud says that knowledge of Torah brings spiritual illumination. Torah lights our path, showing us the way to go, our spiritual illumination.
3. Olive Oil, from Isaiah 51:3,4 *For the LORD* will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her ruins; and he will comfort all her waste places like Eden and her desert like the garden of the LORD*. Joy and gladness will be found there, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. My people Pay attention to Me! O My people Listen to Me! For instruction (Torah) will proceed from Me, and I shall make My judgment to rest for a light to the peoples.* Oil is the source of illumination and the source of joy. It is called the Oil of Gladness.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 6.

1. *Does someone of you dare having a lawsuit with another, to be judged by the unrighteous and not by the saints?*
2. *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? (Dan.7:22) And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent in trivial cases?*
3. *Do you not know that we will judge angels, let alone ordinary matters?*
4. *Indeed, if you are having lawsuits over ordinary matters, do you appoint as judges' men who have no standing in the congregation?*
5. *I am saying this to shame you. So, is not one among you wise? Who will be able to judge between one and his brother?*
6. *But is brother judged with brother and this by unbelievers?'*
7. *Surely now then these are an utter loss for you that you are having lawsuits with one another: Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?*

In ancient Israel both criminal and civil law were handled in the synagogue and the Temple. Paul was telling the early church to follow that example, that Christians had no business going before the heathen courts but were to resolve their differences within the body of believers. Each first century synagogue had an appointed judge, whose primary qualifications were knowledge of Torah and application of those principles in the lives of the members. The Torah was their legal code, their guide for every legal decision, based on the 613 commandments the first five books of the Bible. Although the commands had been known for some time, it was not until the 3rd century AD that the count of 613 was first written, with 248 positive and 365 negative commands.

We have not understood some of these passages. Most of the 613 commandments deal with personal relationships and many deals with the spoken word. Thus, it was not a surprise to His listeners when Y'shua said *And I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be guilty in the judgment. And whoever would say to his brother Empty-headed,' that one is guilty to the Sanhedrin: whoever would say, 'Stupid' is guilty in the Gehenna of the fire.* (Matt. 5:22)

There was a local Sanhedrin in each community as well as the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Each one was a council of elders that served to determine local matters according to Torah.

The ancient Hebrews had long before Y'shua's day determined that the references such as "an eye for an eye and a toot for a tooth" (Exod. 21:24) were not to be taken literally. They said this because the basic premise was that God is just, and if a one-eyed man knocked out the eye of someone with two eyes. Then to take the second eye from the one-eyed man would make him blind. This would not be just. If a toothless man knocked out someone else's tooth, then he would escape punishment. This would not be just. Therefore, these and other scriptures were used as the basis for establishing monetary punishment-fines.

A major difference between the Torah and the law of other ancient countries can be seen in the case of adultery. In Jewish practice if two people were caught in adultery both were to be punished. In the other countries, only the woman was to be punished because their laws did not involve moral problems, but property rights. The woman was punished because she was the property of the husband. The man with whom she was caught was not punished.

This use of Torah for legal decisions is why Jewish writers sometimes refer to Torah as Law. Understanding these fundamental differences between Torah and Law is crucial to understanding New Testament truth. This is a whole different context from the mind-sets that we have acquired from Christian teachings. Remember, Torah means teaching or instruction, so substitute the word Torah for law in other translations.