Nomos

A. The noun *nomos* (νόμος) has the following cognates:

6. *Kleronomeo* (κληρονομέω) (verb), “to give over as an inheritance, make someone the owner.”
10. *Nomizo* (νομίζω) (verb), “have in common, use customarily, consider, regard, suppose.”
12. *Nomimos* (νομιμός) (adverb), “lawfully, legally, according to the law, according to the rules.”
15. *Nomothesia* (νομοθεσία) (noun), “the giving of the law, the law, legislation.”
16. *Nomotheteo* (νομοθέτεω) (verb), “to legislate, to enact law, to establish or settle by law.”
19. *Oikonomo* (οἰκονόμο) (verb), “to manage a household, be a steward, manage, regulate, administer.”

B. Classical Usage

1. The noun *nomos* is formed from the verb *nemo*, distribute, deal out, assign, grant especially in the sense of assigning property, apportioning pasture or agricultural land.
2. In ancient times it has a comprehensive range of meaning which embraces any kind of existing or accepted norm, order, custom, usage or tradition.
3. The word denoted anything that was legally prescribed, regulated, or customarily practiced in any given society’s social, cultural, and political structure.
4. In other words, the reference is to those processes which are essential whenever men live together in a community, whether small or great.
5. In the earliest period *nomos* is a creation and revelation of Zeus and is thus rooted in a divine sphere in which there is true belief.
7. It is by its very nature righteousness
8. Relationships to earthly possessions have to be determined in a legally binding fashion, so that private and communal ownership may become a reality.
9. The word *nomos* (found in literature from the time of Hesiod, 7th century B.C.) originally referred to distributing and what follows from it.
10. It meant that which has been laid down, ordered or assigned; but more particularly the results of this, namely arrangements which become regularized and attain the status of tradition.
11. The word therefore denotes custom, usage, statute, law, especially in the context of distribution of goods, and of law and order.
12. The legal, ethical and religious meanings of *nomos* are inseparable in antiquity, for all goods were believed to come from the gods, who upheld order in the universe and in relations between men.
13. Hence, the universal conviction, found throughout history, that law is linked to the divine—an idea which has persisted subconsciously even in periods when the purely human aspects of law have been emphasized.
14. The close interrelationship between the worship of the gods, the customs of the time and one’s duty to the state was expressed in the charge levelled at Socrates, namely that he failed to reverence the gods officially worshipped (*nomizein*) by the city, or at least that he did not worship them as everyone else did (Plato, Apol. 24b).
15. In opposition to the Sophists Socrates’ whole thinking on *nomos* begins with the very positive content of the polis.

16. The *nomos tes poleos* is the norm of his life to such a degree that he not only does not act contrary to the laws but dies because they require it, even though they are unjustly manipulated by men.

17. The relation of Socrates to the laws of the state illustrates the significance of *nomos* for Greek ethics.

18. Socrates does not distinguish between his pure conscience and degenerate political morality.

19. For the classical Greek world does not speak of personal moral conscience but of objective knowledge of what is right and wrong.

20. This knowledge takes the form of law.

21. Obedience to law is righteousness.

22. Used in a political context, *nomos* was regarded as the most essential feature of the polis or city-state, i.e., the judicial norm, legal custom, the “law of the land.”

23. From about the 5th century B.C. onwards, the *nomos* was written down as *nomoi* (plur. Laws), thereby acquiring the specific meaning of written law, the constitution (of the polis), the coercive law of the state, which had to be obeyed upon pain of punishment.

24. *Nomos* represented the law enacted by the city-state governing body and administered by the judicial system.

25. This purely political view of *nomos* led to relativization and an increasingly man-centered approach to law.

26. Many Greek tragedies rest on the fact that one law stands over against another, both claiming validity but mutually incompatible.

27. Hence, men are caught in the toils of such conflict, as in Sophocles’ Antigone.

28. Indeed, *nomos* is sometimes even disparaged as a human exaggeration, compared with *physis* or universal law.

29. In the polis established usage is given constitutional form and thus, as the epitome of all legal norms, it becomes law.

30. Along these lines the concept can then come to specific development and mastery.

31. For the state as a theoretical form is itself *nomos* for the Greeks.

32. The people were to contend for its *nomos* as for its wall and is the reigning power which commands.

33. In the 6th century the new understanding of the divine world brought a corresponding change in the content of *nomos*.

34. It is still connected with deity but the Zeus of an earlier age is now reconstructed as a divine principle.

35. The concept of the cosmos produces the view that *nomos* is a reflection of the universe in which the same *nomos* rules as in political life.

36. Earthly law is simply a specific instance of the divine law in the cosmos.

37. The inability to keep the *nomos* was given a tragic interpretation by the Greeks and was not attributed to human sinfulness, but rather places the responsibility with God.

38. Plato was of the opinion that rejection of the rule of the laws was equivalent to apostasy from God (Plato Leg. IV 701b,c; Ep. VII, 336b).

39. For the mode of being and mode of operation of the gods are essentially known in *nomos* (Plato Leg. XII, 966c).

40. In opposition to the Sophists Socrates’ whole thinking on nomos begins with the very positive content of the polis.

41. The *nomos tes poleos* is the norm of his life to such a degree that he not only does not act contrary to the laws but dies because they require it, even though they are unjustly manipulated by men.

42. The classical world did not address personal moral conscience (*suneidesis*) but of objective knowledge of what is right and wrong.

43. This knowledge takes the form of law and obedience to law is righteousness, but all virtues are included in righteousness.

44. Plato revolutionized Greek thinking by developing the concept that the ideal is not the dominion of the law, but the rule of righeous and kingly figure who possesses true knowledge.

45. Aristotle also follows suit and states that the man who towers over all others by reason of his arete seems to be no longer bound to any law.

46. Not only is he over law but he himself is law both for himself and for others (Pol. 3, 13, p. 1284a, 3 ff.)

47. This viewpoint permeated Hellenistic thinking where *nomos* no longer rules as king in the polis, but the will and person of the *basileus* has itself become *nomos*.

48. The divine king is the new divine source of *nomos*, which is linked to him in a special way.
49. The *nomos* of the Greeks is that wherein a being, or something of intrinsic validity, is discovered and apprehended.

50. The true meaning of *nomos* is never that which, rightly understood, crushes him and reduces him to despair by making him aware that he cannot keep it.

C. LXX Usage

1. In the LXX *nomos* occurs approximately 430 times, of which about 200 are without Hebrew equivalents.

2. The following Hebrew terms are translated by *nomos*:
   a. *Davar* (דָּבָר), “words” (Ps. 119:57 [118:57]).
   c. *Dath* (דָּת), “command, law” (Ezr. 7:12; Dn. 7:25-Aramaic).
   d. *Choq* (חֹק), “statute, order” (Jos. 24:25; Jer. 31:36 [38:36]).
   e. *Chuqqah* (חֻקַּה), “law, statute” (Ex. 13:10; Nu. 9:12; Jer. 44:23 [51:23]).
   g. *Mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט), “judgement” (Jer. 49:12 [29:12]).
   i. *Torah* (תּוֹרָה), “law” (Lv. 14:2; 2 Ch. 17:9; Ps. 119:1 [118:1]).

3. The commonest equivalent is *torah*, with *dat* occurring 16 times, *hoq*, *huqqah* 12 times.

4. In the canonical OT, *nomos* is concentrated most heavily in the Pentateuchal books other than Genesis occurring about 60 times, of which 25 are in Deuteronomy and 20 in Leviticus.

5. Next come Ezra and Nehemiah, if one counts the apocryphal 1 Esd. (53 times) then the Pss. (40 times, of which 27 are in Ps. 119 (LXX 118).

6. Among the prophets Jeremiah employs the word most frequently (15 times).

7. The frequent use of the word in the non-canonical books (it occurs about 100 times in the Books of the Maccabees and 30 times in Sirach) indicates the importance of law in the Judaistic thought of the last 2 centuries B.C.

8. It is important to note that *torah* frequently does not mean “law” in the modern sense of the term.

9. At a time when the Jews saw “law” as the transcript of an eternal norm, and the Greeks likewise thought of *nomos* as having definite content, the predominant use of the latter word must have produced a striking translation.

10. Originally *torah* (mostly in the singular) meant an instruction from God, a command for a given situation.

11. The plural also occurs and indicates the concreteness and variability of such instructions (Ex. 16:28; 18:16, 20).


13. Also, specific instructions for the different kinds of offering (Lev. 6 and passim), or for a definite priestly procedure (Num. 5:29), or with regard to the Nazarites (Num. 6:13, 21).

14. The client nation of Israel was governed by the Law which was given to Moses by the Lord on Mount Sinai.

15. The Mosaic Law is broken up into 3 parts:
   a. Codex #1
   b. Codex #2
   c. Codex #3

16. Codex #1: The Decalogue or 10 Commandments
   a. The 10 Commandments were for both believers and unbelievers.
   b. They define human freedom in terms of morality, privacy, relationship with God, property, authority and the right to love God.

17. Codex #2: The Spiritual Heritage of Israel as a client nation to God.
   a. Codex #2 contains the spiritual code.
   b. It contains a complete Christology and Soteriology (Christ and the plan of salvation).
   c. It was communicated in prophetic form and ritual form in the messages of both the prophets and the priests.
   d. It required a specialized priesthood.
   e. The Tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe in Israel.
   f. They were descended from Moses' brother Aaron.
   g. Now Codex #2 contained the "Ritual" plan of God which included:
      1. The structure of the Tabernacle.
2. The outline of the Holy Days.
4. Levitical offerings

18. Codex #3: Establishment Code
   a. The Establishment Code was for the unbeliever and believer
   b. Establishment means "privacy, freedom, sacredness of property, and life."

19. God has ordained 4 establishments:
   a. Volition
   b. Marriage
   c. Family
   d. Nationalism

20. Codex #3 contained:
   a. Freedom through military victory
   b. Criminal Law
   c. Diet, health, sanitation, quarantine, free enterprise.

21. The Mosaic Law was given only to Israel (Ex. 19:3; Lev. 26:46; Rom. 3:19; 9:4).
22. The Mosaic Law was not given to the Gentiles of the OT (Acts 15:5; 15:24; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 2:19).
24. The Mosaic Law could not provide eternal salvation for men (Gal. 3:21-26).
25. The Mosaic Law could not provide the Holy Spirit.

26. The Mosaic Law could not solve the problems of the old sin nature (Rom. 8:2-3).
27. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4).
28. In the Judaism of the last 2 centuries B.C. and at the time of Jesus nomos was used in an absolute sense: the law was an absolute in itself and was independent of the covenant.
29. In the time between the testaments the Law became increasingly looked to as the source of salvation.
30. More and more emphasis was placed upon keeping the letter of the Law.
31. The Law required such a place of prominence in Judaism that it was believed to provide the means to win God’s grace as well as the means to remain in His favor.
32. From internal pressures within Judaism itself the religion of Israel drifted into a legalistic system that adopted the idea of earning salvation by works (law-keeping).
33. This view permeates the pseudephigraphal and apocryphal literature.
34. Such a legalistic attitude toward a relationship with God and an obsession with fulfilling the letter of the law occurs especially in rabbinic Judaism.
35. The Pharisees represented the strongest and most extreme form of such legalism and created a system of works entirely apart from the Mosaic Law.
36. This system is clearly delineated in the Mishnah and Talmud which are non-canonical texts!
37. The majority of the citizens of the client nation of Israel did not know the original Hebrew language of the OT and in particular the Torah.
38. The Pharisees and the Scribes knew the original language of the Torah (Hebrew) and commented or interpreted the Mosaic Law.
39. Their commentaries themselves or their interpretation of the Mosaic Law evolved into a legalistic system of works and had in fact became nomos.
40. The Torah is primarily the Mosaic Law but this is the basis of all other meanings of Torah in the Rabbinical writings.
41. Thus, the Torah can be used specifically for the Decalogue.
42. Along with the use of Torah for the Law of Moses we often find the word in the sense of that part of the OT Canon which contains the Law, i.e., the Pentateuch.
43. Also, all the writings of the OT are called Torah.
44. Thus, the Torah can denote the following:
   a. The Torah
   b. The Prophets (Nabhiim)
   c. The Writings (Kethubim)
45. It can also in a given context have the sense of valid teaching generally.
46. Tradition as distinct from Scripture is considered at times Torah.
47. Torah can have the special sense of study of the Torah, especially in contrast to mitswah as the keeping of the commandment.
48. In Mt. 15:1-6 we have the account of the Pharisees complaining that the disciples transgressed the traditions of the elders by eating with unwashed hands.

49. Jesus retorts upon them with the question: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" and citing the specific case of the 5th commandment which was evaded and virtually broken by their ingenious distinction of qorban.

50. This is a very instructive incident in its bearing upon the point which we have sought to enforce-- that it was the traditional interpretation and not the Law itself which Jesus condemned or corrected.

51. This Jewish Traditionalism which was simply ordinances determined by the Rabbis that were considered absolutely binding upon all Jews and were considered of greater authority than the OT Scriptures since they interpreted the Torah or supplemented it and gave it meaning!

52. The Rabbinal Traditionalism placed their oral laws or oral interpretations of the Mosaic Law above the written Law or inspired OT Hebrew Scriptures.

53. Therefore, there is a distinction to be made regarding nomos.

54. It can indicate either the uninspired oral law of the Rabbis or the divine inspired written Law delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai.

55. Thus, the Pharisees or the Rabbis interpreted the Mosaic Law and their commentaries or interpretations were held in higher esteem than the original language of the Hebrew OT!

D. NT Usage

1. The noun nomos occurs 195 times in the NT:
   a. Paul: 119 times
      1. Romans 72 times
      2. Galatians 32 times
      3. 1 Corinthians: 9 times
   b. Acts: 17 times
   c. John and Hebrews: 14 times each
   d. James: (10 times)
   e. Luke: 9 times
   f. Matthew: 8 times

2. Bauer, Gingrich and Danker have compiled the following list of meanings of the word from their research (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature page 542):
   a. Generally of any law (Roman or Mosaic)
   b. A rule governing one’s actions, principle, norm
   c. Especially of the law, which Moses received from God
   d. A collection of holy writings precious to the Jews
      1. Pentateuch
      2. OT Scriptures as a whole
   e. Figure of Christianity as a “new law.”

3. The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon list the following (pages 427-428):
   a. Of any law whatsoever
   b. Of the Mosaic Law
   c. Of the Christian religion
   d. By metonymy ho nomos, the name of the more important part (i.e., the Pentateuch) is put for the entire collection of the sacred books of the OT

4. Louw and Nida have compiled the following from their research (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains volume 2):
   a. A formalized rule (or set of rules) prescribing what people must do – ‘law, ordinance, rule’ (page 426).
   b. The first five books of the OT called the Torah (often better rendered as ‘instruction’) – ‘the Law’ (page 395).

5. Moulton has compiled the following (The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised, page 279):
   a. A law
   b. The Mosaic Law
   c. The OT Scripture
   d. A legal tie
   e. A law, a rule, standard
   f. A rule of life and conduct