

## Survey of the Bible

### Notes from 3-15-20 Class

When we met last, we had just gotten Moses and the Israelites to Mt. Sinai, and Moses had come down from the mountain with the ten commandments on the tablets, and we decided to stop there because we need to spend a bit of time on this section. We said last time that this week that we would talk first about the form of the law, because the form the law takes is almost as important and essential as the substance, or the content, of the law. Let's turn first to the form of the law.

Moses first gets the Ten Commandments which are types of "apodictic law." Apodictic is a legal term, not a biblical, scholarly term, and it means absolute and unconditional. These are just sides of the same coin. If something is absolute, of course it's unconditional. I wouldn't say to you, "NO SMOKING, but if you are gonna smoke, do it outside, or only smoke half the cigarette". An absolute law is naturally unconditional. This unconditional nature is underscored in several ways.

First, eight of the laws are negative, and they're negative with the strongest possible no, which is 'Lo' ( לא ). If someone says 'Lo' to you it's not like a polite negative, as in "Please don't open the window." It's like, "If you open that window, I'm going to take a gun and shoot you through the head." That's how absolute and emphatic this no is. It's absolute prohibition, and eight of them are worded this way.

Secondly, these laws are in the second person singular. In English we don't really make a distinction between the second person singular and the second person plural, both of them are 'you'. If I say, "You should study your bible," we don't know if I mean you specifically (one person) or a room full of people. Hebrew allows this though, and these laws are written in the second person singular, so you can't hide out in a crowd, they are aimed specifically at each individual.

And finally, you can say that these laws are terse, short and pithy. Something that's pithy skips past the outer shell and goes to the meat of the thing. They're substantial.

Now this form of law seems, at first blush, to be super forbidding. But counterintuitively, it's just the opposite. This negative form of law allows for a free response, a creative response, and individual response, an autonomous response, a latitudinous response, but we kind of have to think our way through how that might be the case. We've got life, from cradle to grave, for every imaginable circumstance you might find yourself in, covered by these ten laws. So how does the forbidding, negative form of these laws allow for more creativity, autonomy, individuality, etc? Consider this: If I say to you, "There's no church next week, go to Aldi." That's one thing. But if I say to you, "There's no church next week, *you must not go to Aldi.*" where do you have more freedom? In the one you can't go to church and you must go to Aldi, but in the second, you can't go to church and you can't go to Aldi, but you can do whatever else you want to do. It allows for much more freedom and creativity.

This is all predicated on the fact that *Hessed* is in play. I don't know if you remember this word, *Hessed*. This is a word that is pervasively and consistently mistranslated in the old testament. It, in fact, is a word that relates only to the covenant, and it has a dual definition. Applied to God it means covenantal grace for unmerited favor. Applied to God's people it means covenantal faithfulness. But it's a species of love and passion, just like there's a passion that exists between two lovers, it's pitched. So *Hessed* really refers to the covenantal love between God and his people. If *Hessed* is in play, then the people's hearts are in the right place, and they have these ten

areas of conduct (the negative nature of which actually allows for even greater freedom, creativity, individuality, etc), so it seems like this is a really super suitable form that these ten commandments are taking. But of course there's always a rub, because the ten commandments are followed by 613 casuistic laws (which means case law). You could say these are case by case laws that are highly detailed, and largely conditional. Not every one of them is conditional, but they are largely conditional. Let's take a look at these, just so we can get an example of what we're talking about.

Turn to Exodus 21:18. "When individuals quarrel, and one strikes the other with a stone or a fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for a full recovery." This is pretty sufficiently detailed. Obviously, back in these times, people striking each other with a stone or fist wasn't that uncommon; these were rough and tumble times. Look in verse 22... "When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine." So we have this detailed law, but look what follows in 21:23... "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." This is the famous Lex Talionis (Latin), the law of retaliation. It's actually meant to attenuate retaliation. So if you throw a rock and you knock out my tooth, I can't go kill all your children. There has to be a measured or proportional response to your retaliation.

The reason this is so choice is because of its relation to the new testament. Any part of the old testament that the new testament picks up should be considered as extremely important. So when you're reading along in the old testament you're really reading blind, because there's a thousand years of faith testament recorded there. But when you get to the new testament and see what that selects as important, then you can almost re-read the old testament with fresh eyes. This Lex Talionis is what Jesus picks up in his sermon on the mount, "You have heard it said in ancient times, 'and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say unto you..." What Jesus is doing, essentially, in the sermon on the mount, is overthrowing the Lex Talionis. He is saying, "My followers are not to retaliate ever. We turn the other cheek. We go the extra mile."

We just tripped upon a very choice casuistic law there in 23, but let's look at 21:28... "When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten (that would obviously be in bad taste, to have your ox gore someone to death, but then you get to have a feast afterward); but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall be put to death."

Let's move over to Exodus 23:5. This one isn't conditional, but it's highly detailed... "When you see the donkey of one who hates you crushed under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free."

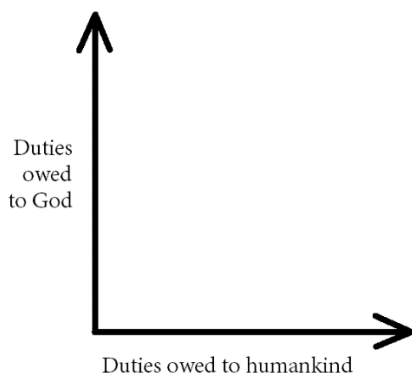
In 23:9... "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." This is picking up on one of the major spirits of both the old and the new testament.

In 23:10... "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat."

In 23:14... Three times a year you shall hold a festival for me. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I command you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt."

These casuistic laws follow the ten commandments, and there seems to be an inconsistency, because the ten commandments by their form allow for this free, creative, autonomous response, but these casuistic laws don't allow for that. These are the essence of micromanagement. What is behind these conflicting laws? What Julius Wellhausen<sup>i</sup> has said is that really what happened originally is that Moses went up to Mt. Sinai and he got the Ten Commandments. But that didn't seem to the people to be much to go on, so there grew a proliferative interpretation of what this looks like in the day-to-day. It's almost like the constitution and then what the case law says the constitution looks like on the ground. So that there was this proliferative interpretation, and when the Pentateuch<sup>ii</sup> was being edited, the editor put these 613 laws in after the ten commandments to show what they should look like day-to-day.

There's one more little piece of the form of the law that we need to discuss. This is the fact that of the ten commandments, the first four are theological in nature – indicating that they delineate duties owed to God.



The last six are ethical in nature – indicating that they delineate duties owed within humankind. What this bespeaks is what scholars call “Ethical Monotheism”, and this is right at the heart of the bible. This concept that vertical duties, theological duties, owed to God must be accompanied by horizontal duties, or ethical duties owed to humankind. These two things are not disconnectable; they must be maintained together. Well nigh the entire burden of the prophets is to expose sins against ethical monotheism. So, if you have sins on the vertical axis, you are doing things that you deem to be ethical, but without any recourse to God, that's bad. That's like Marxism, he's got his own ethics, but without any recourse to God. In like manner, if

you're all about your vertical duties owed to God, and you aren't on this ethical plane, that's every bit as bad. Let's flip over to the prophet Amos just to read a little more about this.

Turn to Amos 5:18...What these prophets are up to is exposing ethical monotheistic violations. Amos makes it absolutely emphatic that if you aren't practicing social justice, if you aren't observing your ethical responsibilities to humankind, he doesn't want you to darken his doorstep<sup>iii</sup>. period. Amos 5:18 reads as follows: “Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!<sup>iv</sup> Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand, panting, against the wall and was bitten by a snake.” The people of Amos's time had this popular conception of the day of the Lord being God's vindication of Israel and indictment of all other nations. As such, they really wanted to see it come. They thought God would be showing the world that Israel is really his promised people, his favored people, and that he would be smiting everyone else. But here Amos is saying, “Why would you want that?!” He goes on to describe a sort of Halloween house of horrors. Amos is a bit of a spoiler. But look in verse 21, we see his ethical monotheism in full view (here God is speaking through Amos)... “I hate, I despise your festivals. I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and your grain offerings I won't accept them. The offerings of well being of your fatted animals I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the melody of your hearts. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” There's the ethical monotheism, presupposed as having been violated. As I said, the prophets are all over this, and one of the early indications we have of it is that theological commands are accompanied by ethical commands.

That's enough on the form of the law, we can jump off and look at the substance of the law, most particularly these four theological commandments, because the ethical ones are fairly self-evident. Let's flip back to Exodus 20. Spoiler alert, the new testament throws out the law of the old testament. There are three essential voices in the new testament: the voice of John, the voice of Paul, and the combined voices of Matthew, Mark and

Luke, and all three of these voices throw the old testament commandments out, they are a temporary thing, but for now the ten commandments are historically important, so let's go through them.

These apodictic commandments have a bit of verbiage around them, so let's look at that. Exodus 20:1... "Then God spoke all these words: I am the lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me." What the Hebrew actually says is: You are not having other gods before my faces. Preliminarily let me say this, here's more evidence of henotheism<sup>v</sup>. The Hebrew is clear, *you are not having other gods before my faces*. So other gods are not precluded. But the essence of this, regardless, is clear: You are to have one God, and one corollary truth, and there are no competing ultimacies, and no competing corollary truths. One God, one truth, that's it. This flies in the face of the spirit of our age which is pluralism<sup>vi</sup>. You can see how much at loggerheads the bible is with our post-modern age.

The next apodictic law is found in Exodus 20:4: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." This might seem very obscure, but you have to recognize that these commandments are very historically bound, you have to know something of the historical context. I think we already know of this historical context, that there was polytheism and then came monotheism, and all of these polytheisms from the entire area around the Israelites was either paganism or a nature religion, which held that the gods adhere to the forces of nature and the trick was to personify these gods and then to render their personifications in idols or likenesses. This is all around the Israelites, they're swimming in it. This commandment is saying they will not make idols, and most particularly they aren't to make an idol of God. The way King James translates this is "you're not making for yourself a graven image." You're not making for yourself an image of Yahweh. Why is that? We saw at the giving of the divine name that God does not want to be defined or confined in a name so that humankind might believe it has mastery over him. God likewise doesn't want to be defined and confined in an idol, so that humankind might believe it has mastery over him. He doesn't want people to think that they can make an image of him, and then believe he's trapped in there, and they can give him a raisin cake and toss some petaled water him on and he'll give them what they want. This is along the same lines as the divine name. God is arranging the relationship properly. God is God, we are not.

The third theological duty is found in 20:7..."You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." This goes only superficially to the idea of people saying god damn or Jesus Christ; that is really a very superficial understanding of this commandment. What this actually goes to is humankind is not allowed to invoke God's name in its own human cause. Before you say that God hates gay people, you better be sure it's not your own homophobia talking. The doctrine of manifest destiny is another good example. That ideology said that God willed for the US to have everything west of the Mississippi, but before you say that that's what God wills you better be pretty sure that that's what he wants, and not that that's just what we want. Don't invoke God to hallow your own profane causes is what this says.

The final one is Exodus 20:8... "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it Holy." As the verbiage goes on to say, God created in six days and then her rested, and so in consideration of that we work for six days and then we rest, to remember the Creator God. That's a theological duty, but it also has tinges of being an ethical duty because when you do that you bear witness to the faithful of your faith, and so that bolsters the faith of everyone.

From there we go on to the ethical commandments: Honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness against your neighbor (which really covers the whole spectrum of lying), and do not covet anything. All that is very straightforward.

That almost brings us to the end of this saga of Israel's origins. Before we part company with this sage and move on to the next, which is 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, as well as Joshua and Judges which proceed them, we should take a look in a parting way at the episode recorded in chapter 32.

So turn to Exodus 32:1. The people of Israel, we saw, were doing a lot of complaining in the wilderness, and it wasn't just legitimate complaining like they had a headache or something. Their complaining wasn't legitimate, it was very sarcastic, and never involved them waiting patiently for anything or participating in their own care. People who complain like that aren't people of high character. There's no epiphany that's going to yank them out of this state of low character. They just got the ten commandments, but we had only started to touch on all the rigamarole that accompanied that. Here's what the rigamarole looked like:

They get to Mt. Sinai;

Moses goes up to God and God says, "I'm about to give these people a law covenant, ask them if they intend to keep it."

Moses goes back down and tells them God is about to give you a law covenant, do you intend to keep it?

The people are all totally enthused about it and swear they intend to keep it.

Moses goes *back* up and gets the entire law covenant in oral form and comes back down.

Moses tells the people what the nuts and bolts of the law covenant are and asks again if they intend to keep that covenant.

The people are almost orgiastic in their fervor for these commandments, they're killing bulls and throwing blood all over the place, and they just really convince Moses they're down for the whole thing.

So Moses goes *back* up the mountain a third time, and God says, "OK, I'm going to give you the commandments in tablet form so that we have a kind of definite code."

Let's go see what the people are up to while Moses is getting these tablets...

Pick it up in Exodus 31:18... "When God finished speaking with Moses on Mt. Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." In 32:1... "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the Mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Now these people had already heard what the commandments were going to be, no other gods, no false idols. And their reaction had been, "Oh of course we'll keep, don't even worry about it." Now they act like they don't even know who Moses is, all the ten plagues are a distant memory. 32:2 goes on to say... "Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Aaron takes all the gold from them and melts it down and forms it into the image of a golden calf. Then he says to them, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

In 32:7 God tells Moses to go back down the mountain at once, that the people are acting perversely. He explains to Moses what they've been up to. He essentially explains that he can see these people are stiff necked and will never do what he has told them to do, and that he intends to let his wrath burn them up, and just use Moses to start over making a great nation. He can see that making a great nation out of Abraham didn't really pan out, so he wants to kill all those people, to wipe the slate clean and start over. But Moses begs the Lord, and tells Him to think about what the Egyptians will think when they see that God brought his people out of the land of Egypt just to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the Earth. As if God would care whether anyone thinks he is a jerk. So according to Moses the optics just wouldn't be that good. So now we see the Lord change his mind about the disaster he planned to bring on his people.

We're going to pause here and note something that we haven't seen yet. We haven't seen it yet, but this is the bible's first super clear descriptor of what constitutes leadership. It's not a single charismatic quality. This is it: The great leader in the bible is one who intercedes for a wayward people and steers them back to God's path.

Of course, we're going to see this really robustly in Jesus Christ, but even as a secular nation, look who we celebrate as leaders – Martin Luther King, Jr, Abraham Lincoln – what do they do? They interceded for a wayward people and brought them back to God's path. As much as we prize our secularism, we're still using a biblical pattern for leadership, we just don't know it.

In 32:15... "Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, on the front and on the back. The tablets that were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp!" Now where did Joshua come from? In 32:17 he just sort of appears as Moses' assistant, and he's going to be Moses' successor. He comes down with Moses and he thinks there's some sort of war in the camp. But Moses tells him that isn't the sound made by victors or even losers, it's the sound of revelers. When Moses comes into the camp and sees all the revelers his anger burns hot and he throws the tablets to the ground and smashes them. So the rigamarole continues. The tablets are ruined, he's got to go up a fourth time. He takes the calf they made and he burned it in the fire and ground it down into a powder and made them drink it, that's how mad he was.

Here we're going to see what little regard the bible has for Aaron. Moses says to him, in verse 21, "What did these people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron's reply is essentially, "Don't be mad, you know these people, they're bent on evil, so I just took their gold and threw it in the fire, and oddly enough a golden calf popped out." Truly, the odds of that are one in a million. He never mentions to Moses that he took the gold and formed it into a mold and gave it to them as an idol.

Now Moses is pretty salty, and he goes over to the gates of the camp and he says, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me." At that point all the sons of Levi gathered around him. Now, Moses is from the house of Levi, so all of his fellow tribesmen are gathering to his side. Herein after, the house of Levi is no longer an ordinary tribe. It gets subsumed into a priestly cast, which is an inherited religious position. They will no longer be Levites, but only priests going forward. Because they were the least bad of all the bad Israelites, not a great claim to fame, but there you go. Moses tells the sons of Levi to grab their swords and go out among the people, and each one of them has to kill their brothers, their friends and their neighbors. Unsurprisingly they did that, and 3000 people fell that day. This is not a pretty picture, but 3000 people had to die that day to quell their rioting and give them a decisive punishment. That finally subdues them, though they don't feel as bad as they're about to feel, because God is done, he tells them to move along, go to their land, but he's done with them. The people realize that God's not behind them anymore, and they were very distraught. So Moses once again acts as a leader and intervenes on their behalf with God. They're pretty bummed about it, and so they strip off their gold and jewelry and head to the promised land in a mournful, dejected state.

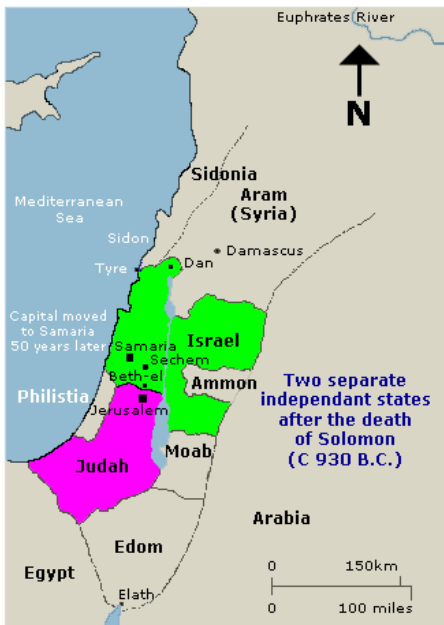
We're at the end of this section now, and we'll just outline what we're about to encounter, and then we'll pick up with the details next time. This is what lies ahead... We are confronting now the so called Deuteronomic History, which is the history of the people on their land in one way or another. They live as a united nation for a very short period. They live on their own land from 1220 to 587. This covers the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings (Samuel and Kings are in two volumes, but that's an artificial distinction. The original scrolls of these were too voluminous. You couldn't have a scroll more than 30 feet long, so they were written on two scrolls, but the history is only one long story).

Joshua is going to describe the conquest. Joshua, as I said, is Moses' assistant and successor, and then he becomes the military leader who's going to conquer the promised land. He does this in a series of blitzkrieg attacks on these walled cities that were pre-existent on that land.

Judges tells the story of the Israelites original deployment on the land. They originally deployed themselves on the land, not surprisingly, as a tribal confederacy. We can understand what that means because we are United States; those were confederated tribes. And that suits their identity, because that's really who they are, they are just a series of tribes. This tribal confederacy is ruled over by a form of government that's called a judgeship. We'll talk about that more when we get to it, because it's a form of government unique to the bible, written about in only one place and that's here.

First Samuel talks about the life and times of Samuel, who is the 11<sup>th</sup> century leader of Israel. He has a kind of fluid role, as he functions sometimes as prophet, sometimes as judge, and sometimes as priest. This section then goes on to record the first king, King Saul, who is a very tragic figure, and the early part of David's reign and the death of Saul.

Second Samuel records the rise of David, his foundation of the Nation of Israel, his naming of Jerusalem as its capital, and his movement of the arc of the covenant to Mt. Zion (making Jerusalem both a political and spiritual capital), and then it discusses David's corruption. We should note something about that the eye-witness report on David here. There are probably six or seven histories written by humankind that are considered the greatest ancient histories ever written, and nobody doubts this. Thucydides springs to mind as one. But this one is without a doubt one of the greatest. There are only two eye-witness histories recorded in the bible: this one and the crucifixion. Not only are they of inestimable historical value, but this guy in particular is absolutely brilliant in his perspective regarding the corruption of David.



Now we move on to Kings I & II. First Kings opens with an account of David's son, Solomon. Solomon took the throne in 961, and died in 922, and no sooner than he dies but the northern tribes succeed, and all we're left with is what you see in the map to the left. The northern nation retains the name of Israel, and the southern nation adopts the Name of Judah. Then there are, throughout the rest of both books of Kings, reports of all the kings to sit on the thrones of Israel and Judah down to 587 BCE, when Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians.

This is what lays ahead for us, and its ultimate importance lies in the fact that this divided nation gives us the backdrop for the rise of this institution called prophecy. Prophecy is the most important part of the old testament for Christians.

For our purposes there are three 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, a 7<sup>th</sup> century prophet, Jeremiah, and a 6<sup>th</sup> century prophet, second Isaiah who we are really aiming for when we discuss the prophets. The

Second Isaiah is without question the highwater mark of the old testament. The entire old testament is predicated on two chapters of second Isaiah. The new testament could not and would not have been written without it, because when the Christ event happens nobody understands what is going on, least of all his disciples. The disciples are depicted as total dumbbells. They don't understand anything, and are in total denial about everything Jesus says, particularly as it relates to his death. So when he dies, as he does, they don't acquit themselves any better, and when he's resurrected things don't get any better. They're not all dying Easter eggs, they're scared to death, they don't understand how or how he's there, and they don't know what's going on at all. Because they don't have any real clear understanding of what went down, they go through the old testament and say, "What in the world prefigured what just happened here?" They light on Second Isaiah, and the entire new testament is written around those prophecies. Those are very important waters we'll be swimming in there, but we won't tackle that today.

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<sup>i</sup> Julius Wellhausen, (born May 17, 1844, Hameln, Hanover [Germany]—died Jan. 7, 1918, Göttingen, Ger.), German biblical scholar best known for his analysis of the structure and dating of the Pentateuch.

His major writings put forth the view that the books of the Pentateuch were not written by Moses but were the result of oral traditions that evolved over time from a nomadic religion through the prophets to the law, rather than from the law through the prophets, as it is presented in the Old Testament. He dissected two distinct narrative structures from Genesis, determining that these narratives were the oldest portion of the Pentateuch, while the laws and rituals were the latest elements.

(WRITTEN BY: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

<sup>ii</sup> The Pentateuch – the first five books of the bible (Genesis through Deuteronomy)

<sup>iii</sup> The way the prophets go, there are three major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They are inserted in the bible in that order only because of their length, not because of their substance or quality. Then there are twelve minor prophets that follow them, and they go in order of their length as well, not chronologically or in order of importance or anything.

<sup>iv</sup> The end of days.

<sup>v</sup> The preference for or loyalty to one god while acknowledging a pantheon. Probably the root of monotheism.

<sup>vi</sup> The belief in or the acknowledgement of *truths*, as opposed to one truth. Probably the central tenant of post-modernism, all truths are equally likely.