

Jewish people commonly refer to their Bible, the Christian Old Testament, as Tanak, or T-N-K. T for Torah (Law), N for Nebi'm (Prophets), and K for Ketubim (Writings). The Torah is the most sacred part of their Scripture, the first 5 books of our Old Testament. Most of us would need an attitude change to find our greatest inspiration from the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy!

Although Torah is commonly translated as "Law," Jewish people especially might be conditioned to understand it a little differently. Torah can also, and perhaps better, be taken to mean "instruction, direction." The underlying Hebrew verb form means "to shoot, throw, direct, instruct."

Related Hebrew words include "archer" one who shoots,  
"rain" something thrown from the sky?, and  
"teacher" one who throws ideas?

Thinking of the Decalogue as "10 Guidelines to a Better Life" gives a different feel than "10 Offenses for Which God will Punish You."

Often we use the term "authority" in two quite different ways:

**Positive**

Pulling, attracting, drawing  
An expert,  
Like a teacher  
Skilled technician

**Negative**

Forcing, pushing from behind  
A physically strong, or armed person  
Like a police officer  
Bully

Torah (Law) seems to follow these same double possibilities:

**Positive**

Guidelines, instructions  
Freeing, empowering  
Image of a loving parent  
God of grace & mercy

**Negative**

Rules, restrictions  
Stifling joy, cramping ones style  
Image of a harsh slaveowner  
God of wrath & judgment

Torah/Pentateuch is mostly a long story with lots of laws added; or is it mostly laws with lots of stories thrown in? A bigger definition of "torah" allows us to include story & law.

Decalogue = 10 "words/sayings" When the book of Deut. uses the expression "ten commandments" it does not use any of the usual words for "commandment;" it uses the common word for "word, thing, event." This opens the way to start counting with "I am the LORD your God..." as the Jews do. "I am the LORD..." is a statement, not a command, but naming them "10 Sayings" allows for this.

It is important to know who is giving out the instructions or the rules, so one knows how seriously to take them. This is the LORD revealed to Moses in Ex. 6 and Ex. 3. Knowing the name of God, or a person, gives us access to that one.

The Decalogue is placed in the setting of a Covenant Ceremony in Ex. 19-24. Treaty partners, ceremonial sprinkling, agreement, etc.

613 laws of the Torah/Pentateuch > "10" > Dt. 6:4-5 > Jesus (Mk. 12:29).

**DISCUSSION**

Do you react differently to a posted list of "rules and restrictions" like at a state park or restricted living community, than you do to a list of "suggestions" as in how to maintain the finish on your new car? Why, or why not? Would your spouse tend to react the same way you do?

Do you think that God sits up there somewhere like an angry father just waiting for you to step out of line so he can zap you? Are you convinced that God really wants what is best for God's people? So would God be more likely to give instructions on how to get the most out of life and God's creation, or would God give restrictive legislation just to make us squirm?

How might it be helpful to speak about "10 Instructions/Guidelines" instead of "10 Rules/Laws?" What might be dangerous about it?

Could you nurture and sustain your faith using only Genesis through Deuteronomy as your Bible?