

SUMMER 3 - Way Out!

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[0 : 00] I would indeed rejoice to sing your praises at the great victories that you have won for your people throughout history. Help us to have hearts filled with praise as we study this word of the great victory that you exercised over the Egyptians and the salvation which you won for your people so long ago.

Amen. If you turn to Exodus 12, that's where we're going to start tonight. We've had a sort of race or gallop through the first ten chapters.

We're going to skip over chapter 11 and start at chapter 12 tonight with the lead up to the exodus of God's people from Egypt. This event, of course, does not just come out of the blue.

It's the climax and culmination of a long period of history. We saw last week nine plagues. This is the tenth. So it's part of a series and we've got to bear that in mind that we're not just starting afresh with some work of God just completely unannounced out of the blue.

It's really being built up to through all those nine plagues and even before that the slavery and servitude of the people of Israel in Egypt at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

[1 : 18] And, of course, as we've seen the last two weeks, the events that are occurring in the book of Exodus all come from God's promises way back in early parts of Genesis to Abraham.

It's God who remembers his covenant, who hears his cries of his people and now acts. So we've got to bear that in mind. We're coming out of a long build up and pattern before we get to this point, chapter 12.

One of the intriguing things about these events of the Exodus and the Passover is that there is such confidence expressed before the event in what's going to follow.

So in chapter 12, we get the institution of the Passover before the event of the Passover. Now, in one sense, I think that's unusual.

For example, we didn't ever have Anzac Day before 1915. That is, we didn't start celebrating Anzac Day in 1912 in anticipation of some battle to come.

[2 : 15] Or we didn't, you know, various significant events, like we never had a Christmas celebration before Jesus was born, for example. But we have a Passover instituted before the event of the Passover.

Now, I think the reason why we go into such detail here before the event is not only to prepare the Israelites what to do on the event, but also to express great confidence that God will do what he says.

So bear that in mind where Moses in these instructions is not just instructing the Israelites what to do when God is going to pass over Egypt, but he's actually preparing the people already for an ongoing celebration.

And I think one of the reasons for that is to express great confidence in God who's about to save. You see, in one sense, the logical sequence would be God saying, this is what I'm going to do, smear some blood on the door, and then after the event, to celebrate the event, well, let's now commemorate it on an annual basis.

But before the event happens, there are the instructions about its commemoration. I think that's quite intriguing. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, this is the beginning of chapter 12, this month shall mark for you the beginning of months.

[3 : 31] It shall be the first month of the year for you. Now, in Jewish calendar, it's actually sort of halfway through the year. The new year is in about September, October. We're talking about March and April. But there's a sense in which this is the beginning of the people, and it's, in a sense, that sort of significant beginning of a year, in a way.

Till the whole congregation of Israel. First time that word's ever used about the people of Israel. And later on, we'll get the word assembly being used for the first time. So now, in these chapters, for the first time, the people of Israel are regarded as a gathered community, almost a nation.

We'll see that next week really being instituted. But there's now a sense in which this is a distinct people group gathering in God's presence and ready for the events that unfold.

Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the 10th of this month, they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. Notice how the basic unit, though there's a gathering sense of congregation, is that it's a family group.

But if the family's small, verse 4 tells us, then join with your closest neighbour. So that, because you've got to eat the whole lamb, you see, that night. You can't leave any of it. So if one lamb's too much because your family's small, then gather with another small family.

[4 : 46] A sense of communality, but joining together as people for this feast. The lamb, we're told in verse 5, shall be without blemish, a typical way that sacrificial animals are described in the Old Testament.

And it's also one way in which, in a sense, Jesus is described, and one way in which, on the final day, God's people will stand before him without blemish or blameless in his sight.

But it's got to be a good lamb. You can't sacrifice a bad one. Because in the lamb that you choose, you're acknowledging something about God's goodness and worth. So you sacrifice the best.

A year old, we don't want an old one that's sort of past its prime. We're picking the best that you can imagine. Therefore, the costliest that you can imagine as well. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

It doesn't actually have to be a lamb. It could be a goat. Although, typically, we think of the Passover lamb. For four days, they've got to guard the lamb. That's what verse 6 is on about.

[5 : 46] And then, on the 14th day of the month, the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. And though it uses the singular, we've got to imagine lots of lambs being sacrificed here.

But there's a sense in which it's all done together. And it's done at twilight. Maybe just in the afternoon leading up to dusk. It probably doesn't mean quite the twilight period like we think of it.

It's maybe a little bit earlier than that in the sort of late afternoon. Might be a better way of describing it. And then, when the animal is killed, it's going to be eaten by the people.

It's not a sacrifice where you just burn up the whole animal. There are some of those later on in the Bible for sin. This is not a sin sacrifice. It's an animal that is killed.

Its blood is taken. And the blood, we're told in verse 7, shall be put on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. So, basically, surrounding your door. Both sides of the door and the lintel above the top.

[6 : 45] Later on, we're told in verse 22 that the way you do that is with a hyssop branch, which would be an appropriate sort of branch and common enough to get them to adorn it with blood and then spot the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood of this animal.

The significance of that is explained a bit later. So far, these are just instructions about what to do. Verse 8 tells us that the meat shall be roasted over the fire.

Later on in Deuteronomy, you're allowed to boil it. But it seems originally, at least, it had to be roasted rather than boiled. And then we're also told in verse 8 that it's to be eaten with unleavened bread.

The significance of that is also explained later. But most of us would know that the reason for that is that there's a sense of haste about this and the people of Israel are to flee quickly.

There's no time for leavened bread. And so that becomes part of the commemoration of the haste with which Israel left Egypt. And also bitter herbs. We're not told there what they mean.

[7 : 51] But we know that in later Jewish tradition, the bitter herbs came to stand for the bitter slavery. Similar word is used back in chapter 1 to mark the bitterness of life in Egypt.

It's to commemorate that and what God is freeing the people from. The entire sacrifice is to be consumed. And verse 9 says, don't eat any of it raw or boiled in water.

It seems that legislation was relaxed later on, as I said. None of it's to remain until morning.

Anything that remains, you shall burn. So if you can't eat it, you can't have cold sort of Passover lamb for the Boxing Day test match or the equivalent in ancient Israel.

It's all got to be consumed that day, that night. None of it can stay ready for the next day. And this is what you shall wear. It's interesting, isn't it? For this event, they've got to wear, in a sense, special clothes.

You shall eat it with your loins girded. And the idea there is that you're ready to run. Now, if you're wearing long cloaks, you'd perhaps tuck them up under your belt.

[8 : 52] I mean, it's not too risqué. But the idea is that your legs are freer so that you can start walking and running to get out of Egypt. It's not a sort of fashion parade statement. Your sandals on your feet.

Normally, I guess, inside you probably wouldn't have sandals on. But the idea is that you're ready to move quickly. And your staff in your hand. I don't know whether this is meant literally or just metaphorically.

It would mean, I suppose, if it's literal, that you've got to hold your staff and you've only got one hand left to eat. And how do you manage a knife and a fork with a staff? It could be a bit clumsy. But the idea is that you're ready to move.

So this is the last night, in effect, in Egypt. And you're ready to get going. That's the thrust of what you've got to wear and holding the staff. You shall eat it hurriedly. That doesn't...

I mean, it does mean, in a sense, with a bit of haste. But there's a sense in which hurriedly has also a connotation of alarm. A bit of fear, perhaps, about what might happen.

[9 : 51] So that word is not just about doing something quickly. It's about a bit of alarm about the events that might come. That's the thrust of it. And then we're told it is the Passover of the Lord.

It is the Lord's Passover. So this event is God's event. It's not primarily Israel's event. And even though Israel is rescued and redeemed and freed from slavery, the basic purpose of the whole event is for God's benefit.

And we saw hints of that last week, if you remember. That in the plagues, the point about the plagues is that Israel, firstly, and Egypt also, would know that I am Yahweh.

I am the Lord. And so on. So it's a display of God's greatness and power that's going on here. And we'll see this theme recur a bit later on as well. What God is ultimately on about is the glory of his name in the world.

And this is not the only place in the Bible where this happens. It's time and again. And sometimes I think we humans have got such a human view of scripture. We see God, isn't he good for me? Look at the things he's given me, the way he's blessed me, the salvation he's given me or us.

[11 : 01] Do we actually lose the sense in which what God is actually on about, both in the Exodus and later events culminating in the cross, is his own glory? There's a sense in which God is acting self-centeredly when he acts to save us.

Because in saving us, he brings glory to himself in the world. And we'll see that again in the last week when we see Moses' prayer in the incident of the golden calf as well.

Then comes some of the explanation. We've already been told about the meal. Now we're told about the explanation and the actual event.

But even in those instructions I've read, although primarily it's about that first Passover night, there's a sense in which this is a new year for you. This is almost already a commemoration.

And we'll see some of that picked up later on in the chapter as well. Now the reason for it all comes in verse 12. Yahweh God will pass through the land of Egypt that night and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals, on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.

[12 : 13] I am the Lord. I am Yahweh that is. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live. When I see the blood I'll pass over you and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Now we might wonder why does God do this? Can't God tell who are his people? Can't he just sort of pass over the land of Egypt and smite the Egyptians and other foreigners but leave the Israelites? Why does he get them to do this, smearing blood on their door to say God keep away from this house?

Can't God just sort of do it? Isn't he big enough? Well of course he is. And he could do it like that. He could just say this is what I'm going to do. So be ready and go and smite the Egyptians but spare the Israelites.

But what I think he's inviting Israel to do here is to express faith in him. By smearing the blood on the door it's a sign that they belong to God. It's an expression of faith.

In one sense God is inviting them to place their faith in the event of the Passover and the salvation of the Israelites from Egypt. He could have done it other ways and he could have done it without getting them to do a thing but he invites them to place their faith in him.

[13:25] And it's a faith that will be expressed in obedience as all faith is. In fact throughout scripture you don't have faith without obedience. So if you trust that this is the way God is going to save you if you're an Israelite then then you obey the command by smearing blood on your doorpost.

You can't go to bed that night and say I trust that God's going to spare us but I'm not putting blood around. What a silly idea. Well that's disobedience and lack of faith. So the two go together. If you trust God's word then you obey it by smearing your doorposts and lintel with blood and eating the animal appropriately and making sure none of it is kept till the morning and so on. Now this is not... Another point in those last verses I read, 12 and 13. God is not only striking down the firstborn of Egypt and their animals there's a sense in which that's a bit of a sort of tit for tat as well.

Remember that Pharaoh was trying to kill the firstborn males of Israel back in chapter 1 which we saw two weeks ago. So here is God not acting, you know, really I mean, yes, with anger I suppose but there's a sense in which God's response to Egypt is an appropriate response.

[14:32] You could say the punishment fits the crime. They tried to kill the firstborn. Israel is God's firstborn. So they're trying to kill God's firstborn so he will kill their firstborn in response.

And at the end of the story we know which God has prevailed. It's not the Egyptian gods because their firstborn are dead whereas the Egyptian ones were spared both at the time of Pharaoh's thing as well as this time of Passover.

Notice too that God is saying at the end of verse 12 I'll pass through the land of Egypt that night I'll strike down every firstborn on all the gods of Egypt I'll execute judgements.

You see that lifts it to the plane in which we saw last week. The real battle is not Moses' Pharaoh. It's not magicians versus Moses. The real battle is God versus the gods of Egypt.

Now we might think, well, how can the Bible say that when there is only one God? There aren't lots of other gods. They're all made up. But often the Bible in a sense, you might say, that concedes what other people think about other gods.

[15:34] I mean, there are no other gods really. So God is not really fighting other gods. But they're idols. They're human creations. But the language concedes the point that, yes, Egyptians believe they've got a whole host of powerful gods.

So, OK, this is Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, the creator god against all of their gods. And not one of them stands against him. And we saw that last week with some of the plagues, how some of them are targeting particular gods.

The darkness, for example, targeting the sun god and so on. Well, here I think, this plague, the last plague, the Passover, is targeting Pharaoh god. Because Pharaoh's firstborn is killed.

And of course, the divine nature of Pharaoh would be passed on to the next eldest son down the line. So the destruction of his son has attacked Pharaoh as a god and it's destroyed the succession as well to the next Pharaoh god that would come when the current one dies.

Further regulations come from verse 14 of chapter 12 onwards. There are a few things here. This is now when the initial event is clearly lifted out of being a one-off meal and sacrifice to becoming a regular event.

[16:52] So this day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord. The word festival is not just feast. It's got an idea of pilgrimage about it. There's nowhere to be a pilgrim to at this point, nor in the wilderness.

But later on, the instructions are in Deuteronomy 16 that you shall make up the men at least shall make a pilgrimage to the place where God chooses to make his name dwell there. Later on, that becomes Jerusalem.

And so in Jesus' day, it seems that by and large, the men would, at least, and women were welcome, but they weren't commanded to go, would go on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts. And we see, especially in John's gospel, Jesus doing that several times, not only for Passover, but the other two main feasts, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles as well.

And of course, when Jesus dies, the reason he's in Jerusalem then is because he's gone to celebrate the Passover festival in accordance with these sorts of instructions about going to the central place.

You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord. Throughout your generations, you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Now, that verse stresses the fact that this is not a one-off event to forget.

[18:02] It is something that, from the beginning, must be remembered forever. And that's quite emphatic because you've got, look at all the words that you've got in that verse. You've got remembrance, celebrate, festival, and then you've got perpetual ordinance.

And then other words will occur in the chapters that follow to emphasise the fact that this has got to be passed on year by year, generation to generation, down the line. Verse 15 talks about seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

Now, firstly, it seems it's a one-night festival. But now it's being expanded. So it becomes a week-long festival. And it seems that the first day of that festival is particularly significant.

Verse 16 tells us that. And the last day, which is, here said, the seventh day, but it may well be sort of, you know, sort of not Sunday to Sunday, Friday to Friday or Saturday to Saturday sort of idea.

And throughout the week, you shall only eat unleavened bread. So it's a week-long festival in the end, although the initial one was just one night. If you don't do this, verse 15 tells us, then you shall be cut off from Israel, no longer considered part of the chosen people of God.

[19:13] The idea being you're excommunicated. It's not a death sentence, but it's an excommunication sentence from the people of God. No work is to be done on the first and the last days, verse 16 tells us.

There's been no Sabbath command to this point in Scripture. God has had a Sabbath after creating for six days in Genesis 2, verses 1 to 3, but the command for God's people to celebrate a Sabbath is yet to occur.

We'll see the first inklings of that a bit later on tonight. The people are to leave, we're told in verse 17, in companies, which is a military term, literally hosts.

And it's almost as though, you know, this is the army of God that is leaving Israel here. And then verse 17 also says, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt.

Now, the day in which this is instructed is before the event, but it says, I brought you out of Egypt, not I will bring you out of Egypt. And notice that it's I brought rather than I took.

[20:18] So the sense is, it's anticipating being in the land, looking back to the time when God brought you from the land. So it's saying it in the past tense, even though it's a future event.

And that in a sense emphasises the fact that this is certainly going to happen. Sometimes the prophets use that sort of language as well. They use a past tense to describe a future event because they want to underline its certainty.

And so that's what's being said here in verse 17. Verse 18, I'm just sort of making little comments of sort of interesting things I guess at this stage.

In the first month from the evening until the next evening, remember Jewish days begin in the evening with sunset, not morning, then evening, but as Genesis 1 says there was evening and then morning each day, day one and so on.

And there's an inclusion in verse 19. An alien or a native of the land is included. Now an alien we probably think of people from other planets but older translations might have sojourner or resident alien or something like that.

[21:28] The idea is it's in effect a permanent immigrant. It's somebody who's come from another country and settled permanently in Israel. They've been circumcised, they've joined in with the people, they're not Jewish by descent but they're permanent residents in the country and they are allowed in to the people of God.

It's part of the way in which I think God is making it clear even in the Old Testament that his point is for the world. They're not just kept out.

Now later on there'll be some people kept out but they're not the permanent immigrants, the temporary workers who come from other countries but they're not permanent residents. They won't be allowed in and so on.

Well then in the next section verses 21 to 28 Moses repeats much of what we've been said. God's been speaking to Moses, the next paragraph is Moses speaking to the elders telling them what God has told him and it repeats much of what's already been said as well so we'll skip over that bit and

then we come to verse 29 and now comes the actual event of the Passover.

At midnight, literally just sort of in the middle of the night, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of Pharaoh himself who sat on his throne, probably not at midnight he was on his throne, later on he's in bed it seems, to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon and all the firstborn of the livestock.

[22 : 54] That is, nobody is left out. It is absolute. Every firstborn, human being and animal is killed that night in Egypt and the expressions in this verse and the next verse say the end of verse 34, there was not a house without someone dead.

Very emphatic negatives there. That is, there is not one exception to this event. Every single firstborn was dead. Pharaoh rose in the middle of the night, verse 30 says, and there was a loud cry in Egypt for not a house, there was, as I said, not a house without someone dead and he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, so it's urgent, and he said, rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites, go worship the Lord, serve the Lord, literally, as you said. Now those words are very urgent. He's fairly abrupt. There's no time to beat around the bush here. He said, go on, get out. And he's making a confession to do exactly what Moses has requested all along.

You remember how last week we saw at the plagues bit by bit, Pharaoh keeps conceding things but then backing back. Now he's conceded the lot. Go, serve your God, that is, you're no longer serving me.

Remember that that was one of the tussles about who should Israel be serving, Pharaoh or its God Yahweh. Go into the wilderness or go off. There's no limitation. Everybody can go. Flocks and herds, verse 32, can go.

[24 : 28] Remember that he will restrain them from taking them at one point of his concession. Now he's given in. Everyone and all their animals they're all to go and then almost laughingly at the end of verse 32 he says and bring a blessing on me too.

Well I think we've got to read that slightly sarcastically but also it does acknowledge at last that God's blessing comes through God's people. Remember those words to Abraham back in Genesis 12, those who bless you I will bless.

Well Pharaoh has done no blessing of Moses and he himself will not be blessed in turn but he still asks for a blessing. At least there's a sense in which he knows where the blessings come from. Well the Egyptians, the people urged the Israelites to hasten their departure as well. They wanted them to clear out. They were sort of ushering them out, pushing them out of the country. Hurry up, be gone.

I guess they feared that if they lingered then all of Egypt will die, not just the firstborn who were already dead. Verse 34, people took their dough before it was leavened.

[25 : 35] There's the thing, there's no time for having leavened bread. So the unleavened dough is taken off and it's wrapped up and carried out by the people. And then, to add insult to injury, the Israelites had done as Moses told them, verse 35, they had asked the Egyptians for jewellery of silver and gold and for clothing and the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians so that they let them have what they asked.

Not favour in the sense of we like them or anything like that, favour in the sense of yeah, look, take it, get out of here, take our jewellery, take our clothes, take whatever you like. We just want to see the end of you.

And that's exactly what God had said would happen back in chapter 5 and chapter 3 as well. And it's hard to imagine in the middle of the plagues that Israel would leave Egypt, let alone leave Egypt with all the jewellery and clothing.

But it happened as God said it would happen in those earlier chapters. Now it's worth a pause here to say well if this is an eternal remembrance ceremony for God's people to what extent should Christians celebrate a Passover?

Because it's made very clear in some of these verses that this is something that's going to happen forever. So to what extent do we as the people of God in the heritage of these Jewish people leaving Egypt ought we to keep a Passover festival?

[26 : 59] Well it's become a bit fashionable in the last 25 years or so for Christians churches to have sort of Passover meals often in the week leading up to Easter in Holy Week. I don't think that there's anything wrong with doing that so long as we don't see that as the final word I guess.

Because the New Testament makes it clear that the Passover is pointing in the end to something bigger. When we get to the New Testament of course we realise just what that is. There we see Jesus being obedient to Passover commands by going to celebrate it in Jerusalem.

We know of at least two or three times that he does that presumably annually. He goes there in John 6 which is in the context of the feeding of the 5,000 in the same sort of area or chapter and saying that I am the bread of life.

And so in the light of eating unleavened bread and Passover festival and so on Jesus is making a claim for himself that some way he's better and bigger than the Passover but more particularly of course his death is tied to the Passover.

Now the Gospels seem to suggest perhaps alternative dates for when Jesus died. Did he die on Passover day or was Passover day on the Thursday so that the Last Supper was the Passover meal?

[28 : 18] I suspect that he died on Passover day and the meal the night before was a Passover type meal but anticipating what would happen the next day but Jesus wouldn't be around to eat it with his disciples so he sort of brought it forward like perhaps like some people here do have Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve sometimes because their family's got to go elsewhere the next day or something like that.

But either way the meal that Jesus has the night before he dies with his disciples is tied to a Passover meal and his death is tied to the Passover event so that he dies at the time of the Passover sacrifice.

Now we pick up also in 1 Corinthians 5 for example Paul calls Jesus the Passover lamb who was sacrificed for us. Similar sort of language not quite so explicit as used in other places Jesus being a sort of sacrificial lamb in say John 1 verse 29 behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Often people try and link that to the Passover the trouble is the Passover lamb is not for the sins of the world it's not an atonement sacrifice although Jesus' death was. Jesus' death fulfils more than one thing you see it fulfils Passover but it also fulfils atonement things.

Certainly the Last Supper and then the Lord's Supper has some Passover links but I don't think we should see the Lord's Supper which we celebrate in church from time to time as a sort of Passover meal.

[29 : 44] I think we have a new meal to celebrate a new event. If you like the connections I think that are the most important is that the original Passover event that is the freedom and liberation of God's people from Egypt is fulfilled in Jesus' death which brings freedom and liberation for God's people from sin.

The Passover meal commemorated the first one the Lord's Supper commemorates the second one and there's a looser link directly between the meals. Do you sort of see the point I'm making?

That is the Passover meal is not really fulfilled in the Lord's Supper particularly. It's that the two meals look to two events which are connected. I hope I sort of said that clearly.

Sometimes I would like to do a diagram but I don't have blackboards and things here. Anyway, enough about that. Israel heads off towards the Red Sea in verse 37 of chapter 12.

They leave or they go from Ramesses which is one of the towns that they were building back in chapter 1 verse 11. We're told that there were 600,000 men on foot and that's caused of course great dilemmas because many sceptics would say well how on earth can there be 600,000 men because you've got to imagine that there'd be the same, roughly the same number of women plus children.

[31 : 02] So we're looking at two to three million people and many people would say well this can't be true. How could two to three million people spend 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai and not leave any trace?

Well of course the desert of Sinai is the sort of notorious place where you don't find trace as much of people especially if they're camping rather than building cities so at one level even though there's lots of people we may not expect to find remains of them along the way.

We've got to remember too that God is able to do whatever he likes so we shouldn't limit what God can do by our own sort of small minds perhaps. Certainly the literal numbers of 600,000 fits in with the book of Numbers which has two censuses and each of them has about 600,000 men and then in addition women and children.

Some would think though that the word for thousand might mean clan or family or something like that. That is a possibility though nobody's really quite proven it but the difficulty is it's a little bit odd to talk about 600,000 families but not including women and children in a sense.

I mean this verse doesn't do it but elsewhere it sort of seems to exclude in the count the women and children which seems an odd thing if you're counting by families. So it seems to me that probably in the end we best leave it to say there are about 600,000 men and in addition to them women and children as well.

[32 : 36] There were some foreigners we're told in verse 38 a mixed crowd they're called so presumably some people from other countries who somehow believed what God had been doing and wanted to follow him and his people.

We're told in verses 40 and 41 that they'd spent 430 years in Egypt which fulfills by and large what God had said to Abraham would happen. 400 years. Well this is a bit more but at least it's still 400 years as well.

So we're looking at about 1440 BC I would reckon. Others would say 1250 BC but I'm inclined to a sort of slightly earlier date but the scholars sort of divide themselves over the two dates but I think the Bible's verses probably fit best with about 1440 BC.

The rest of chapter 12 and the first bit of chapter 13 down to verse 10 reiterate some of these Passover commands.

It's the third time and the repetition I guess shows how important it is. I'm going to skip over all of that. I want to pick up a couple of things in the next paragraph 13 verse 11 to 16.

[33 : 42] The consecration of the firstborn. When the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites as he swore to you and your ancestors and has given it to you you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb.

All the firstborn of your livestock that are males shall be the Lord's. But every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a sheep. If you do not redeem it you must break its neck.

Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem. Now the idea here I just want to pause on this just for a minute is that Israel is God's firstborn.

He's destroyed the firstborn of Egypt and there's a sense in which as a grateful response the firstborn belong to the Lord. So what it's saying I think is that the firstborn sheep and bull and all the other animals they are to be offered as a sacrifice to God.

For some reason donkeys are singled out maybe because they're beasts of burden maybe because they're rarer. So instead of sacrificing a donkey you can redeem it with a sheep.

[34 : 53] That is you sacrifice a sheep and you keep the donkey. That is the sheep becomes a substitute for keeping the donkey. But you've got to do that. You cannot if you don't redeem the donkey and presumably you're allowed to there's a concession to do that you must break its neck.

That is you weren't allowed to keep the donkey without redeeming it. That would be greedy. Same sort of thing applies for humans. There's certainly no permission to sacrifice a child at all.

That's the most abominable thing. But in order to compensate when you have a firstborn son you are to redeem your son with a sheep. That is you sacrifice the sheep or a lamb in order to acknowledge that your child, your firstborn male child belongs to the Lord.

Now we might think this is a little bit strange but what it is doing is acknowledging this event. God has spared the firstborn therefore in a sense they belong to him and so this is to be something that Israel is to acknowledge for generations to come.

But of course the children are not given in sacrifice. You offer a sheep as a substitute. And here I guess we have yet again what happens several times in scripture that there is a substitutionary idea to sacrifices.

[36 : 14] So that something is sacrificed in place of something else. The same sort of thing happened in Genesis 22 when a ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac. Remember when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son he was about to do it and then God said okay I know you believe in me here's a ram sacrifices instead.

And what it's what of course this theme culminates in is Jesus death and it reminds us that Jesus death is a substitutionary death.

That is he dies in our place. Now sometimes people sort of try and deny that or push that down a bit but it helps us appreciate just what Jesus did for us.

He died in our place as our substitute because we don't so that we don't have to die in a sense for our sins. So here's just a glimmer of that substitutionary theme that begins to sort of gain momentum later with the sacrifices in Leviticus and then of course climaxing in the cross as well. It also explains why in Luke 2 Jesus is taken into Jerusalem as an acknowledgement that he is the firstborn of Mary and Joseph. Well moving on 13 verse 17 now the people of God continue now towards the Red Sea.

[37 : 35] They've already left a little bit from Egypt travelled to Sukkot and now they're heading further but it's an odd route. When Pharaoh let the people go God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines although that was nearer.

Now let me I was looking around for a map for the overhead and I couldn't find it in a hurry tonight so I apologise for that. But if you imagine the Mediterranean coast from Egypt, let me try and do it your way, from Egypt here going up what's the Middle East so it becomes the coast of Israel then Lebanon and goes up to Syria and then around to Turkey.

Okay. That is flat mostly and it was the main highway. It was the sort of Hume highway of the ancient world actually called the Via Maris, the way of the sea. So if you travelled in the ancient world from Egypt to Babylon or to Assyria or to Iraq or Persia or Turkey you would go up the coast road because it's flat and it's easy.

It happens to be where the Philistines lived and that's the normal way you would go from Egypt to Israel. That's not the way God led them. God led them down southeast, down towards the Red Sea. It's an unusual route and why did he do it? Well he says in verse 17 if the people face war which they would because there'd be Egyptian outposts there and Philistines to go through and so on, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.

[39 : 06] Now God knows from the beginning how fickle his people are. They're not surprising him when later on they want to go back and all that sort of stuff. He knows what they're like. Now the tape's being changed at this point.

It says, the Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle and Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites saying God will surely take notice of you and then you must carry my bones with you from here.

Those words exactly quote Joseph's words from Genesis chapter 50 verse 25. And you remember that the book of Genesis ends with Joseph dead but his bones not buried but placed embalmed in a coffin because he's going to be buried in the promised land.

It's a statement of great faith in God. So Moses is now carrying those bones of Joseph and later on at the end of the book of Joshua they're finally buried in Shechem traditionally at a site that the Palestinians destroyed just a few weeks ago.

They set out from Sukkot and camped at Etam on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them along the way and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light so that they might travel by day and by night.

[40 : 21] Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. So here is God leading the way by day and by night providing direction for his people in a sort of physical sense cloud and fire.

fire. And that's something that he does right the way through the period of the wilderness. The cloud and fire occur in other points. That's part of a key idea in the book of Exodus that God is with his people.

Remember back in chapters 1 and 2 God was hardly mentioned and it looked as though he'd abandoned them to slavery. But he assured them, or Moses at least, that he was with them. Moses, I will speak your words and so on.

I'll be with you. That's sufficient for you as we saw last week. And the book will end with the construction of the tabernacle and the reassurance that God is with his people. So here is God with his people mobile moving through the desert as he'll do for 40 years.

Well Pharaoh's in pursuit. His heart is hardened again. And chapter 14 verses 1 to 12 talk about Pharaoh's heart being hardened and pursuing the Israelites.

[41 : 37] Notice in verse 4 of chapter 14 God says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.

So here is one reason why God is leading them this way. So that Pharaoh will see the glory of the Lord even more. You might think that destroying the firstborn was enough but no Pharaoh's heart is still hardened.

He's still in pursuit and God will still reveal his glory even more fully to Pharaoh and Pharaoh's army. Now then comes some very important verses I think in verse 11 and 12.

Pharaoh's drawing near and this is the beginning of the reading that Alan read. The Israelites look back and they're in great fear and they cry to the Lord and they say to Moses, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness?

What have you done to us bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt? Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians for it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. That's an extraordinary complaint.

[42 : 47] So few days after leaving with such an extraordinary act of God's power killing the firstborn but here now Pharaoh's in pursuit. So we've got a picture here, the Israelites with the sea behind them, they've turned back and they're facing in effect Pharaoh's army bearing down on them.

That is we've got to picture them in a cul-de-sac at a dead end. They can't get out. They've got sea behind and they've got Pharaoh in front and there's no way out of it. It's just like any typical sort of Batman and Robin film.

It always gets to an inevitable point where you cannot imagine any way out of the situation. Now God's contrived it this way in order for his glory to be revealed.

But the grumbles of Israel are meant to make us realise that they are no different from Pharaoh. Here's Pharaoh's heart hardened yet again against the glory of God and here are the Israelites grumbling about God's work.

So we're meant to see here a picture of an undeserving people who are being redeemed by God. There is never ever a glimpse of anything in Israel that warrants God saving it from Egypt.

[43 : 54] They're not really any better than the Egyptians at all. It's just that they happen to be descended from Abraham to whom God made promises. Now this is important verses because it's not the only time that Israel grumbles.

Later on in chapter 15 they come to a place called Marah having crossed through the Red Sea. They come to a place called Marah but the water is bitter. Hence the name Marah which in Hebrew means bitter and they complain and so in the end a miracle is performed by Moses where he throws a stick or tree into the water and it becomes sweet and they can drink the water.

Moving to chapter 16 not very far down the track now they're hungry. They want meat and they want bread. They wish that they were back in Egypt because they had all the food they wanted there.

Again they're complaining and this time God miraculously provides for them. Quail by the bucket load and also manna, bread from heaven, a special sort of bread that appears in the morning.

It only lasts a day. The next day it's gone off. You can pick some more the next morning and people have tried to say well it's sap from this tree or it's excretion from locusts or cicadas or something like that.

[45 : 08] But none of those naturalistic explanations account for the fact that it only appears six days a week doesn't appear on the Sabbath and on the sixth day you get twice as much as you need and that night only it'll last for two days.

It is a miraculous provision. And then in chapter 17, three chapters in a row the Israelites grumble yet again. This time beginning of chapter 17 they're grumbling because they've got to a place Rephidim and there's no water there at all, not even bitter water.

And this is the point where Moses strikes the rock and water comes out of the rock. Now just occasionally you might get a trickle out of a rock if you hit it hard enough because in some of those places the rocks are, and I'm not a geologist so I'm not quite sure the terms, but they're sort of layered rocks and sometimes water can, rainwater can hit the rock over here and it can fill in between the layers and if somehow you disturb it by hitting it you might just get a trickle that gets disturbed out.

But enough water to feed two to three million people, well it's hardly a naturalistic provision. Again it's a miracle of God. The point is that Israel keeps on grumbling to God.

Here's the first time and they haven't even got to the Red Sea. They get through the Red Sea and you think at last maybe now they've realised that God's fantastic and he's going to do what they

want. They just walk down the road a little bit and they grumble and then they grumble and then they grumble and they keep on grumbling.

[46 : 30] You can read the book of Numbers and you see that they grumble still in the wilderness in chapter 11, chapter 14, chapter 16, chapter 20. So we've got here a people who keep on grumbling at God.

Now Paul uses that as a great warning to us in 1 Corinthians 10 that we are people who are redeemed in a bigger way than Israel was but we also could be just as prone to grumbling at God as they were.

We've got to heed their example here or not follow it is what I mean. We've got to make sure that we're not people who grumble at God, complain when things don't quite seem to be going well. We're supposed to be people who trust in his provision for us each day even if we can't see where that's going to come from. After all he's in a very powerful way saved us through the death of Jesus on a cross.

If he's done that for us he can do everything that we need. He can provide for our daily needs if he's done that amazing event already. So let us make sure that we're never like the people of Israel here.

[47 : 31] Although in between there's some scattered obedience by the Israelites. They're not totally disobedient at every point. But let us make sure that we don't have the same sort of grumbling murmuring hearts against God.

Sometimes I've met people who've been Christians for a long time or maybe a short time but something significantly difficult has happened in their life. A death, a loss of a job, a severe ill health, a divorce or something.

And sometimes those significant offence have led to the person becoming hard hearted and grumbling against God and complaining about their lot in life. God provides all that we need. Doesn't mean that life will be easy. It wasn't for Israel in the wilderness. But God provides abundantly what we need. We must never grumble at his provisions but trust that he will provide as he promises.

Well they come to the sea. Verse 13 of chapter 14. Moses responds to their grumbling by saying don't be afraid, stand firm and see the deliverance.

[48 : 36] They're very urgent words. Literally just one word commands. Don't fear, stand firm, see. Now that's something that's quite extraordinary. There's no word of participate here.

See. See. Watch. It's all done by God you see. You don't have to do a thing. Just watch what God is going to do. If ever we doubt that salvation is a total work of God, here is an illustration that it is. It is a total work of God. All the Israelites have to do is see. Watch. What God is going to do. Because they don't deserve it. But he's still going to do it for them.

He's about to do the greatest miracle of the Old Testament I suppose by way of salvation and it follows immediately on their grumbling. We can never think that God is saving us because we deserve it.

We don't and they didn't. But God did it anyway. So in verse 14 Moses says to them, the Lord will fight for you and you have only to keep still.

[49 : 39] That is literally shut up. Putting them in his place. God's doing all the work. And then God says to Moses, why do you cry out to me? Not blaming Moses personally but Moses is the representative of the people.

Tell the Israelites to go forward but you lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea just as Moses had done with the first plague over the Nile River and divide it that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.

Now the word dry ground here literally means ground that has lost its moisture. So we can't imagine that the sea walls are going to separate and Israel sort of wades through a muddy seabed.

The word literally means dry. So this is not again just sort of a wind that happens to blow the tide back. The ground itself is now dry and it's been a seabed for goodness knows how long.

So this again is clearly a miracle. Then I'll harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they'll go in after them, verse 17, and I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh.

[50 : 48] See I'm not doing this for your benefit Israel or for your benefit Moses. I'm doing this for my glory. Let's keep that in mind that when God acts to save us he does it ultimately for his glory.

And the Egyptians shall know that I'm the Lord even if they know it in death when I've gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots and his chariot drivers. So that night before all this happened the angel of God and the pillar of cloud they move from being in front of the people near the sea to the other side to protect them from the Egyptian army that's somewhere over there maybe within sight nearly or something like that.

So now they're protected through that night. The cloud was there with the darkness and it lit up the night. One did not come near the other all night.

Then verse 21 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind. Now presumably that means that the wind is coming from the other side of the sea because the Israelites are on the west side of the Red Sea.

So if they could see what's going on and there's light so probably they could. There's a sense in which the wind is coming towards them and the water is parting from the far side towards their side.

[51 : 59] Maybe initially they wouldn't have seen a thing and then all of a sudden the whole sea is opened up before them. I should make a comment about where this is happening. Some people say it's the swampy marshes up north of the Red Sea around the sort of Suez Canal area which is not really Red Sea but the Sea of Reeds because the Hebrew name could mean Sea of Reeds.

And I'm not very good at telling funny stories and I'll probably get this one wrong but there was somebody who was preaching that this wasn't really a miracle because it's a swamp and that the Israelites would have waded through a sort of six inch water swamp.

And the person had cried out at the beginning of the sermon when he's talked about God doing this and saying what a miracle that the Israelites could get through. And the man said no it's not a miracle it's sort of six inches of swamp.

And then the man replied by saying well what a miracle that Pharaoh's army could drown in six inches of water. There's no way around it really. It must be a miracle.

And it seems that the location where this probably occurs is what is part of what's called the Gulf of Suez. The Red Sea runs up from to its south would be Ethiopia, Somalia, Ethiopia I guess and Eritrea.

[53 : 08] And then it becomes I think Egypt, maybe Sudan in there I'm not quite sure. And then it sort of splits into sort of like two horns. One goes up to Jordan and Israel, the Gulf of Aqaba and then the Gulf of Suez goes towards the Suez Canal as it is now.

It's probably in that Gulf of Suez bit that they're crossing over. Something that's always sea rather than just a little river or swamp or something like that. So Moses stretches out his hand, verse 21 the Lord drove the sea back.

The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground. The water's forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Wind doesn't normally do that. Some people say it's just a big tidal wind so the whole water's moved.

But you don't get walls on both sides of you from an unusual wind, I wouldn't have thought. The Egyptians pursued and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots and chariot drivers. The morning watch, that's probably two to six a.m.

The Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, threw the Egyptian army into panic. Something that God does from time to time against the enemies of his people. He clogged their chariot wheels.

[54 : 11] Literally it's removed their chariot wheels but then it's hard to see how if they're removed they turn with difficulty. Probably it is the idea of clogging them so that they're not able to turn and move quickly through the dry ground where the sea was.

And the Egyptians said, let us flee from the Israelites for the Lord, that is Yahweh, they acknowledge his name, is fighting for them against Egypt. Well, here's the Egyptians finally admitting that they're in a hopeless situation.

God then says to Moses, verse 26, stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers. Moses did as he was told and adorned the sea return to its normal depth.

As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea. Not one of them remained but the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

And then the last couple of verses of the paragraph summarise in effect what's just been said. This is one of the most important events of the Old Testament.

[55 : 20] There's no way we can explain this as a natural event, as just a sort of coincidence of nature. It is clearly the hand of God directly saving his people and directly judging and punishing the army of Pharaoh.

The motif of the Exodus comes many times in the Old Testament. It is the salvation event to which the people of Israel look back. It's there in some of the Psalms, 78, 106 for example.

It's there in the prophets, Isaiah and Zechariah for example. Later on in Israel's history, another 800 years later, the people of Israel are carried into exile in Babylon.

Jerusalem's destroyed. And there the people sit down, wail and bemoan the fact that they're there as you can read in say Psalm 137 or Ezekiel, Book of Lamentations for example.

And they are told by the prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah to an extent, that God will bring them back to their land. And the language that is used, especially in Isaiah 40 to 55 of bringing the people back to the land is the language of the Exodus.

[56 : 30] Make straight in the desert a pathway for our God. That sort of language. God will part the waters so that the people can go back to the promised land. So the language of the return from exile is the language of the Exodus.

God has saved you once and he'll do it again. But the same language gets used again when you get to the New Testament. There's a sense in which when we start the New Testament, the people of God are still in spiritual exile.

That I think is why John the Baptist's first words are about prepare away in the desert and so on. And then of course, Jesus' death is the Exodus where he dies as a Passover so that we may be liberated from our, not slavery to Egyptians, but slavery to sin and brought into God's promised land.

So there's a sense in which the language of our salvation in Christ is picking up the language of the Exodus in the early part of the Old Testament. It becomes a model for how God saves.

And just as we've already seen a sense in which salvation is liberation from slavery, we are liberated from our slavery to sin, there's a sense in which there's redemption as well where a price is paid so that we can be set free.

[57 : 44] The price being, if you like, the offering of the firstborn to God. For us, it's the price of Jesus' death on the cross that enables us to be saved by God. Well, the people sing a song, which is chapter 15, to extol the praises of God having crossed the Red Sea.

I'll just read the first two, three verses by way of conclusion. I'll sing to the Lord for he's triumphed gloriously. Horse and rider he is thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation.

This is my God, and I will praise him. My father's God, that is the God who makes promises back to Abraham, etc., and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior.

He's fought Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, and he's won. Yahweh is his name. Well, let's pray.

Our God, we thank you for the victory that you won for your people over the gods of Egypt and over Pharaoh and Pharaoh's army, and how your glory was revealed so obviously to the Egyptians and to the Israelites.

[58 : 56] We see also how you acted in an even greater way, revealing your glory in the cross by securing for your people victory over sin and over death.

We too exalt you and praise you. But we also know the warning of ancient Israel, that just before and just after this great act of redemption, they grumbled and complained and disobeyed you and rebelled against you.

We know all too well our hearts are fickle. And though with one sentence we may praise you in songs like Exodus 15, we know all too well how easy it is to use our tongues and our words and our lives to rebel against you so soon after.

Preserve us from such disobedience, we pray, that our hearts may with sincerity sing your praise and extol your glory for the whole world to see. Amen.