

OPEN YOUR BIBLE

Study Companion

Torah — תּוֹרָה

Law, Instruction, Teaching—and What the Hebrew Word Can Actually Tell Us

A printable companion for tracing **torah** through wisdom, priestly instruction, written covenant material, poetry, prophecy, and the Greek **nomos** bridge.

Use this packet with your Bible open. Write what the passage actually does with the word before choosing a definition.

WORD-STUDY RULE

A word is not its English gloss. A root is not a definition. Context decides which part of the range is active.

Don't take my word for it—Open your Bible.

Before You Study

Record your starting position before you edit it.

What do you currently think Torah means?

Which English word do you normally prefer: law, instruction, teaching, or something else? Why?

What do you currently believe the word itself proves about believers today?

Keep These Questions Beside You

For every occurrence ask:

Who gives the torah?

Who receives it?

What is being taught, directed, or regulated?

How broad is the referent?

Does the passage describe advice, wisdom, ruling, covenant instruction, a specific procedure, or a written corpus?

Lexical Snapshot

תּוֹרָה — torah

Common lexical range:

- direction
- instruction
- teaching
- law

The noun can refer to human teaching, divine instruction, specific regulations, priestly rulings, and written Mosaic Torah. Do not assume every occurrence has the same-sized referent.

My First Working Definition

Before tracing the passages, write a one-sentence definition.

Translation Check

When might **law** be a helpful English gloss?

When might **instruction** or **teaching** be better?

What danger comes from insisting on only one English gloss?

Human Torah

Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 31:26

READ the passages.

Proverbs 1:8

Who gives the torah?

What is the child expected to do with it?

Does this occurrence refer to the Pentateuch, or to parental instruction?

Proverbs 6:20-23

How does parental teaching guide conduct?

Proverbs 31:26

What kind of torah is associated with the wise woman's speech?

Evidence Check

These passages prove that **torah can mean human instruction**.

They do NOT prove that every occurrence of torah is merely human advice or optional teaching.

My observation:

Specific Torah

Leviticus 6–7

READ several of the repeated formulas:

- torah of the burnt offering
- torah of the grain offering
- torah of the sin offering
- torah of the guilt offering

What does “the torah of X” appear to mean in these passages?

Would **instruction**, **procedure**, **regulation**, or **law** communicate the sense best in English? Why?

Does translating torah as “instruction” make the procedure optional?

SCOPE RULE

A word can have a stable general idea while its **referent** changes. “The torah of the guilt offering” is narrower than “the Torah of Moses.”

Priestly Torah

Malachi 2:5–9

READ the whole paragraph.

What was supposed to be in the faithful priest’s mouth?

What were people supposed to seek from his mouth?

How did corrupt priests cause people to stumble through torah?

Does this passage picture torah only as a book, or also as instruction taught and applied?

Compare

Deuteronomy 17:8–13 Leviticus 10:10–11

What teaching or adjudicating responsibilities do priests have?

Written Torah / Torah of Moses

Deuteronomy 1:5; 4:44; 31:9–13

READ the passages.

What is Moses doing with “this Torah”?

Can Torah here be written, read, taught, and obeyed?

Joshua 1:7–8

What relationship is there between the Torah Moses commanded and the “book” Joshua is to meditate on?

Nehemiah 8

What exact phrase identifies the scroll Ezra brings?

What happens when the Torah is read publicly?

Evidence Check

These passages show that **Torah can identify a recognized written Mosaic corpus.**

That does not mean “the first five books” is the lexical definition of every occurrence of torah.

Before Sinai

Genesis 26:5

List the terms used together:

Charge: _____

Commandments: _____

Statutes: _____

Torot / instructions or laws: _____

What does the plural **torot** clearly show?

What does the word alone NOT establish?

Exodus 16:4, 28

What divine instruction appears before the formal Sinai covenant ceremony?

Interpretive Boundary

Supported: Yehovah gave commands and torot before the Sinai covenant was formally established.

Requires more evidence: Abraham possessed the complete later Mosaic code in its final written form.

Write the distinction in your own words:

Torah and Neighboring Words

Hebrew Scripture uses several related terms. Trace them without flattening them into synonyms.

Term	Basic idea	Passage to observe	My note
תּוֹרָה torah	instruction / law	Genesis 26:5	
מִצְוָה mitzvah	commandment	Exodus 24:12	
חֹק choq	statute / prescribed enactment	Genesis 26:5	
מִשְׁפָּט mishpat	judgment / ordinance	Exodus 21; Deut. 4	
עֵדוּת edut	testimony	Psalms 19	

What do you notice when several of these words appear together?

Does Torah contain commandments without being identical to the word “commandment”?

Torah in the Psalms

Psalm 1:1-3

What does the righteous person do with Yehovah's torah?

What picture of torah does "delight" and "meditate day and night" create?

Psalm 19:7-11

List the effects associated with Yehovah's revealed instruction:

Psalm 119

Choose three verses that describe the writer's relationship with Yehovah's instruction.

- 1. -----
- 2. -----
- 3. -----

What does this add to a purely legal definition of Torah?

Torah in the Prophets

Isaiah 2:1-4

Why do the nations go up to Yehovah's mountain?

What do they want Yehovah to teach them?

What goes forth from Zion?

How does the parallel between **teaching His ways** and **Torah going forth** help define the word in this passage?

Isaiah 8:16-20

How does torah function as a standard?

Malachi 2 Revisited

How do prophetic uses keep torah connected to living instruction rather than only a historical document?

Jeremiah 31 and the Word on the Heart

Jeremiah 31:31–34

What Hebrew noun appears in “My law / My instruction”?

Where does Yehovah place it?

What is explicitly NEW about the covenant context?

Keep Both Truths

Lexical continuity: Yehovah still calls what He places within His people **torah**.

Covenant newness: the covenant is explicitly “not like” the covenant made at the Exodus.

What can the word itself establish?

What larger questions require the rest of Scripture?

Root Study: Yarah

Torah is commonly connected with יָרָה — **yarah**. The word family supports ideas of directing and teaching, but root history does not replace contextual usage.

Root-Fallacy Test

Complete the sentence:

“A word’s root may help me understand _____, but the meaning of the word in a verse is determined by _____.”

Why is “Torah literally means shooting an arrow at a target” too strong as a lexical claim?

What part of the picture may still be devotionally useful if presented honestly?

Law or Instruction?

Use the passages below and choose the English gloss that seems most natural. There may be more than one defensible answer.

Passage	Possible gloss	Why?
Proverbs 1:8	law / teaching / instruction	
Leviticus 7:1	law / procedure / instruction	
Deuteronomy 4:44	law / instruction / Torah	
Psalms 1:2	law / instruction / teaching	
Isaiah 2:3	law / instruction / teaching	
Malachi 2:7	law / ruling / instruction	
Jeremiah 31:33	law / instruction / Torah	

Conclusion

Is **law** a bad translation?

Is **instruction** always better?

Write the balanced answer:

From Torah to Nomos

νόμος — nomos

The Greek Septuagint frequently uses **nomos** to translate Hebrew **torah**. The New Testament then uses nomos in several ways.

READ:

Matthew 5:17 Matthew 7:12 Romans 3:27–31 Romans 7:21–25 Romans 8:1–4

Where does **nomos** clearly refer to Israel's Scripture or Mosaic Law?

Where does Paul use **nomos** for a governing principle such as “law of sin” or “law of the Spirit of life”?

What does this teach you about moving from Hebrew Torah to Greek nomos?

Test the Claims

“Torah literally means law.”

What is true in this statement?

What is too narrow?

“Torah does not mean law; it means instruction.”

What is true?

What is too absolute?

“Genesis 26:5 proves Abraham possessed the entire Mosaic Torah.”

What does the verse prove?

What requires more evidence?

“Jeremiah 31 proves every Sinai command continues unchanged.”

What lexical fact is real?

What covenant question remains?

“Nomos always means Torah of Moses.”

Which Pauline passages complicate that claim?

“The root gives the real meaning.”

What is the safer word-study rule?

Build Your Definition

Review your notes before writing.

Torah can refer to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The common thread is:

The word itself can prove:

The word itself cannot prove:

My Final Working Definition

Torah is...

Personal Reflection

Has your definition changed from page 2? How?

Which passage changed or sharpened your understanding the most?

Where have you previously asked a word to prove more than the passage supported?

What will you do differently in future Hebrew or Greek word studies?

Prayer / Response

Yehovah, make me teachable before Your Word. Help me love truth more than slogans, context more than debate wins, and Your instruction more than my preferred conclusions. Give me patience to read carefully and humility to change when the evidence requires it.

My own prayer / notes:

Quick Reference

Torah — תּוֹרָה

Common range: direction, instruction, teaching, law.

Can refer to: human teaching; a specific ruling or procedure; priestly instruction; Yehovah's instruction; written Mosaic Torah.

Word-study rule: A word is not its gloss. A root is not a definition. Context decides.

Translation rule: "Law" and "instruction" can both be legitimate. Choose from context rather than theology-by-gloss.

Covenant rule: The lexical meaning of torah does not by itself settle how every Mosaic command functions under the New Covenant.

Greek bridge: νόμος — nomos often translates torah but also has a contextual range of its own.

Keep Studying

Genesis 26:5 Exodus 16 Leviticus 6–7 Deuteronomy 4 Nehemiah 8 Proverbs 1 Psalm 1 Psalm 19 Psalm 119 Isaiah 2 Jeremiah 31 Malachi 2 Matthew 5 Romans 3; 7–8

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