Outline
Lesson 10 - American Experiment: stepping Stones

I. Introduction – God’s design for the state – How close was the American Experiment?
   A. Three rules: Won’t deify America; won’t deify Founders; won’t cast stones
   B. Basis for the three branches - Isaiah 33 – Lawgiver, Judge, and King
   C. Early educational system – Instilling principles of Biblical Christianity
      1. Primer and NEA – Biblical doctrine and prayer were essential to education
      2. Founding and original mottos of Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia

II. Foundations of Religion and Morality – Basis for Freedom and Liberty
   A. Dr. Tackett’s personal journey – America 101
      1. Murals in Capital rotunda
      2. Revelation 2:5 - Remember, Repent and Return
      3. Washington’s Farwell address
   B. Foundations of this country - Religion and Morality
      1. Consistent theme in virtually all of the Founder’s writings
      2. They saw a strong connection between virtue and liberty
   C. Purpose of Civil Magistrate - Punish evil and condone good – Romans 13

III. Foundations of Law
   A. Blackstone – Valid human laws must be based upon God’s laws
   B. Influence of Darwin radically changed law in America – Case study methodology
      1. Legal Positivism – The state is the authority for determining right and wrong

IV. The Larger Story
A. Original charters and constitutions – Acknowledgment of God’s authority and recognition that the state was subject to and accountable to God
B. Pilgrims intent – “preserving and propagating the truth and liberties of the gospel”
C. Historical revisionism – Founders depicted as Deists and secularists; stripping God and Christianity from all historical accounts; pursuing a secular basis for law

V. Conclusion – How has this happened?
A. Men have forgotten God
B. Cycle of Nations – Hosea 13:6 – Judgment and destruction upon proud nations
C. Jesus removing the lamp stand – Our hope: Light always overtakes darkness
Lesson Guide
Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

Introduction
For this tour we will remain in the southwest sector of the compass long enough to examine a special sub-category of our last topic of discussion: the design of the state. In particular, we want to take a brief look at the question, “What should God’s minister on earth (Romans 13:4) look like? What is a proper form for this agency that is divinely appointed and commissioned to administer justice, punish evil, and encourage goodness among its citizens or subjects?” We will approach this task by considering the American Experiment.

Themes
From the beginning, Dr. Tackett lays down three ground rules for this study: first, we will not seek to deify America; and second, we will not seek to deify the Founding Fathers (the third ground rule will be dealt with at the end of the lesson). Having established these guidelines, he hastens to point out that there are compelling reasons for giving special attention to the subject of this tour. The American Experiment has the potential to prove unusually conducive to a deeper understanding of God’s design for the state precisely because it is unique in the history of the world. Here on these shores, and here alone, people with a strong Christian worldview have been afforded an unparalleled opportunity to create from scratch what they considered an ideal system of government – a system designed in careful conformity with the principles outlined in Lesson 9.

We begin by establishing the biblical character of that worldview. The New England Primer, the second best-selling book (after the Bible) of the colonial era, provides an intriguing window into the attitudes of early Americans. In particular, it reveals an outlook and a way of life powerfully shaped by the teachings of Scripture. The pervasiveness of this outlook is further demonstrated in statements made by America’s early political leaders, legal and social architects, and educational pioneers – people like Benjamin Rush, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, Charles Carroll, Noah Webster, and the founders of Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia Universities. In spite of the fact that not all of them were practicing Christians, these luminaries agreed with President John Adams that the success of America’s republican form of government would prove directly dependent upon the virtue and morality of her people, and that virtue and morality are necessarily founded upon religion – by which all meant the Christian religion. All of these early thinkers were convinced that the state must be held accountable to the authority of a higher ethical and spiritual standard – the “Natural Law” or the “Law of Nature’s God” – if the human rights abuses they had observed in Europe and throughout history were to be hopefully avoided on this continent.

Tragically, however, America is quickly turning away from these principles. It is hard to put a finger on the exact reasons, but one clear element came as Darwinian evolutionary theory made its influence felt in the field of law. In 1869, Harvard Law School Dean Christopher Langdell
advanced the view that law is not based upon the transcendent standard of “Nature’s God,” but is rather a fluid and constantly mutating body of “doctrine,” a set of purely human ideas that inevitably change “by slow degrees.” In other words, law and ethics, like biological species, are continually “evolving.” Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes expanded on this theme by declaring that the law is “simply an embodiment of the ends and purposes of a society at a given point in its history,” thus effectively granting to the state the power to establish society’s ethical norms. John Dewey implemented these ideas in the realm of public education. “There is no God,” said Dewey (nicknamed “The Architect of Modern Education”), “and there is no soul. Hence, there are no needs for the props of traditional religion.”

These statements, says Dr. Tackett, bring us to the present moment. Today, America has largely forgotten God and denied the validity of her biblically based Christian roots. As a result, we see the power of the state expanding in our time. This, too, is a manifestation of the perennial Cosmic Battle, which is always fought most fiercely in the social realm. Ultimately, we must face the fact that the American Experiment is likely to fail altogether if we do not take intentional and deliberate steps to salvage it. This is a task which falls primarily on the shoulders of Christian people. As believers, we need to remember God’s call to prayer and repentance in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. There is nothing to be gained, says Dr. Tackett, by casting blame on non-Christians (this is the third ground rule for our study).

Points to Watch For
This last point should be kept in mind throughout the entire discussion. From beginning to end, Dr. Tackett seeks to communicate the thought that the American Experiment makes sense only when understood as the brainchild of Christians who operated on the basis of a biblical worldview. Just as the experiment was instigated by believers, so it must be carried on by believers – believers who care deeply and passionately about their country – if it is to survive and continue to succeed.

Discussion Questions

1) What did you see on this tour? Which of these were particularly striking to you? Why?

2) It was during a re-enactment of Washington’s Farewell Address, says Dr. Tackett, that he was struck by the “sinking feeling” that he had been “lied to.” What “lies” does he have in mind, and how do they fit the pattern of the other lies we’ve encountered during the course of our worldview tours? Have you been subjected to such lies yourself?

3) Name some of the early sources for the idea of “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” referenced by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Why was this concept so important to the founders of the American system of government? What risks do we run in replacing this idea with Langdell’s notion of “evolving law?”
4) What did John Adams mean when he affirmed that “… Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other”? What does this imply about the foundations of the American Experiment and the basic structure of the system of government it established?

5) Why, according to Dr. Tackett, is it in vogue to hate America today? To what extent is this hatred justifiable, and to what extent is it a manifestation of the Cosmic Battle?

6) What should we do when Adams’s assumptions no longer appear to be valid – that is, when it becomes evident that Americans can no longer be characterized as a “moral and religious people” as he understood the phrase? How do we apply the Founders’ ideas to a “multicultural” America where a flood of moral and spiritual perspectives – e.g., Buddhism, spiritism, Islam, Native American religions, and Wicca – have become part of the cultural fabric?
Key Terms
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**Affront**: An open insult or offense to somebody.

**Agent/Agency**: Dr. Tackett uses this term to describe the authority position within the Sphere of the State. This lesson examines the biblical design of that agency, and how the Founding Fathers attempted to base the American experiment on biblical foundations.

**Alexis de Tocqueville** (1805-59): French political thinker who wrote *Democracy in America*. He was a major observer and philosopher of democracy, which he saw as an equation that balanced liberty and equality.

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706-90): Drafter and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Postmaster General of the Continental Congress, newspaper editor and publisher of *Poor Richard's Almanac*. He formed the first library and first fire department. His interest in science and technology made him famous for his electricity experiments and invention of the lightning rod, Franklin stove and bifocals.

**Benjamin Rush** (1745-1813): Signer of the Declaration of Independence, attendee of the Continental Congress, physician and first Surgeon General, he had a major influence on the development of American governmental structure. (Rush believed that Americans should have the right to medical freedom in their Constitution, much as the right to freedom of religion is expressly guaranteed in that document).

**Bill of Rights**: Term that refers to the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution ratified in 1791 and drafted by James Madison. These amendments explicitly limit the Federal government's powers, protecting the rights of the people by preventing Congress from abridging freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religious worship, and the right to bear arms, preventing unreasonable search and seizure, cruel and unusual punishment, and self-incrimination, and guaranteeing due process of law and a speedy public trial with an impartial jury.

**Case Study Method**: Method of studying law first proposed by Langdell, "Law, considered a science, consists of certain principles or doctrines…Each of these doctrines has arrived at its present state by slow degrees; in other words, it is a growth, extending in many cases through centuries." This reflected Langdell's belief that law was not based on absolutes but must be viewed as an evolutionary process in which one looks at how law has evolved and what it must next become.
Charles Carroll (1737-1832): A lawyer, member of the Continental Congress, member of the first United States Senate, and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Charles Eliot (1834-1926): American educator selected as the President of Harvard in 1869. Under Eliot's 40-year administration, Harvard developed from a small college into a modern university. Consequently Eliot was a proponent of Darwin's evolutionary theories and began to implement the teaching of them throughout his school. He hired Christopher Columbus Langdell to introduce this new understanding of law into the Harvard Law School.

Christopher Columbus Langdell (1826-1906): American jurist who taught at Harvard and introduced the new case study method of instruction. His curriculum was first adopted at Harvard, then Columbia law school, and remains today as the standard first-year curriculum at nearly all American law schools. Based on an evolutionary view of life.

Cycle of Nations: Biblical outline of attitudes and resulting events that a nation commonly experiences during its existence. God blesses a nation, that nation becomes satisfied and develops pride, the nation begins to forget God, and God brings judgment upon the nation in order that they might remember, repent and return to God. If they do not remember God, He will bring destruction.

Daniel Webster (1782-1852): United States Senator and Secretary of State. Notable lawyer and one of the greatest orators of his time. His passionate patriotic devotion to preserving the Union led him to find compromises between the northern and southern factions of the country.

Declaration of Independence: The document in which the Thirteen Colonies in North America declared themselves independent of the Kingdom of Great Britain and explained their justifications for doing so. It was ratified by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.

Federalist Papers: Series of 85 political essays written 1787-88 with the intention of persuading New York to approve the Federalist Constitution. Primary writers were Alexander Hamilton (51 essays) and James Madison (14 essays). The essays are still considered a classic work of political theory.


Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816): As chairman of the committee of style during the Constitutional Convention, he was the author of large sections of the Constitution. He is widely known for his words in the Preamble: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..."

James Wilson (1742-98): American jurist, member of the Continental Congress, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Wilson is most well known for his part (with James Madison) in drafting of the United States Constitution. He also proposed the Three-Fifths Compromise at
the convention, which made slaves count as three-fifths of a person for representation in the House and Electoral College. This proposal is greatly misunderstood today. Wilson and the non-slave states wanted to limit slavery and the power of the slave-states. They didn't want the slave-states to count slaves thus gaining more representatives. The slave-states wanted to count slaves fully. The compromise was the non-slave states attempt to limit slave-state power, NOT to indicate slaves were only 3/5 of a person.

**John Adams** (1735-1826) : Member of the Continental Congress, drafter (with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson) and signer of the Declaration of Independence, considered "Father of the Navy" because of his efforts to establish and strengthen the American Navy, and Second President of the United States.

**Natural Law/Law of Nature/Moral Law** : Theory that laws exist independently of political legislation, a society or a nation-state because they are fundamental to human behavior. Natural law is opposed to positive law, which is human-made, conditioned by history, and subject to continuous change. The phrase "all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain rights" expresses a natural law philosophy.

**New England Primer** : Small textbook, first printed in 1690 and used through the 19th century to teach children the alphabet and how to read. It was the intent of the colonists that all children should learn to read because they believed that an inability to read was Satan's attempt to keep people from the Scriptures.

**Noah Webster** (1758-1843) : Often called "The Father of American Education". He wrote the *Blue Back Speller (Elementary Spelling Book)* which help standardize American spelling and was used by pioneer families and schools to teach children to read. Webster has become a household name since he first published *The American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828.

**Patrick Henry** (1736-99) : First governor of Virginia and member of the Continental Congress. Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Paine were influential advocates of the American Revolution. He was an eloquent orator and instrumental in the adoption of the Bill of Rights.

**Positive Law/Legal Positivism** : The claim that the state is the ultimate authority for creating, interpreting and enforcing law. The position that believes that all legal truth is based on the decision of the state.

**Samuel Adams** (1722-1803) : Governor of Massachusetts, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and organizer of the Boston Tea Party; he was an American Patriot who played a major role in starting the American Revolution.

**Sir Edward Coke** (1552-1634) : An English jurist whose writings on the English common law were definitive legal texts for more than 300 years. He was a Member of the Parliament, Speaker of the House of Commons, and England's Attorney General. Every lawyer in early America was trained from Coke's books, and both John Adams and Patrick Henry argued from Coke's treatises to support their revolutionary position against England.
**The American Experiment**: An experiment conducted by the founding forefathers of the United States to establish a nation built on biblical principles reflecting God's design for government.

**Thomas Jefferson** (1743-1826): Governor of Virginia, first Secretary of State, principle author of the Declaration of Independence, and third President of the United States. Jefferson is often attributed for the concept of "Separation of Church and State" because of the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" in a letter he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802. Jefferson believed the First Amendment had to be enacted in order to prevent the federal establishment of a national denomination; he had no intention of limiting, restricting or regulating public religious practices.

**United States Constitution**: The founding political document which detailed the structure, roles and responsibilities of the American republic. It was drafted at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and ratified by nine states in 1788. It created a federal union of sovereign states, and a federal government to operate that union. The preamble begins, "We the people…"

**William Blackstone** (1723-80): An English jurist and professor who wrote *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. First published in four volumes from 1765-69, this historical treatise on common law still remains the most thorough treatment of the English law ever produced by one man. Every lawyer in early America studied from Blackstone's *Commentaries* and this work served the basis of our legal profession.