

Is it Possible to Rejoice in the Law?



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Jews have a holiday called “Rejoicing in the Law” שמחת תורה (*simkhat torah*). By contrast, many Christians are used to hearing about the Law as a “yoke of slavery” (see Gal. 5:1).

One reason for this major difference in perception is rooted in language. In Hebrew the word *torah* does not actually mean “law,” but rather “instruction” or “teaching.” The same root gives us the word מורה (*moreh*) “teacher, educator.”

We can easily see the “teaching” meaning in Proverbs 31, the famous description of a “virtuous woman” – or, more literally, a “valiant woman” אשת חיל (*eshet khayil*). There, in verse 26, the poet-queen tells us that this strong and exemplary woman has a mouth full of wisdom and a tongue that drips with the “torah of empathetic kindness” תורת חסד (*torat khased*).

Regardless, almost all Bible translations use “Law” in most places where the Hebrew word “Torah” תורה (*torah*) appears – and also whenever the “New Testament” refers to the Torah or Teaching that God gave through Moses. For example, in Matthew 5:18 Yeshua/Jesus says that “not even one iota shall pass away from the Law” – i.e., from the Torah/Instruction of God. Here Jewish-Greek νόμος (*nomos*) corresponds to Hebrew תורה (*torah*).

Once we understand the Hebrew meaning, it is easy to relate to biblical expressions like “O how I love Your Torah!” (Psa. 119:97) and “Your Torah is my delight!” (Psa. 119:77). The first-century Jew Paul/Shaul similarly wrote: “I delight in the Torah of God!” (Rom. 7:22). So the “yoke of slavery” he mentioned in Galatians must be something different.

The biblical understanding of God’s Torah is that it brings joy, delight, and goodness. This is the basic idea underlying the Jewish holiday of Simkhat Torah!