

EXODUS—WEEK 14

NATION BUILDING



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is an anonymous work,
on display at Museum Catharijneconvent, in Utrecht, Netherlands*

Now God gets down to details. He starts laying down the moral laws that make for a functioning society. 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.

Most importantly, God teaches them the concept of Sabbath rest.

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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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Exodus 20:7–20:17 — Nation Building
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1 Exodus 20:7

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

Out of respect for this very commandment, translators universally mistranslate this verse. God has a name— just like you and I have. That name is the four Hebrew letters “yod, hay, vav, hay” (YHVH). It’s so tricky to pronounce that common English transliterations include both “Jehovah” and “Yahweh.” Can you imagine how a single spelling in any other language could lead to two pronunciations that far apart?

This is by design; God made His name difficult to pronounce. Most modern translations just translate YHVH as “the LORD.” Never saying God’s name obviously prevents saying it vainly.

But people in the Bible used God’s name in conversation (always respectfully, of course). For example, Ruth spoke God’s name in conversation.

But Ruth said:

*“Entreat me not to leave you ...
The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.”*

When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. — Ruth 1:16-18

Ruth actually says, *“May YHVH do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you.”*

She uses God’s name to make a point about her willingness to follow Him.

The third commandment isn’t against using God name; it’s against using it in vain. Still, the universal judgment of the experts is not something to be taken lightly. Is there a safe alternative?

Yes. Jews either pronounce YHVH as “ha shem” (Hebrew for “the name”) or as “Adonai” (Hebrew for “lord”). For example, the Complete Jewish Bible uses “Adonai,” instead of “the LORD.”

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ruth+1&version=CJB>

I like to say “Adonai” when I read YHVH (or The LORD) in an Old Testament passage because, to my ear, it sounds like a name. It is a name; it’s supposed to sound like one.

I think this gives the passage the right feel. Follow the link above and see if you don’t agree.

Honoring God’s name is also key to the Lord’s Prayer. Consider the words carefully. Try praying the way Jesus taught us to pray but not by reciting it from rote.

Instead, dwell on each part and pray what it means.

This can be an eye-opening exercise.

2 Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Moses has been super busy since the moment God called him. The scrolls of the Torah are far from done. At this time, the details of creation are just an oral tradition.

So, when Moses announces this commandment, for some folks it's the first time they've have heard of God creating the universe in six days and resting on the seventh. They've had a Sabbath from collecting manna every week, but may not know why. Even if they've heard the backstory, it may not be clear.

Now God explains it. The Sabbath is part of the structure of everything; it's the link between how the universe was created and how we are to live. This goes way deeper than most Christians realize.

The Genesis report of creation is written in a poetic form called a chiasm. A chiasm is a symmetric structure that points to what's important. The chiasmic structure in Genesis 1 points to Sabbath.

These commandments are being delivered to a people who had just been freed from unrelenting slavery. One of the key lessons they need to learn is how to rest. Here's Marty Solomon's explanation.

<https://www.bemadiscipleship.com/1>

Sabbath is much, much more than just a day to lounge around.

From a secular point of view, this makes no sense. Secularists like weekends too much to complain, but they don't buy the whole system. To them, weekends have no meaning.

This mentality infects Christianity in America. Many of us go to church on Sunday but don't make the whole day special. That's a bigger mistake than we realize.

God commands that the Sabbath be honored. It's so important to Him that this commandment precedes all but the foundational ones. It is not to be trifled with.

Christians who go to church and then hit the stores and start projects are missing the point. Sabbath is much more than just a day off. It's a holy day. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

This is worth praying and meditating on. Everyone should keep the Sabbath holy in accordance with a plan that they have carefully thought through.

Too many Christians, especially in America, fail to recognize the seriousness of this commandment.

3 Exodus 20:12

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

Now we move from the big, structural commandments to some simple rules of behavior. This one stands out because it includes a promise for those who obey the command—*your days may be long upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

There are two interesting twists in how this commandment applies to the Israelites it’s being delivered to. First, for them, living longer as a result of honoring your father and mother is pretty obvious. Your kids are watching how you treat your parents—especially in their old age. They’re learning how it’s done.

How you treat your parents will be the foundation for how your kids treat you. Back then, there was no Social Security and no 401Ks; your kids were your retirement plan. In fact, there’s not really such a thing as retirement; people contribute what they can to the family until they die. If your kids don’t honor you, your senior years won’t be fun.

The other twist is that the people hearing this aren’t going to live long in *the land that the LORD your God is giving you*, because they aren’t going to live there at all. They’ll blow it. Their rebellion will lead to them not making it to the promised land. They’ll die in the desert. Their lives won’t be all that long either.

Of course, the commandment is permanent and later generations will experience the value of it.

This commandment has blossomed into a magnificent calling for the church.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. — 1 Timothy 5:8

Except parents are not now always members of the same household as their grown children. Besides, our government has taken over some of this responsibility, especially with respect to healthcare. But note:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. — James 1:27

Our changing society has connected these two verses to produce a glorious calling for the church. Paul’s admonishment in 1 Timothy 5:8 now applies to us as a body. In 21st century America, ministering to orphans and widows isn’t just a sign of pure and undefiled religion. Anything less is a sign of unbelief.

If a widow in the church has, say, a plumbing problem, who do they call? If calling the deacons wouldn’t even cross their mind, something is missing.

4 Exodus 20:13–16

“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 of 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 king said. There was no continuity; when the king died everything was 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. And the king could ban something you’ve already done and then punish you for it. The system was unreliable and capricious.

The Ten Commandments changed all that. Here was a fixed system of laws that wouldn’t change at the drop of a hat (or a king). This is one of the foundations 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 it 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.

5 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 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.

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. The “protestors” resented what they called “the [richest] one-percent.” They didn't care how you got rich—you could be a baseball star, a doctor, or Oprah Winfrey. If you were rich, you were hated.

And, guess what? Occupy Wall Street had a huge crime problem.

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

Anyone who knew diddly about the Bible saw that one coming.

Coveting is universal in America. We are competitive in an unhealthy way. We call it “keeping up with the Joneses” but this 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 so ignored.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Is calling God by His name inappropriately personal (like a child calling an adult by their first name)?

2. How should we go beyond just relaxing so as to seriously “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy”?

3. What is your church doing for widows and orphans?

4. What is a common way we “speak with forked tongue”?

5. How can we fight our natural tendency to covet?