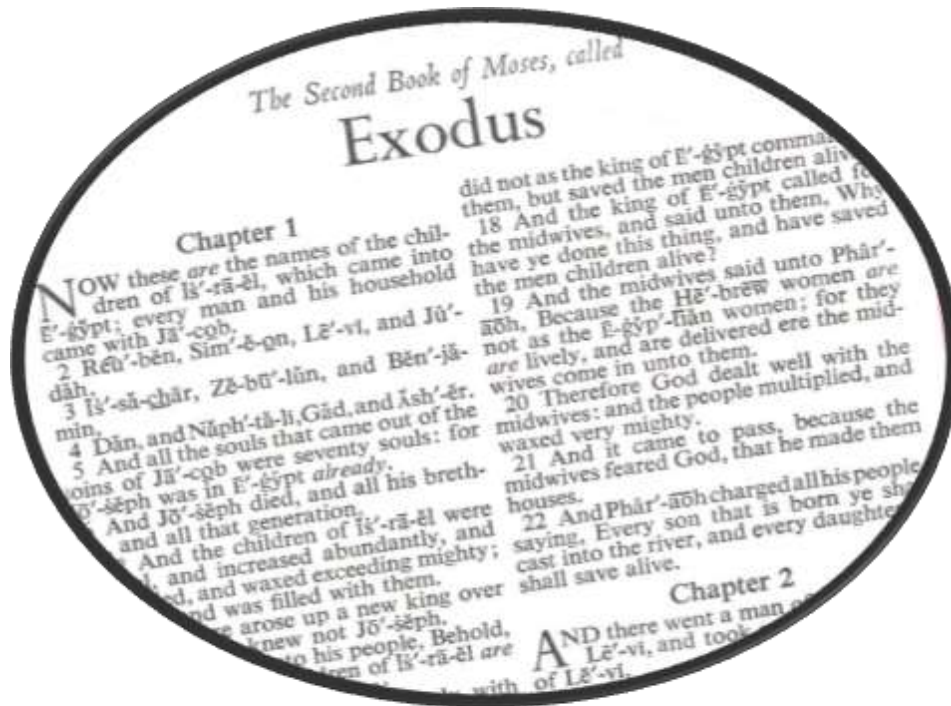


EXODUS – WEEK 13

NATION BUILDING



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 20:13–21:17 – Nation Building

Now God gets down to details. He starts laying down the moral laws that make for a functioning society. Unlike the earlier commandments that structure Israel's relationship with God, these structure people's relationships with each other.

This teaches a people who have known nothing but slavery how to be a free and independent nation.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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Thank you.

Exodus 20:13–21:17 – Nation Building
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1 Exodus 20:13-16 (NKJV)

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Many courthouses in America have the Ten Commandments chiseled into the walls or otherwise posted. This gives the secularists fits. They see this as a violation the establishment clause. They miss what makes the Ten Commandments so foundational to our legal system.

Prior to the Ten Commandments, the law was whatever the latest king says. There was no continuity; when the king (or Pharaoh) died everything was suddenly up in the air. If the new king had different preferences, the law changed. That’s what happened to Israel when the new Pharaoh came in who didn’t know Joseph. Furthermore, a king could ban something you’ve already done and then punish you for it. The system was capricious and unreliable.

The Ten Commandments changed all that. Here was a fixed system of laws that won’t change at the drop of a hat. This is the foundation of the American legal system. Laws are permanent. Furthermore, you can’t break a law that hasn’t been written yet. You can only be charged with violating a law that existed at the time you committed the “crime.” Nothing is more central to our legal system, and this all began with the Ten Commandments.

We post the Ten Commandments on courthouse walls to celebrate the invention of fixed law.

Americans bear false witness more than they realize. We live in a naturally deceptive society, so much so that we don’t even notice. I can’t explain this except through a long story.

The weekend after 9/11/2001 my wife took a troop of Girl Scouts camping. On Sunday, the leaders felt it appropriate to take the girls to a church service on the campground. Unfortunately, the sermon was way, way over the top – spouting apocalyptic visions of God punishing America. The leaders hustled the girls out of there in the middle of the sermon.

One leader stayed behind and afterward told the preacher, unsolicited, that the girls left because they had to pack. That sounds normal until you consider that it was false and erased a lesson the preacher probably needed to learn. Silence was clearly a better option in that situation. Yet lying was the natural choice.

These “white lies” are so common in America that we’re blinded to them. We’re better story tellers than truth tellers. Ask God to open our eyes to being more genuine.

2 Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

This commandment goes a step beyond all the others and governs feelings, not just actions. This cuts to the heart of sin. Obey this commandment and most of the others fall into place. It's curious that this one comes last; it seems so central to sanctification.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.
– Matthew 15:19 (ESV)

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. – Matthew 5:21-22 (ESV)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. – Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV)

Early in the 21st century, there was a movement in America that was openly based on covetousness – Occupy Wall Street. They resented what they called the [richest] one-percent. They didn't care how you got rich – you could be a baseball star, a great surgeon, or Oprah Winfrey. If you were rich, you were hated.

So, of course, Occupy Wall Street had a huge crime problem.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street (scroll down to Security)

If these folks knew diddly about the Bible, they would have seen that coming.

Coveting is universal in America. We are competitive in an unhealthy way. We call it “keeping up with the Joneses” but that sugar-coats what it really is. It's violating the tenth commandment.

We're all guilty of this. America is saturated with covetousness. In my neighborhood, even the Christmas lights are a competition.

Ask God to help rid us of covetousness. Also, we need to be more open about this and more willing to challenge our brothers and sisters; this is easier to see in others than in ourselves.

And it's easy to miss how important this is. We forget that this is one of the big ten.

In practice, no other commandment is as underappreciated.

3 Exodus 20:18-26 (NKJV)

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.’

The clamor on the mountain is too much for the Israelites and they keep their distance. Good, they’re supposed to stay back anyway. Moses explains that this is just God’s way of intimidating them to keep them from sinning and not something to be feared generally. (That is, God isn’t unpredictably dangerous).

Then God reiterates the commandment against making idols but extends it a bit. They’re not only prohibited from fashioning idols, when they build an altar of stones they’re prohibited from fashioning the stones. The altar should be made of stones that are just as God made them; fashioning them profanes them.

Altars had to be all natural.

God loves his creation. That’s obvious, but we gloss over it. We make lots of noise about how God loves us (and, to be sure, God’s love for us is special) but we rarely take the time to appreciate God’s love for His whole creation.

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge. – Psalm 19:1-2 (NIV)*

Praise God for the beauty and wonder of His creation. Here are some favorite glorious things to browse.

<http://www.spacetelescope.org/images/archive/top100/>

Don’t worship the creation; worship Him. But meditating on the wonders He has wrought can make for wonderful worship.

4 Exodus 21:1-6 (NKJV)

“Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”

The chilling history of slavery in America makes these verses difficult for us to read. But, in fact, they shouldn’t be troubling. The servitude called “slavery” here is not analogous to American slavery; it’s analogous to “indentured servitude.”

Indentured servants were common in colonial America. People sold themselves into indentured servitude to pay a debt or to pay for passage to America. But indentured servitude wasn’t permanent. That made all the difference. Indentured servitude was a form of paid up front employment. Conversely, American slavery was an inhumane system where people actually bought and sold other people.

However, biblical slavery could be made permanent.

But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever

We don’t know much about how this permanent slavery worked. Obviously, if it was anything like American slavery, no one would ever want to do this. We know from Genesis 42:6 that back then even a foreign slave in the Egyptian system could rise to become second in command over the whole nation. American slaves had nothing close to that kind of opportunity.

This passage doesn’t abolish slavery, but it does add some useful regulations. These regulations protected slaves and gave them specific rights.

It’s hard to imagine that slavery still exists, but it does. And modern slavery (AKA human trafficking) is just as vicious as antebellum American slavery – maybe more so. A lot of it is sex slavery.

This isn’t just going on around the world; it’s going on right under our noses. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a hotline to report suspected trafficking (888) 373-7888.

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>

<https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking>

Do everything you can do to end this shocking evil. Pray and keep your eyes open.

5 Exodus 21:7-11 (NKJV)

“And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.”

These verses equate female slavery with marriage. You could buy a bride from her father. That sounds pretty extreme until we remember that Isaac and Jacob essentially bought their brides, and these turned out to be legitimate, successful marriages.

“Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master’s son’s wife, as the LORD has spoken.” And it came to pass, when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. – Genesis 24:51-53 (NKJV)

Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.” And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” – Genesis 29:18-19 (NKJV)

This is all in the context of a primitive culture with many unfamiliar, even disturbing, practices. Often, rather than abolish those practices, the Bible regulated the practices so as to protect the innocent.

The regulations imposed here were a leap forward in women’s rights.

Think modern courtship is better? Consider this. In sixty-percent of reported on-campus rapes, the accuser was too drunk to remember what happened.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304558804579374844067975558?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052702304558804579374844067975558.html>

How can laws protect people who don’t care to protect themselves? You can’t legislate self-esteem.

The mistreatment of women is just one facet of man’s inhumanity to man. We don’t need new laws to get people to act sane; we need them to become sane. Only gospel transformation can do that.

God has placed His church in the middle of an ocean of pain. We need to respect the urgency of the situation.

God saved us for a reason.

6 Exodus 21:12-17 (NKJV)

“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

“But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

“And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

“He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

“And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

These verses introduce capital punishment. Capital crimes include first degree murder (but not second degree murder), shanghaiing someone into slavery, possessing such a shanghaiied slave, and egregious violations of the fifth commandment.

Murder comes first, as it should. However, there are lots of details and special cases to consider. The distinction between first and second degree murder is important. All this, including how each case should be handled, is detailed in Numbers 35.

At first glance, capital punishment for merely possessing a shanghaiied slave seems excessive. However, unlike any other stolen property, slaves can testify to the fact that they were stolen. So, no one can claim ignorance about where their slave came from. This law destroys the market for shanghaiied slaves.

The punishment for grossly dishonoring your parents seems incredibly severe. Okay, so don't do that; it's apparently very important to God. He makes the rules, right?

Besides, a strong family structure is essential to society, and honoring parents is key to that.

If you're looking for an explanation for why our society is going down the tubes, look no further than the collapse of traditional families. Nothing correlates more with success than coming from a stable family. Nothing correlates more with crime than coming from a broken one.

But why are families breaking up so often nowadays? If it's the church's job to help, how can we help?

The answer is not to treat the symptoms but to treat the disease. Divorce and out-of-wedlock births are not the root cause. Sin is. The answer is the gospel. You save marriages by saving people.

I know this sounds like I'm saying that the gospel is the answer to everything.

That's because I am saying that the gospel is the answer to everything.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is a common way we “speak with forked tongue”?
2. How can we fight our natural tendency to covet?
3. Where do you see God in nature?
4. Have you ever seen something first hand that made you suspect human trafficking?
5. Have you ever gotten directly involved in someone else’s pain?
6. How do you present the gospel to a couple that’s at loggerheads? (How is the presentation different?)

Items for prayer: