



**Church of God Fellowship  
Sermon Summary**

**Paul's Writings in  
Perspective**

By Harold Smith

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## Paul's Writings in Perspective

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**Is the Law of God oppressive?**

**Has the Law been done away?**

**Did the apostle Paul indicate that those who accept Christ as their Savior  
are no longer required to keep the Law?**

Many have come to believe that obedience to the Ten Commandments is no longer required. They believe the Law was nailed to the cross. There is a general belief that we should be keeping the last six commandments which deal with human interactions—honoring parents, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying nor coveting another's property. However, most tend to disregard the first four commandments.

What is the basis upon which so many believe it is all right to disregard God's Law? There is no place in the Old Testament which will validate their claims. There is NO evidence in the first four books of the New Testament that will prove we no longer need to obey all Ten Commandments. One cannot find proof in the writings of James, Peter, John, or Jude. Yet, those who call themselves New Covenant Christians, professing to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, claim the need for obedience to all Ten Commandments is no longer binding upon a New Covenant Christian.

So, from where do they draw their conclusions? The answer, of course, is in selected sections of the writings of the apostle Paul.

Did you know the Bible has a warning label about Paul's writings? God inspired the apostle Peter to include that warning label just before Peter finished his contribution to the New Testament writings. This warning label is found in II Peter 3:16. Here Peter says: *"His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."* (NIV) Understand what Peter is saying here. Some of the things Paul has written are hard to understand. They are difficult to accurately comprehend if they are analyzed, standing alone, outside the context of the rest of the Bible.

In verse 16, the word *"ignorant"* can mean "unlearned", and refers to those who do not understand the basic, foundational teachings of scripture. It does not matter how much seminary training they may have, they

are still unlearned as far as what God's Word says. Added to unlearned are "*unstable people*", meaning those who are easily swayed. They are unstable in their thinking, reasoning, and understanding of the scripture. This means those individuals who trip over Paul's writings have never actually proven the truth. They have no foundation upon which to stand. This is the reason they are unstable. We go on to read in verse 16, (NIV): "*people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*" They twist and pervert Paul's writings. If they do not repent by acknowledging the error in their thinking and reasoning, Peter says it will cost them their eternal lives. It will cost them salvation.

Despite the seriousness of Peter's warning that Paul should not be the primary source of doctrine, Paul's writings have become the major foundation for most of the beliefs, teachings, and doctrines of the Protestant world. And, the Protestant world, as a whole, has been confused over some things Paul wrote.

We have seen here in II Peter 3:16 that even the apostle Peter understood Paul could be confusing. Peter was an apostle and lived for three and a half years with Jesus Christ. He probably understood the truth better than any of us, and yet Peter said Paul could be confusing even to him, an apostle.

A good example of this confusion would be the book of Galatians. In Galatians, the apostle Paul is explaining the relationship between grace and the law. When the book of Galatians is read apart from the rest of God's word, it seems to indicate that obedience to the Law does not benefit one in his quest for salvation. However, even Jesus stated if we wish to receive eternal life, we must keep the Ten Commandments.

Our purpose in this presentation is not to delve deeply into the epistles of Paul, but rather to get a perspective of Paul against the backdrop of the rest of the Bible. We must keep in mind that the writings of Paul are only

one part of the Bible.

Why would God have decided that Paul's epistles should be included in scripture if they contradicted the foundation of the rest of the scriptures? That would be confusion, and God is NOT the author of confusion. Men confuse what Paul means. The only way to correctly understand Paul's writings is in relation to the rest of God's word. Any who fail to put them in context with the rest of scripture fall into the category of the unlearned and the unstable mentioned by Peter in II Peter 3:16. The Bible clearly warns against removing one section of scripture from the rest and basing an entire doctrine and teaching solely upon it.

In Isaiah 28:9, we read: "*Whom shall He [God] teach knowledge? And whom shall He [God] make to understand doctrine?*" (KJV) According to what we read here, God does not allow everyone to understand doctrine. Whom will He teach? Whom will He make to understand? Not everyone has the privilege to receive that understanding of doctrine; at least at this point in time. He goes on to say: "*them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*" There is a prerequisite before we can begin to comprehend and understand the deeper teachings of the doctrines of God. God does not begin to teach doctrine until a person digests and understands the basics, the milk. Paul was constantly scolding various congregations because of their lack of ability to digest the milk of the Word. In I Corinthians 3, he told the group of God's people in Corinth: "*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men?*" (vss 1-3) He says they were behaving like those who are cut off from God. They were simply incapable of receiving any solid food up to this point.

Paul was saying that they were incapable of learning anything else. Simple, basic teaching was all the Corinthian congregation could receive. Not once in his letters to the Church in Corinth does Paul ever undertake the explanation of grace and justification as he did in the book of Galatians. They were too spiritually immature. They were still on the milk, and the book of Galatians is beyond milk. It is only for those who have digested the milk and matured enough to be able to understand concepts too difficult for one still on milk.

In the book of Hebrews we find another situation where Paul was dealing with individuals who were a part of the body of Christ in the area of Judea. He states in Hebrews 5:12, (NIV) *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"*. Paul tells the Judean Christians it is necessary to take them back to the very basics again, even though they should be ready to eat solid food. He goes on to say, *"For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe."* (vs 12) Paul told them they did not have the ability to process certain teachings. He knew if they were given teachings beyond their present basic understanding, they would not be capable of chewing up and swallowing those teachings without becoming choked.

Physical teeth are a necessity for chewing and swallowing solid food. Those without teeth cannot safely be fed meat. They will choke on solid food which they cannot chew. Through the years many have tried to swallow the meat from God's Word, and have choked on it. They were incapable of chewing and swallowing it. They literally choked to death on Galatians, Romans and other writings of the apostle Paul. They were not ready spiritually to receive what Paul had to say. He told them, *"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to*

*discern both good and evil."* (vs 14) Paul says the mature have not only drunk the milk of the Word, but have digested it as well. They have made it a part of themselves and assimilated it into their spiritual understanding. They have matured to the point where they can take in and comprehend the further teaching of the apostle Paul. He states in Hebrews 6:1, *"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God."* Not laying again the foundation of what? *"Repentance...and... faith."*

Notice, **REPENTANCE** and **FAITH** are **FOUNDATIONAL!**

We must not miss this emphasis. Both repentance and faith are foundational, elementary principles upon which all further doctrine is to be built. We must be firmly anchored in these basic doctrines before attempting to tackle more spiritually mature concepts. Repentance involves the recognition and rejection of sin. Sin is the breaking of God's Law.

Paul later in this epistle to the Hebrews defines faith, which involves believing that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Paul shows in Hebrews 11 that diligently seeking God involves obedience; doing the things God says are required.

In Ephesians 4:14, another group of individuals had difficulties in correctly understanding some of the basics. *"That we should no longer be children [no longer infants who need to remain at the breast and drink only milk] tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive."* Those who do not understand the need to obey God's Law have not come to the point where they have faith that Christ means what He says. Those who fall into this state are easily misled. Paul tells us there are those who are looking for the opportunity to deceive; those who have not yet

assimilated the elementary doctrines.

It is imperative to be stable. For those who are stable, it does not matter how hard the wind blows. They will remain firmly anchored in place. Paul says it is easier to sway children because they are still trying to prove the first principles. He warns us here that we must not be as children. This is exactly the same warning Peter gives in II Peter 3:16, about the twisting of scripture. We are required to grow in our ability to digest more than the milk of the Word.

### HERE A LITTLE, THERE A LITTLE

Once we have the milk of the basic principles fully digested, we can begin to learn more complex teaching. After asking and answering the question: *"Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine?"* In Isaiah 28:9, God then continues by outlining the proper procedure which must be used: *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"* (vs 10)

Notice, God tells us how the Bible is laid out: *"Here a little and there a little."* God tells us that He has put His Word together in such a way that it requires careful searching. He has placed a small part of a doctrine here, and a small part of it there. What is found scattered through the scriptures must then be properly assembled. If it is incorrectly assembled, the result will be detrimental: *"But the word of the LORD was to them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared and caught."* (vs 13)

The correct procedure for assembling what God has scattered here and there, is qualified by the phrase: *"Precept upon precept."* A precept is a command. **All commands of God must be built upon the basic commandments which are already**

**in place!** But, there is more: *"line upon line"* refers to the precision which must be maintained as the commandments of God are built upon the basic foundation of the Ten Commandments.

God requires those He calls to build correct doctrinal understanding by careful and thorough study of the scriptures. This means we must understand that doctrine is scattered throughout the Bible. The apostle Paul warns against thinking that the entire teaching of God can be derived from one section of scripture. In II Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy: *"And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* The *Holy Scriptures* to which Paul was referring is what we call the Old Testament. Timothy did not have the New Testament, nor many of Paul's writings. Paul continues: *"ALL SCRIPTURE is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* (vss 15-16) The NIV has, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."* All scripture has been breathed out of the mouth of God. Paul tells us, *"All scripture,"* all of the Old Testament *"is profitable for doctrine."* He does not say, *"Now, Timothy, the only things profitable for doctrine are my writings. All you need to study are my letters."*

Paul emphasizes the fact that the words of God recorded by Moses, David, Ezra, and the other prophets of the Old Testament are essential. They are absolutely necessary to read in order to completely and correctly understand doctrine.

### A LOGICAL ORDER

Even though doctrine is sprinkled here a little and there a little, as Isaiah tells us, God has arranged the scriptures in a very logical sequence for those He has called and brought into the knowledge of the truth.

The Jews have preserved the proper order of the Old Testament. However, those responsible for translating the Hebrew into the Greek Septuagint rearranged the order of the books into what they felt was more logical. Most of our translations today, with the exception of Fenton's translation, follow the same order as the Septuagint in the Old Testament. The order we have of the New Testament books was determined well over a century after the death of John.

Although probably meaning well, the men responsible for the present order of the books of the Bible actually distorted the proper arrangement. There is a logical order or outline of scripture which God established to facilitate the building of "*precept upon precept*". Even Jesus Christ gave substantiation to the fact that the Bible is in a particular order and for a reason. Luke 24:44 states, "*Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in [ #1 ] THE LAW of Moses and [ #2 ] THE PROPHETS and [ #3 ] THE PSALMS, concerning Me.'*" Jesus tells us that there are three major divisions of the Old Testament. Contained within all three are prophecies pointing to Jesus as the Messiah.

## THE LAW

The first major division Jesus mentions is *The Law*, which is composed of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five books are also referred to as the Torah and the Pentateuch. The Law is the foundation upon which the rest of the Bible is constructed.

Twice within this section God enumerates the Ten Commandments. Indeed, **the first words designated as Holy which have been preserved as Scripture were the Ten Commandments** which were spoken to Israel by God at Mt. Sinai. These words are what God's people heard from the

beginning of their covenant with Him. God wrote these first words on tablets of stone and gave them to Moses. All the Law which Moses then wrote was founded on the first words written by the finger of God: The Ten Commandments.

So, the foundation of the first five books, the first division of the Bible, and all which is built upon it is the Ten Commandments. Without a foundation a building cannot stand, and without the foundation contained within the first five books, there is no foundation for anything that follows. Without it, the rest of the Bible must also be discarded, including Paul's writings because his epistles are built upon the Law. Without the foundation of the Law the entire building we call the Bible collapses.

## THE PROPHETS

The second major division of the Old Testament was referred to by Jesus as *The Prophets*. The prophets division is itself composed of two distinct sections known as the *former* and the *latter* prophets. The former prophets are primarily historical in content, whereas the latter prophets are primarily prophetic, presenting a view of the future.

### The Former Prophets

The former prophets include the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. They present a historical perspective of the consequences of either obeying or disobeying the Law. When Israel obeyed God's Law, the nation received blessings, but when the people disobeyed the Law, they reaped terrible curses.

### The Latter Prophets

The latter prophets division is also subdivided. The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are all very lengthy, and due to their length, have been designated the *major* prophets. The twelve much shorter books of

the prophets division are called the *minor* prophets due to their shorter length. These are the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Both the major and minor prophets point to the future, focusing primarily on the time at the end of the age. Part of their emphasis centers on the descendants of Israel who are still breaking the Law, just as their ancestors, who were recorded in the former prophets.

Breaking the Law at the end of the age reaps the same penalty as when the Law was transgressed by ancient Israel. The latter prophets reveal that God has determined the certain destruction of the present age due to mankind's disobedience to the Law.

We also discover within the latter prophets that the time is coming when all of the world will be obedient to the Law. This time, during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ, will be a time of incredible blessings due to humanity's obedience to the Law.

### **THE WRITINGS**

The third major division of the Old Testament is called *The Writings*, sometimes called *The Psalms*, due to the first book in this section. This major group is composed of the larger books; the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Then the five shorter books; Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, which are also known as the festival scroll. Since Daniel is not recognized as belonging to the Prophets division by Jewish tradition, it is also included within The Writings.

These books further explain how obedience to the Law is of vital importance. Whereas the Prophets division generally focuses on national or worldwide application, the books in this section generally center on personal application of the Law.

Let's take the book of Job for example.

Why is the book of Job in the Bible? What purpose does it serve? Is it no more than a children's Bible story about a man who fell under a terrible curse from the devil? No, the book of Job is of major importance in revealing how the Law is to be approached on a personal level.

It shows that keeping the Law by human effort alone is not the correct approach to obedience. Obedience without the right attitude and perspective can never achieve salvation. Job was keeping the Law but his attitude was wrong. He was convinced he was in total control of his salvation due to his perfect obedience to the Law. His approach was complete self-sufficiency. He thought all of his obedience had earned him God's approval and personal salvation.

The book of Job is to the Old Testament what the book of Galatians is to the New Testament. In Galatians, Paul was addressing people who thought their obedience to the Law was all that was necessary. Paul warns them that their efforts alone were not earning them salvation. Salvation is not the salary paid by God for good works. Salvation is a gift given to those who have yielded themselves to God, acknowledging their need for His help in their lives, as they obey His law.

Job eventually understood he had left God out of the picture. Paul, in Galatians, shows that those who were relying only on physical works were also leaving God out of the picture. Like Job, they were trying to earn salvation by their own righteousness.

We find that whether we go to Job, Proverbs, or Psalms, all of the books within the Writings division, just like the Prophets division, direct us back to the Law.

### **THE GOSPELS AND ACTS**

Having the three divisions of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings firmly established, showing that each is built upon the scriptures preceding it, we now move on to

the fourth division of the Bible, the *Gospels*--Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—and the book of *Acts*. This is the first division of the New Testament.

The Gospels give us the verbal teachings and the physical example of Jesus Christ—the One who was the Word who spoke the Law and inspired all three divisions of the Old Testament. Everything Jesus did focused on and consisted of obedience to the Law. Whether He spoke it, or actually lived and practiced it, it was perfect obedience to the Law. Jesus never broke the Law. He never sinned!

From the outset of His ministry, Jesus, in Matthew 5 proclaimed: *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (vss 17-20)

This declaration by Jesus upholds and protects the first two divisions of the Bible—the Law and Prophets—and, by implication, the third division—the Writings. This means Jesus validates every word of the Old Testament. He emphatically states He did not come to destroy, but rather to magnify or “fill to the full” the Law. He says He came to extend its impact into the spiritual lives of God’s people, as He goes on to show in Matthew 5-7. Jesus reveals He did not come to do away with the Law but to focus the attention of His followers onto the Law. He did this through His verbal teachings and physical example set during His three and a half year ministry.

Jesus was obedient to the Law. He lived

the Law and never sinned—not one time! This is the example He left, and it is recorded for us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He both talked the talk and walked the walk of obedience. He never implied the Law would become unnecessary after His death.

Notice the importance Jesus placed upon obedience to the law in Matthew 19:16-17, *“Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But [in answer to your question] if you want to enter into life, **keep the commandments.**”* Jesus flatly stated this was necessary for salvation.

The man responded by asking Jesus, *“Which ones?”* To which He replied, *“You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (vss 18-19) Jesus made clear reference to the Ten Commandments. He does not list them all, but only enough so that no mistake could be made regarding to which He was referring.

At another time during His ministry Jesus was asked the same question. Notice in Luke 10:25-28, *“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’”* The primary emphasis made on the Ten Commandments in this example was on the first four, which focus on our relationship with God. The primary emphasis in the previous example was on the last six, which guide us in the proper relationships with our fellow man.

What is emphasized in both examples is the importance placed by Jesus on the need

for obedience to the Ten Commandments," *If you will enter into life, keep the commandments!*" There is not the slightest suggestion within the four gospel accounts that Jesus ever intimated doing away with the need to keep any of the Ten Commandments. In fact, in both examples we have just reviewed, Jesus exhorts all who want eternal life, who desire salvation, to keep the Law. This is the most basic, fundamental teaching of the Bible: **KEEP THE LAW!**

The very first principle that Jesus Christ gives in the Sermon on the Mount is *"keep the commandments!"* This is the basic principle upon which all of the teachings in the Bible are based.

John begins his gospel account with an important point regarding the origin of the Law: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."* (vss 1-3) This means that Jesus Christ, who was the Word of the Old Testament, was instrumental in creating, forming, and fashioning the Ten Commandments. Why then, would He say it is no longer necessary to keep them, as some claim He teaches through Paul's writings?

Jesus, the night before His crucifixion, had an excellent opportunity to tell His disciples they would no longer need to obey the Ten Commandments because His death would relieve them of that obligation. Yet, what did He say the night before His crucifixion? *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* (John 14:15)

We have already seen that the Word, who became Jesus Christ, was responsible for the creation of the Ten Commandments. He said, *"Keep My commandments."* This does not sound like He is about to do away with the need to obey them. In fact, in verse 21 He continues, *"He who has My commandments, and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I*

*will love him and manifest Myself to him,"* Jesus indicates the only ones who love Him are those who keep all of the Ten Commandments. He again reveals that the only ones who can have a personal relationship with Him and the Father are those who keep the commandments. Notice in verse 23: *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our home with him.'"*

In John 15:10, Jesus again tells His disciples, the night before His death: *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."* The commandments of Jesus and those of the Father are the same. It was through the Word, Jesus' pre-incarnate state, that God made and spoke all things.

We find repeatedly in His final teachings, Jesus' admonitions to keep the commandments, therefore we have no other option than to keep the commandments.

Chronologically, as to the time books of the Bible were written, the gospel of John was the last. It was written decades after Paul's epistles. IF Paul's writings indeed prove "the need to obey the Law" was nailed to the stake, why would the apostle John insist, about thirty years after Paul's death, that the Law is still in effect? That would sound like John was purposely contradicting Paul. Yet, John is the one who put Paul's writings in the Bible. He was the one who made the final decisions, as God directed and inspired him, as to the composition of the New Testament.

In fact, John was also responsible for recording the material in the book of Revelation, which is placed as the final book in the Bible. It is therein that one of the final instructions contained in the New Testament emphasizes the need of keeping the Law. *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the*

city.” (22:14) Some of the final teachings of the Bible, not only chronologically, but as far as placement in the canon of the New Testament, tell us that God expects us to keep the Ten Commandments.

In his position of deciding which books to include in the New Testament, John would never have included Paul's writings if they were in disagreement with what he taught. John understood that Paul was not teaching about doing away with the Law, but rather putting emphasis on the proper attitudes and perspectives needed by those who are keeping the commandments.

After the *Gospels*, which focus on Jesus' obedience to the Law, comes the book of *Acts*, which reveals that the early New Testament Church followed Jesus' example of obedience to the Law. *Acts* tells us about the founding of the New Testament Church, and it brings to light some of the problems that affected the early apostles.

Virtually all of the background of the apostle Paul is contained within this book. We learn that Paul was highly educated by the best Jewish rabbis, that his devotion to Judaism led to his active persecution of the Church, and that God chose him in a miraculous way.

We also learn from the book of *Acts* that the early apostles' major problems stemmed from the leaders of Judaism. These men were infuriated with these “ignorant” Galilean fishermen and the loathsome tax collector who were called “apostles” and who “assumed” a role of authority which the properly educated rabbis and Sanhedrin members alone deserved. They had attempted to stop this movement by killing the One who told them their authority was being taken away and given to others. In the conclusion of the parable of the wicked vinedressers in Matthew 21, Jesus made this proclamation: *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it...**Now when the chief priests and*

*Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.”* (vss 43,45)

This edict did not go over well with these religious leaders of the Jews. For centuries God had taken the Jews as His chosen people. They were the ones solely responsible for the preservation of the Holy Scriptures. This position of being the keepers of the oracles of God made the religious leadership very smug in their relationship to the rest of the world. The Jews were taught by their rabbis to look at the rest of mankind as unclean. They were of the opinion that the years of keeping God's Law as a nation ensured their salvation.

Then along comes a group of people who are now claiming to be the chosen of God. These upstarts were allowing all sorts of unclean people to consider themselves to be God's chosen people. This highly offended the Jews. But there was another teaching far worse, which caused them to attack the work of the early apostles with great zeal. These apostles taught that salvation was impossible apart from accepting Jesus as the Messiah and following His teachings.

They were especially enraged with this teaching which Peter first delivered in *Acts 2*: *“And it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death.”* (vss 21-23)

Shortly after, Peter once again was required to deliver the same message to the Jewish religious leaders. *“Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you*

*builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.” (4:10-11)*

These Jews were the ones who had failed to build the spiritual nation necessary for the kingdom of God. Their responsibility was to build a model nation for all of the rest of the nations to emulate. However, they had failed—they were fruitless—because they had rejected the One who was necessary to make that spiritual nation possible. It was now necessary to build a new nation upon the very One they had rejected.

Peter continues in verse 12: *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* The Jews connected the name of Abraham to salvation. (Matthew 3:8-9) Yet, the apostles taught that all Jews, just like those of other nations, must go through Jesus Christ in order to receive salvation. This incensed many of the religious Jews.

During this time, the religious leaders had the authority to arrest those breaking their laws. Peter and some of the other apostles were arrested for preaching the message about and of Jesus Christ. After their release, the religious leaders confronted them: *“saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, **you** have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and **intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!**’* [Notice, they were agitated that they were being linked to Jesus’ death.] *“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to those who obey Him.’” (5:28-32)*

The apostles did not back down. They upheld their charge that these men were responsible for having Jesus put to death

because that was how the prophecy of the stone being rejected was ultimately fulfilled. They were also clear that the gift of God’s spirit comes only to those who obey God.

The reaction of the leaders of Judaism was anything but humble, as verse 33 shows: *“When they heard this, they were furious and took counsel to kill them.”* We find these men had an attitude of murder. It is very important to keep in mind the kind of resistance which faced the apostles of the early New Testament Church. There were religious leaders of Judaism throughout the Roman Empire who were so hostile they wanted to murder the apostles.

The apostle Paul was up against this same hostility several years later. *“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”* (Acts 9:22) Rather than humbling themselves after being shown the truth: *“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.”* (vs 23)

Paul had been one of the primary persecutors of the New Testament Church. Yet, now he was part of the Church and supporting its teachings. His former relationship with the leaders of Judaism meant nothing. Their hatred had quickly been extended to include him.

In order to understand some of the things Paul wrote it is important to grasp the intensity of the resistance he and the other apostles were facing at that time. In Acts 13:44-46: *“And the next Sabbath came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but **since you reject it**, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, **we turn to the Gentiles.**’”*

Since their fruits proved they were not living by the word [disobeying the commandments], God was now offering those of other nations what the Jews had rejected. *"For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'* Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region." (vss 47-50) Once again it is important to note the level of hatred and hostility to which the apostle Paul was subjected.

The Jewish religious leaders were the main obstacles to the teachings of the apostle Paul. Enclaves of Jews were scattered throughout Asia Minor and Greece, all the way to Rome. Wherever Paul went he came across Jews who were, in most cases, hostile to the things he taught, and did all they could to undermine the work of the apostle: *"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and poisoned their minds against the brethren."* (14:2)

Time and again we find a wall of animosity existing between the Jews and the early Church. In verse 19 the Jews in Iconium persuaded the people to stone Paul. This was the mentality with which he was being confronted throughout that whole region.

Paul records in II Corinthians 11:23-27 the many kinds of turmoil and attacks he continually faced. He was constantly running into trouble, constantly being badgered by the Jews. In Acts 18:12-13, we read: *"Now when Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, 'This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.'" Notice, they were*

accusing Paul of teaching contrary to the Law. He refers to their accusation that he was teaching against the need to keep the Law in some of his letters.

It was due to this misperception that some devoted themselves to putting him to death. For example, in Acts 23:12: *"And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul."* There were more than forty that joined in this conspiracy.

They were constantly looking for an opportunity to kill Paul, or at the least, attempt to stop his ministry by filing charges against him. We read in Acts 25:7-8: *"When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, **which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I offended in anything at all.'**"* No one could bring forth any proof that Paul had taught contrary to the Law, and Paul himself flatly denied having done so.

In fact when Paul appeared before king Agrippa, after appealing his case to Caesar, he again affirmed that he had never taught anything contrary to the Law. Acts 26:1-2 states: *"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 'I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews.'" He was meticulous in the way he obeyed God. Nothing could be found in the way of life he lived which could indict him as a hypocrite. Continuing in verse 20, Paul says: *"But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."* Paul clearly taught the need for those who broke*

the Law to repent. *“For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, **to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come:**”* (vss 21-22) Paul told Agrippa about a decade after writing the letters of *Romans* and *Galatians* that he had not deviated from the teachings found in the Law and the Prophets.

Paul never taught anything to undermine or weaken the impact of the Holy Scriptures. Rather, he wrote things that would supplement or complement what Moses and the prophets had expounded. He helped to amplify the application of the Law.

The hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees was well-established in the four Gospel accounts. The primary interest of those religious leaders was to enjoy prominence among the people, as Jesus revealed in Matthew 23. Their teachings revolved around their own interpretations of the Law, with emphasis on their own traditions and customs, as Jesus also exposed in Mark 7: *“For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men... you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down...”* (vss 8-9,13)

The book of Acts carries on where the four Gospels end. Peter, Paul and the other apostles met major resistance from these men who felt their positions of religious leadership were being threatened. Once we understand this early Church history and the types of problems Paul faced, we can begin to better understand what he meant when he wrote his epistles.

As a quick review of this fourth division of the Bible, we have the four accounts of Jesus' life and teachings which record His respect and reverence for all that had been written in the Holy Scriptures, as well as His

indignation toward those who disrespected the commandments of God. The book of Acts continues by showing how the apostles and early Church closely adhered to Jesus' example of respect for all God's commandments. The apostles taught the need to repent of breaking the Law, and the Church is shown emulating the example of Jesus by keeping the Sabbath and annual holydays of God.

## GENERAL EPISTLES

A reiteration of the basics of Christianity immediately follows their constant presence in the Gospels and Acts, and comprises the fifth major division of the Bible. The group of letters included in this section are called the *General Epistles*. Although placed after Paul's writings in all major Bible translations, the General Epistles should actually follow the book of Acts, which is self-evident, based on their content. The men closest to Jesus Christ while He was on this earth—James, Peter, John, and Jude—were the writers.

James was a half brother of Jesus and grew up with Him. He saw the manner of life Jesus lived from the time he was a young boy until His death.

In all likelihood, Jude was also another half-brother of Jesus, who was later converted and became an apostle.

As the four Gospel accounts show, Peter and John were with Jesus for the three and a half years of His ministry.

Due to their personal knowledge of and experience with Jesus, these men were the ones who would be the best qualified to write the general information about what was expected of a follower of Christ.

### James and Faith

First in order is the book of James. Its primary focus is the need for faith—the kind of faith necessary for salvation. James writes,

*"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (1:22) Be doers of what word? The word that has existed from the beginning of the Holy Scriptures—the Law that God gave to Israel through Moses at the beginning!

James further elaborates on what God expects from *doers of the word* in the next chapter: *"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."* (2:10) James says *doers of the word* cannot choose personally-selected points of the Law to obey. They must be obedient to the whole Law! In verse 14, he connects faith with the need to keep the Law: *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"*

He then gives an example about faith and works with the conclusion: *"Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You hast faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will **show** you my **faith by my works.**"* (vss 17-18)

James clearly shows that faith and works are connected. *"But do you know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and **by works faith was made perfect?**"* (vss 20-22)

Those who are not keeping the Law, have no evidence of faith. Faith can only be substantiated by the visible response to what one believes. Those who have genuine faith believe God and trust everything He says, and prove their faith by what they do with what they profess to believe. In concluding this passage, James states: *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also."* (vs 26)

Before any attempt to read the writings of Paul, one must understand this point made by James. Unless the relationship between

faith and visible obedience to the Ten Commandments is comprehended the reader could become confused and choke on some of the concepts contained within the solid food of Paul's letters.

## Peter and Hope

Once the topic of genuine faith has been addressed, it is necessary to understand what God requires of those who hope for eternal life. Peter emphasizes the need for a Christian to keep hope alive. He also stresses that those who do not follow Christ's example of obedience to the Law have no hope. Peter in I Peter 2:21-22, Peter writes: *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin...**"*

What is sin? John wrote in his first letter: *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law.**"* (3:4, KJV) If Christians are not to sin, as Jesus Christ did not sin, then they are not to break the Law. Jesus always kept the Ten Commandments, and all Christians are required to follow that example in order to have the hope of the resurrection and eternal life.

Peter encourages Christians to meditate on the writings of the prophets and the apostles (II Peter 3:2), so that they can keep the hope of Christ's return ever before them. With that hope they will be more apt to heed his admonition in II Peter 3:14: *"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless."* Only those who are under God's grace can be blameless. And only those who live repentant lives, who mold their conduct according to God's Law, can remain under that grace.

What Peter writes here precedes what Paul wrote. It is very important to understand what Peter records before attempting to study

the writings of Paul. In fact, as we saw at the outset, Peter is the one who gives a warning about how some of Paul's statements have caused some to become confused.

### John and Love

Once faith and hope are linked together, and to the Law, it is essential to establish the final [Paul calls it the most important] of the three basic requirements of a Christian. That topic, which is the primary theme of John's letters, is love! John shows the need for love and defines what love is. He writes in I John 2:3-6, "*Now by this we know that **we know Him, if we keep His commandments.** He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But **whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.** By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*"

John probably wrote this some twenty to thirty years after the death of the apostle Paul. Yet, John is insisting it is needful to keep the Ten Commandments. He did the same thing when he wrote the gospel of John, and the book of Revelation, a few years later.

His emphatic pronouncement in this passage is extremely important. He reminds us that we have the record of the way Jesus walked, or led His life, and if we claim to be His disciples, we must follow His example of keeping the commandments.

Later, in 5:3, he adds: "*For **this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments:** and His commandments are not burdensome.*" God's commandments are not oppressive, impossible or unreasonable. They must be kept!

These are basic principles we must have in mind before we approach Paul's writings. In II John, verse 6, "***This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.** This is*

*the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.*" What were the first words of God from "*the beginning*" of His instructions? The Law, comprised of Ten Commandments, was the first thing spoken and recorded by God as the Holy Scriptures. We are to **walk in that LAW!**

Going on in verses 8-9: "*Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*" John says if someone is not obeying God's Law, they are transgressing, or breaking it. By so doing they are not keeping the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Continuing in verse 10, "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him...*" John warns of the danger of listening to anyone who teaches against the need to keep all Ten Commandments. Since John was responsible for including Paul's letters in the New Testament writings, it is clear John understood Paul did not teach contrary to this. Had he thought otherwise, he would have followed his own commandment and excluded anything objectionable. John understood Paul was only adding clarifications as to the proper state of mind and approach one must have in obeying the Ten Commandments.

### Jude and Warning

After being reminded of the connection faith, hope and love have to the keeping of the Ten Commandments, we finally come to the last of the General Epistles; the letter of Jude. A very important warning is contained here. Let's notice in verse 3: "*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend*

*earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* Jude is telling us that we need to make sure we contend for [strive to keep] that faith *“which was once for all delivered.”* In verse 4: *“For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness, and deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* These men by their teaching were giving license to disobey or break the Law. They began to look at grace in a very different light than God intended. They said there was no need to keep the Law.

Jude concludes the General Epistles and should immediately precede Paul’s writings. God inspired Jude’s location so that there would be no misunderstanding of what Paul said. Jude is a **WARNING**. Unfortunately, Jude has been relocated to precede the book of Revelation. Paul’s writings were moved to follow the book of Acts. With this arrangement, we do not have the preparation that the writings of James, Peter, John and Jude give us before we launch into Paul’s writings.

If we read the books in the correct order, then we have the preliminaries and the warning. Before we approach the apostle Paul’s writings we receive a warning to be careful of those who are already trying to twist and pervert grace. Jude makes it clear that there are those who were saying it isn’t necessary to obey the Law.

Paul spends a lot of time explaining and expounding grace in his epistles—what true grace is, not the perverted grace that is taught by so many in the world today. Jude warns us of those who would come along and turn the grace of God into license to disobey, who would claim that there is no need to keep the Law because grace takes care of everything for us.

Jude concludes the fifth major division of the Bible, setting the stage for the sixth division—the Epistles of Paul. However, before we take a brief look at the beginning of his writings, we need to establish the position taken in the final division of the Bible, which follows Paul, regarding the need for keeping the Ten Commandments.

## REVELATION

The seventh division of the Bible revolves around the fulfillment of all the prophecies which came in the previous divisions. Ultimately, this section reveals the need for God to deal with the accumulation of sin in the world and all of the cursings which are the result of sin. All of the plagues enumerated are in response to sin, which is the breaking of the Ten Commandments.

This section of scripture reveals that at the close of the age, the Church of God is still actively keeping the Ten Commandments, just as the Church was doing during the time recorded in the book of Acts. *“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who **keep the commandments of God** and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”* (12:17) Also, in 14:12 we read: *“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who **keep the commandments of God** and the faith of Jesus.”* The last blessing pronounced in the final section of inspired scripture deals with remaining faithful to the very first words of inspired scripture. *“Blessed are those who **do His commandments**, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”* (22:14)

## REVIEW

Prior to coming to Paul’s writings, we must have assimilated all that has come before. We must have a clear understanding

of what Moses wrote in the LAW, especially the revelation that the very first words of all inspired scripture were the ones delineating the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God in stone.

We must also grasp the lessons recorded in the PROPHETS and the WRITINGS regarding the national and individual blessings and curses which are derived from obeying or disobeying the Ten Commandments.

Before taking even a glimpse at the teachings of Paul, we must fully comprehend from the GOSPELS the examples that Jesus' life teaches us. He said, "I have not come to destroy the Law, but to magnify it." His example and teachings, as well as that of the early New Testament Church in the book of ACTS, point us back to the need to keep the Ten Commandments.

The final preparatory stage to addressing the words recorded by Paul is fully fathoming the teachings in the GENERAL EPISTLES. Faith, hope and love are all based upon obedience to the Ten Commandments. Peter warns that some twist the meaning of Paul's writings, and Jude warns that some were incorrectly teaching that keeping the commandments was not necessary.

## PAUL'S CONTRIBUTION

Paul's epistles are for those who understand the need to build upon all of the scriptures which have come before, all of which emphasize the need for the Commandments to be kept.

People who do not understand this fact are **NOT** ready for the solid food God provides through the writings of Paul. They will spiritually choke to death if they have not proven the need to keep the Law. Spiritually, they are not any more equipped to understand

Paul's teachings than a baby is prepared to bite into a big steak. Before eating the meat in Paul's writings, the milk of the Word must have already been digested.

Paul now builds on everything that has been laid down to this point. He builds on top of the foundation. He does not dig a basement under the foundation or weaken it in any way. He does not build next to or under the foundation, he builds upon everything that has come before. He tells us in I Corinthians 3:11 that there is no other foundation that we can build on except that which has already been laid. That foundation is Christ. Christ is the Word of God. The Word of God begins with the Law, moves to the Prophets, then proceeds to the Writings. Paul was not trying to build on another foundation. He was building on what was already there.

Another point in properly understanding his letters is to keep in mind the persecution that Paul received from the Jews. They believed and taught that being born a physical descendant of Abraham and keeping the Law saved them. No Gentile could ever receive salvation without becoming a proselyte of the Jews. Paul was teaching that neither physical descent nor keeping the Law could ever earn salvation. He taught the only way to attain salvation was by looking to, and relying on, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul **NEVER** said keeping the Ten Commandments was unnecessary. **HE SAID KEEPING THE LAW WOULD NOT EARN SALVATION.** The controversy with the Jews revolved around their charges that Paul was doing away with the Law. Yet, in the very first of his letters in the sixth division of the Bible, Paul sets out to establish the Law. He states in Romans 2:13, "*for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the **doers of the law will be justified.***" Paul is very emphatic here. He emphasizes the need to obey the law if one ever hopes to be justified of his past sins and be made right with God. This is one of the foundational concepts

he states in the book of Romans.

He later addresses the relationship between keeping the Law and faith. *“Do we then make void [without effect] the law through faith? (3:31) If we have faith, are we no longer required to keep the Law? Paul answers the question emphatically, “Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish [NIV, uphold] the law.”* He clearly relates that one who has faith will obey the law. That is exactly what James stated in the General Epistles. Paul is building on what James taught.

In chapter 6 of Romans, Paul is showing the relationship between obeying the Law and the extension of God’s grace. *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (vss 1-2)* Just as he said in 2:13, Paul here states that all who desire to be justified by God’s grace must keep the Law. He goes on comparing baptism to the death of the old, sinful way of life and the birth of a new way of life without sin: *“knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that **we should no longer be slaves of sin.**”* Those who have been baptized repented of sin first. That is, they acknowledged they were wrong for breaking the Ten Commandments, which define sin, and made a commitment to God to walk in obedience to the Law for the remainder of their lives. Paul forcefully claims the baptized cannot allow sin to dominate their lives any longer. They must resist any thought or activity which would break the Law and create sin.

He then addresses the status of the Christian who is under grace in vss 15-16: *“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to*

*death, or of obedience to righteousness?* Paul compares disobeying the law with obeying the law. He first says IF the law is disobeyed because one chooses to sin, that individual will die! He then says IF the law is obeyed, one can become righteous because, as John recorded in his gospel, Jesus will come and live in the one who is obedient.

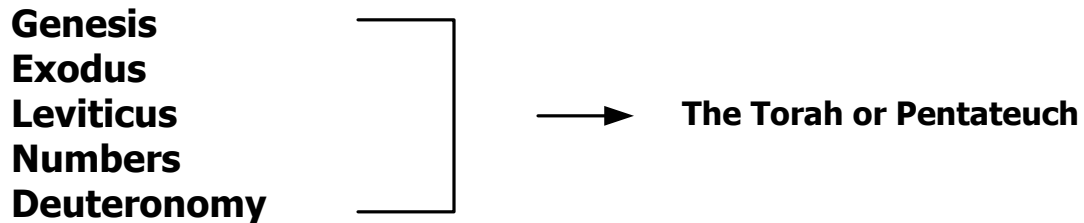
Although there are passages throughout his letters substantiating the need for obedience to the Law, Paul does not elaborate at great length on that topic. Paul’s main responsibility was not to go back and reiterate the basics over and over again. Rather, it was to go on to explain deeper concepts to those who have already mastered the basics—the first principles. His writings are to be read, studied and assimilated by the spiritually mature—those who already KNOW the Law must be obeyed!

Hopefully, from what we have covered in the background leading up to Paul’s epistles, we can see the need to tie the scriptures together—not dissecting the Word of God and throwing out what does not seem to apply to our way of thinking. We must see the need to apply the whole Bible [every precept, every line] and do what must be done in order to properly understand. According to Psalm 111:10, a good understanding of the Bible, including the material God inspired the apostle Paul to record, comes only to those who obey God’s commandments.

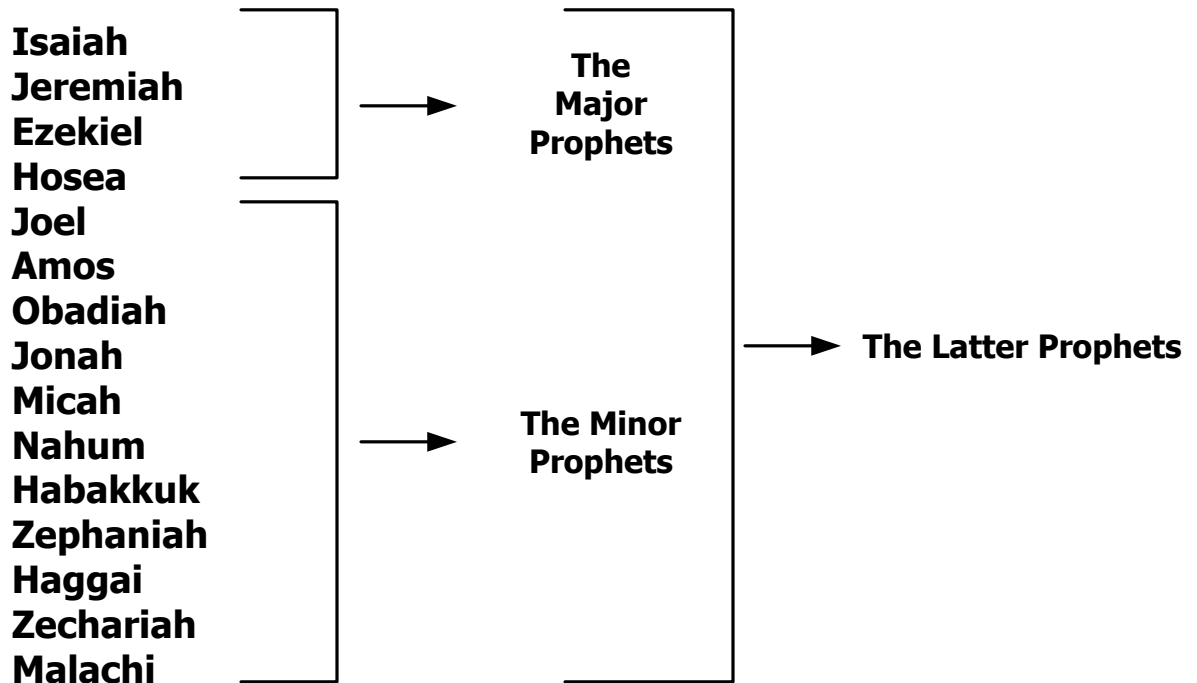
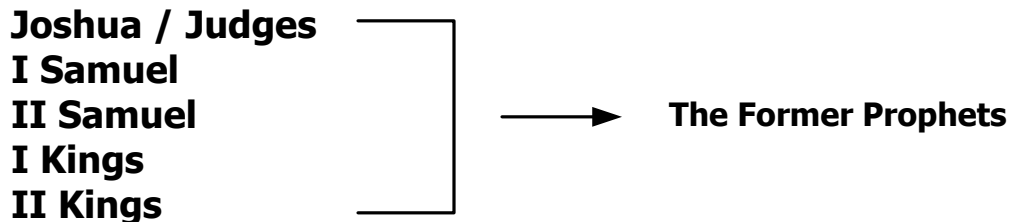
All scriptures are quoted from the New King James (NKJ) Version unless otherwise stated.

# The Inspired Order of the Books in the Bible

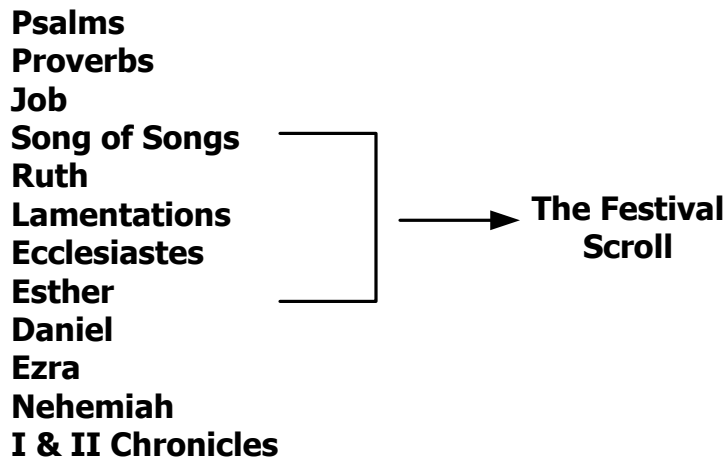
## The First Division - The Law



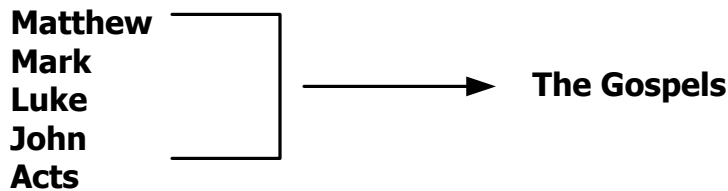
## The Second Division - The Prophets



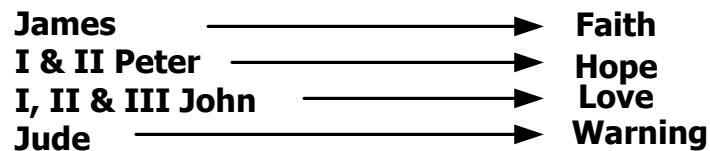
## The Third Division - The Writings



## The Fourth Division - The Gospels & Acts



## The Fifth Division - The General Epistles



## The Sixth Division - Paul's Writings

Romans  
I Corinthians  
II Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
I Thessalonians  
II Thessalonians  
I Timothy  
II Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon  
Hebrews

## The Seventh Division - Revelation

Revelation