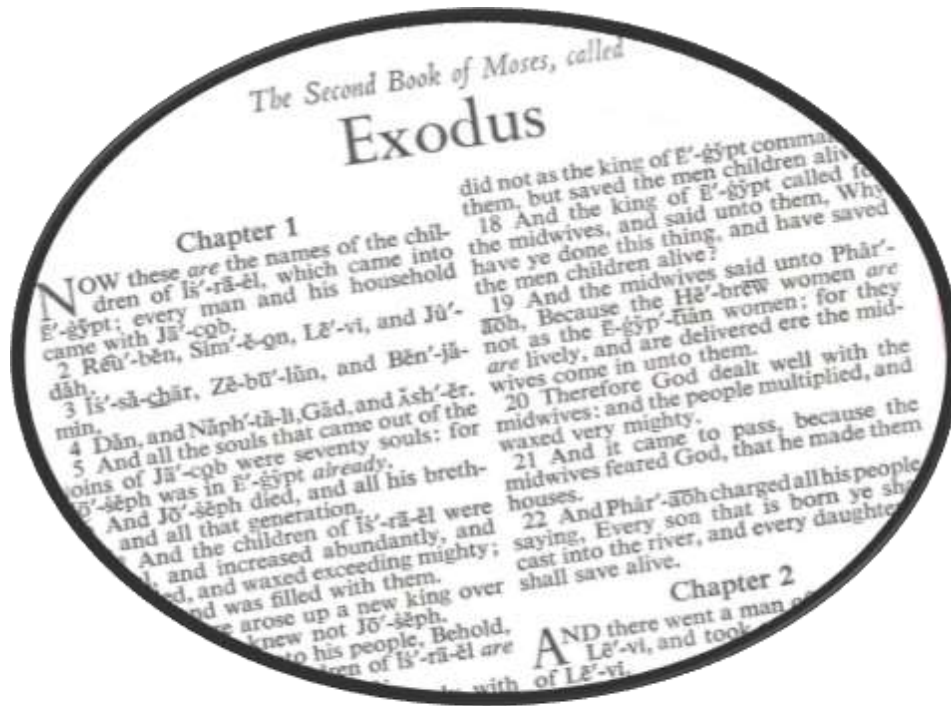


EXODUS – WEEK 24

THE PEOPLE GET TO WORK



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 34:22–35:29 – The People Get to Work

Moses returns from the mountain with a new copy of the Ten Commandments, and people are frightened by his glowing face. Then they step up, bringing in major treasure to be used to make the Tabernacle.

And Moses starts writing down God’s words. Thus begins his writing career.

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Thank you.

Exodus 34:22–35:29 – The People Get to Work
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1 Exodus 34:22-28 (NKJV)

“And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end. Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

The New King James is better here because it capitalizes “He” in the last verse. This makes it clear that God wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets (which He said He would do in 34:1). Thus, we know that the LORD wasn’t talking about the Ten Commandments when he said to Moses, *“Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”*

Earlier (in verse 24:4) we saw Moses write down what the LORD had said up to that point. That was on his own initiative in reaction to the people saying, *“All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

Now the LORD tells him to *write these words* down. It appears that this took Moses forty days and forty nights, while he neither ate bread nor drank water. The expression, “forty days and forty nights” makes it sound like he didn’t sleep either, but that’s just a normal Hebrew colloquialism for forty days.

This is only the second time God has instructed Moses to write something down and the other time was about a single incident (the defeat of Amalek).

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” – Exodus 17:14 (NKJV)

This time feels more significant. Moses is getting down to the task of writing the Bible.

Moses surely thought that leading Israel to the Promised Land was a big deal. Little did he know that his writings would be just as significant.

Do you keep a record of your walk with the Lord, particularly your prayers? I did this with my fellowship group and it was more significant than we could have imagined.

Reviewing the journal is an amazing experience. God’s hand, and His strategic priorities come out in living color.

I cannot recommend this too strongly.

2 Exodus 34:29-35 (ESV)

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Two questions jump out from this passage. Why did Moses' shining face scare people so that they *were afraid to come near him*, and why did Moses *put a veil over his face*?

As always, holiness is pretty scary, so we'd expect some negative reaction to Moses' shining face. Having never personally witnessed "shining face syndrome" we can't know what it looked like, but it sure sounds scary. The Israelites wouldn't know what to make of it – certainly not at first.

The second question is easier if you think of it as, "Why did Moses hide his face?" But note that he didn't always hide it. *And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining.* Then *Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.* What was he hiding?

He was hiding the fact that the glow fades. Paul explains this in his second letter to the Corinthians.

The Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ... Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. – 2 Corinthians 3:7b, 12-13

So, after Moses talks with God, his face glows for a while. It's not surprising that the glow isn't permanent. Yet Moses doesn't want anyone to see that.

Why not? It's still a glorious reflection of God's holiness; the temporary nature seems perfectly natural. This sounds like pride. There may be some other explanation, but none is given in scripture. There's certainly no reason to be ashamed of the fading glow. What a curious time to be prideful.

This illustrates how the great sin of pride never leaves. It lurks in every corner of our hearts and our lives. Confess your pridefulness and ask God to root it out. We cling to our pride. Let it go.

3 Exodus 35:1-3 (ESV)

Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.”

The priority God gives to the Sabbath is truly wondrous. He just keeps hammering the point. This time He mostly repeats what He said in Chapter 31.

But now we get an interesting addition. *You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.* What’s so special about kindling a fire?

Well, first of all, with primitive methods starting a fire is definitely work. Here’s a downloadable movie of what it looks like when a modern expert does this with exactly the right kinds of wood.

<http://www.primitiveways.com/Fire%20by%20Friction%20Methods.mov>

The Israelites may not have even had the best wood (a good insulator, so that it can get hot enough.) Plus, it’s unlikely that anyone back then was as good as the guy in the video. The preferred method may have been to just add some kindling to the coals from yesterday’s fire. If you don’t let the fire go out, no special skills (or materials) are needed. This appears to be how Abraham handled fire.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. – Genesis 22:6 (ESV)

Starting a fire from scratch seems not to be an option there. But if the Israelites are prohibited from kindling a fire for a whole day, the coals will surely go out. What then?

Maybe God telling the Israelites not to kindle a fire specifically, “*in all your dwelling places*” is the key. Some central, communal fire, such as the one in the bronze altar, may have served as the source.

Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. – Leviticus 6:13 (ESV)

If so, this command against kindling a fire on the Sabbath would have had an interesting effect. It forces the people to depend on God, and on one another.

Independence is at the heart of who we are. It was how our nation was born. Nevertheless, the concluding sentence of The Declaration of Independence acknowledges our dependence on God.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Church should feel like we’ve made a pledge like this to each other, especially within a fellowship group. Koinonia should be intense.

4 Exodus 35:4-9 (NKJV)

And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying: ‘Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats’ hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.

This was all listed before in Chapter 25. There it was in the future tense. Now it’s time to act.

The LORD reiterates that the offering is strictly voluntary. *Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD.* No requirements, no formulas. This stands in stark contrast to the sacrifices, where strict obedience to specific details is commanded.

“All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. – Exodus 34:19-20 (NKJV)

This contrast between required covenantal procedures and heart driven giving is one of the most important concepts in all theology.

Unfortunately, people often conflate the two.

This is particularly common in modern Christianity. The required part is simple. Christ requires only one thing, that He be the lord of your life. As clear as this is, people get it wrong. They think you only have to confess Him as lord. Not true.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” – Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)

He must actually **be** your lord. Worse still – and I hear this on the radio all the time – are people who think you only need to confess Jesus as savior. The concept of lordship often isn’t even mentioned. Yikes! That’s focusing on a benefit of being a Christian instead of focusing on being one.

But the other extreme is just as bad. Some folks think that works are required the way faith is required. Not so. While the absence of visible works can look bad, we don’t see the extenuating circumstances. Each Christian’s calling is unique. Give time and effort as you are called, not out of obligation.

It’s all about the heart. Heart driven giving is not a required covenantal procedure. The motivation is love for God and love for our neighbors. And yes, loving some neighbors can be hard. That doesn’t change the standard, even if it isn’t a requirement.

Living this out doesn’t save you; it glorifies God. That’s what’s important anyway.

5 Exodus 35:10-19 (ESV)

“Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded: the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests.”

What a staggering undertaking all this is. There are hundreds of tasks and thousands of details, which must all be coordinated. The project management is daunting, but where are they going to get the people to do all the work?

The Israelites are still responsible for tending their livestock, patching their tents, raising their kids, and every other aspect of running their lives (except producing food). This is on top of all that. They need the people to use their gifts in holy tasks.

What a perfect picture of the church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 27 (ESV)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: – 1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

Everyone has a role to play in the church – probably more than one. Furthermore, your role can change over time. If you're not sure what your role is, good. God doesn't want you to get stuck in one spot.

Growth in Christ is often rooted in growth in church jobs. Expect to be called to do things you never imagined. Writing was absolutely dead last on my list of possible roles. You just never know.

This is one of those times where, when God calls, the phone actually rings. God's doesn't usually whisper in your ear that you have a gift you haven't noticed; someone in your church is going to ask you for help with something.

Next thing you know, you're outside of your comfort zone and doing just fine.

Life in Christ is exciting that way.

6 Exodus 35:20-29 (ESV)

Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

Wow – most successful fundraiser ever. The people bring in much more gold than they did for the golden calf. Then they only gave up their earrings; this time they haul in the good stuff. *All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD.*

For most things, there's 100 percent participation too. *And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.*

Not bad for a bunch of *stiff-necked people*, eh? Is this a change in heart?

Well, yes and no. Obviously, they're doing the right thing. They're embarrassed about the golden calf and repentant about it, but as we will see, the change isn't permanent. That's spiritual immaturity.

They're just living in the moment. They'll shift to grumbling as soon as conditions warrant.

This is why it's so important for the church to teach sound Christian theology, *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* – Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)

Pray for teaching ministries: Sunday School, sermons, Bible studies, even these devotionals. Ask God to keep us from error. Ask Him to bless our preparation and give us clear thinking and clear communication.

May we all learn and grow in maturity and stability of faith.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever journaled anything?
2. Do you know anyone who seems to have conquered pride?
3. Who do you depend on?
4. Do we do enough works? Too much?
5. When has someone pushed you to grow?
6. What is your favorite teaching ministry?

Items for prayer: