

# OpenTheo

## Exodus: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

February 14, 2022



**Alastair Roberts**

\*CONTENTS\*

00:00:00 - Chapter 1: Oppression in Egypt

00:11:02 - Chapter 2: Moses' Birth and Flight from Egypt

00:26:47 - Chapter 3: Theophany at the Burning Bush

00:38:36 - Chapter 4: Signs

00:54:50 - Chapter 5: Heightened Oppression

01:04:19 - Chapter 6: Genealogy of Moses and Aaron

01:16:46 - Chapter 7: First Plague

01:29:44 - Chapter 8: Second, Third, and Fourth Plagues

01:41:06 - Chapter 9: Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Plagues

01:54:18 - Chapter 10: Eighth and Ninth Plagues

02:02:55 - Chapter 11: Final Plague Announced

02:08:07 - Chapter 12: Passover

02:18:34 - Chapter 13: Instituting the Law of the Firstborn and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

02:34:39 - Chapter 14: Crossing the Red Sea

02:47:49 - Chapter 15: Song of the Sea

03:00:27 - Chapter 16: Manna

03:11:21 - Chapter 17: Water from the Rock and Defeating Amalek

03:23:54 - Chapter 18: Jethro's Counsel

03:35:35 - Chapter 19: Mount Sinai

03:50:42 - Chapter 20: The Ten Words

04:14:09 - Chapter 21: Case Laws

04:35:56 - Chapter 22: More Case Laws

04:52:04 - Chapter 23: Festivals and the Angel

05:03:46 - Chapter 24: The Covenant Confirmation

05:11:05 - Chapter 25: Ark, Table, and Lampstand

05:21:22 - Chapter 26: The Tabernacle

05:30:22 - Chapter 27: Bronze Altar and Oil for the Lamp

05:39:17 - Chapter 28: Garments of the Priests

05:56:08 - Chapter 29: Consecration of the Priests

06:05:56 - Chapter 30: Altar of Incense, Ransom Silver, Bronze Laver, Anointing Oil, Incense

06:15:05 - Chapter 31: Bezalel and Oholiab, Sabbath as the Covenant Sign

06:27:26 - Chapter 32: The Golden Calf

06:44:32 - Chapter 33: Moses Intercedes for Israel

06:57:56 - Chapter 34: Moses' Shining Face

07:11:34 - Chapter 35: Donations for the Tabernacle

07:18:05 - Chapter 36: Constructing the Tabernacle

07:26:51 - Chapter 37: Furniture for the Tabernacle

07:36:03 - Chapter 38: The Court and its Bronze Altar and Laver

07:44:17 - Chapter 39: Making the Priestly Garments

07:55:10 - Chapter 40: The Completion of the Work

If you have enjoyed my videos and podcasts, please tell your friends. If you are

interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Exodus Chapter 1 begins the great story of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt. This passage takes for granted a general knowledge of the Book of Genesis, and more explicitly recalls Genesis Chapter 46. Its opening words, and these are the names, directly recalls Genesis Chapter 46, verse 8. This story is taking up the threads that we have just left in Genesis.

If Genesis looked forward to the events of the Exodus, with the story surrounding the burial of Joseph and of Jacob, the story here looks back to the story of Genesis and picks up some of the details from it. While the sons are listed in Genesis Chapter 46, the order of the sons that we have here comes from Genesis Chapter 35, verses 23 to 26. This is possibly because in the context, in verses 10 to 12 of Chapter 35, there's the promise of being fruitful and multiplying.

The tribes are listed according to their mothers, not according to the order of the birth of the children themselves. The two handmaids are reversed and correspond to the respective wives in a book-ended form. So it starts with Leah and it ends with Zilpah, and in the centre you have Rachel's child Benjamin and then the children of Bilhah.

There's one detail that's different from Genesis Chapter 35 that's worth noting. Reuben is not referred to as the firstborn here, perhaps on account of his demoted status. The text refers to the 70 who came down into Egypt and it also highlights 12 as the number of the tribes.

12 and 70, as we've seen already, are significant numbers. They're associated with the identity of Israel and appear at many points in Israel's history. There's 12 tribes and there's 70 elders.

In a few chapters time we'll encounter Elim where there are 12 springs and 70 palm trees. Israel is fruitful and multiplying, recalling the blessing of Genesis Chapter 1. They're fulfilling the calling given to Adam and Eve and the promise given to Abraham. And this can be contrasted with the struggles of the story of Genesis, where the women within the story, whether it's Rebecca, whether it's Sarah, whether it's Rachel, are

struggling to give birth and experiencing painful birth.

Here, while there are struggles surrounding birth, those struggles come purely from outside. The women are giving birth at a rate of knots. There's no way to stop them.

There is an exponential growth of the population of the people. The language here is not just the language of fruitfulness and multiplication. There's language more typically used of the swarming of insects.

You can imagine how the Egyptians are seeing this. They're cockroaches filling the land, or like locusts devouring the land. That's how they appear to the Egyptians.

And the cluster of words for growth in verse 7 drive this point home. They are increasing in number at a truly incredible rate. And while we usually associate death with terror, there's something about an excess of life that can be monstrous and terrifying too.

And perhaps this is the way that the Egyptians are seeing the Israelites at this point. When they finally leave, it's not with the 70 that they first came down with, but with 600,000 people, which gives some sense of the growth that they have experienced. The rising of a new king might refer not just to someone new coming to the throne, but to the start of a new dynasty.

It's not just someone in the existing line of succession. And this person doesn't know Joseph. Well, maybe he knows Joseph on the history books, but there's no sense of a duty to Joseph or an appreciation of what he has done for Egypt and the responsibility that Egypt has to his descendants and his family.

The Israelites have now become a threat as a large and powerful foreign population is distinct from the Egyptians. They haven't assimilated into the nation. They're a distinct body of people.

And Pharaoh fears that if there is a war, the Israelites will fight on the side of the enemies of the Egyptians, rise up and gain supremacy. Pharaoh perhaps knows that there's an order to the blessing that's given in Genesis chapter one. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth.

And they've reached that stage and subdue it. There's a concern that they're going to subdue the land. Pharaoh's concerns here are those of a shrewd politician, if a particularly unscrupulous one.

He sees the parameters of the situation. He sees that they don't look good. And so he wants to take a preemptive strike against this potential enemy of his people and to ensure that they do not rise up in such a manner.

We need to be aware of reading Exodus simply as a story of straightforward good versus

evil, although there is good versus evil. It's a more subtle and consequently powerful story than that. Pharaoh is a typical baddie in most tellings of the story, but Pharaoh has motives.

Pharaoh has reasoning behind his approach that make clear to the careful reader that he is a three-dimensional character and that perhaps by reflecting upon this story, we might learn something about our situations. Israel is then afflicted and enslaved as God foretold to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15 verse 13. They're reduced to a sort of servitude and Pharaoh conscripts the Israelites into a great city building project.

The alert reader might think back to the story of Babel in chapter 11 of Genesis, where once again a story begins with, come let us. Bricks are fired in order to build a great city and a building project of a tower. And here we're seeing that same thing playing out again.

This is a Babelic project. However, even as the Israelites were oppressed, they grow in number and they spread out even further. The Egyptians are in fear and dread of the Israelites, much as the animals were in relationship to man after the flood.

And Pharaoh moves at this point on to infanticide. This is plan B. The initial plan has failed and so he wants to move on even further. So he instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys.

Now the midwives are either Hebrew midwives or midwives to the Hebrews. Their names suggest that they are probably Hebrews. But the important thing to notice is that their names are given to us.

Pharaoh's name is forgotten and there's much debate about who this Pharaoh actually is. But the names of the midwives are remembered and their heroism ensures that they are still remembered and spoken of to this day. They're the first names that we encounter in the actual story of the book of Exodus beyond the initial statements about Joseph and the family of Jacob.

Their names stand out in the context of anonymous figures. Pharaoh's name is not given to us. Pharaoh's daughter's name is not given to us.

Her servant girl's name is not given to us. Moses' mother, her name is not given to us here. And even Miriam's name is not mentioned at this point.

Even though we are told the names of Jochebed and Miriam later, the Hebrew midwives then are the only ones whose names are given at this point. It's not entirely clear what the stones refer to. Some have seen it as the birthstool, the stones on which women squatted while in labour.

Alternatively it could refer to the genitals of the child, to see the sex of the child and to

kill the boys. The boys were to be killed and presumably the girls were to be taken. The girls were to be brides for the Egyptians.

We can think back to the story of Genesis chapter 12 where the threat was that Abraham would be killed and Sarai would be taken. This is the same sort of thing that we're seeing here. The threat often in scripture and elsewhere in history has been the removal of the men leaving the women vulnerable to being taken by foreign powers.

As in the story of Genesis, deception is the response. The Hebrew midwives deceive Pharaoh. They play upon the Egyptians xenophobia and superstition it seems.

When we fear another group we can easily ascribe to them some special quality or power that exceeds or diminishes regular humanity. And this seems to be what's taking place here. The Hebrew women are not regular Egyptian women.

They are far more vigorous and as a result they bear children even before the midwives get to them. The Hebrew midwives' deception of Pharaoh probably plays upon the story of the fall. In the story of the fall the woman is deceived by the serpent and in story after story in the Old Testament women deceive tyrants.

There is a poetic justice as the women get their own back upon the serpent, upon the tyrants. The midwives stand out for their courage. They disobey orders, they deceive Pharaoh and Jonathan Sacks has suggested that this is the first recorded account in history of civil disobedience.

This is an example of people just disobeying orders. When those orders are wicked they refuse to obey and their courage has stood testament to them to this God blesses the midwives with families of their own. Bear in mind that many of the women who would have become midwives would have done so because they had no children of their own.

And here God blesses these midwives with children of their own. The Israelites continue to multiply and they're fruitful and the response to this is plan C. If subjection to servitude was not enough, if the instruction to the midwives didn't work, then time for a different option. Time for the nuclear option.

We're going to kill all the baby boys and so Pharaoh tells his men to drown the baby boys in the river Nile. The Nile will both be the means of killing them and it will cover up the crime. A question to consider.

It's no accident the book of Exodus begins with themes of birth and struggling in birth. These are themes that relate not just to individuals within the nation but to the nation as a whole. The nation is struggling to be born and this story plays out the birth of Israel as God's firstborn son.

Not just the birth of baby boys to women within the nation but an event of national and

epochal significance. And in its presentation of this reality the book of Exodus begins with women's center stage. The Hebrew midwives, the mother of the son of Moses, the sister of Moses, Pharaoh's daughter and her handmaid.

This is a story that begins with and focuses upon women. There are other stories that begin and focus upon women in the Bible. Which stories are these and what similarities are there between this story and those stories? Why do you think that God begins such stories with such a focus upon women? The story of the deliverance of the infant Moses in Exodus chapter 2 is a familiar one to us.

We've all heard it many times. Even though some details have been exaggerated or changed for dramatic effect it is a story that we remember well. The story begins with a man from the house of Levi going and taking as his wife a daughter of Levi.

She gives birth to a son and sees that he's a beautiful child. The beauty of Moses is a sign that he's well-favoured. He's one that is marked out already for a good destiny.

You can see other examples in scripture of people who have a striking physical appearance. Rachel or Joseph or people like David. And these people are marked out for rule or for leadership or for some blessing by the symbolism of an attractive appearance.

This is not to say that God prefers people who are physically attractive. As we see in the context of the choice of David, man looks at the outer appearance but God looks at the heart. So the heart is what matters.

Your physical appearance doesn't make you more or less loved by God. But yet a beautiful physical appearance is a sign of someone who's set apart in some way. And from the very beginning of his life there is something that singles Moses out as different.

Moses is bound for some remarkable destiny and his appearance is commented upon for this reason. She hides him for three months. We've already noted periods of three in the book of Genesis.

On the third day or in the third month or in the third year it can be a time of testing. A time when things come to a head. On the third day Abraham arrives at the mountain with Isaac.

On the third day the chief baker and the cupbearer will be taken out of prison and face their fate. And in the third year Joseph will be released from prison. These sorts of events occur at the third period of time.

And the three months here lead to a point where there is a crisis moment and she can't hide him any longer. So she takes a basket or literally an ark made of bullrushes and daubs it with bitumen and pitch. Now the word for ark here is the same word as we have used of Noah's ark.

It's not the same word that we have used of the ark of the covenant or the chest of the covenant. This is a different word and it's a very unusual word within scripture. We don't really see it used apart from in reference to Noah's ark and to this ark.

Now why might that be? Pharaoh is trying to drown the baby boys and here one baby boy is saved through the waters in an ark. Now the mother of Moses is literally obeying the rule of Pharaoh. She is casting the child into the water but yet she's doing so within an ark and he's going to be brought through the waters like Noah was brought through waters and delivered.

And the description of the ark is also similar. It's covered with pitch and that preparation of the ark might also remind us of the story of Babel where Babel is this preparation of bricks and using bitumen as mortar and the bringing together of bitumen and pitch here is interesting. On the one hand the ark of Moses is like the ark of Noah.

He's going to be delivered through the waters in which others are drowning. It's also like a reversal of the Babel themes. In the context there are great store cities being built.

The Israelites are being caught up in the task of making bricks and here is a sort of brick being made but yet this brick is being used to rescue a child to form a different sort of kingdom. Not the kingdom of Pharaoh's great building projects but a kingdom that will have a very different character to it. She places the ark among the reeds by the river bank and the sister stands at a distance to see what will happen to the child and at this point the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to bathe at the river and her young women are walking beside the river at this time.

She sends out her servant woman to take the ark and as she opens it she sees the child. She sees the child crying and takes pity on it declaring that it's one of the Hebrew's children. A few things to notice here.

First of all that there are some similarities between the characters of play. So you have a symmetry between the daughter of Levi, Jochebed as we later find her name to be, the mother of Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh and then the servant girl and the sister of Moses. These characters have a symmetry to them and the daughter of Pharaoh knows that it's one of the Hebrew children and yet still rescues the child.

Rescues the child knowing that she's disobeying her father's command and rescuing one of the children that's supposed to be killed. She sees the child and she sees that child is crying. We don't have references to children crying within biblical narrative for the most part.

This is something that's very rare. The fact that the baby is crying is a matter of importance. What does it matter that the child is crying? Well the child is crying in part because his state of distress represents the state of his people more generally and she



takes pity upon the child but also recognises the state of the people from which this child comes.

It's one of the Hebrew's children and the compassion that she takes upon the child is the first of a number of series of people in this chapter who see and take notice and have compassion and act. She is the first one to play out this pattern and others will follow. At this point the sister of the infant comes up and speaks to Pharaoh's daughter and says should she go and get a nurse for the child? Now I don't presume that it was common for Hebrew children to speak so directly to a princess of Egypt and the fact that she could suggests to me that Pharaoh's daughter knew that this was the sister.

She wasn't just a random Hebrew child and she knew that in entrusting the child to this girl she was entrusting the child to the mother and saving the child for the sake of that family. Without the courage of this one woman none of the rest of the story would take place. Her salvation of Moses sets the terms for what takes place afterwards.

She's prepared to risk word getting out. There are servants around her, there are other women around her. Any one of those could spread rumours within the palace and word could get back to her father and she could be in serious trouble but her courage is seen in the fact that she goes ahead anyway.

When the child is weaned the child is brought to Pharaoh's daughter and she becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter and at this point the child is named Moses because he was drawn out of the water. Now Moses in that sense is a Hebrew name but the Egyptian meaning would suggest that he's son or born. He's born out of the water, he's the one who is the child of the water.

He's her son as well. We can think about the way that we have names like Ramses, son of Ra. The fact that Pharaoh's daughter gives Moses his name and that is Moses' name, not a name that he was given by Amram and Jochebed, his parents, not a name that God gave him at some point but a name given to him by the daughter of the antagonist within the story, it's remarkable.

It's a sign of how remarkable Pharaoh's daughter is as a figure that she is the one who has the honour of naming the great saviour of God's people and the name he receives anticipates things that will happen in the future. In Isaiah chapter 63 verse 11 it speaks about Moses. Then he remembered the days of old of Moses and his people.

Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit? Moses leads the people up out of the sea, he draws them out of the water. So he's not just the one drawn out of the water himself, he is the one who draws out of the water. And the events that we have here are played out again in the story of the Red Sea Crossing.

Once again there is an event of threat from Pharaoh. Once again there is this deliverance in the sight of the reeds. The Red Sea could also be translated as Sea of Reeds.

It's the same word that we see here used for the reeds in which Moses is placed. And Miriam is present again in both occasions as a witness. And that drawing out of the water being associated with birth is also something that's the case of Israel's deliverance in chapter 14 and 15.

They are drawn out of the water and that's a birth experience for them too. Moses was drawn out of the water, he was born out of the water. Israel will later be born out of the water and they will enter into the experience of Moses at that point.

The text jumps forward some years here in Stephen's account in his sermon, 40 years. Moses has grown up and he goes out and he sees his people, looks on their burdens. He sees their distress.

Much as his mother, his adoptive mother, saw his distress and his sorrow and his crying. So he goes out and he sees his people and he takes compassion upon them. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and he intervenes.

He intervenes also recognising that the Hebrew is one of his people. That there is a connection between him and that person no matter the difference in their status that he has been raised with in the palace. That Hebrew is one of his people and he strikes down the Egyptian and hides him in the sand but the next day when he sees two Hebrews he discovers that the word concerning his action has come out.

It is known that he has killed the Egyptian and the Hebrew is not prepared to recognise him as a ruler over them. Rather he's seen as an outsider, he's seen as an Egyptian and they reject him accordingly. When Pharaoh finds out he tries to kill Moses and Moses flees and goes to the land of Midian, arrives at a well.

Now we've encountered a number of wells in the book of Genesis. Wells are often associated with women and at these wells there can often be significant encounters. Rebecca was first met at a well.

Rachel was first met at a well and now Moses comes and he sits down at a well and the priest of Midian has seven daughters. Again there are women associated with the well and they come and draw water, fill their troughs to water their father's flock and they're assaulted by the shepherds who drive them away and Moses stands up and intervenes and saves them and waters their flock. They go back to their father, tell him the news and he is obviously used to the fact that day after day they're driven away by these shepherds and harassed and it's surprising to him that they've come back so early on this occasion.

Then he hears about this Egyptian who's intervened on their behalf and calls for him to

come and have a meal with them and Moses ends up dwelling with Rul and his family and becoming one of them. He is given the daughter of Rul, Zipporah, as his wife. She gives birth to a son and he calls his name Gershom.

He has been a sojourner in a strange land. There should be a number of patterns that jump out to us here. First we've encountered a very similar story in Jacob.

Jacob goes to this foreign land fleeing from a threat to his life, someone trying to kill him and he ends up arriving at a well, meeting the woman that he's about to marry, being invited in and welcomed into the family, serving with a new father-in-law figure and this is what we see in the case of Moses. Rul is pretty much the same sort of character as Laban at this point but it also looks forward. Moses leaves Egypt, fleeing Egypt and there's a threat to his life, pursuit, come to water and there's a threat at the water.

The shepherds are trying to drive the people away and he intervenes and acts on their behalf, drives away the shepherds single-handedly, saves the women and waters the flock. Then he meets Rul, who's later described as Jethro, and ends up marrying one of his daughters. This is a very similar pattern to that which we find in Moses' later ministry.

He leaves Egypt with the people of Israel as Pharaoh tries to take their lives. At the waters he stretches out his hand and delivers the people, saves them and delivers them from the hand of their opponent and then he waters the flocks of God in the wilderness. From then he has an encounter with Jethro in chapter 18 of Exodus and then there's a marriage, a marriage between God and his people at Sinai and also the next thing that happens within the story here is an encounter with God at Sinai.

A similar pattern is playing out. The events of Moses' life are anticipating what will later happen to him and to the people that he leads. The Midianites are sons of Abraham by the concubine Keturah and they are seemingly God-fearers.

They're presumably not circumcised. Moses does not circumcise his son while he's with them but they do seem to worship the true God and later on Jethro will lead Moses and Aaron in sacrifice. When we're reading the Old Testament it's important to consider that the Jews weren't the only people that believed in and worshipped God.

There were other people out there who were God-fearers, people like Jethro. They had a genuine relationship with God but they were not part of the special priestly people. You did not need to be an Israelite in order to be saved.

The chapter ends with the king of Egypt dying and Israel groaning because of their slavery and crying out for help and just as we've seen the daughter of Pharaoh seeing the crying infant Moses and taking compassion on him and Moses seeing the distress of the daughters of Reuel and taking compassion upon them and acting to save them, now we see God hearing and seeing his people and acting on their behalf. Their cry for rescue

comes up to God and God remembers his covenant and promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He sees the people of Israel and he knows.

Two questions to consider. First question, what might seven daughters associated with a well remind us of that we've already encountered in the or in which he acts within this chapter that set him apart as a fitting leader of his people in the future? In Exodus chapter 3 we arrive at the event that propels the story that follows. We've just been told that God has taken notice of Israel and their distress which prepares us for the call of Moses in chapter 3. Moses drives the sheep into the wilderness from Midian towards Horeb.

Horeb is typically but not always associated with Sinai. It's described as the mountain of God but there's no evidence that Moses made such an association and at this mountain he sees a theophany. A theophany is an external manifestation of God's presence.

Moses looks at the burning bush obviously for long enough to notice that it has not been burnt up. God is present in the bush in the form of the angel. In Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 16 we possibly have another reference to this bush where it says the favor of him who dwells in the bush.

Fire can also represent God's presence particularly fire that does not need fuel. It's a divine fire. It's burning but it's not burning up the bush that it's within.

It might also suggest the state of Israel in Egypt. Israel is the bush and God dwells in her and Israel is experiencing the fire of persecution in Egypt but they are not being consumed because God is in her and with her. Some have also suggested that the bush may pun on or relate to the name for Sinai.

A peculiar detail of this event is the fact that God does not call to Moses until God sees that Moses has turned aside to look at the bush. Moses has clearly looked at the bush long enough to notice it's not being consumed so he's been watching for a little while and then he goes to the bush to see more closely what's going on with it and it's at that point when God sees that he has turned aside that God calls to him. This is a peculiar detail and to me it suggests that it's connected with Moses' relationship with Israel.

Israel is the bush. God is in the midst of Israel. Israel is being burnt within Egypt but not consumed and Moses has already turned aside to look at Israel, to see their state, to take interest in their condition and to act on their behalf and in the same way he sees this bush that's being burned but it's not being consumed and as he goes to inspect it more closely God speaks to him from the midst of the bush.

God's call to Moses is that typical form of address. Moses, Moses, the response being, here I am. God declares that the ground around the bush is holy on account of God's presence.

Moses must remove his shoes from his feet. This is a peculiar detail. We've seen holy times before in the Sabbath but we've not seen places in quite the same way.

There are some similar details in the story of Bethel in chapter 28 of Genesis but this probably goes some way further. God declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses' fathers. Now you can think of the significance of this to Moses.

Moses has been raised as an Egyptian and then after a brief abortive attempt to save his people he has been driven out of Egypt and dwelt among the Midianites and now God declares himself to be the God of Moses' father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. While Moses may be cut off from his people, God is identifying him as one of the Hebrews at this point. God declares that he has heard their cry and has come down to act on their behalf, to deliver them from Egypt and to bring them into a spacious and fertile land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The land of Canaan to this point seems to have been occupied by a number of different peoples, not just one great power. No single power ruled over the land, presumably simply on account of its internal variety of zones. It was very difficult to control and there were also other external forces making it difficult for any single party to gain dominance within the land.

It would be remarkable that Israel would gain such dominance in time. Moses is called to be a messenger and this is the first prophetic call of its kind, a call to someone to act as an emissary of God to some people. Abraham acts as a prophet in certain ways, he's called out of the land of Ur of the Chaldees but not in quite the same way with a prophetic call to minister to a people.

Moses responds with uncertainty, perhaps this is related to his humility that's described in Numbers chapter 12 verse 3 or perhaps it's just a lack of faith, his timidity and that getting in the way of accepting God's power to act in his situation and to use him. To be fair to Moses I can understand why he would think it was strange that he would be the one called for such a mission. He was not recognised by his own people the Hebrews, he was an outcast prince who had fled the country 40 years previously as a result of killing someone and now he's going to go to Pharaoh to represent the Hebrews, to tell Pharaoh to let his people go.

This seems to be a strange calling, one that maybe he's not the most apt to perform. God responds by assuring him, I will be with you and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain.

The later part of this verse can be interpreted or translated in a number of different ways, perhaps it's referring to the fact that God's presence with Moses will be the sign to

him that God has called him and sent him and equipped him for what he needs to do. Or perhaps the sign is going to worship God at the Mount Horeb and as he arrives at Mount Horeb with the people it will be a sign that God has indeed sent him, that that will demonstrate the truth of his mission. Perhaps.

One thing we should notice is that God's statement of assurance to Moses is something that's very similar to the name that he gives later, I will be with you, I will be. This should be borne in mind as we proceed to the next section. Moses asks what name he shall say is the name of the God who has sent him and you can maybe understand Moses' position here.

He's not one of the Israelites, how are they going to accept him? How will they know that he has indeed been sent by the God of their fathers? Many gods claiming to be the gods of people's fathers, how did he know that this was the God of the Hebrews? Perhaps then he's asking this name in part to prove himself to the people. It's also requested in the context of the foretold worship, that they will worship God on that mountain. To what name will they be calling out? And God gives his name maybe in that context.

Moses, however, as we go through the book of Exodus, seems to have an insistent desire to know God. We see this again in chapter 33. He asks God's name and he asks God's character.

And the answer that God gives here, I am who I am or I will be what I will be, could in some ways be seen as not an answer. God isn't defined by anything other than himself. When we think about naming things, we're typically naming things as a means of getting control of them.

When we give something a name, we feel we have some power over it, some understanding of it. And yet when God gives his name, God is the only one who can pronounce his name truly. And when he pronounces his name, it's not a name that we can define relative to anything else.

God is self-defining. And God's name is also something that speaks of his existence and perhaps also his self-determination. God will be what he will be.

It's not for us to put God within our control. We cannot do that. A further thing to reflect on here might be the other attempts that we see in scripture to ask God's name.

In the book of Judges, chapter 13, verses 6 and 17 to 19, the name of the angel of the Lord is asked by Manoah and his wife. And the response is, why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful. It's a name that is not truly given.

But then Manoah offers sacrifices to the God who works wonders, playing upon the name. It seems here that maybe there's a giving of a name and a not giving of a name. In Exodus 3, maybe it's the other way around.

Maybe there is a giving of a name, but that name that is given is also in some sense not a name. God has a name, but the name itself describes something of God's ineffability, that God cannot be captured by any name, that no name actually is adequate to speak of God. God exists beyond all names.

And what names we have that we use to speak of God are all found to be lacking ultimately. God will be who he will be. This giving of the name of God also introduces a sharper form of monotheism.

Some have seen within this name a gesturing towards God's self-existent being, that God exists in and of himself. God does not have any creator above him that has formed him or fashioned him. God exists purely of himself.

We should, however, I think, be wary of putting too much weight upon some of those explanations. Expressions that are not too dissimilar are found within descriptions of pagan deities of that day, and so maybe we should not read too much into it. However, it does seem as this term develops within scripture and its treatment and uses, that there is something greater about God being referred to.

There's a veiling, but also an unveiling of God in his majesty that exists beyond human understanding. God's ineffability, God's self-existence and aseity, but also God's commitment to be with his people. Remember, the first time we see I will be is in reference to God's promise, his assuring promise, to be with Moses as he goes to the Egyptians.

And perhaps one of the things that the name of God describes here is his unchanging and unfaltering commitment to his people. The fact that he is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's the Alpha and the Omega, he's the beginning and the end, he's the one who does not change.

And as a result, he will be with his people and assure his people of his presence, not just in their present sufferings, but in whatever sufferings they may face in the future. The statement that follows that God has noticed and will deliver his people is one that draws our attention back to Genesis chapter 50 verse 24, the promise statement of Joseph. And Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

God has taken notice of his people and he will fulfill his promise. I'm going to go three days journey into the wilderness. Perhaps this is to be outside the realm of sanctity of the Egyptians, but perhaps it also should make us think of Abraham going three days to the Mount of God, where he prepares to sacrifice Isaac.

There is going to be other themes of sacrifice of the first born here, and perhaps we should connect these two events. A question to consider, the chapter ends with the

statement that the people will have favor in the sight of the Egyptians. And when they go, they shall not go empty, that each woman shall ask of her neighbor and any woman who lives in her house for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing.

She'll put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Where have we seen a promise of this earlier on in the book of Genesis? Exodus chapter 4 is one of the most puzzling chapters in the Bible.

There are a lot of questions that arise from it that are not easily answered. It begins with the Lord giving three signs to Moses. These signs are for the sake of the people as a demonstration that the Lord has actually appeared to him.

First of all, there is the sign of the staff, then there's the sign of the leprous hand, and then finally there's the sign of the water turned to blood. God first of all asks Moses what he has in his hand. He answers a staff and then he's instructed to throw it on the ground, after which the staff turns into a serpent and he recoils from it.

But the Lord says to Moses to stretch out his hand and catch the serpent by the tail, and the serpent becomes a staff again in his hand. The meaning of this sign isn't immediately clear. In chapter 7 this sign is performed before Pharaoh and the serpent, or in that case the dragon that it's turned into, consumes the dragons that the rods of the magicians of Egypt turn into.

In that case the emphasis is not upon getting control over the serpent again, but upon the power of the serpent or the dragon over others. So while the serpent is controlled, that is not the primary point. The primary point is that this staff belonging to this person can turn into this powerful creature, this powerful and dangerous creature.

The fact that the word for staff is the same word for tribe might add something to the meaning here. The tribes of Israel cast to the ground become as serpents and Pharaoh and his men will recoil before them and will be consumed by them ultimately. Perhaps that's the meaning of this particular sign.

It's important to remember that these signs are not just acts of power and pyrotechnics. They are actions with symbolic meaning, actions that describe something about what's going to take place. In the second sign Moses is instructed to put his hand into his cloak next to his bosom and then to take it out it becomes leprous and then he puts it in again, takes it out again and it is restored to full health.

What is the meaning of this sign? I'm not entirely sure but the fact that he has to put his hand into his cloak next to his bosom suggests that the leprosy is associated with the state of the heart of the people or whoever Moses represents and then as he puts it back in and it's restored it's a change in the state of the people. Maybe that's part of what's going on here. Within the purity system of Leviticus, leprosy or corruption renders one



unclean and it separated those who suffered it from the presence of the Lord.

It's given particular attention in the book of Leviticus in chapters 13 and 14. It's important that we notice that it is spoken of in terms of a plague. Leprosy is a plague of corruption that afflicts persons and houses and it has a similar effect to contact with the corpse as we see in Numbers 19.

As a sign of death and uncleanness associated with separation from the presence of the Lord, Moses' sign of leprosy could have been a powerful one. As his hand touches the flesh around his heart it turns leprous bearing the plague of corruption. It's a sign of Israel's state perhaps and when he returns his hand to his bosom and takes it out again it's smooth and restored.

So the placing of the hand upon the bosom and then moving it out suggests that the hand is reflecting the state of what it has just touched. It's healed while Pharaoh's heart will become more and more corrupt and hardened. And in many respects the story of the plagues that follow is a story of the plague of corruption breaking out in Egypt, of the house of Pharaoh becoming corrupted and being condemned to destruction.

Both the Israelites and the Egyptians originally manifest the plague of corruption and they suffer the first three plagues together. However for the last seven plague days a distinction is made between the Hebrews and the Egyptians as the plague of corruption spreads among the Egyptians while Israel, their households purified with blood sprinkled with hyssop, escape the condemnation of Egypt through the water. It is a ritual reminiscent of the process of being freed from leprosy.

So Israel's state is going to be dealt with. And then the final sign that Moses is given involves taking water from the Nile and pouring it on the drier ground. And this sign manifests God's power over the Nile, one of Egypt's deities and the primary source of its life.

It gave life and it gave purification. You can see that Pharaoh and his family go down to the river to wash on a number of occasions in the book of Exodus and in turning it to blood it becomes associated with death and defilement. It is also having the effect of bringing to light what has been done in that river.

The river covered up the crime of the slaughter of the Hebrew infants but now as it turns to blood it's manifesting the wickedness of what has been done and it's making it unavoidable. The blood that has been shed in that river is coming to the surface and no one can avoid it. To unpack the imagery of these signs a bit more it might be interesting to look at Psalm 74 verses 11 following.

It's a reference back to the event of the Red Sea Crossing and in the Red Sea Crossing there is the destruction of the serpent or the sea dragon of Egypt. Egypt is spoken of in

terms of a sea dragon in various places in the prophets and here in the Psalms it's also described using that sort of symbolism. It is a sea serpent that's destroyed in the waters whereas Israel is like a sea serpent that goes through the waters.

This narrow path winding its way through the waters like a serpent on its path and Egypt recoils at the Red Sea in the same way as Moses recoils from the serpent. It seems to me that there's some connection here that Israel as it serpents its way out of Egypt it is the serpent from which the Egyptians will recoil. That sea dragon, that sea serpent will be destroyed in the waters and the serpent that God has established of his people will be led through the wilderness and brought into the promised land.

So that might be part of the purpose of the signs. When these events happen in the future it will have a confirmatory force for Moses and for the people and I think we see that in Exodus chapter 14 verse 31. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

This recalls the purpose of the signs for the sake of the belief of the people. You can maybe think about this in the light of Jesus' miracles where many of his miracles and signs had their meaning and their confirmatory force retrospectively as in the light of the resurrection people understood what was truly meant by what Christ had done. That it was not just some sign of power but there was some deeper meaning and significance to the action or the word that he had spoken.

The reference to God having his hand in the bosom of his garment in Psalm 74 verse 11 is an interesting detail. I'm not sure what to make of it in the close proximity with the sign of the destruction of the serpent of Egypt. It seems to me that there might be something going on here.

I'm not sure what to make of it. The broader meaning of the signs though is that God will bring to light the sin of the Egyptians. It will come to the surface and God will deal with them and it.

Israel will be made powerful and dangerous in the hand of God's prophet and will ultimately defeat the sea monster of Egypt and God will also restore the heart and the arm of his people so that they can act with power and no longer be in death and exile. Moses protests at this point that he doesn't have the skill that he needs. He's not eloquent, he's not gifted, he's not an orator.

He has spent most of the last 40 years in the wilderness herding sheep. He's probably not the person for the job and yet God assures him that he is the one that created man's mouth. The theme of God preparing the prophet for his ministry whether placing his words in his mouth or cleansing his lips or granting him the eloquence with which to speak is a theme that we find in a number of places.

We see it on the day of Pentecost as God gives fiery tongues to his people so that they can speak with new fiery tongues and we see it in the story of Jeremiah as God gives him this burning word, in the story of Ezekiel as God gives him the scroll to eat, in the story of Isaiah where his lips are cleansed with the burning coal. God is angry with Moses for his failure to trust but he tells him that Aaron his brother the Levite will come and meet him and that he will be the mouthpiece for Moses to the people and to Pharaoh. The fact that Aaron is spoken of as the Levite here is an interesting detail.

I mean if he's Moses' brother surely the Levite detail is extraneous and unnecessary. Perhaps it's worth asking what Moses knows at this point. He has been raised in the house of Pharaoh as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter and it's not necessarily the case that he knows that Aaron is his brother, his biological brother.

Maybe just the fact that he's another one of the Israelites and he's one of the Israelites himself, he knows that much. It's not clear that he knows his family relations though. Beyond the earliest period of his life when he was being nursed by his actual mother there's no record of his connection with his people until he goes out at a later point.

In chapter 15 verse 20 Miriam is spoken of as Aaron's sister, not Aaron and Moses' sister. There seems to be a breach in this family where the siblings didn't necessarily know each other well. They were half strangers to each other and had been raised separately.

Perhaps we should think of some of the connections with the story of Joseph here. There are ways in which Moses is like Joseph the lost son who was taken in by the Egyptians but Moses might also be the one who's being drawn out. Joseph is being delivered from Egypt, this is an important theme of this story, and Moses the one who's drawn out first.

And the fact that Midianites play an important role in chapters 3 and 4 might also draw our mind back to the story of Genesis chapter 37 where it's the Midianites who draw Joseph out of the pit. The fact that God is choosing Moses as the one to lead the exodus is an interesting thing to reflect upon. He could have chosen Aaron, he could have chosen one of the Israelites, but yet Moses is someone who's been raised in an Egyptian prince, he's lived outside of Egypt for some period of time now, and he has the most tenuous relationship with the rest of his people.

Beyond the fact of his birth he is someone who has had very little connection with them but yet God chooses him. And it seems in part that he's the one who turns aside, he's the one who turns aside to look at the burning bush, he's the one who turns aside to look at the state of his people and to intervene for them. He's someone who identifies with the state of the Egyptians, he's not just acting as someone with patriotic zeal, simply acting on the part of his compatriots.

He's someone who can identify with Egypt, he's someone who's concerned for justice. And God chooses him, this figure who exists between worlds, this figure who is at once

associated with Egypt and also associated with Israel, he chooses him as the one that's going to lead the exodus. Like Joseph, Moses is the Egyptianized son, he's the one who's been taken into the house of Pharaoh.

Joseph was, as it were, the firstborn of Pharaoh, the one who was exercising the authority of the second in command in the nation. And Moses is someone who's the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses goes to his father-in-law and asks, Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.

That inspecting of his brothers might also recall the events of chapter 37 of Genesis, where Joseph was sent out by his father to inspect his brothers to see if all was well with them. Moses then, having returned to Midian and talked to his father-in-law, returns to Egypt. And on the way, there's a strange thing that happens.

In the lodging place or the night encampment, God intercepts him and seeks to put him to death. This event occurs immediately after God has said, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.

This is anticipating the event of the Passover. And I think the event that happens in the night encampment is also an anticipation of the Passover. Just as the Passover required circumcision as a prerequisite and the display of blood, so there is God as the destroying angel, as it were, coming to seek to kill those who are not prepared.

And then this act of circumcision and the display of the blood on the legs, the legs of the house being represented by the doorposts. And that anticipates the Passover as well. Moses is entering into the land of Egypt.

God is going to come near and he needs to be prepared. He also needs to identify with the Israelites. Until this point, Moses seems primarily to have been identified as an Egyptian in many respects.

When he goes to Midian, he's spoken of as an Egyptian, perhaps because he's clean shaven and speaks with the language of an Egyptian. But one way or another, he's someone who's not been identified with the Hebrews fully. And with the circumcision of his son, he identifies with his people in a new way.

At this point, he meets with Aaron, who has come out to the wilderness to meet him. And the encounter with Aaron is an interesting detail. It can remind us of an earlier story that we've read, the story of Jacob.

Jacob had to flee his country after he did something and his brother sought his life. He had to go to another land. He married the daughter of someone for whom he served for a number of years.

He met the daughter at a well and he prospered within the land in various ways. And then coming back to the land, he was intercepted by God who fought against him and then met with his brother in a peaceful reconciliation after many years of separation. The story then is the story of Jacob, it's the story of Moses, and it's also the story of the people of Israel.

You can think of the parallels with the story of Joseph that we have identified. At the Javok, the angel touched the thigh or the hip socket of Jacob and claimed Jacob in part by wounding him in that particular location, a site associated with generation. Maybe the action of circumcision connects with that here, that there is a claim upon the generative power of Moses.

One way or another, many of the details of this passage are mysterious and we are left with speculations. We cannot put too much weight on any particular reading. A question to consider, how might reading this passage against the backdrop of the book of Genesis help us to understand more of the significance of the expression, Israel is my firstborn son? In Exodus chapter 5, Moses and Aaron present themselves to Pharaoh.

They begin maybe on the wrong foot. God had told them to present themselves to Pharaoh with the following words, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us and now please let us go a three days journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Instead they burst in with the words, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.

There's no mention of Moses bringing the elders with him as he was instructed to do, only Aaron. Maybe Aaron does substitute for the elders but again it's a possibly significant divergence from God's command. They don't perform any signs at this point nor do they present the warning about the firstborn.

Rather they come in with a very forceful command and then after receiving a negative response they come back with a far more muted statement, one more in line with the original instructions. Why is the original request to have a three days journey and hold a feast? This is quite different from what actually takes place, that actually delivered from slavery in Egypt. Why mention this three-day feast? Is God trying to trick Pharaoh that they cut and run when they're in the wilderness? Or is there something more going on here? This original request is still significant.

It's a request that is premised upon ownership of the people which Pharaoh has to recognize. God owns his people and they're supposed to serve him. Israel is God's firstborn son and so Pharaoh should let them go and serve their father.

However the original request holds out a different possibility for how that could have taken place. We know the way that the story happens, we've read this story before, so we presume that the way that it happened was the way that it had to happen. But it's

not necessarily the case.

Earlier on in Genesis we've seen a procession going out of the land of Egypt, going towards Canaan and being led by an honor guard of Egyptians. It was the burial procession for Jacob, returning Jacob to the land. And in many respects the exodus is a burial procession too.

When they leave Egypt they head up with the bones of Jacob and at the very end of the book of Joshua we have the burial of Joseph in Shechem. Joseph is returned to the place where he was sent to by his father, where everything went wrong, and so it's a burial procession. Recognizing the relationship between the exodus and the earlier account of the burial procession of Jacob helps us to realize that the role of the Egyptians wasn't necessarily fixed.

They could have played a positive part. They could have recognized God's ownership over his people, that Israel is God's firstborn son, and recognizing that actually assists them in their calling as the firstborn son, as the Egyptians did in Genesis chapter 50. But when they resist the plan changes.

In Genesis chapter 50 they leave their cattle and their children behind in the land of Goshen. It's quite possible that the same thing would have happened had the Egyptians been happy for them to go. Their cattle, their possessions, and their children could have been left behind in Goshen and they could have returned, and then over time gradually moved back to the land with the blessing and support and assistance of the Egyptians.

But that's not the way that things happened. Pharaoh refused to let them go and it ends up in a struggle. In the Genesis narrative the choice is between which father will Joseph serve, and will Pharaoh recognize that Joseph, as it were his firstborn son, someone he's been treating as if he were his firstborn son, that his primary loyalty is to Jacob, his natural father.

If he recognizes that, he lets Joseph go, he lets the firstborn son go, to honor his father. Will this Pharaoh allow Israel, the firstborn son of Yahweh, go and honor their father? That is the question. The first Pharaoh in the story of Joseph set an example, a positive example of that.

This Pharaoh resists that. Pharaoh's first words in the narrative are important ones. Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice? Pharaoh sets the terms for what's going to happen next.

The question to be answered is, who is the Lord that Pharaoh should obey his voice? That's going to be amply demonstrated in what happens next. The story is of God demonstrating his identity. The burning bush incident began with God declaring his name and as we move through the story God is going to demonstrate who he is, that he

is the God of all things.

Moses seems to have come to Pharaoh with expectation that his request will receive ready response, even though he's been warned by God that it will not. It's something that leaves him disheartened by the end of it, because Pharaoh hasn't responded. In fact, Pharaoh has responded in a very negative way by increasing the burden upon the Israelites.

There are conversations that move up and down the chain of command. So Pharaoh instructs the Egyptian taskmasters, who instruct the Israelite foremen, who instruct the Israelite slaves. And then the Israelite slaves complain to the foremen, who complain to Pharaoh, and also complain to Moses and Aaron.

Moses then complains to the Lord. And there is a cycle of blame here that we're seeing that is significant. Pharaoh's approach is designed to discredit agitators and it's also highlighting the fundamental conflict that's at play here.

Whom will Israel serve? This is a purpose of this chapter. It highlights the central question, that Pharaoh intensifies his demands of service as a response to God's demand of service, that Israel go and serve him in the wilderness. His response is to increase the burden of their service.

This chapter also gives us a window into the form and the machinery of oppression. Any resistance will lead to a tightened grip and this serves to discredit agitators and it serves to create tensions within the groups and to divide and conquer. The Israelites and the foremen are set against each other.

The foremen are set against Moses and Aaron and there's tensions all around and the people they can't stand together because of the way that Pharaoh has organized the structure of oppression. They have to collect stubble because straw is no longer provided. This is a far more onerous task.

It's not just that collecting straw that's readily available. They're actually getting stubble because the straw is not available. Their request for relief is presented as rising out of laziness rather than a desire, true desire, to serve the Lord.

And another thing that we're seeing here is a key theme of Exeter starting to emerge which is the theme of Sabbath. This is a situation of no rest, of constant work. It's all propelled by the request for a religious feast and the story then leads to the giving of the covenant and the great sign of covenant is the Sabbath, a day that is set apart for rest and for relief of those who work.

And this chapter helps us to see not just the structure of oppression, not just the way in which Pharaoh sets people at odds with each other and uses collaborators among the Israelites to cause problems. It's also setting up the question of service. Whom will the

people serve? And also the question of who is the Lord? Who is the God who can make this sort of demand? Now Moses and Aaron go into the situation a bit brashly.

They don't necessarily present Pharaoh with a reasonable basis by which he could know the one who is making this request of him. This might not be the wisest way of approaching things. The other thing that we see is this sharp contrast between Pharaoh and the Lord starting to emerge.

The chapter begins with, thus says the Lord, and then later on we see, thus says Pharaoh. The word of Pharaoh directly juxtaposed with the word of the Lord. A question to consider.

This chapter begins with an emboldened and confident Moses and Aaron coming towards Pharaoh to present the word of God to him. It ends with a disheartened and deflated Moses and a people that feel oppressed by even heavier burdens. Pharaoh's direct intention is to dishearten the people and to squash their spirit to ensure that they do not rise up.

But God's actions seem to have a similar effect upon the people and upon Moses to dishearten them, to make them feel that this effort is worthless. How could we contrast the way that Pharaoh tries to crush the spirit and the way that God, even when he seems to dishearten his people, is actually working for their good? Exodus chapter 6 presents the answer to Moses' problem at the end of Exodus chapter 5. Moses has ended that chapter feeling disheartened by the failure of his initial approach to Pharaoh. But God here assures him that he has the situation under control.

Pharaoh will drive and send out the Israelites with a strong hand. The hand is a recurring theme throughout the Exodus narrative. That's a term worth paying attention to.

In verse 2, God gives Moses a fresh call and commission. And Moses' initial call is reconfirmed here in a way that recalls his initial call of Exodus chapter 3. If we hold the two passages alongside each other, we'll see many different parallels. For instance, between 3 verses 6 to 8 and 14 to 15 and 6 verses 2 to 8, God declares his name and the fact that he has seen the distress of his people in both places.

In 4 verse 10, we can see similarities with the second half of 6 verse 12. In 4 verse 16, there are parallels with 7 verse 1. Moses is made as God to Aaron, and then Moses is as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron is his prophet. In verse 19 and following of chapter 3, there are parallels with chapter 6 verse 7 and chapter 7 verse 4 following.

There's a promise to bring them out with great and powerful acts of judgment. And God's speech to Moses in verses 2 to 8 begins and ends with the words, I am the Lord. The response to Moses' discouragement is a reminder of the one whom he serves.

The expression, I am the Lord, can also be seen as a sort of redoubling of God's name.



God is I am, and God declares, I am the Lord. It is here as if God is preaching the gospel of the Exodus to Moses in his disheartened state.

He's recalling him to the fact of his presence and his identity. God will bring them out. He will redeem them, and he will deliver them.

By beginning and ending by declaring his name, God is also tying the pronouncement directly to his divine identity and his attributes. He's reminding Moses of the revelation to the patriarchs, his work with the patriarchs, God's recognition of the state of his people in Egypt, his commitment to them, his promise to redeem them. God will redeem them as a kinsman redeemer was committed to deliver his near relation.

He also makes a covenant style promise that he will deliver them by tying his future name to what he is about to accomplish. I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And then finally he gives the promise of the land.

The very center of all of this is God's commitment to be his people's God and for them to be his people. He's preaching the gospel, as it were, of the Exodus to Moses so that Moses can be reassured that God has things under control. This mission is not a failure.

God will bring it to completion. God has committed his own identity to this. Verse 2 begins this statement by telling us that God spoke this way to Moses and verse 9 tells us that Moses declared these words to the people of Israel.

It's as if we have the words given to us and we're then told at the end, thus Moses said to the people of Israel. God's speech to Moses seems to achieve its initial purpose. It takes the disheartened prophet and encourages him and gets him moving again.

And so by the end of the speech we see that the words that we've just read are not just God's words spoken directly to Moses but the words of God being reported by Moses to the children of Israel. Moses has been revived in his spirit and now he's speaking to the people but they are still disheartened and they're not listening or hearing these words of encouragement. God speaks to Moses again and tells him to go to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to tell him to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

But Moses still has issues. The people of Israel have not listened to him. How can he expect Pharaoh to listen to him in that case? And he points to his own problem that he's a person of uncircumcised lips.

It's quite possible that Moses had a speech impediment, a stutter or something like that that made it difficult for him to speak. He is someone who has an untamed tongue, an uncircumcised tongue, a tongue that is not functioning as it ought to and so he feels totally inadequate for this purpose. But having presented this problem and the fact that he has not been listened to by the people, remember that Moses is someone who is in

many respects an outsider.

He's someone who's grown up as an Egyptian. He's not really recognised by his people and so his place is precarious and uncertain and he presents these issues to God. And then we have a break in the narrative.

It seems very strange but this family tree is given at this point and I think it does answer some of the problems of the narrative because what it does is it roots Moses and Aaron in the family tree of Israel again. He's not being heard by his people but this gives him validation. This shows his pedigree.

This shows that he belongs to the line of the people. The genealogy here is an unusual one. It begins with the first two sons of Jacob but it does not give a full genealogy of all the sons of Jacob nor does it give us the full details of the sons of Reuben and Simeon.

It gives us their initial sons. It doesn't trace their genealogy down the line. Its purpose rather seems to be to situate Levi, the tribe of Levi and his descendants within the larger family of Jacob.

And once this has been done the focus is purely upon Levi and nothing is said about the successive tribes. By listing the first two tribes also maybe raises the question of the firstborn status or the pre-eminent status within the nation of Israel. As we look through the story of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers we can see that this is a key question.

Which is the pre-eminent firstborn tribe? At certain points it seems like Joseph. Joseph gets the firstborn portion. Two portions.

One for Ephraim, one for Manasseh and all the other sons just get one portion. So in that sense he is the firstborn. Judah becomes the leader of the tribes.

Reuben is the firstborn but is disqualified because he slept with Bilhah. Simeon and Levi seem to be judged as a result of their actions in Shechem. They're scattered among the people.

But Levi seems to have some sort of redemption. Levi takes the place of the firstborn sons in the book of Numbers, representing the people as the firstborn son of Yahweh. So the firstborn status of Israel seems to be in the background of this particular account.

Another interesting detail here is that only three ages are given. The ages of Levi, Kohath and Amram. No other ages are given.

Although we do have ages in the next chapter. The ages of Moses and Aaron. Amram and Levi both lived to 137 years.

Amram is the father of Aaron and Moses. And there might be some suggestion here that he is the archetypal Levite. He is the one that is the both the Levite who leads the

Exodus, Moses, and also the Levite who leads to the high priesthood.

James Bajon has noted that there are 137 words in the first five commandments in the ten commandments. Perhaps there is some connection to be noted there. He's also observed that there are 26 generations from Adam to Moses and Aaron.

Jochebed is also the 26th name in the list. The names Yahweh and Kvod, which are both represented within the name Jochebed, both have a gematrial value of 26. The way that certain words have a numerical value in Hebrew and also in Greek.

Her name is the first name in scripture to have the divine name Yahweh as an element within it. A further interesting detail is that the second set of five commandments cover 26 words. And the fact that 26 is the gematrial value of the name of Yahweh makes it an especially important detail within scripture.

There are questions that we could ask here about chronology. We are told elsewhere that there are 430 years leading up to the Exodus. Now, we could date that from the time they first go down to Egypt.

Or, as some have suggested, it begins with the promise of Isaac's birth and living under the hegemony of the Egyptians. This is something that they do when they live in the land of the Philistines. The Philistines are associated with Egypt.

And then as they go down to Egypt, of course, that is continued. In chapter 15, verse 16 of the book of Genesis, we are told that they will come out in the fourth generation. And Levi has four generations leading up to Aaron and Moses.

So this seems to fulfill that particular promise that is made to Abraham. It is interesting to note that there are a number of women mentioned within this genealogy. Amram marries Jochebed, who is again the 26th person within the list.

She is someone who is the first person to have the name of Yahweh included in her name in scripture. And she is the mother of Moses and Aaron. She has already been an actor within the story so far, but not named.

Aaron marries Elishabeth. And Elishabeth is a daughter of Amminadab and a sister of Nashon. She is from an important family within the tribe of Judah, the leading princely family.

And for that reason, there seems to be some sort of relationship between the priestly and the royal lines here. And then we hear that Eliezer marries one of the daughters of Putiel. All of these connections suggest that there is something about the priestly line that deserves special attention.

The ages of the priestly line of Levi, Kohath and Amram are given, and later Moses and

Aaron. And then we see the names of their wives given. There's attention given to their pedigree and the relations that they have.

The final verses of the narrative resume by recalling Moses's objection that occurred just beforehand, but does not repeat the statement that he had concerning the people not listening to him. His pedigree has been established at this point. And there's something about this genealogy that I think helps to move the narrative forward.

It connects the narrative with what has gone beforehand in the book of Genesis and elsewhere, and it also moves it forward by bringing the tribe of Levi to the foreground of the narrative. Levi is going to be the tribe that really propels the actions of the Exodus. It will be the first born tribe in that respect.

They represent the firstborn of Israel, sacrificed to the Lord, dedicated to his service. A question to consider. At various points in the book of Genesis, God changes people's names.

But in the book of Exodus, the focus is upon God revealing his own name, something deeper about his identity. He says that previously he's been known as God Most High by the patriarchs, but now he's being known by his true name, Yahweh. And the events of the God reveals his identity through history.

And the purpose of the Exodus is, perhaps above all else, a theological one, to reveal God's identity to his people and also to the Egyptians. Can you identify some of the ways that God has already highlighted the importance of his identity within the narrative of Exodus so far? In Exodus chapter 7, we reach the beginning of the story of the plagues. Moses is still discouraged after the failure of his initial approach to Pharaoh and the people's refusal to listen to him.

And he feels very keenly his weaknesses at the end of the previous chapter, the fact that he is a person of uncircumcised lips. And God declares that just as he was to be as God to Aaron, speaking to him as God's representative, so he is to be as God to Pharaoh, with Aaron as his prophet. Moses will speak words that have been given to him by the Lord, but he will speak those words as one who is standing for the Lord, as one who is representing him in a fuller way.

God declares what he is going to do beforehand, so that it's clear that when it happens he has been in control throughout. God is not just muddling through events, responding to things as they come up. God knows exactly what he's going to do.

He calls the fact that Pharaoh is going to resist, and he makes clear that that has always been part of the plan. The statement made to Pharaoh is more absolute now. There's not just a mention of a three days journey into the wilderness to worship.

He must let the people go. Pharaoh began by asking, who is the Lord that I should obey

his voice? And now God is going to demonstrate exactly who he is to the Egyptians. God doesn't just want to get his people out of Egypt.

He's going to confirm his identity as the Lord to the Israelites, to Pharaoh, to the Egyptians, and then to the entire world. God says that he is going to stiffen the heart of Pharaoh, and there are a number of different words used in relationship to the heart of Pharaoh. At some points it talks about stiffening his heart, at other points it talks about the deadening or making heavy of his heart, making it heavy and unresponsive, and then at other points his heart is strengthened.

These things are not necessarily the same. It's also important to notice that sometimes Pharaoh does this to his own heart, and sometimes God does it to his heart. There are a variety of different actions then which aren't necessarily the same, and as we go through the narrative it'll become clear that these different actions serve different purposes.

We should also recognize that on some level there is an openness to Pharaoh's future, some way in which things could go differently. If he did respond, the story of the Exodus might take a very different course, and this is held out as a genuine possibility I believe. Moses has previously performed a series of three signs before Israel to confirm his identity and his mission, and now Aaron is called to perform a confirmatory sign before Pharaoh.

Aaron squares off against the magicians of Egypt, while Moses squares off against Pharaoh himself, and the fact that Aaron is as the prophet to Moses and Moses is as God to Pharaoh presents them as having different levels of opposition. While the magicians are around, Aaron's role is important. He is the one who's particularly conflicting with them, as if it were the pawns on the board that need to be dealt with first, and then we'll get to the back row, the king, who's lying behind them.

In the first three of the plagues, this conflict between Aaron and the magicians is prominent, and then later on it's Pharaoh and Moses, and then Pharaoh and Yahweh himself. The staff is cast to the ground and it becomes a dragon or sea monster. The word here is different from the word used earlier for the serpent, and when the staff of Moses is referred back to, it's spoken of as the one that turned into a serpent, not the dragon or the sea monster, as Aaron's staff turns into.

Aaron produces a dragon from his staff, but so do the Egyptian magicians, and the Egyptians seem to use spells or arts or trickery to achieve the same effect. That sort of effect can be achieved with a particular way of holding a snake, and so maybe they're doing that sort of thing. However, Aaron's rod consumes theirs, and I think among other things this is a sign of the Red Sea, which swallowed the Egyptian dragon in its watery depth.

The same language is used for swallowing in chapter 15 verse 12, where the earth

swallows the Egyptian men. We should also recognise that there is some connection between the Egyptians and the sea monster. In Psalm 74 verses 13 and 14, you divided the sea by your might, you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters, you crushed the heads of Leviathan, you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

So it's retelling the story of the Red Sea crossing and the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and there they're described as sea monsters, as Leviathan, this great sea monster, the sea beast, and it's destroyed in the waters, the heads are crushed, and in a similar way the serpent of the Egyptians is crushed or defeated by the serpent of Israel, by the dragon that Aaron's rod turns into. Again, that can relate to the imagery of the Red Sea, where you have this path through the sea, a serpent-like path throughout the sea, and then the sea itself as some great sea monster swallowing up the Egyptians that enter into it. Further reference to Egypt as a sea monster can be found in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 29 verses 3 to 5. Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, my Nile is my own, I made it for myself.

I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales, and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams with all the fish of your streams that stick to your scales, and I will cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams. You shall fall on the open field and not be brought together or gathered to the beasts of the earth and to the beasts of the heavens. I give you as food.

Pharaoh the sea monster and the Egyptian sea monsters and fish are going to be defeated, and this is a prologue to the plagues. It's also an anticipation of the great climactic event of the Red Sea crossing. It highlights the importance of the rod and also the importance of the stubbornness of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh responds with stubbornness when his magicians can replicate the sign. It's also ironically in response to Pharaoh's own request for a wonder. The plagues are called signs and wonders in verse 3. They're meaningful portents of judgment.

They're also a pattern of decreation. God is taking his creation and throwing it into a sort of tumult and chaos. He's breaking apart the order and making that order unravel and turn against man.

The plagues have some sort of pattern to them. There are three sets of three plagues and then a climactic final plague. The first plague in each sequence of three, one, two, three, and then four, five, six, and then seven, eight, nine.

The first plague of each sequence, the first, the fourth, and the seventh, begins with Moses rising early in the morning and speaking to Pharaoh, generally as he comes out of the water. The second plague, he comes to Pharaoh, presumably at the palace, to warn

him, presumably during the day. And then the final plague, there is no warning, there's no opportunity to change course, maybe associated with the evening.

The plagues also seem to move upwards. They move from the very base of Egypt, the Nile, up throughout the whole building, from the waters beneath the earth to the heavens above the earth. Every single part of the creation is being touched by God's judgment and testifying to his authority.

Another thing that's important to recognise is that this is drawing our attention back to the initial events of chapter one. Moses threw the baby boys into the Nile. This is the covered up graveyard of Egypt.

They've concealed the bodies in this place. And now the blood of those bodies is calling out from the water. This is a nation that's built on covering up its crime.

And now the creation itself is refusing to collaborate. There's a sign of Egypt's crime that's unmistakable and unavoidable. It's also a sign of God's remembrance of Israel's suffering.

They might have been wondering, has anyone seen this? The waters of the Nile continue to flow day by day as if there were no bodies in there at all, as if our children had not been killed within this river. But now the creation itself testifies to the sin of the Egyptians. It's also an anticipation of the blood of the Egyptians themselves.

In the book of Ezekiel chapter 32 there's a similar judgment made upon Pharaoh. You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a dragon in the seas. You burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet and foul their rivers.

Thus says the Lord God, I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples and they will haul you up in my dragnet. And I will cast you on the ground. On the open field I will fling you and I will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you.

And I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you. I will strew your flesh upon the mountains and fill the valleys with your carcass. I will drench the land even to the mountains with your flowing blood and the ravines will be full of you.

It's a promise there that God will judge the people of Egypt and cause their blood to flow through the land. This anticipates the way that God will judge Egypt in the plagues and then in the final action at the Red Sea. This is a warning.

Now it's important to consider why God doesn't just whisk his people out of Egypt. He could do that. He could deliver them in one fell swoop without any need for all of these different plagues.

The plagues seem to be serving a purpose beyond merely getting the Israelites out of

the land. They seem to be serving a pedagogical purpose, a purpose of teaching the Egyptians and teaching others who God is and also teaching them about their sin so that they might repent. This plague brings to light the crime of the Egyptians and it does so in a way that causes discomfort but not death.

They could repent. If they really took the lesson of this plague to heart they could turn around and many within Egypt presumably do. Another thing that's possibly going on here is a challenge to the divinity of the Nile.

To Happy, this God who claims authority over the Nile, is being defeated on his home turf. The God of the Hebrews is more powerful than the God at the heart of the very life of Egypt. Some further things to notice here.

Some of the context for the performance of the sign might recall the deliverance of Moses and the role of Pharaoh's daughter in chapter 2. Another thing is that the differing agency of Moses and Aaron is important. Both of them have rod actions to perform. Moses strikes the central course of the Nile and then Aaron judges the other rivers and the other water bodies.

However, the Egyptian magicians can replicate the effect and as a result Pharaoh stiffens his heart. They can't provide relief but they can repeat the effect and as a result there is no repentance and the scene is set for the continuing of the signs and the wonders into the chapter that follows. A question to consider.

The first plague highlights the sin of the Egyptians and does so in a way that gives them the opportunity to repent but it makes the fact of that sin unavoidable to them. The ugliness of the sin, the pollution of the sin and the extent of the sin are all presented to them powerfully by the symbol of the water being turned to blood. It also offers them a warning of what will happen to them if they do not in fact repent.

It's an anticipation of what happens at the Red Sea later on. What are some of the ways in which the grace of God can be seen even in his acts of judgment and punishment in scripture more generally? In Exodus chapter 8 we move on to plagues 2 to 4. We should remind ourselves at this point of the pattern of the plagues. There are three sets of three plagues with a great capstone plague, the slaying of the firstborn.

The plagues gradually move from the Nile upwards. They move from discomfort to more direct attacks upon property and flesh to judgment from the heavens. The first cycle has Aaron squaring off against the magicians of Pharaoh.

The second cycle is very much Moses versus Pharaoh and the third cycle is God against the false gods. There's an internal pattern to each cycle in plagues 1, 4 and 7. The first in each sequence they occur in the morning and Moses meets with Pharaoh as he comes out of the river. In plagues 2, 5 and 8, the second in the sequence, he comes to Pharaoh



to warn him, presumably during the day.

And then in the final plague of each sequence there's no warning or opportunity to change course. It's as it were the evening plague. The first plague was the turning of the river and the various waters into blood and the second plague, the plague of frogs, originates in the river and comes out to the land.

There's a natural progression here. The water has been polluted and now things from the water come onto the land and pollute the land. We are told that the Nile swarms or teems with frogs and this language is only used on one other occasion in the book of Exodus.

In chapter 1 verse 7, the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. Israel teems and fills the entire land of Egypt.

Now the frogs will come up from the Nile and do the same. If the turning of the water into blood recalled the infanticide that the Nile had covered up, in the plague of frogs it's as if the teeming people who were drowned are coming up and covering the land once more. God speaks to Moses at this point who has to tell Aaron to stretch out his rod.

Once again Aaron seems to be the main actor while the magicians are still in play as he's their counterpart. They're the pawns on the board and they need to be removed by the time that God deals with the people on the back row, the gods of Egypt and Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh has to request the removal of the frogs.

We can note the parallels between Israel and the frogs again. If Israel teems like the frogs and fills the land like the frogs, the Lord is telling Pharaoh to let his people go but he's also symbolically representing his people's presence in the land in the form of plagues from which Pharaoh must ask for relief. And there's an ironic character to all of this.

God is presenting his people as if a plague upon the land. You can also think about the way that the frogs would be associated with the Egyptian deity of fertility, Heket. This goddess was also associated with midwifery.

This raises the possibility that the frogs don't just represent the Hebrew infants who were drowned within the river that has turned to blood but that there is also some retribution for the role that Pharaoh tried to get the midwives to play in the crime. One of the immediate outcomes of the plague of the frogs is a defiling of the land. The frogs, as their dead bodies are piled up, cause a stink in the land.

Notice that this term has already been used in reference to Israel itself back in chapter 5 verse 21. The Lord look on you and judge because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants. And then the Nile is caused to stink in chapter 7 verses 18 and

21.

There are piles of stinking dead bodies beside the waters. This might make us think further on down the line in chapter 14 verse 30 the dead bodies of the Egyptians themselves are piled up. Maybe that comes into view as well.

Moses' request for the timing of the plague's removal is interesting, particularly in Pharaoh's response. Pharaoh asks, not as you would expect, remove them right away. Get rid of the frogs as soon as you possibly can.

No, he says tomorrow. Why tomorrow? Well in part because any god can perform some great act of power, throwing the muscle of deity around and making some big effect within the world. Any deity can do that.

But something more is at play when we see a god acting with such precision. Not just throwing great power around but acting with great precision. And so asking for the frogs to be removed the next day tests the precision of God.

Is God just a deity throwing his weight around or is God a deity who is able to control things truly? Pharaoh initially relents and agrees to let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord but then he hardens his heart when there is some relief. Following this there is a third plague and this third plague is a sort of spreading of the rot. In the first two plagues Aaron stretched out his rod over the rivers and canals and pools of Egypt but in the third he strikes the dust.

The waters were turned to blood. Now the dust comes alive. It turns into gnats or mosquitoes or lice.

We're not entirely sure what these things are. We might also see a natural progression here. The dead bodies of the frogs have been piled up and within those dead bodies the larvae of mosquitoes and other creatures have been developing and now those come and cause a problem.

The dust is associated with the curse and the third plague leads to the curse coming up from the ground. The topsoil becomes alive and then there's this covering of people. The third plague which is the final in the first cycle of plagues leads to the climactic event of the defeat of the magicians.

They realise that they are dealing with the finger of God. This is not just human trickery or some sleight of hand. There is something here that cannot be replicated by human arts and skills.

This is the finger of God himself and yet Pharaoh strengthens his heart. Now it's important to notice the difference between the ways in which Pharaoh's heart is said to respond. At certain points it is said that he hardens his heart or that God hardens his

heart.

At other points he strengthens his heart or God strengthens his heart. These seem to be different things although there is a relationship between them of course. When he strengthens his heart there's a sort of emboldening of his heart.

He takes new added courage and spirit and he's able to stand up and be even more resistant. The hardening is a lack of responsiveness. This closing down, this making the heart dull and heavy and these are slightly different things.

As God strengthens the heart of Pharaoh we can see that God is giving him the spirit to resist. He's giving him the strength by which he can rise up and resist God. Not just dulling his heart but giving him a greater power in which to pit himself against God.

The fourth plague which comes next follows the same pattern of three. So it begins with the morning as Pharaoh is coming out of the water will be followed by a plague in which Moses presents himself to Pharaoh during the day and then finally a plague that comes without warning later on. Aaron is no longer so prominent within these plagues.

In the previous three he was squaring off against the Egyptian magicians but now they've been taken out of the fight for the most part. So now it's Moses primarily in conversation with Pharaoh. There's also an added dimension at this point in that God makes a distinction between the Egyptians and his people.

Formerly it seems that all came under judgment but God in preparation for taking his people out is gradually separating and distinguishing the people of Israel from the Egyptians. In the swarms of flies or beetles or whatever the creatures are here it's as if the previous plague may be coming more airborne. That's one possibility.

We're not entirely sure what either of these creatures are exactly so it's not entirely certain how they relate to each other. In Psalm 78 verse 45 they seem to be biting insects. Insects or creatures that feed upon the Egyptians.

They also seem to be clinging to the Egyptians and their dwellings to a greater degree. It's not just upon the land and creatures in general. It's like a natural guided missile that these things are following the Egyptians around.

They're going into their houses. They're causing problems that are very clearly targeted upon the Egyptians. There's a greater precision here.

A more targeted character to this particular judgment. This is followed by further negotiations between Pharaoh Moses and Aaron. They insist that they must sacrifice a three days journey according to God's command and when there is some agreement reached we're told that not one of the swarms remained.

This is an expression that's also found in chapter 10 verse 19 in reference to the locusts but also interestingly in chapter 14 verse 28 in reference to the Egyptians themselves that as a result of the judgment of the Red Sea not one of them remains. Seeing the sort of associations that we've noted between the Israelites and the creatures of the plagues but also with the Egyptians and the creatures of the plagues we can see maybe that there's something deeper going on here. These are signs.

They're symbols of what God is doing. They're symbols of judgment but also a possibility how if you respond you can avoid these fates that await you. That these fates that are initially just external discomforts and become more and more intimate and more and more directed that if you respond in time you will be able to avert the fate that awaits you.

However once again Pharaoh proves untrustworthy and won't let them go. A question to consider. The story of the plagues is in many ways a story that teaches us a lot about sin and the way that God brings sin to our attention.

We see the way in which people are reminded of the crime by the water being turned to blood. The way that the crime becomes a discomfort in the plague of the frogs and then how the sin becomes more and more in their face and unavoidable. In the process God is bringing this sin to a reckoning and he's also preparing the people to recognize the true character of the sin.

The judgments bring to light the character of what has been done. What are some of the ways that you see that these passages shed light upon our understanding of sin and the way that God brings it to the surface in our own lives and societies and how we should respond as he does so. In Exodus chapter 9 we arrive at the last two plagues of the second cycle of three plagues and the first plague of the third cycle of plagues.

As we've discussed already the plagues happen in groups of three. So the first one begins in the morning the next one is in the day and then the final one comes without warning. God instructs Moses to go into Pharaoh and to inform him of a coming plague.

Moses by himself without Aaron. There's no mention of the rod or of Aaron's action in the second cycle of plagues. This is a plague upon the livestock and once again there's a distinction made between the Israelites and the Egyptians and God declares a time at which this event will occur.

It says that all of the livestock of the Egyptians die but a few verses later in the plague of the hail we see livestock again. So it seems to me that the statements are either hyperbolic not intended to be taken in a strictly literal sense like we might say everyone came out to support the team recognising that presumably some people still stayed at home but the group of people generally attended or we could think about it only referring specifically to the livestock that are out in the field. So all of the livestock of the

Egyptians, the livestock out in the field are destroyed.

The livestock are suffering on account of the sin of the Egyptians and the resistance of Pharaoh. The natural order and the creatures are set into disarray and they suffer as a result of the sin of human beings. This is something we see at the curse.

This is something that we see also in the flood. Humanity is responsible for the well-being of the animals and as humanity sins the whole of the creation suffers. It's not just human beings that suffer for their own sins.

Our sins have consequences for the entire creation. As the plague upon the livestock occurs Pharaoh checks to see whether any of the livestock of Israel were dead. He wants to ensure that God is actually doing this, that God is able to distinguish between his people and the Egyptians.

Is this just an act of power or is it an act of precision as well? But even when he sees the evidence that God is a God of power and precision he hardens his heart again. The sixth plague, the final plague in the second cycle of plagues, comes without a prior warning. It's simply an act of judgment performed before Pharaoh and Moses performs the action in particular.

Soot is taken from the kilns, that soot thrown up into the air becomes dust and then that dust breaks out and soars on man and beast throughout the land. Once again there is likely symbolism here, a testimony to Egypt's oppression of Israel in forcing them to make bricks. Some have questioned this saying that it isn't clear that the Egyptians used kilns for brick making rather than simply using sun-dried bricks but other commentators dispute that claim saying that during the period we do have evidence of fire-baked bricks not just sun-dried bricks.

It's a symbolic action connecting soot with the affliction that follows and also making clear that God is the one who brings about this problem. Boils elsewhere are associated with leprosy in places like Leviticus 13 and in Deuteronomy chapter 28 the boils are explicitly associated with Egypt. In verse 27 we read the Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt and with tumours and scabs and itch of which you cannot be healed and then in verse 35 the Lord will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

So the boils were associated with Egypt at that point and their very bodies are afflicted at this stage. This is not just the external inconvenience of the water being turned into blood, it's not just the discomfort and the unpleasantness of the frogs and the lice and the flies and these sorts of things. It is something that striking in the more intimate place we might be reminded of the case of Job.

Striking the body is a more severe and intimate attack and there's a sort of living state

of death. There's a putrefaction of the flesh and the association between leprosy and the plagues of Egypt might also come to mind here. The language that's used in association with the also occurs in the context of the laws concerning leprosy in Leviticus chapter 13 and 14.

Leprosy itself is called a plague in those places and also we might think back to the sign that's given to Moses, the second sign, as he puts his hand into his garment and then takes it out and it becomes leprous and then puts it back in again and it's healed. There is a leprosy that's clinging to the nation of Egypt. A leprosy that the sixth plague reveals, brings to light.

At the end of a third plague the Egyptian magicians recognised that they were dealing with the finger of God. They could not replicate the signs performed by Aaron and here they're knocked out more decisively. They're defiled by the skin disease.

They can't stand before Pharaoh anymore. They're overcome completely. But yet God strengthens Pharaoh's heart at this point.

Now what does this mean that God strengthens Pharaoh's heart? The language is different from God hardening Pharaoh's heart or Pharaoh hardening his own heart. The language of hardening suggests the stubbornness and the obstinacy of Pharaoh. He will not respond to God.

No matter what God throws at him he resists. But strengthening suggests something different. Strengthening suggests the emboldening of Pharaoh's heart.

What God seems to be doing here is giving Pharaoh the power to resist. God is not just going to steamroll a Pharaoh. He could do that.

He could just crush Pharaoh with his might. But by strengthening the heart of Pharaoh God is determined to win by principle not just by power. God could win by power.

He could use his power to strike terror, fear and awe into the heart of Pharaoh. So Pharaoh would just give up and surrender and put up his hands. He's faced with a greater power.

He can't do anything. But by emboldening the heart of Pharaoh God ensures that Pharaoh won't just give up. Pharaoh will have to admit his place relative to God.

He won't just submit out of fear and defeat but he will submit as he recognises who God is. The seventh plague is the start of the third cycle of plagues. And once again it happens first thing in the morning.

This time God is going to send the plague more directly himself. God declares that he has raised Pharaoh up for a purpose so that his own power and name might be

proclaimed in all of the earth. God could have taken the Israelites out of Egypt without any trouble.

He could have whisked them away. He could have used darkness for instance and just allowed the people to escape under cover of night. He could have completely devastated the Egyptians instantaneously.

But he didn't do any of those things. It is essential that we see that the exodus, more than the matter of delivering Israel from Egypt, more than the matter of judging the Egyptians for their sins, is about God demonstrating who he is. And the fact that there are a series of plagues, plagues that strike at different parts of the life and the world of Egypt, shows God's power in each one of the realms that would be attributed to different gods of the Egyptians.

This time something else happens that hasn't happened before. There's a warning given and a chance to repent. Whoever fears the word of the Lord has the chance to deliver themselves.

Note the fear of the word of the Lord, not just his destructive might. Any person can fear the plague when it hits but those who fear the word of the Lord will remove their animals and their slaves before it hits. The second cycle of plagues begins a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites, the land of Goshen and the rest of Egypt.

And the third cycle begins a distinction between God-fearing Egyptians and others within the land of Egypt and those who resist the Lord, Pharaoh and his servants who align with him. Moses stretches out his hand, holding his staff towards heaven, and the plague involves thunder, fire and hail all together. This is a massive and terrible electrical storm and the combination is probably a significant sign of God's power to wield these elements in concert with each other.

God is not, like most of the gods of the Egyptians, a god of just one particular element, one particular part of the cosmos. This is a god who is in control of all these different parts of the world and he can use them one after another in succession but also at the same time. This is a sign of God's power over the creation that he has created.

And after this plague, Pharaoh seems to confess his fault but his admission again is shallow and he hardens his heart once more. As Moses recognises when he speaks to him, Pharaoh and his servants still do not fear the Lord. This judgement occurred at the time of the flax and the barley, so it was likely in the first week of February.

Some scholars have observed that the order of the plagues does not seem to be arbitrary, rather we can think of a causal chain that connects them. Now this is not to deny that God is in control of the entire causal chain, indeed that's the precise point, nor is it intended to reduce all of these things to natural causation. There are some plagues

such as the plague on the firstborn which cannot be explained in this way.

The point rather is to show the manner of God's work within his creation. Even miracles can use the natural means and causes of the creation itself. So the suggestion that some have given is that it starts off with heavy rain at the source of the Nile and that pollutes the river with red earth which gives it its red colour, it turns to blood.

But in association with the picking up of this red earth there's this explosion of flagellates and those flagellates cause the water to become smelly, they deoxygenate the water causing fish to die and the place just becomes disgusting. And then as a result of this water going all over the land, as there's been an especially pronounced flooding season, sources of water that people would formerly have depended upon have all become polluted and they have to dig new wells. As a result of this the habitat of the frogs is fouled up by the dead fish and the frogs leave it and go into human residences and elsewhere.

But they become infected by anthrax and after they take refuge in man-made places they end up suddenly dying. At this point the Nile subsides and that leaves all these stagnant pools and within those pools there's a proliferation of mosquitoes. Now this is taking us from August to about September or October.

At that point there is this breeding of horse flies and they are breeding rapidly in the decaying vegetation that has been left behind by the flooding of the river Nile. They don't breed in the land of Goshen because the conditions aren't right for them. They die possibly because they've been infected by the anthrax and then the cattle go out to pasture as the flood recedes, as the Egyptians would usually put their cattle out at that point, but they're eating from ground that has been infested by anthrax, by the dead frogs, and they end up dying as a result.

At this point flies that have picked up anthrax spores from the cattle and elsewhere, they bite animals and human beings and they infect the human beings producing this skin condition. By this point we arrive at the events of the hailstorm and that comes in early February or late January. This has been a series of blows upon Egypt starting at about the time of August and it will go all the way through to April.

It moves from severe irritation to disaster to utterly devastating calamity. It is as if God has set up this vast Rube Goldberg machine of judgment. The sin of Pharaoh and the Egyptians has set in motion and until they repent things are not going to be stopped.

A question to consider. The plagues are a revelation of God's power, of the character of God's power. By this point in the story what have we learned about the character of God's power and the way that it contrasts with the power of the false gods? In Exodus chapter 10 we reach the final two plagues in the third cycle of the plagues.



The eighth and the ninth. The plague of locusts and the plague of the darkness. At this point the plagues have a greater finality to them.

They are no longer warnings to Pharaoh so much as they are final judgments, destruction being brought upon the land. God now declares that he is doing this so that the Israelites will recount his signs performed upon the Egyptians in the future to their sons and their grandsons so that they might know that he is the Lord as they look back upon his humiliation of the Egyptians and their power. A plague of locusts could completely ravage a region devouring everything in sight and the locusts that come here would completely cover the eye of the land so that no one would be able to see the land.

They darken the entire surface of the land. There's playing upon the notion of sight here covering the eye of the land so that no one will be able to see the land. They're darkening the land.

The failure of sight seems to be particularly important in these final two plagues of this cycle. At this point Pharaoh's courtiers get involved and try to get Pharaoh to compromise and negotiate with Moses and Aaron. They see that the land of Egypt is being completely destroyed as a result of the stubbornness of Pharaoh and they want to try and get some sort of deal negotiated.

Pharaoh wants to ensure that the Israelites return and for this purpose he wants the children and the women to stay behind because if they stay behind then they can be sure that the Israelite men will come back for them. They're hostages to some degree. The locusts are brought in by a strong east wind.

They settle on the entire land of Egypt and consume all of its vegetation darkening the whole land. Again Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron to ask them to plead for the removal of the locusts. He describes the locusts as this death.

It is something that has completely ravaged the land and is associated in Pharaoh's mind with death itself. God removes the locusts from the land at Moses' request and there's not a single one left. They're blown away by a strong sea wind and blown into the Red Sea.

But then the Lord strengthens the heart of Pharaoh once more. So once more when the pressure is off he resists the command to let the people go. We are told that not a single locust remained in all the land of Egypt and as we look through this plague we can probably recognise some similarities with other things in the story of the Exodus.

Not least the experience of Israel. We've first encountered a strong east wind with the blighting east wind in the dream of Pharaoh concerning the years of famine. It was that wind that brought in the Israelites to the land and they multiplied and grew strong within the land covering the whole surface of the land.

The locusts are described as the Abbe and that is language that maybe plays upon the description of God's multiplication of the people in places like Genesis chapter 22 verse 17. And when the locusts are removed they are removed by a wind to the Red Sea. Perhaps we are to see in all of this that the locusts represent the people of Israel.

They are going to be removed from the land but they're going to be removed at Pharaoh's request. The locust devouring the land is just one of ten plagues but the Israelites devouring the land as long as they're not being sent away is the whole story of the plagues. This is something that Pharaoh needs to deal with if the locusts of Israel are supposed to go.

Now comparing Israel to locusts in part I think arises from the Egyptians own conception of the Israelites. They think of the Israelites as insects that devour the land that multiply in swarms. They think of them as vermin like the frogs and all these sorts of creatures that are undesirable and destructive.

They're also like flies that cause defilement and until the Egyptians will send the Israelites out they will be afflicted by these creatures. These creatures that represent what they regard the Israelites to be and when they finally send out the Israelites they'll find they're blown into the Red Sea. There's a strong wind that enables them to cross the sea and they never see them again.

They're completely removed. There's not one left in the land and so maybe we're supposed to see Israel within this. But there's another way of seeing it.

We could also see it as representing the Egyptians themselves. They are as a result of their own unfaithfulness destroying their land. It's being absolutely ravaged because of their sin and they will ultimately be blown into the Red Sea and they'll all drown there.

That is going to be their fate and the presence of the wind in the opening up of the sea and then the closing of the sea suggests maybe that there is such a connection here. We might also notice that when the Egyptians are destroyed in chapter 14 verse 28 we are told that not one of them remained. So there's a similarity between the Israelites and the locusts but also some similarities between the Egyptians and the locusts.

The plague that follows is a plague of darkness. Now this doesn't seem to have caused much destruction but symbolically it was incredibly powerful, turning the lights off over the entirety of Egypt. A victory against the greatest god of all in the pantheon, the god that represented the sun itself and his victory over darkness now being repealed.

This is a return to the state of the original creation before light was created and in that respect it's the completion of a de-creation process, an event of devastating symbolic import. This plague was almost certainly the result of a great sandstorm that the darkness could be felt, would be all these different particles and other things in the air

that made the darkness itself tangible. It lasted for three days, once again three days appearing within the stories of Genesis and Exodus.

We've seen this number occurring on a number of occasions to this point and it seems to be a number of some significance. Three days on the journey to Mount Moriah, three days before the chief baker and the chief cut bearer would be restored to office or killed, three days the brothers were placed in prison and three days was also the period of time that they asked to travel into the wilderness. So there seems to be first of all a significant number here, three days, but beyond that more general significance there's the more particular significance of the way that it parallels the three days that they had requested.

As they had asked to worship the lord and that had been denied now there will be three days in which the heavens themselves are blocked out, they have no communion with their great god. Perhaps there's some sort of poetic justice in this particular judgment. Pharaoh summons Moses at this point and he says that they can go and serve the lord, they just have to leave their livestock behind.

He's made a great concession at this point, he's going to allow them to take the women and the children, they just have to leave the livestock. But Moses refuses, they have to take the livestock with them and indeed Pharaoh has to give them sacrifices to take too. It's not enough that Pharaoh will allow them to take their own livestock, they have to take some livestock of the Egyptians as well.

But God strengthens Pharaoh's heart once more and he will not let them go and then Pharaoh dismisses them completely. Pharaoh is not going to allow them to see his face again and Moses confirms that this will indeed be the case. Pharaoh might think that this is some sort of judgment against Moses but really the fact that Moses will no longer come to him with warnings is a sign of judgment upon him, the finality of that judgment.

No longer will there be a heads up that God is about to judge, rather the great judgment to come will fall and it will be catastrophic and final and Pharaoh will not be prepared for it. A question to consider, there is an event in the New Testament that closely parallels the plague of darkness, what event is that and how can we fill out the significance of the parallels between them? The short chapter of Exodus 11 is an interlude between the nine plagues of the first three cycles of plagues and then the great judgment of the final plague. At this point the three cycles have been completed and we're in that period of waiting for the final hammer blow to fall, the decisive plague to end them all.

This is about April time, the plagues began in August so there's been a few months of just one blow after another upon the nation of Egypt. The word for plague used in verse 1 here isn't found elsewhere in the plague narrative but it's used in reference to leprosy in Leviticus 13. This might suggest that what's in view is some sort of disease, very often we're trying to think of some purely supernatural explanation for these things and fail to

see God's demonstration of his power over all things in his creation.

The time for warning and repentance has now passed and we're moving towards the closing of the curtain. Moses is instructed to address the people of Israel rather than Pharaoh at this point. Although he does speak to Pharaoh, Pharaoh no longer seems to be a key player.

The focus in this section is upon relations between Israelites and Egyptians. The Egyptians and the Egyptian officials honour and fear Moses over Pharaoh and indeed Moses says that it will be the Egyptian officials that ask them to leave the land because they are the ones that see the severity of the situation. The Egyptians are favourably inclined towards the Israelites so the Israelites can ask for gold and silver jewellery and they're given it.

This was foretold in Exodus 3 21 to 22. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians and when you go you shall not go empty but each woman shall ask of her neighbour and any woman who lives in her house for silver and gold jewellery and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters so you shall plunder the Egyptians.

We see this again in Genesis chapter 15 verse 14 where God says to Abraham that they'll go out of the land of their captivity with great treasures. You can also think of that theme of plundering in the book of Genesis as Abraham leaves Egypt with many great gifts that he's been given and Jacob leaves the house of Laban with great riches that he's gained during his time there. The way that the plague is described is in terms of a cry and silence and it's also described in the context of themes of mastery that Moses will be treated as the one who's greater than Pharaoh that people will bow to him.

There seems to be an inversion of themes of slavery here that Pharaoh has his house of slaves but now the slaves are being taken from him too. They're bowing to Moses, they're recognising his authority and the authority of Moses' God over the stubborn Pharaoh that rules over them. You can also think in this context of the cry of Israel that went up to the Lord and now it will be the cry of the Egyptians that rises up and the Israelites will be silent.

We might also think of the gold and silver in terms of sale for slavery. Joseph was sold into Egypt and now they leave Egypt with treasures. There seems to be some sort of reversal of the means by which they came down there.

They were sent down there for the sale of money and now they leave with great sums of money. Moses goes to Pharaoh with the message about the destruction of the firstborn and we might ask why? God does not seem to have sent him and at their last encounter Pharaoh had threatened him if he returned. Moses is furious when he leaves Pharaoh as well.

Why? The people of Egypt respect Moses and they honour him and I think they also recognise that Moses is to some extent still one of them. Moses is someone who was raised as an Egyptian, someone who was raised by an Egyptian that saw the suffering of the Israelites and took it seriously and if his Egyptian adoptive mother cared about his cries when he was a child, Moses cares about the cries of the infants of the Egyptians. He sees the pointlessness of the tragedy that Pharaoh is bringing upon his people by his stubbornness.

It's needless but yet the tragedy will be so great. Pharaoh stands alone at this point and the people honour Moses but Pharaoh is going to bring them into destruction. The chapter concludes by summing up the entire plague narrative to that point.

Moses and Aaron showed all these signs but Pharaoh was ultimately unresponsive and God strengthened Pharaoh's heart but Pharaoh used his strength of heart to resist God all the more. A question to consider. When we look at the plagues we can often think in terms of the dichotomy between natural and supernatural.

How might we better understand the way that God is evidencing his power within these great events of judgement? How might it change the way that we think about the categories of natural and supernatural and give us a fuller understanding of God's relationship with his creation? Exodus chapter 12 begins strangely. It begins with the words, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt. This snatches us out of the narrative and positions us at a point from which we are looking back.

Why is this? It seems to be the institution of something that should be ongoing within Israel's life. At this key point liturgy supersedes and interprets narrative as the most important narrative of all in the life of Israel. It takes the form of ongoing ritual.

We're expected to understand the story of the Passover through the lens of the continued liturgy of the Passover. The point of the Passover is not so much the original event as the continued practice. The force of the original events continues and the point of the ritual is the future practice in the land and there are a number of references to this within this chapter.

It's looking forward as are a number of the things in chapter 13 to what they'll continue to do when they're in the land. This event of deliverance will be one that they look back on and which has continued force and emphasis within their lives. It looks forward not just back.

It's a sign of hope not just one of memory. And beyond establishing a new ritual God also resets the calendar. This will provide the basis for Israel's future experience of time.

The interruption of the narrative at this point to institute an ongoing ritual has the effect of heightening suspense. We're waiting for what's going to happen for the hammer to fall

and at this point we're held back. We're waiting for this institution of the Passover and once that has taken place then we can hear about the judgment.

The symbolism of the Passover is worth tearing with. There's a lot that could be explored here but here are a few brief thoughts. They leave in through a bloody door.

In the story of the exodus the prominence of themes of birth and stories of birth are not accidental and in the chapter that follows we'll see more emphasis upon this. Israel is God's firstborn son and the story of the exodus is the story of a coming to birth. We might also think about some other details of the rite.

Why a pot without water in it? Why eat the meal in a group? Why do they have to draw out a lamb? Why do they dip the hyssop in blood? There are many different ways we could explore this. Perhaps there are some connections with the rite for leprosy but perhaps we are also supposed to see connections with the story of Joseph. The pot without water in it might remind us of Joseph being thrown into a cistern without water.

Why eat the meal in a group? They had thrown Joseph into the cistern and sat down and ate a meal together. Why did they draw out a lamb? Well the last time that same phrase was used was in the story of Genesis 37 where Joseph was drawn out of the pit to be brought down into Egypt. Now they're going to have to draw their brother out of Egypt and bring him back to the land to the place where he first got lost.

Why dip the hyssop in blood? Because the brothers dipped Joseph's tunic in blood and presented it to their father. What is the blood that the tunic is dipped in? The blood of a sheep or a goat and the goat's blood was that which was used to feign the death of their brother. The story of the exodus is in part the story of the rescue of Joseph, the brother that was lost in Egypt and the restoration of him back to the land.

It's the expectation at the end of the book of Genesis. It's the event that takes place in the next chapter as they go up with the bones of Joseph and in the book of Joshua at the very end it's the culmination of the story of the exodus, the burial of Joseph. God will execute a final judgment upon the gods of Egypt at this point.

We see this in verse 12. Throughout this story God has been judging not just the Egyptians, not just Pharaoh but also their gods, proving his supremacy in every realm of the universe that he is above any name that might be named, any god that might be appealed to, that he proves his supremacy and his power in the realm where they would claim power. Once again the story of the exodus is the manifestation of the uniqueness of God's identity throughout, not just to Israel but to Egypt and the nations.

God strikes the firstborn son and Israel is God's firstborn son. We saw the threat of this in chapter 4 verses 22 to 23 and now it's carried out. If you do not let my firstborn son go I will kill your firstborn son.

Once again there's a judgment that corresponds to the crime of killing the Hebrew boys, the boys of the firstborn nation. Now the firstborn boys of Egypt are killed. The firstborn represents among other things the strength of the family.

The firstborn is the one who pushes forward the family's destiny and also is the standard bearer for its identity. The firstborn is also the bridge between generations, the bridge between parents and children, representing the mediation of the parents' influence to the younger siblings. As God takes the lives of the firstborn he's judging Egypt for what it has done to his firstborn.

His firstborn Israel is supposed to lead the other nations into his worship and as his firstborn has been taken by another he will strike that opponent until they let his firstborn free. The Israelites dress themselves with the plunder and the riches of the Egyptians as they had been promised by God earlier on. They leave with 600,000 men besides women and children.

This is military numbering. They are God's hosts leaving the land to enter into a new land. The numbers here might also recall those connected with the ark and the age of Noah.

There are similar factors and maybe we're supposed to see some sort of connection. The purpose of the ritual only becomes clear in verses 12 and 13 as God explains why he will pass over their houses as the blood is displayed. This pattern has already been anticipated in Sodom's destruction to some degree.

They eat a meal of unleavened bread at night, there is a threat at the doorway, they are saved at the doorway from the destroying angels and the others are struck with blindness and then they're rescued and brought out of the city. This is a similar pattern to the one that we see in the story of the exodus. They journey to Succoth.

Maybe we can think back to Genesis chapter 33 verse 17 where Jacob first journeys to Succoth after meeting Esau. It's a different Succoth but it's named again for the booths that are established there. The feast of unleavened bread involves the cutting off of leaven, a principle of life and food that connected them with this ongoing ritual of life within Egypt.

That has to be broken with. They have to make a new start and the cutting off of the old leaven is a sign of that. No longer continuing that pattern but breaking with that generative pattern of life and food in Egypt and starting something new.

A connection between the cutting off of leaven and the cutting off of the foreskin should probably be recognised here. In both cases there's a ritual of division and separation occurring. The continued leaven being cut off represents a breach with the life of Egypt and then that is connected later on with the importance of circumcision.

They must prepare for the Passover by cutting off the leaven. They must also prepare for the Passover by cutting off the foreskin. Both of them connected with principles of generation and continued life.

Ritual in these sorts of situations can function as a protective hedge against judgement. Note the way that ritual and institution are often established in the context of judgement, shielding people from wrath. So circumcision occurs just before judgement falls upon Sodom and Gomorrah and the land.

And the Levites are established for a blessing in the context of the judgement at Sinai. Phinehas is set apart for high priestly ministry as he stands up and stops the plague. Passover is established in the context of judgement falling upon Egypt.

The temple is established on the site where God's judgement and the sword of the angel of the Lord is stayed. In all of these places we see ritual and the institutions of Israel's ritual life serving as protective hedges against God's judgement. Holding back God's judgement when he comes near in his holiness and protecting the people from the full force.

The blood on the doorposts and the importance of circumcision might remind us of the encounter on the way to Egypt and Zipporah's circumcision of Gershom. That's a proto-Passover event. It's also an event connected with birth.

And what we're having here is this playing out for the entire nation. They are experiencing what Moses experienced on the way back to the land. And all of this is preparing Israel for its ongoing identity into the future.

This passage is not just about a historical event but by a fundamental generative principle of Israel's life and identity as a people. This is the event to which they will look not only in memory but in hope. It's the framework in which they understand God's concern for them as a people and look forward to the future in which God will reveal and fulfil the true promise of this historical deliverance.

In ritual we are recounting God's great works but we are looking forward to God's greater deliverances. He has made a statement of intent in these historical deliverances and we look forward to the full revelation and realisation of those things in the future. A question to consider.

How does the Passover help us to understand the Christian practice of the Lord's Supper? Exodus chapter 13 continues to be concerned with the establishment of some ritual perpetuation of the memory of the Exodus and the Passover. The sacrifice of the son is a theme throughout the story of Genesis and into Exodus. God will claim the first born son one way or another.

The Passover was the time when Israel became God's first born son in a special way in a



manner similar to the event of the binding of Isaac. God in that event claimed Isaac as his own and Abraham was blessed for his faithfulness but Isaac was also brought into a new status as a result of that event. The Passover creates a new situation.

A situation in which Israel was taken as God's own. It's important to recognise how this is fulfilling so many of the themes of the story of Genesis within which the question of firstbornness and the sacrifice of the son to God, the lostness of the son but then God claiming that son for himself, that theme is prominent throughout. Israel was supposed to be the people that was the first born of the nations, to lead the rest of the nations, providing the bridge between God and the other peoples.

As they were the first born they provided the example that others would follow and all of this helps us to understand why chapter 13 begins with the law concerning the consecration of the first born. The individual first born symbolise and manifest the identity of the nation as a whole. The Levites took the place of the first born of Israel later on standing for the priestly vocation of the people as a whole.

It's important that we appreciate the logic of representation here. The nation as a whole was the first born son but this doesn't mean that every individual in the nation was a first born son so much as that the first born sons of Israel manifested, symbolised and represented something that was true of the nation as a whole, as a unity and as a particular subset of the nation. They stood for something that was true of the whole.

We can think about this in terms of the body. There are certain aspects of the body that can stand for the whole. The strength of the body can be particularly focused upon the hand.

The sense of the self of the body can be focused upon the face. The face is the soul of the body as some have called it. We can think about other aspects of the way for instance the mouth and the tongue start to represent the expression of the self from within what comes forth.

In all of these respects we can see an analogy to the way that human societies work where individual groups or subsets of the larger whole can stand for some aspect of that which is true for the entire body. The nation then was the first born son and that first born son character was represented first of all by the literal first born males of Israel but also later on by the priests. Likewise the nation was a priestly nation but most of the people were not priests rather it was just a subset of the tribe of Levi and the priestly character of the nation was represented by those figures within it.

The consecration of the first born implies sacrifice. No humans are being sacrificed. They are substituted for but they are subject to the logic of sacrifice.

Either the first born are killed or they are claimed and if they are claimed they have to be

substituted for and symbolically offered in that substitute. All of this is connected with the time of the Passover and the Passover occurs in the spring when livestock would typically bear their young. It's connected also with the historic event of the Passover.

There are themes of first fruits and first born here that relate both the agricultural feast and also to the redemptive historical feast. The festal pattern of Israel connected specific times of the year and agricultural patterns with redemptive events in history. This continues into the new covenant where Easter for instance is connected with the feast of first fruits and that connection is seen in Christ as the first born from the dead and the first fruits of the grave.

The grain harvest was associated with Passover as were the animals bearing of their young. Once again Moses emphasises the ongoing rituals that are instituted in association with the historical events and the ways that those have resonances with other aspects of the life of the people. They will be starting an agricultural life when they enter into the land.

They're not yet engaging in agriculture. They're on the move but there will come a time when the agricultural calendar is something that shapes their self-understanding and when that occurs they will understand the events of the Exodus in terms of that. The ongoing rituals that are instituted are arguably eclipsing the actual recounting of what happened at many points.

The point is not so much the focus upon what happened as a historical event that's important in its place but what is really important is that the force of this event, Israel being taken as God's first born and claimed as God's first born, continue throughout the life of the nation. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is the cutting off of what came previously. The consecration of the firstborn however is about the new, about the opening of the womb, about some new order being instituted and established.

The changed calendar and the yearly festival serves to keep that historical event of the Exodus in people's attention and memory. It has continuing significance for Israel's life and identity as God's firstborn son. And there's a concern for future life in the land here.

On three occasions within these chapters Moses talks about what will happen when they come into the land. It would be easy when Israel were brought into the land to forget the lessons of the Exodus and what that meant for their self-understanding. The Exodus wasn't merely to deliver Israel from slavery, to achieve the purpose of removing them from the bondage of Pharaoh.

It was also to reveal who God was and to bring them into a new relationship of sonship with him. And the continuing ritual is very much concerned with passing these things on, with such things as the instruction of children, an element that is highlighted on several occasions in chapters 12 and 13. The firstborn males of the animals would belong to the

Lord and be sacrificed to him.

They would also be used for the provision of the priests and could be eaten before the Lord by the worshipper on occasions. You can see that in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 19. Donkeys, as they were an unclean animal that Israelites might own, couldn't be sacrificed but must have their neck broken or preferably be redeemed by a lamb.

The firstborn males were to be redeemed. How exactly this was to take place isn't fully explained here but presumably it was with five shekels. You can see that in Numbers chapter 18 verse 16 compared with Leviticus chapter 27 verse 6. The distinction between the sexes here is also noteworthy.

The firstborn seems to refer to males in particular and I think in places like Numbers chapter 3 verses 40 to 49 the firstborn seem to be far more clearly specified as the firstborn males. Throughout the Old Testament in particular there is a lot of attention given to the difference between the sexes. The firstborn sons who must be circumcised stand for the identity of the whole people in a particular way.

They stand for the strength of the people. They're the first fruits of the people. They're preeminent among the passing on of the life of the people to the next generation.

They are the preeminent ones of that next generation. They're also the ones that are most particularly the image of the father of the previous generation. They carry on that image and represent that image particularly among the sons.

The firstborn male would bear the mantle of the father as the father passed on and would for that reason receive a double portion of the inheritance. As we live in a highly individualistic society it's difficult for us to understand how these things operate. But this is the way the church is supposed to be understood too.

Israel had differentiated roles and identities within it. The mother was not the same as the father. The father was set over against but in a very clear relationship with the firstborn son that differed from his relationship with the younger son or with his daughter.

All of these different places within the life of Israel served to stand for the larger identity of Israel. Same with things like the Levites. The Levites stood for the priestly identity of the whole nation but they were just one particular tribe.

In Genesis chapter 49 verse 3 we have a sort of definition of the firstborn. Reuben you are my firstborn my might and the first fruits of my strength preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. It is essential that we understand the way that the firstborn represented aspects of other people's characters.

The firstborn was the one who opened the womb and so represented something very

powerful for the mothers of Israel. The firstborn was the one who's the first fruits of his father's strength and also preeminent in dignity and might among his brothers and the one who provided the bridge between the generations. The one who set the pattern for the younger generation being the particular image of the father.

In all of these ways we need to see that the firstborn was not just a detached individual. The firstborn stood for the whole reality of Israel itself conceived from a particular vantage point. It stood for something for the wife and the mother.

It stood for something for the brothers and the sisters. It stood for something for the father. For God to claim the firstborn was to claim something about Israel as a whole and also for each individual in Israel.

It was saying to women you must give up that child that represents your transition into motherhood. Becoming a new sort of person and you must give up the fruit of that to recognize God's claim upon that. Saying to the fathers that firstborn son that you have that represents your legacy your strength being passed on to the next generation that one belongs to God.

He has claimed that for himself. He was saying to the brothers and the sisters that one that you look to as your model that one is claimed by God and as a result you must follow a model that has been set by God. Now we can see that this was not the only figure within the life of Israel that was important.

Fathers were the heads of their household. The oldest son was a sort of miniature head one that was as it were the image of the father's headship among his brothers. And then we can think about the character of the wife and the mother as the heart of the household.

The beating heart that gave the unity and the sense of cohesion to its life. Each of these figures represented something essential about the existence of the nation as a whole and represented part of each person's identity to them. A person's mother is not just an individual that they relate to.

A person's mother is part of them. It's an aspect of their identity held by someone else in the same way as someone's father represents a part of themselves outside of themselves. This is the way the Bible operates and it's very difficult for our individualistic society to understand but once we do the power of God's claiming of the firstborn will begin to make a bit more sense.

God sent them out of Egypt and took them the longer way around sparing them from immediate warfare. Had they taken the way of the Philistines they would have been invading Canaan very quickly something for which they really were not ready. They travelled around in military formation.

They went out in ranks in groups of 50 or fives maybe. They moved in an orderly manner and this isn't just a rag-tag bunch of people in the wilderness. They're prepared to some degree for what lies ahead and they go up with Joseph's bones.

They're delivering that lost son from Egypt the one who had been sent down into Egypt is now being brought back up. What went wrong in Genesis chapter 37 is being set right now and that is a core theme of the Exodus. God is going to redeem that son that was lost in Egypt.

He's going to bring him back to the land and he's going to be buried in Shechem the place where it all went wrong. They are setting right something that had gone wrong at the beginning of the story. It's also a reminder of the story of Hagar and Ishmael.

The Egyptian maid servant afflicted in the house of the Hebrews now has been replaced with the Hebrews afflicted in the house of the Egyptians as their servants and they have experienced the world from Hagar and Ishmael's perspective. Hagar and Ishmael had a sort of Exodus experience. Hagar was afflicted and she fled from the presence of Sarah and then later on they wandered in the land of Israel.

God is replaying this history but in a different way and so Israel is entering into the experience that they inflicted upon others and until they can recognize themselves in the experience of Hagar and Ishmael as they have come to they cannot truly be the people that will represent the whole. They cannot truly be the firstborn unless they feel that affinity with their brothers in humanity. Unless they can recognize that they too are connected with the Egyptian Hagar.

This is one of the reasons why it matters that they go up from Egypt with a mixed multitude with many people who aren't descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but people who have joined the nation from outside and are going to be assimilated into its life. They are going to be adopted into its life. The outsiders, the outcasts, the foreigners, the people who don't belong, the strangers are now going to become part of the family.

That is an event that is reversing the pattern that we see in the story of Ishmael and Hagar or the story of Joseph where the one who belongs to the family is being cast out. Now it is going the other way. They are led up by a pillar of fire and cloud.

The divine chariot is a manifestation of God's glorious presence and I think that is what is taking place here. You can maybe contrast this with the ways that God generally revealed himself in Genesis where God would come in the form of the angel of the Lord and he would be present in a more human form and relate to people in that way. This is a step up in glory and perhaps the pillar of fire should also throw our minds back to the burning bush.

The pillar of cloud and fire is a manifestation of God's own constant presence with them.

The Lord is going up before them and he is never going to leave them. He is not going to forsake them.

He is going to be with them every step of the way. A question to consider, how might the interplay of narrative and ritual instruction in such a passage as this help us to understand the purpose of law in scripture more generally? The story of Exodus chapter 14, the crossing of the Red Sea, is a pivotal event in the Exodus narrative. It is the hinge that leads from the Exodus narrative and the plagues to the story of the wilderness.

It is a narrative once again sandwiched in liturgical material. On the one hand it has the material concerned with the Passover celebration and the law of the firstborn and on the other side it has the song of the sea. God is going to gain glory over Pharaoh.

He strengthens Pharaoh's heart again. Pharaoh has changed his mind in verse 5 and God intensifies Pharaoh's resolve. This is for his glory and also for the revelation of his glory to the Egyptians.

In verse 25 of the chapter the Egyptians declare that the Lord fights for the Israelites. God will gain honor over the Egyptians in this and gain honor from them as they declare his glory. God said in chapter 9 verse 16, for this purpose I have raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

There are 600 chosen chariots that pursue the Israelites. 600,000 Israelites have left the land of Egypt so there's one chariot for each one of the thousands of Israel and beyond that there are many other chariots besides. Back in Genesis chapter 50 there was an honor guard of chariots that accompanied the body of Jacob as it was being brought to the land of Canaan to be buried there.

God once again is having chariots accompany his people out of the land, this time as pursuers, no longer as an honor guard. But there is a sense of the honor that he will gain in both instances, either with the Egyptians as an honor guard or with them as pursuers to be defeated. The numbers are interesting.

600,000 of Israel, divided in 50s as they're going out in 50s in their ranks, is 12,000. It's the tribes times a thousand then times 50. It probably is a significant number for that reason.

We can think maybe back to the story of the flood as well. There are 120 years leading up to the flood. The width of the ark is 50 cubits.

Israel goes out in 50s and they're 40 times the length of the ark is in cubits in numbers of their ranks. Maybe there's something to this. Maybe we're supposed to see a new ark going through the waters.

The Egyptians overtake the Israelites and Israel is trapped between the sea and the

Egyptians and at this point the people cry out against Moses. Moses tells them not to be afraid. God will fight for his people.

All they have to do is be silent and watch God's deliverance. Once again God strengthens the hearts of the Egyptians. The point is not to harden them but to give them the courage and the resolve to go through with their purpose.

They become foolhardy enough to follow the Israelites into the sea. Moses in this story plays a central role. He is the one who goes before Israel.

He is the one who is the backbone of the nation, giving them confidence in a time of terror and fear and he declares that as they stand and watch that God will accomplish his salvation. This whole event is in some way encapsulating the greater deliverance. It's returning to the original crime of the Egyptians.

The Egyptians cast the Hebrew boys into the waters of the Nile. Now they are being cast into the Red Sea. Their boys are being cast into the Red Sea and there is a sort of poetic justice occurring here.

We might also see symmetry with the story of Moses himself. The sea is the Red Sea but it also could be translated as the Reed Sea. The word that we have for the place where Moses was placed among the reeds is the same word used for the description of the sea here.

Moses received his name as he was drawn out from the water. Israel is drawn out from the water here. Moses was greeted by his sister Miriam as he was delivered.

She was the one who came and spoke with the daughter of Pharaoh and ensured that he was given to his mother to nurse him. Now we have a similar situation. Miriam will greet the people with song at the other side.

So Moses does not merely lead them through the Red Sea, give them confidence as they take the route that God has opened to them. He is also the one who is the exemplar of the salvation that God is about to work for them. He has already experienced this.

They are entering into something that he has already undergone. The angel of God goes before them and the connection between the angel of the Lord and the pillar of cloud is interesting here. They are associated together and yet they seem to be slightly different.

Maybe we can think about this in terms of the relationship between the angel of the Lord and the glory cloud of the Spirit. At various points in the book of Genesis we have an appearance of the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord, I believe, is associated with the second person of the Trinity.

At many of those points the angel of the Lord does not appear with glorious

manifestations surrounding him. Whereas here there is that association. Maybe we should see a movement into a greater degree of glory occurring at this point.

There are many creation themes that we might recognise in the story of the Red Sea crossing. There is the presence of the Spirit, the glory cloud of the Spirit that might remind us of the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep at the very beginning of the story of creation in Genesis chapter 1. There is the light in the darkness, the light of the pillar of cloud. There is the division of the waters.

There is the raising of the land from the waters and dry land emerging from the waters. It is a new creation event and there are continued themes of God's supernatural work against the nation of Egypt. Evening and morning were the first day and now there is a new evening and morning.

The evening of the crossing passes and a new day emerges where everything has changed. Israel has been created as a new nation. The Egyptians lie dead at the bottom of the sea and they have emerged into a new freedom.

The Egyptians descend into the tomb of the deep and they recognise that the Lord fights for Israel and none of the Egyptians remain at the end. The response of the Israelites is to fear God and to believe in his servant Moses. This once again recalls the early story of Moses, that Moses is set apart from the people as a leader but also as an example, as one who has undergone this experience before them.

He goes before them in his personal life through the waters. He's drawn out of the waters. They are drawn out too.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul speaks about this as them being baptised into Moses. What happened to Moses happens to them later on. It's a similar pattern with us and Christ.

Christ is drawn out of the waters of death and we follow through him as he has opened up the abyss of death so that we might walk through on dry land. The crossing of the sea is a definitive transition and in the story of Israel, we have a series of these transitions, water crossings, at which the identity of the people is defined. They served foreign guards on the far side of the great river, the Euphrates.

They received the name of Israel at the ford of the Jabbok. They are delivered from Egypt through the Red Sea. They enter in through the Jordan.

Each one of these transitions is an event in which Israel receives something of their identity and as they would look back to these events and also see these physical boundaries of their nation, they would be reminded not only of past deliverances but of their present identity. Water crossings bookend the entire wilderness experience. The whole wilderness period could be spoken of as if it were in this period of the crossing.



It's as if they're in the middle of these two bodies of water and they have to pass through this liminal realm, this space on the threshold between Egypt and the promised land. This can be spoken of as a conflation of the two events as we can see in places like Psalm 66 verse 6, the drying up of the sea and the passing through of the river. Those two events belong together and that bookending also leads to a symmetry of the going out and the coming in.

Those two events are similar and they also express something of the connection between what Moses does and what Joshua does. The event of the Red Sea crossing has an incredibly important part to play in the later praise of Israel. They would look back to this event, look upon God's deliverance and recount it in praise and in song.

It was also something that was connected with deeper themes, God's power over evil and the forces of chaos for instance. That's the way it's described in Psalm 74 verse 13 to 14. In chapter 63 of the book of Isaiah we see a similar thing.

Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them, to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths like a horse in the desert. They did not stumble like livestock that go down into the valley. The Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.

So you led your people to make for yourself a glorious name. Israel is led through the sea but this is described as if it were a new creation experience. As if God was setting the heavens in place.

As if God were working with the deep to divide the waters, bring out dry land. Israel is being formed as a new cosmos. God created the heavens and the earth.

Now God is creating a new heavens and a new earth and new people from this water crossing and the cosmic themes that come to the surface here are not accidental. Nor is it accidental that within the New Testament we'll have further uses of this material concerning the Red Sea Crossing to describe the experience of the church, the actions of Christ and the events of his ministry. For instance in the story of Jesus' temptations, the event of the baptism leading to the 40 days in the wilderness.

We should not be surprised to see some sort of connection here. I've already mentioned Isaiah chapter 63 verses 10 following and if you listen carefully to those verses you will have heard the words that the book of Hebrews brings out in verse 20 of chapter 13. Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will.

He's drawing upon the Old Testament story of the Red Sea Crossing as it is recounted in the story of Isaiah and he's presenting this as a paradigm for thinking about the resurrection. That Christ is the one who opens up this new sea before us bringing out a new flock of God's people. He is the new shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep.

Like Moses brought the people out and formed the people under his leadership, so Christ forms a new people as he leads people up not from the womb of Egypt but from the womb of the tomb itself so that they might walk through on dry ground through the abyss of death itself. Water crossing in the story of the exodus is a new birth. It's a new birth also in the story of the resurrection.

Creation and redemption are connected here. We see that God who delivers his people from Egypt is the same God who created the heavens and the earth to begin with. A question to consider.

Throughout the history of the church the story of the Red Sea Crossing has provided an important paradigm and pattern for thinking about Christian baptism. How can you see the pattern of Christian baptism within the story of the Red Sea Crossing in chapter 14 of the book of Exodus? Following the deliverance of chapter 14 of Exodus at the Red Sea, chapter 15 contains two great hymns of praise. In some respects the Song of the Sea or the Song of Moses could be compared to a sort of national anthem for Israel.

Both of these parts of the song are preceded by a reference to God's great act of deliverance in chapter 14 verses 27 to 29 and in chapter 15 verses 19. The first of these great songs is led by Moses and Moses leads the people in this song of worship and praise to the Lord and it's followed by a refrain led by Miriam the prophetess as she sings to the women. Perhaps we should see this as a sort of antiphonal singing as they're singing back and forth to each other and it seems to be part of the liturgy of victory more generally.

In the book of 1st Samuel chapter 18 verses 6 and 7 the women come out to meet King Saul with tambourines with songs of joy and with musical instruments and the women sang to one another as they celebrated. Saul has struck down his thousands and David his tens of thousands. A similar song can be found in chapter 5 of the book of Judges as Deborah and Barak sing concerning their victory over Sisera and his men.

This song like the other elements round about, the legal elements, are part of the liturgical aspects of Israel's continuing life that are associated with the deliverance. This is not just a historical song it's a song that they would have been singing in the future to memorialise this particular event and the significance of what God achieved through it. It connects the Red Sea crossing with future events preparing us for the conquest of the land, the passing over of the Jordan and finally the planting on God's holy mountain.

It isn't just about leading them out it ends on the theme of leading them in. The chiefs of

Edom dismayed. Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab.

All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them. Because of the greatness of your arm they are as still as a stone.

Till your people, O Lord, pass by. Till the people pass by whom you have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain.

The place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode. The sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The Lord will reign forever and ever.

It's looking forward not just to the time in the wilderness but to the time when they'll be settled in the land. They'll be worshipping God on his holy mountain, on his abode. This song then deals with the whole range of the founding events of Israel leading up to the completion of the significance of those events as they are finally established in worship in the land.

We can see something of this in the building of Solomon's temple where in the context of the building of that temple there are a number of references back to the exodus. The exodus was always looking forward to the completion of the establishment of worship and once that worship is established and instituted then the exodus has reached its purpose, the end for which it always existed. This is similar to songs of deliverance that we might find in the psalms and there's a sort of realized eschatology then.

This event is definitive. It's definitive for Israel's deliverance and everything else that comes next is already in this event by implication. Being led out of the land is already by implication connected with the event of being led in to the promised land.

God is creating a new heavens and a new earth and we should attend to the language of creation that's employed here because it's drawing the events of redemption into the orbit of the symbols of creation. It's testimony to God grounded in historical acts in which his character and purpose are revealed. The character and purpose of a God who both creates and redeems.

A God who demonstrates his power over his creation but also his faithfulness to his people. A God who proves his supremacy over the false deities and his enemies. Verses 11 and 12.

But on the other hand he is the God who comes near to his people. The God who is faithful, who will lead them in, who has demonstrated his commitment to them. God has never before rescued a people, delivered them from oppression in quite the way that we see here.

The event produces a number of responses. The praise of Israel most notably. This whole song is a response to what God has done.

It leads to the overcoming and humbling of his adversaries and the trembling of other oppressors as they hear of the example of Egypt. The whole world is seeing this and marvelling. This is a declaration of divine purpose and of divine identity.

And as we read through this song maybe we should notice that there is a certain departicularisation that occurs. This song does reference Egypt in verse 4 for instance but as you go further into it it's not just about Egypt. It's about something more expansive.

It's about God's power over his creation. It's about God's power over oppressors and adversaries. Beyond their historical particularity the Egyptians also stand for the chaotic forces of the world and all that might be arrayed against God.

God's victory here is of cosmic significance and it goes out to the world in its message. The importance of song more generally should be reflected upon here. Song is not just an ascent to some divine truths that we sing about but it's a stirring of emotions, a declaration of God's glory from the heart.

It's a taking up of these statements in the form of the first person where it's not just a word that God has declared that you're agreeing to but it's something that you are declaring from within as your commitment, your belief and your desire and your animating passion. This exists also for the benefit of memory and for memorialisation. We memorise songs.

We don't necessarily intend to but songs stick in our heads and so if we're singing something over a period of time it's very hard not to memorise some of the words and putting the great deliverance of God into song is one of the ways in which these events are memorialised so that they will not be forgotten, so that they provide the foundation for the understanding of God's self-revelation in history. As people looked back they could see what God had done and learn who God was through his past actions. It should be noted that as we go through the book of the Psalms again and again we encounter the event of the Red Sea Crossing as a fundamental testimony to who God is, to his faithfulness, to his power, to his strength of his arm and his supremacy over all opponents and adversaries and oppressors.

God is the great warrior, he's the great king, he fights not with human weapons but with his very creation, with the winds, with the deep, with the sea, with the flood, with the earth that swallows up his enemies. God wields nature itself against all his adversaries. This is a song of historical deliverance but it's also a song about God's creational power and throughout the story of the plagues this is what we've been seeing again and again.

It's God's hypernatural power that God is using nature itself in the most powerful way to achieve his ends. In the book of Genesis it's God using history to achieve his ends. In the story of Joseph this comes to the forefront and now we see God's power over nature and

of history together.

God is the God who controls all the forces of the world, the forces of time, the forces of space, the forces of the things and the elements that are within the creation. From this though there is quite a step down. They end up in a place called Mara and they're thirsty and there's no fresh water to drink.

Perhaps this should draw our minds back to the result of the first plague where the water was turned to blood and it could not be drunk and that bad water was a cause of great distress and annoyance and frustration and irritation to the Egyptians. And now Israel is facing the same problem. Can God deliver them from the plagues, from the problems that these other nations might experience? This water that can't be drunk is healed by a log or some wood being placed within the water.

There are a number of references to wood in the story of the exodus that might be worth connecting with this. Perhaps we should connect it with the theme of the rod. The rod as this wooden object performs all sorts of miracles and wonders.

Putting the log or the wood into the water has a desalination effect. It removes the salt brackiness from the water and the water can be drunk. Now is this a miracle or is it some natural power of this particular type of wood? It could quite possibly be the latter.

God instructs Moses to do this thing. It's not a command as he was commanded to stretch out his rod so that the waters would be divided in a miraculous way. Rather maybe God is instructing Moses in how to use elements of the world itself to achieve his ends.

Maybe God is equipping Moses to engage in the use of nature itself to achieve great purposes. The event here however shows that God's power over creation is not merely to destroy or to use it as a weapon but it can be healed. God can restore the creation.

God can make the creation a life-giving source not just a source of death and destruction and judgment. This is the reversal of the first plague and now Moses and the people can drink from water that was formerly undrinkable. One interesting feature of this narrative is the possibility that it may be playing upon the name of Miriam.

Miriam has just been present in the story of the Red Sea crossing and the worship afterwards. That calls our mind back to the original deliverance from the water that Moses experienced as an infant where once again Miriam was present and she was active just afterwards. She provided nursing for the child that was delivered from the reeds.

Now the people have been delivered from the sea of reeds and she is the one who sings with Moses at that great deliverance and following that singing water is provided. Miriam's name seems to mean bitter sea or maybe it means rebellion but the same

letters are found in a number of different words within this passage. The name of Mara itself, the word for bitter, the word for the waters, the word for the name of the place itself.

Maybe there is some association with Miriam and the waters. Now this might all seem very speculative and it is speculative but when we go further on in the story there seems to be some hint of a connection between Miriam and the water in the wilderness and as we look through the book of Numbers perhaps we'll study this in more detail. Here however God is testing his people, testing if they're going to be obedient.

God is giving them commandments and instructions not just as a testing of whether they're absolutely loyal to him but in order that he might be their healer. The purpose of God's instructions and commandments to his people is in order that they might know well-being, that they might be people who rejoice in his presence and his good gifts. Not people who are just obedient because of command but people who delight in what God gives them, who know him as their provider, as their healer and as their guide through the wilderness.

God will heal then and deliver his people. This is not just negative. A question to consider.

There are 70 palm trees and 12 springs of water at Elim. Why would we be told those details? Why do those numbers have some significance? In Exodus chapter 16 the hypernaturalism that has been a feature of the story of the Exodus to this point continues. It begins with a complaint about the lack of food.

They look back with longing upon the food of Egypt. There is a food crisis but there is an attendant faith crisis. Would they rather be in the service and employ of Pharaoh where they have reliable food and they can build up and accumulate food day by day and not have any concern about not having food for the next day? Or would they rather trust upon God their deliverer, the one who cares for them, and rely upon his provision? God is continuing to test his people.

Note that the point of the Exodus is not just the mere deliverance of people from oppression. It's a revelation of God's character for the end of proper relationship with him. It's not just about deliverance.

God is testing his people to see whether they will trust him in a difficult situation. Will they trust him when they need to depend upon him? And there is a discipline of trust that they must learn that will be taught in large part through the giving of the manna which occurs in this chapter. The pattern of the Sabbath will be established and revealed along with the gift of the manna.

It involves a relationship between God's foundational work in the creation itself and

Israel's dependent work upon God's foundational work in the providence that he exercises within his creation and Israel's dependent work as they depend upon the good gifts of creation to gather what they need for themselves. It's going to be a sign of reliance upon the God who works in all things. And the introduction of the Sabbath at this point is also important as a contrast to the lack of rest in Egypt.

They are going to serve a new master. They need to depend upon this master, to trust this master, not to see themselves as at odds with this master. They complain but Moses makes clear that they are complaining against God himself.

God is the one who brought them out of Egypt. He is the one who established the exodus. Moses is his servant.

It wasn't Moses who achieved this. It was God. And it's an impugning of God's character to suggest that he wouldn't provide for the people that he has delivered.

The glory of God appears in the cloud at this point and something about the appearance of the cloud presumably changed to indicate that God was gloriously present within it. At the evening God provides quail as food and in the morning he provides manna. The focus is particularly upon the manna but that evening morning pattern might draw our mind back to creation itself.

God is providing over six days and then on the seventh he's going to give rest. He is establishing the creation pattern that we see back in Genesis chapter 1 and he's teaching his children to operate with the same pattern. He's teaching them to act as their father acted.

He's treating Israel as his firstborn son to the training to work in the pattern of their father. Manna is provided in a way that requires and necessitates radical dependence. There's an omer given per head.

A particular quantity that is enough to feed them but no more than that. They have this omer given to them of a substance that is mysterious. What is it? They don't know what it is.

It's not clear. It's not something that fits into their regular categories. It has a honey like flavor and maybe we're supposed to see here a foretaste of the land that will be given to them.

A land flowing with milk and honey. In first Corinthians chapter 10 Paul can speak about this as all eating the same spiritual food. There is something about what is given to them in this manna that anticipates something of the land that they're going to enter.

It also maybe points to a feeding upon God in a deeper sense. We have the manna of the Lord's Supper. The point of the manna is to give us a foretaste of the kingdom that we

will enter into in the future.

Later on in the story of the Exodus we read of the grapes of Eshcol. Some grapes that are taken from the land and brought into the wilderness so that the people can taste something of the good gifts and fruit of the land before they enter into it. And here maybe they're having a foretaste of a greater land that they will enter into at some point in the future.

Some commentators upon the book of Exodus have suggested that there is a naturally occurring phenomenon that could account for the gift of the manna. And I would not dismiss that out of hand. We've seen throughout the story of the Exodus that there is a hyper naturalism to the story.

God uses natural means to achieve his supernatural purposes. We are not looking for an explanation within the blind events of nature, of a nature that's autonomous, works on its own principles and has no relationship to a creator. Rather the point is that there are natural processes that the creator God will use for his purposes to achieve his ends for his people.

And so experiencing the gift of the manna, the point is not necessarily that God can overrule and provide beyond the provision of nature. The point is that the God of nature can provide for everything that they need. If he's the God of nature he does not need to provide from some other source.

He has great storehouses. He's the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He can find a way to bring his bounty to them and they need to learn to depend upon him.

Manna can't be accumulated. It can't be preserved. You can't gather an excess for trade.

It must depend day by day upon provision and they must depend on extra provision on the day before the Sabbath, an extra sense of trust that must come in at that point. On the day before the Sabbath you're not just relying upon the regularity of a natural pattern. You must depend upon the God who establishes those patterns.

You must depend upon God to provide over and above what the regular pattern of nature would presume you would be receiving. There's no assurance beyond the character of God. You cannot have guarantees that release you from the burden of trust.

It isn't given in proportion to labour. Those who try and gather a lot end up with just as much as they need. Those who gather little and struggle maybe have just what they need too.

They must work to gather it. It's like the workers on the vineyard in Jesus' parable. They are provided with exactly what they need and no more.



They must be willing to depend upon God completely for provision. We should see connections between the testing of Israel here in the wilderness and the Egyptians being judged with the plagues. There's hypernaturalism at work in both places.

God rained hail upon Egypt and now God rains bread from the heavens upon the children of Israel. The locusts came up upon and covered the land of Egypt. The quail come up upon and cover the wilderness.

In Numbers 11 the wind brings the quail like the wind brings the locusts and so there is a symmetry. The symmetry between the God who is in control of nature and can tear nature apart and use nature as a weapon against his enemies and the God who is the Lord of nature and can use nature to serve his people, to protect them, to feed them, to give them everything that they need. There are other food tests that we can see in the Old and New Testament that have a similar pattern.

Maybe we could think of 1 Kings chapter 19 as Elijah is in the wilderness and he's provided for by God or the story of Elijah where he's given the ravens to give him food. God can use even these birds of prey and carrion to provide for the prophet who's in need. A similar thing in Jesus in the wilderness.

He must be tested concerning food. Is he going to trust God? Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God is the one that we trust.

God is the one that provides and as a result we can depend upon God in these situations of extremity but also in these situations of the day-to-day provision. This is the pattern that the story of the manna provides. It's a lesson that's supposed to be taken into the future of Israel's life.

Not just as something that is left in the past in the wilderness experience that they grow beyond as they enter into the land. Manna is a pattern for God's provision more generally. In Leviticus chapter 23 verses 10 to 11 it's recalled in the practice of the sheaf or the omer that's offered and it's the same term that's used in the Hebrew.

In chapter 23 verses 10 to 11 we read, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf or the omer of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf or the omer before the Lord so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

As in the case of the manna preserved before the testimony, this ongoing practice of presenting the firstfruits, the firstfruits that are weighed in the omer or the sheaf that is the same measurement of the manna provided each day, Israel was recalling God's fundamental provision in the wilderness as a constant lesson to be recalled in its life in

the agricultural system of the land. They depend upon God there too. It's less obvious, it's less apparent, but it's no less true.

They depend upon God for daily provision and in offering up that firstfruit, that omer, they are recalling the lesson that they learnt concerning the manna in the wilderness. A question to consider. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 13 to 15, Paul writes, For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Paul here quotes from the story of Exodus chapter 16, referencing the words concerning the manna, but he's applying it to the practice of Christian charity. How does his argument work and what can it teach us about the principle of the manna as it relates to our practice as the people of God? In Exodus chapter 17, Israel is moving by stages through the wilderness toward the promised land, following the itinerary that has been established for them by the Lord, and the people blame Moses for bringing them out into the wilderness to die of thirst.

They've run out of water, there's another water crisis, they've had that crisis at Marah, and now there's another. Massah and Meribah are spoken of on a number of occasions within the Old Testament as places where Israel tested God. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 16, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him at Massah.

In Psalm 78 verses 17 to 20, yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the most high in the desert. They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God saying, can God spread a table in the wilderness? He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed.

In Psalm 81 verse 7, in distress you called and I delivered you, I answered you in the secret place of thunder, I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Then in Psalm 95 verses 7 to 9, today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof though they had seen my works. By the time of Numbers chapter 14 verse 22, we're told that the Israelites had tested the Lord 10 times.

This testing of God proceeds from unbelief and is an attempt to force God's hand, to set God an ultimatum. We can see examples of this perhaps most clearly in the temptations of Christ. It's an attempt to force God to prove himself to sight rather than living by faith.

It's not taking God at his word, it's trying to force God to prove himself. Moses recognised that his own life at this point was potentially under threat. The people were almost at the point of being willing to stone him.

Moses and some of the elders were sent ahead, ahead of the Israelites with the staff with which the Nile was struck. And just as the striking of the Nile with that staff led to undrinkable water, so the striking of the rock with the staff produces water that all can drink. Once again we shouldn't presume that this is a suspension of the laws of nature.

Rather the God of nature is proving his power over nature to be able to provide whatever his people need from the wilderness, this most unpromising of locations, can spring forth with rivers that will feed a multitude, it can offer quail from the heavens and rain of bread from heaven. God can provide for his people in whatever situations they find themselves in but he is the God of nature. Moses brings the elders of Israel with him presumably as witnesses to God's power and his faithfulness in providing for his people.

It's interesting to note that the Lord stands before Moses upon the rock and he has to strike the rock. This appearance of God upon the rock and Moses striking the rock associates God with the rock. In Deuteronomy chapter 32 this language is used of God.

The rock, his work is perfect for all his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright as he. And then later on in verses 28 following, for they are a nation void of counsel and there is no understanding in them. If they were wise they would understand this, they would discern their latter end.

How could one have chased a thousand and two have put ten thousand to flight unless their rock had sold them and the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not as our rock. Our enemies are by themselves for their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. The imagery of the rock is used earlier on as well.

He made him ride on the high places of the land and he ate the produce of the field and he suckled him with honey out of the rock and oil out of the flinty rock. And then a few verses later again its language applied to God. But Jashurin grew fat and kicked, you grew fat, stout and sleek.

Then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation. They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods. With abominations they provoked him to anger.

They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. You were unmindful of the rock that bore you and you forgot the God who gave you birth. The language then of rock is associated with God.

God is the rock that gives security to his people. He's the rock from which living waters flow. He's the rock who is able to withstand all that would buffet it.

He's the rock who is unchangeable and secure. And this language applied to God also has that connection in the story itself as God stands upon the rock, associates with the rock and then the rock is struck in a way that associates the striking of the rock perhaps

with the striking of God himself. This might be particularly important to reflect upon when we consider the later tradition of the rock that followed them in the wilderness and the way that Paul can use that in 1 Corinthians 10.

This is a second water crisis in the story of the wilderness. There are two water crises early on in Israel's experience in the wilderness but no water crisis mentioned again until nearer the time that they're about to enter into the land just after Miriam dies. Massah is associated with the name trial and Meribah with the word quarrel and we see another Meribah in Numbers chapter 20 with a similar thing that takes place although on that occasion Moses is supposed to speak to the rock but he strikes it when he should not.

At this point Amalek comes upon Israel. They attack Israel. Now this attack is a pre-emptive strike.

Israel has not done anything to antagonize them. The Amalekites see them in the wilderness. They see they're weak and they want to prey upon them.

In Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse 17 to 19 we're told about this incident. Amalek at this point is placed under the ban. They're described as lacking the fear of God, acting in a way that rejects all established moral principles.

They're brutal, treacherous, and predatory, seeking to take advantage of those who are weak as those who are thirsty, hungry, don't have many resources. Amalek is first introduced to us as one in the line of Esau's family in Genesis chapter 36 verse 12. Timnah was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son.

She brought Amalek to Eliphaz. And then in verse 16, Korah, Gatham, and Amalek, these are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Adar.

Perhaps we're supposed to see Amalek as bearing something of the grudge that Esau had against his brother Jacob. It's been forgotten in the rest of the family but Amalek keeps that grudge alive. Maybe we're supposed to see some symmetry with the encounter with Esau after the water crossing in Genesis chapter 32 to 3. Amalek, however, is the son of a concubine.

He's a descendant of the Horites who dwelt in Seir before the Edomites. He seems to have a less official place within the nation than the children of Esau's full wives. Joshua leads Israel in the fighting of the battle but Moses goes up on the hill and holds up his arms and as he holds up his arms Israel prevails and if his arms fall Israel starts to be beaten back.

His hands are raised perhaps in prayer but this isn't the usual term for that. It's not entirely clear what Moses is doing at this point. Is he engaging in prayer? It's quite possible.

That would be the natural thing to suspect. Others have suggested that he's holding up a banner which explains why it's later said that the Lord is my banner. That holding up of the banner would explain also why when his hands drop the situation changes.

It's not that he's stopped praying as his arms drop. It's the fact that he's no longer holding up the banner. That's another possibility.

But one thing to notice here is the presence of two people around him. One on either side. Aaron who's the high priest and Hur who seems to be a leading civil leader.

He's a political leader. He's a descendant of Judah and he seems to have some authority within the camp. Later on in Exodus chapter 24 verse 14 when Moses goes up the mountain he leaves the people in the charge of Aaron and Hur and so he seems to be a prominent son in the line of Judah and on the other side you have the high priest.

So there are three figures. Moses the prophet, the Judahite Hur, a prominent son of the line of Judah whose grandson happens to be Bezalel, the one who will be especially responsible for the crafting of the tabernacle and then on the other side you have the priest Aaron. This pattern of supporting pillars might remind us of Yacon and Boaz, the two pillars as you enter into the temple.

Also of the picture that we see in Zechariah chapter 4 the relations of Israel by which they will win their victories may be described here. So in the centre you have the prophet Moses, the one who relays the word of God to the people and then on the one hand of him you have Aaron the high priest who represents the law of God in the rule and managing of the tabernacle and its worship and on the other side you have a chief civil leader, a member of the tribe to which the throne will one day be given. These are the relations by which Israel will be equipped to prevail as they relate to God, as they lift their hands up to God and as the prophet is supported by the king and the priest that triumvirate will be the means by which they succeed.

After they win the battle Moses builds an altar called the Lord is my banner and after the battle the Lord instructs Moses to write down in a book for a memorial to Joshua and others that the memory of Amalek will be utterly blotted out. This is the first mention of writing within the Bible. It's here given in the context of the importance of being mindful of, attending to and learning from history and this conflict with Amalek continues in the story of Israel.

It continues in the story of Saul where Saul fails to deal with the problem of Amalek. It continues later on in the story of the exodus and then it continues in the story of Esther where we have Haman the Agagite, a descendant of Amalek. A question to consider, how can we see the New Testament using the events in this chapter to refer to Christ? What are some other ways beyond the ways that are identified by the New Testament that we might see Christ being symbolized or figured here? In Exodus chapter 18 there's a

reordering of the nation of Israel as a structured polity.

This occurs after the fight with Amalek where we saw Aaron, her and Moses on the mountain with Joshua fighting the battle. There the relationship between Aaron, the high priest, her, a chief character in the royal tribe, and Moses represented something of the structure of the nation as a whole, the way that the different offices within it should support each other. In this chapter we see an elaboration of this, a filling out of this fundamental pattern as there are elders and leaders established for each tribe and each group, the nation being broken down into administrative groups that could be overseen by particular persons.

Some have suggested that this narrative is out of chronological sequence and I think there's a good argument for this. They're already camped at the mountain of God and there seems to be a functional altar there, it's the way it's described in the chapter. In Numbers chapter 10 we read something similar.

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony and the people of Israel set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai. That's verse 11 of chapter 10. In verses 29 following, and Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, we are setting out for the place which the Lord said I will give it to you.

Come with us and we will do good to you for the Lord has promised good to Israel. But he said to him I will not go, I will depart to my own land and to my kindred. And he said please do not leave us for you know where we should camp in the wilderness and you will serve as eyes for us and if you do go with us whatever good the Lord will do to us the same will we do to you.

The reordering of the people of Israel is also mentioned in Deuteronomy chapter 1 verses 9 following. At that time I said to you I am not able to bear you by myself. The Lord your God has multiplied you and behold you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven.

May the Lord the God of your fathers make you a thousand times as many as you are and bless you as he has promised you. How can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and your strife? Choose for your tribes wise understanding and experienced men and I will appoint them as your heads. And you answered me the thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.

So I took the heads of your tribes wise and experienced men and set them as heads over you commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens and officers throughout your tribes and I charged your judges at that time hear the cases between your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment. You

shall hear the small and the great alike.

You shall not be intimidated by anyone for the judgment is God's and the case that is too hard for you you shall bring to me and I will hear it. And I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do. Then we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrifying wilderness that you saw etc.

Putting this passage together with the passage from Numbers chapter 10 it suggests that the reordering of Israel occurred at the very end of their time at Sinai. It was followed by their leaving Horeb. Now why is it out of sequence? Well one of the first things that it does is it highlights the contrast between the Midianites and the Amalekites.

Jethro is an example of one of several leading Gentiles who supports and sponsors God's people. Maybe think of Melchizedek of Hiram of Tyre, the Queen of Sheba of Cyrus or the wise men in the story of Matthew chapter 2. In 1st Samuel chapter 15 verse 6 there's some weight given to this theory by the connection between the Kenites or the Midianites and the Amalekites. There we see a contrast between the Amalekites and the Kenites or the descendants of Midian.

The Kenites showed mercy and showed compassion and concern for the people of Israel whereas the Amalekites are judged and under the ban as a result of their hostility and inhospitality towards the Israelites. The other thing to ask is if this is out of chronological order where else would it go? If it were actually placed in its chronological sequence it would either be dropped out of the book together or would disrupt the climax of the book which is about the tabernacle. By putting it at this particular point it highlights the larger structure of Israel, the way that Israel is being established as a polity at Sinai.

It also connects some other themes and I think we'll see some of these as we go through. Jethro comes with Moses' wife who seems to have departed from him. The last we saw Zipporah she was involved in the circumcision of presumably Gershom at the end of chapter 4. It seems likely then that she went back to her father when the plagues were going on in Egypt.

It was not a pleasant time to be within Egypt and the wife of Moses, the liberator, would be someone who would be under threat presumably by Pharaoh and others and so being out of the land, avoiding the impact of the plagues and having a bit more security with her father would make sense. At this point she's brought back and there's no suggestion that there was a divorce or anything like that as some people have seen within this text. She's brought back as his wife by his father-in-law.

There's no angry words, they're completely at peace and so it seems very unlikely that we are dealing with a situation of divorce here. It might also be worth contrasting the character of Jethro with the character of Laban. Laban is a bad father-in-law whereas

Jethro is the good father-in-law.

In the story earlier on Jethro welcomed the man who met his daughter at the well and then they got married and the son-in-law served the father by looking after the sheep and finally left to return back to the land from which he had come. All of this is similar to the pattern of the story of Jacob and his sojourn with Laban. And at this juncture much as there was in chapter 31 there's a covenant formed between the two.

A covenant made with Jethro and the leaders of Israel. A covenant was formed with Abimelech in Genesis chapter 26 verse 30 and with Laban in chapter 31 verse 54. After the arrival of Jethro having this special meal which presumably creates some sort of covenant arrangement between the two people and being reunited with his family Moses faces a problem.

Day by day he's having to judge the people and the people are coming to him with all their problems looking for him to adjudicate in their situations. They come to him to inquire of God. Moses has to make known to them the laws and the teachings of God.

Now this sets things up for the event of Sinai. It begins with Moses judging the people alone and it's a movement towards the nation being judged by wise judges by a law that has been revealed to them by God. The burden of judgment will be spread out throughout the people and also the gift of judgment.

It will no longer be for Moses alone as a prophetic revealer of God's law to be the one who judges. No the work of judgment will be spread among the elders and the rulers and the various chiefs of the people. It will be something that can be borne more generally.

It's not good for Moses to be alone. Notice some of the subtle creation themes that have been playing throughout the story of the Exodus to this point. In the whole account of the plagues there's themes of de-creation but then following the plagues and the release from Egypt there are themes of new creation.

Evening followed by morning, division and provision of water, the light, all these sorts of things. And here we may think back to the story of Genesis chapter 2. It's not good for Moses to be alone and that same sort of language occurs here in Jethro's mouth as was found back in Genesis chapter 2 as God declared concerning Adam that it was not good for him to be alone. And just as Adam had a woman brought to him to be his helper, to assist him in his task, so Moses has people from Israel brought to him to assist him in his task.

There are ways in which this account might make us think back to the earlier encounter with Jethro in chapter 2. There Moses fled from Egypt and Pharaoh and sat down by a well. He encountered the daughters of the priest of Midian and delivered them from the shepherds. And they went home and told their father that they had been delivered by an



Egyptian and that he drew water for them and that he watered the flock.

And once again we're seeing something very similar here as Moses recounts to Jethro how God has saved them from the hand of Pharaoh, how God has defeated the shepherds that were troubling the people and how God has brought as it were this bride out and delivered her, provided water for her in the wilderness. After that event Jethro gave Moses his daughter Zipporah and here maybe we're having something similar that's being set up. There was a marriage back then and there's a marriage coming up, a marriage between God and his people, a marriage where God will take his people for himself and this will change the relationship between Moses and the people too.

To this point Moses has been related to God. Moses has been as God to Aaron and representing God to the people. When the people want to relate to God they have to go to Moses and Moses has to inquire of God for them.

But God is going to take Israel as his bride at Sinai. It's going to be a new form of relationship and that new form of relationship is maybe hinted at by the presence of Jethro at this point. The establishment of judges among the people and the giving of the law will establish a new intimacy between God and his people.

They will no longer just have to go to Moses and learn from him. Each one of them as they receive the law and learn from the law will be able to know God for themselves in a new way. This is moving us towards the event of Sinai and all that that represents.

A question to consider. There is a prudential ordering of the people here. An ordering of the people according to the wisdom of a foreigner.

Nevertheless this wisdom and this reordering of the people is placed within the context of the story of God's deliverance of the people and his establishment of them as a new polity. What are some of the lessons that this might have for us in the ordering of Christian societies in the present day where we're trying to bring together divine instruction and establishment and also the wisdom that we can find in the world? In Exodus chapter 19 God establishes a covenant bond with his people. This is a sort of marriage as some have seen it.

The bond established between God and his people here has been described as a suzerain vassal treaty. It's where a higher ruler establishes a covenant with a lower party and these were common within the ancient world of the Near East and yet there is something unique about this even if it's following a familiar pattern in certain respects. God is speaking to individuals and to the social body not just to another king or the rulers of the social body.

It's a new covenant order that's established in the life of the covenant people of Abraham. It's not building something new that's unrelated to what's gone before rather

it's building upon a relationship that already exists between God and his people. It establishes the people on a different and a greater footing.

They are being set up as a new nation and this chapter gives a context for the giving of the law that follows. The law comes from heaven but it comes at a very specific juncture in history in a very specific time and place and to a very specific people. The events of this chapter begin on the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt.

There are a number of ways in which this could be read. We could see this as the third month after the first month on the 15th and then there was the second month on the 15th and now this is the third month on the 15th of the month. Or we could see it as the third month so they left on the 15th of the first month then there was a second month and now this is the first day of the third month.

A further option is to see it exactly three months after they departed so this would be the 15th day of the fourth month. Now of these positions I'm more inclined to accept the idea that this is the first day of the third month. A dating which helps us to understand some of the associations with the events here at Sinai and other dates that are given to us in scripture which I'll discuss before long.

Israel is here constituted as a people. Sinai is the place where they receive their founding charter and where the new structures of their life are established. They need to camp in front of the mountain and Moses had already been at the mountain of God in chapters three and four.

He's been here, he's been told that they will worship God at this mountain so this is a fulfillment of things that he has already been told. This is among other things a confirmation to Moses and to others of the validity of his calling. God announces that he has chosen Israel in particular to relate to him.

There is an open-ended commitment between God and his people that is being called for here. They must ascent to his law and to his rule within their life. God describes how he has already related to them and he declares how he will relate to them in the future if they hear his voice and commit themselves to him.

First of all he has brought them on eagles wings to himself even though he judged the Egyptians. The image of the eagle that we have here is the image of a mother eagle taking care for its young and rushing to protect them and to bring them to a particular place with swiftness and care and that's how God has related to his people. He has brought them to this point.

He has brought Egypt to its knees. He has judged Egypt but he has shown the most remarkable kindness to his people Israel bringing them to this place to form them as his

own and he promises that beyond this great deliverance that distinguishes them from all these other peoples he is going to take Israel as his special possession. All the earth belongs to the Lord and all the peoples but among all the peoples of the world God will take this one particular people.

They'll be his special possession, his own, his holy possession. What it means to be holy to the Lord is an important part of this chapter. It requires a form of behavior that corresponds to it.

A priestly purity. God establishes a holy nation and Israel is established in this way before it has all of the other distinguishing marks of a nation. They don't have their own land, they don't have their own ruler, they're established in a wilderness and as such they are unique.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4 verses 32 to 34 Moses says, Israel's origin is unique, it's strange, it's not something that has ever been seen in any other nation. Their identity rests upon God's promise. They don't have a land, they don't have a king, they don't have all these other marks of nationhood but what they do have is a promise and a God who is committed to them, a God who is their king, a God who establishes and guarantees their identity.

Israel's identity does not arise from imminent realities. They're formed in a wilderness. Israel is a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Their identity will be represented by specific parties within the nation. Israel has levites and it has kings later on in its history and its identity is particularly born by these parties. They represent Israel to itself in much the same way as the queen might represent what it means for the United Kingdom to be the United Kingdom.

When Israel has priests and when it has kings it will discover its identity as a kingdom of priests in a fuller way. Their identity at the moment is precarious. They're a release group of slaves, they don't have a land in which to reside, they don't really have a full ruler.

Moses is a prophet who's leading them through the wilderness but he's not a political ruler in quite the same way as a king would be. As a nation their identity very much lies in the future but it rests upon a promise. God has committed to establishing them as a kingdom of priests but this statement of them being a kingdom of priests seems to me more than just that they will be a kingdom with priests.

In some way the levites represent to Israel what Israel is in relationship to the nations and what the levites are within the life of Israel is something that declares Israel's own destiny. The levites are scattered throughout the land, they establish God's law within the people, they teach it and they have mastered it themselves, they've understood it

and they can pass it on to others. And Israel's destiny is to be that within the world more generally.

As Israel's history develops this is what happens in many ways. They are scattered among the nations and among the nations they serve as a sort of priestly people, a people that point beyond the particularity of a specific nation to the God behind all nations. There are people that have a defining absence at the heart of their life, they're not defined by a king primarily, they're not defined even by a land primarily, they're defined by the God who's over all peoples, over all lands and as they're scattered abroad they do not lose their nationhood, rather their nationhood serves to testify to something beyond all the parochial structures of nationhood that exists in other lands.

And as God gives them the law over time something else happens. It's no longer a kingdom with a priestly caste at its heart, a people who study and teach the law to people who do not know it, rather it's a people who have more generally studied and learned God's law and can teach it to others. God has revealed his word to the nation of Israel in a unique way and Israel would grow into a more and more general knowledge of this as the knowledge of God's law spread not just to a particular caste of priests at its heart but to all people that all of them would know the law and the Lord that gave the law and through that knowledge that they would express that priestly character as people that teach and uphold the law in their own house, the house of Israel that is maintained by the priests and by each individual Israelite, extending that priestly vocation both internally in their own lives and then externally out towards the nations.

What happens at Sinai is not just an event for individuals, it's the constitution of a people, it's a political event, this is the founding event of a whole nation. The nation is founded upon a divine covenant which points forward to and places limits upon everything else. This people is not primarily formed upon the consent of the governed, there is an event of consent here but it's not primarily that which establishes the government, rather God's government is recognised and submitted to.

That divine government places limits upon all human government, it also places limits upon nationhood tied to land, they do not yet have a land, God will give them a land but they do not yet have a land. Their identity as a people rests upon what God is doing with them primarily, not upon any imminent factor. The people accept Moses' expression of God's message and then Moses reports this to God.

We should note the way that Moses is playing the role of the intermediary here, it's emphasised. God clearly knows what the people said but Moses still formally has to declare it to him as a sort of go-between. Moses is the one who's arranging this covenant, who's establishing the two parties in relationship with each other.

With this expression of covenant the time is ready for the formal establishment and ratification of the covenant, the covenant ceremony itself and the declaration of the

covenant that occurs in the following chapter. The covenant will also ratify Moses' place as the mediator of the covenant and they must prepare themselves by maintaining their purity and washing their clothes. On the third day God will come and these three days can be associated with trial, with something like Abraham going to Mount Moriah and at that point God will come down in a theophany and speak to his people.

Thinking about the number of days here we might notice that there are a lot of similarities with the story of the flood. If you trace the number of days it would seem that there are two periods of seven days after they first arrive and then there's a period of 40 days as Moses goes up the mountain. These are periods that we see in the story of the flood.

Maybe we should see a connection between the flood narrative and the establishment of a covenant there and the establishment of the covenant on this mountain. It's not Mount Ararat, it's the Mount of Sinai and God is establishing something that has cosmic significance again. In Moses and the people of Israel we see the seeds of a new world.

At this point God demarcates different realms of Sinai and says that certain places should not be approached. God's presence is in the cloud, the holy of holies as it were, and Moses can ascend into that and then there's the lower levels of the mountain, the holy place where the priests and the elders could ascend but not the people. And the people are gathered around the base of the mountain as the people gather around in the courtyard of the tabernacle.

The seeming association between this ordering of the mountain and the ordering of the tabernacle should alert us to the fact that the tabernacle is in many ways a portable mountain. When the tabernacle is built they leave Sinai and they can have this portable Sinai that they take with them. The same sort of regulations are established for that.

God's presence in the holy of holies of the tabernacle is similar to God's presence at the very peak of the mountain. And many of the images that we associate with the mountain also come to be associated with the tabernacle. Smoke ascending from the sacrifices, the cloud, the cloud of the glory that enters the tabernacle and the cloud that is also the cloud of smoke and other things, the fire that ascends, the trumpets that are blown, all these sorts of things.

These are signs of God's presence and they're elements of the tabernacle worship too. The strict laws against trespass apply in both cases. God's holiness requires a need for barriers and boundaries.

Not everything is holy. Much in the world is not holy. There are certain things however that are set apart.

There's one day in seven that is set apart as the Sabbath. And there is this particular

realm of the Mount of Sinai that is set apart and later on the tabernacle. Holiness establishes among other things space for God's otherness in the course of human affairs.

If everything were holy human beings could not exist. If no place or time were holy however there would be no way for God to be present with human beings in the course of their lives. We should maybe think back also to the story of the burning bush.

Moses here is bringing a flock to the mountain of God and meeting with God there. There are restrictions of holy ground. There's burning and things not being consumed.

There's an encounter with and a speaking with God in this theophanic event. This is what happened at the burning bush and it's happening again on a grander scale. Now the shepherd Moses is not bringing sheep.

He's bringing the flock of Israel, the people of Israel and forming a new covenant with God at this place. A question to consider. Tracing the chronology of the events of Exodus chapter 19 many have noted an association between the event of Pentecost, the feast of Pentecost established in Leviticus chapter 23 verses 15 following and the event of Sinai and the covenant given at Sinai.

What are some of the associations that you might see between the feast that's given to us in Leviticus 23 and the events of this chapter and those that follow? If you were asked to list the most famous chapters in the bible I'm sure that Exodus 20 would be one of the top 10. It's the chapter of the 10 commandments and the most prominent place within the western imagination. Even if people don't know what the 10 commandments are they know what they stand for.

They stand for all these things that are the basis of social morality. They're the foundation of western society and the appeal to them has often taken on a political flavour in certain contexts. Yet when we actually look at the 10 commandments they seem a bit disappointing.

Do we really need to be told not to murder people? Do we really need to be told not to steal and all these other things? And then some of the commandments just seem strange. If this is just the moral law summed up why this one day and seven commandment? It all seems very strange. A lot of it seems unnecessary and superfluous while other parts that aren't belabouring the obvious are making rather obscure and strange points.

What sense are we to make of all of this? Well first of all when we encounter the 10 commandments we can often detach them from the context in which they are given. The 10 commandments are given at Sinai as a climax of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. This is a sort of declaration of independence and a charter of their new existence as a people.

This is the basis of the entire system and their way that they will relate to God. It's not a

regular legal code. It seems fairly rudimentary but also it contains elements that do not usually fit within any legal code.

It has a command about coveting. Where do you find that in other legal codes? It's all very strange. As we read through it though we recognise certain patterns and as we meditate upon these patterns it will seem that there is more sense to be discovered within them.

While at first glance the law may seem to be one of the driest parts of scripture, lots of do's and don'ts and little else, if we meditate upon it we may find a great deal of richness here. But it's not entirely clear how we might meditate upon something as bare as you shall not steal. We can be tempted to reduce this just to merely obeying.

Yet God has more for us than this. God isn't just looking for us to not steal. There's more within that and as we meditate upon the commandments and the way that they're given to us we might see some of this.

What does meditation involve? It's like a dog with a bone. We chew it over. We labour to get all of the goodness out.

God is here forming a bond with his people. This is a marriage document among other things and reflecting upon it will help us to understand the will of the divine husband. It's a recognition that God doesn't put everything out on the surface.

Sometimes authors can leave their readers with questions so that they will come to understanding as they try to puzzle out riddles. The riddle beckons you towards understanding. It forces you to undertake a journey for yourself rather than just having understanding handed to you on a plate.

And God does not give all the goodness of his law up front. The law requires lengthy meditation. God wants us to pour over his law, to devote our lives to understanding it inside and out.

And as we look through the story of we can see this theme of meditation upon the law continuing. The law is gradually taken into people as they reflect upon it. It's taken into people in the form of wisdom as they gain insight into the moral structure of the universe.

It's taken into people in song as they no longer just externally ascent to it but they rejoice in it from the heart. It's taken into people in the practice of the spirit as the spirit writes the law of God upon our hearts and we obey it from the heart. Obedience isn't the only goal.

Understanding is necessary and we need not only to do what is good but to perceive, to understand and to rejoice in its goodness. And this is all part of the process of growing

up. Children need to learn not just to do what their parents tell them to but also to discover the goodness of those commandments for themselves and to pursue that goodness from their heart.

And meditating upon the law will lead to wisdom and delight and understanding and this requires a posture towards the law driven by love and faith. This is the law that's given to us by our Lord. It's the law that's given to us by the God who wants to and has set us free.

And as we approach the law in that way we should discover what it means to live in liberty as those who have been set free. Legalism then is lying about the law. It presents the law as burdensome merely as commandments.

It presents the law in detachment from God and his goodness and the liberty for which he set us free. It presents the law apart from faith. And Jesus talked about the law as having a logic to it.

The law can be summed up in two great commandments. The greatest, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second, love your neighbour as yourself.

He also argued that there are weightier matters of the law. God's justice, mercy and faithfulness. They're the sun around which the law orbits.

Understanding the law is really important then. That the law is not just this set of detached commandments. There's a logic and a principle and structure to it.

And as we explore it we'll see that it hangs together. And the deeper we look the more we'll find we're confronted not just with do's and don'ts but with the love of God himself and the desire of God that we be formed in that image. There are a few examples of ways in which we can go about this meditation on the law.

We can reflect upon the historical context of the giving of the law which we're doing here. We can think about the way that it comes after God has delivered his people from slavery. It's a movement from slavery into service.

Now that movement into service is not a movement into this sort of libertarian freedom. Rather it's a movement into service to something that will set you free in a truer way. That will order you towards that which is liberating and good and freeing.

So for instance when we understand the fourth commandment against that backdrop it makes more sense. It comes around Pentecost time. It's the first fruits festival.

It's the start of something new. It's the establishment of a new people. It comes as the formation of a covenant.



Sinai is a sort of wedding ceremony. There are other ways that we can think about the law and reflect upon it. We can think about the ways it's illuminated by the temple.

There are five tables of showbread on each side in the temple. There are five lampstands on each side. There are ten water chariots in the court.

The law then is our bread that we feed upon. It's the light that lightens our path and it's something that flows out giving life to the world. And then we can look in the text and think about the structure of the commandments.

The commandments are divided into two halves. The first half, the first five, have explanations and rationales. As we read through them we'll see each one of them has a warning attached, a blessing or promise attached, some explanation attached or something else.

The first half mention the name of God and the first half are long, the second half are short. You can maybe think about these as like the two hands of the body. There are two sets of five commandments and there are commands that parallel each other in different ways as we look through it.

There are unifying themes. We can think about the household as it appears in different commandments. There are two core commandments at the heart, positive commandments.

There's the law concerning the Sabbath day and there's the law concerning honouring father and mother and everything else around those are like the marble that has to be chipped away to reveal this positive sculpture in the centre. And God has this sculpture, this life of the covenant that is supposed to be set free by all these things that we're supposed to avoid. And what is that? It's remembering God, enjoying life in his presence, worshipping him, taking a day off every week to reorder our lives to God.

It's being released from the bondage of slavery and service, of constant non-stop work, the work that characterised Israel in Egypt and having time to be with God. It's setting others free to enjoy that. What else does it involve? It involves positive relationships between man and woman, between father and mother, husband and wife and positive relationships between the generations as children honour their parents and parents delight in their children.

As we read further on in scripture we'll see more ways that this gets unpacked. You can think about the exposition of the commandments in Deuteronomy chapter 6 to 26. In these chapters each one of the commandments is unpacked in some sort of succession.

It explains the logic of the commandments and relates them to very specific commands. It is maybe to be seen as the refraction of the bright light, the bright white light of the commandments into these different colours on the spectrum. We can see all these

different ways in which that one commandment can play out in different situations.

So what we're seeing is that the law can be condensed in two key principles and those principles have an order to them. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and a second principle that arises from that and your neighbour as yourself. It arises from it in part because to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength is to honour those also who are created in his image as a corollary of that.

There is a deep unity then to the entirety of the commandments but then there is also this plurality and in this plurality we can understand some of the deeper rationale of the commandments and some of the ways in which they're more rightly fulfilled. So as we see in Deuteronomy 26 there is something that corresponds to the law concerning coveting. How is that law fulfilled? Not just in a commandment not to covet these different items but in the positive practice of a feast.

A feast in which you give thanks for what God has given to you where you show generosity to those who are in need in your community, to the Levite, to the stranger and to any other person who might be in need and as you express contentment for what God has given you. So there's generosity, contentment and thanksgiving. That's how you fulfill the commandment not to covet.

Not just in a negative thing but in a positive series of actions that are the alternative to that and that's what we see as we reflect upon the law. The law is something that bounds the reality of a positive form of life. It helps us to see what is the silhouette of the righteous life which is often filled out in other parts of the law.

The law starts with the uniqueness of God and the salvation that he has wrought for Israel. It's not just this abstract principle. It's about what God has done in history for his people and a particular relationship that he has forged with them.

This is personal. This is not just an abstract set of moral principles. God has delivered his people.

He has entered into relationship with them and this is what it means to be in relationship with God. They should have no other gods before him. Now when we think about morality we often exclude any idea of idolatry but yet idolatry is at the very heart of error.

The sins that people will do out of self-interest typically pale before the crimes they'll commit in service of a false god whether that's the god of the state, whether it's the god of some ideology or whether it's some pagan deity. God defeated the gods of the Egyptians. Gods that held the Egyptians in mental bondage and servitude to them and God has saved the Israelites from service of these gods too.

He wants them to enjoy freedom in service of him. Serving the true God will release us from the bondage of service of false gods, of the idolatries that hold us captive. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness.

God cannot be represented. God is above the creation. He created things.

He is not like the lesser deities of the creation, some being that can be represented and contained within the creation itself. He exceeds the creation. He created it.

It is his creation and so he cannot be bound to it. We cannot establish a sort of idol that gives us a handle on God, that allows us to have a sort of tool to control God, to get God to do our bidding. No, God is above all these things and as a result we must serve him in a way that acknowledges that, refusing to make false images that would treat him in a way that he could be controlled.

And these are all forms of spiritual adultery. These are ways in which God's jealousy is provoked. We're setting something up in the place of God, something that faces God and something that stands in the place where his honour and true worship should be.

Instead of that we have something that is usurping his status and his honour. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. We can often read this as if it were the commandment, don't cuss, but that's not what it's saying, or at least that's only a small part of what it's saying.

What does it mean to bear a name? Among other things it means to have a name attached to you. You can think about the way that in a few chapters time Aaron will bear the name of Israel into God's presence. He has the names of Israel and its tribes written upon him.

On his forehead he has Holy to the Lord. He has God's name written upon him. He bears God's name.

In the same way Israel was bearing God's name among the nations. We as God's people bear God's name as well. To bear God's name in vain is to act in a way that brings dishonour, that does not hold that name with the weight and the honour and the respect and the truth with which it should be held, with the faithfulness that should characterize any use, any bearing of that name.

As members of our families we bear the name of our family. We can bring dishonour to our family by our behaviour or we can bring honour by behaving in a way that befits those who are members of our family. God in delivering Israel from Egypt placed his name upon them.

Israel is my firstborn son. Israel represents me. Israel is mine.

And for Israel to bear the name of the Lord is a fearful thing. If they bear it in vain they will be judged and punished by the Lord for their unfaithfulness. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

The whole story of the Exodus is propelled by this quest to have a feast before the Lord, to be released from non-stop labour and have some time to rest in God's presence. Pharaoh is a master who imposes non-stop work upon his slaves. But God is one who sets them free in order that they might rest and give rest.

This isn't just rest for ourselves, this is rest that's supposed to be given to others. And as a principle of Israel's life and economy they had to give rest to their servants as well, give rest to their animals, give rest to their land. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

He worked a work week and he wants those named by his name to participate in his creation and formation of the world, to have the dignity of this same work week. Honour your father and your mother is the fifth commandment. It's the final one of the first five and the first five commandments deal with vertical relationships, the second five with horizontal relationships.

Our father and our mother represent not just our physical father and mother but also any authorities that are placed over us. They are the authorities that God has placed that rule over us and we're supposed to submit to them and to honour them. They represent God's own authority in some way.

This is an authority that's not just an authority of fathers, it's an authority of mothers too, of men and women together. The unity of father and mother is something that is at the very basis of authority within society. It's this foundational relationship, the relationship of the mother and the father that is the one from which all other authority structures within society arise.

And if Israel wants their days to be long in the land they have to respect such authority structures. The sixth commandment, you shall not murder, addresses the most fundamental violation of others made in the image of God. God creates, he gives life and for us to murder is to take life into our own hands.

It's to present ourselves as God in some way, to set ourselves up in opposition to God. It can also be seen as a way in which we strike against God himself. Satan is described as a murderer from the beginning.

He can't give life but he can take it away, he can destroy life. And that has been his quest from the very outset. He tries to murder Adam and Eve by bringing them into death.

The seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery, upholds the dignity of the

bond of marriage and the crime of undermining that, of betraying the faithfulness that should exist between a husband and a wife, of acting in a way that is sexually immoral or in a way that is promiscuous or in a way that is characterized by indecency. These are all in their own ways violations of the image of God in ourselves or in others. It's a way of attacking the image of God in the unity of man and wife.

This commandment exists to protect and uphold the honor of the marriage bet and the importance of the marriage bond. The eighth commandment concerns stealing. A person isn't just their body, a person isn't just their life.

A person also has things that belong to them, things that express and extend their dignity out into the world. And a violation of those things or a taking of those things can be another form of attack upon the image of God in the person. Think about the way that we feel if someone breaks into our house and takes some of our stuff.

We feel violated, we feel unsafe, we feel that we ourselves have been threatened. The commandment concerning stealing here is not just upholding property as such and saying that all property must be upheld. Indeed, as we see this principle developed in places like Deuteronomy, it pushes in a surprising direction.

It protects, for instance, the right of the poor to glean from the fields of the rich. There is a duty that we owe to each other and we do not have absolute property. We have a duty of care for people and if we do not fulfill that we are stealing from them.

The ninth commandment concerns false witness and false witness is not just lying. We can include lying within it to a certain extent but it's false witness against your neighbor. There are certain times when it is appropriate to give the wrong message to people.

If they are seeking to destroy someone else it is appropriate to mislead them. This is something that Scripture gives us numerous examples of. What false witness against one's neighbor means is something more precise.

It can include such things as gossip, as spreading rumors, of slandering someone, of seeking to bring them down with our speech with something like false testimony against them in court. Yet the commandment includes more than this. The commandment also relates to the use of authority structures as a means of oppressing or wronging other people.

In this case the legal system. It can be a way in which people take advantage of power structures to mistreat others who are not in so powerful a position. This use of power structures against our neighbor can be seen in a great many different cases.

It can be seen not just in the law court but in various other social and civil and political institutions. The final commandment is perhaps a surprising one. It tells us not to covet and gives a long list of the things that we're not supposed to covet.

Coveting is not an external action in the way that most of the other things mentioned in the law are. Rather it calls for us to inspect inside, to consider our desires, to reflect upon how our desires are ordered relative to our neighbor. And that reordering of desires is something that the law is always pointing towards.

Now when we read the tenth commandment it invites us to reread the rest of the commandments in the light of it, to propel us to investigate, bringing the light of this commandment to bear upon all these other sins. How is it that desire gives rise to murder or to adultery or to stealing or to bearing false witness? Jesus discusses this in the Sermon on the Mount and other such places. We must bring this light of the law to bear upon our inner life not just our external actions.

And the tenth commandment calls us to just that sort of meditation. Now the law as we've seen it here, in this very rudimentary way, is far more rich than it might look at first glance. There's a lot more going on here.

There's things to be learned from its structure. There's things to be learned from its deeper logic. And the children of Israel were given this law as they were encountered by God himself.

God did not merely give this by Moses to the people. He spoke to the people directly. This is personal.

God is relating to his bride and he's calling for his bride to take these commandments not just as onerous restrictions but as a new form of life, a form of life in which freedom, the freedom for which God had set Israel free, would be enjoyed. A question to consider. Moses says to the people, do not fear for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin.

What are the different meanings of the word fear in that statement? Many of the themes associated with the ten commandments that we saw in chapter 20 of the book of Exodus reappear in the next chapter, chapter 21. It begins with the release of people from slavery in the seventh year, reminding us both of the beginning of the ten commandments as God recounts his deliverance of Israel from slavery in the land of Egypt, and also of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath. As we move beyond this introduction which recalls the first and fourth commandment, we find a lot more that would remind us of other commandments.

We have laws concerning honoring father and mother, concerning murder, concerning man-stealing, concerning theft, concerning false witness, and as we move through we'll see many things that recall the ten commandments. The material in chapters 21 to 23 can loosely be clumped together according to principles or laws of the ten commandments. Chapter 21 could arguably be related chiefly to the themes of slavery and release, and of violence and murder, with a bit of honoring father and mother

thrown in for good measure.

By clumping laws together in this way, under the loose categories of the ten commandments, it helps us to expand the core principles that we find in the ten commandments into larger bodies of law. You learn literacy in part through expounding things, expanding things that are tight pithy statements into large developed statements about a particular reality. It's a process of expounding and also of condensing, of taking that big set of principles and truths and making it comprehensible in a single statement or a single reality.

In the same way when we're reading the book of the covenant in chapters 21 to 23 of the book of exodus, we are dealing with case laws that expound and unpack the principles of the ten commandments themselves. Meditating upon the relationships internal to the case law and upon the relationship between the case law and the core moral law of the ten commandments will give us a sense of literacy in the law. It will help us to understand how principles can be derived from the core principles and how the expounded principles can be found to have a unity among themselves, that these aren't just a set of 600 odd laws that we have in scripture but they are bound together, there is a logic and a unity and a coherence to them.

And as we see these core principles we'll realize we don't actually have a lot of detached commandments after all. We have a few key principles that are expounded and unpacked, there is a refraction of them as we see the clear light of God's law refracted into the particular colours of different situations. The case law provides examples of judgements arising from the core principles of the law then, teaches literacy in the law but it isn't a complete legal code.

If you look through the law here you'll see a lot of commandments that seem odd and strange, you might puzzle upon why they're here in the first place. You'll also notice a lot of gaps that aren't really addressed, lots of situations that might arise in life that aren't really spoken to by the law. So the law is not a complete system, rather it teaches you how to arrive at case law and judgements in specific situations from the core principles without actually dictating every single one of those cases.

It requires some sort of jurisprudence and wisdom and some recognition of specifics and how the law can be brought into relationship with those different situations. The other thing to notice is that a lot of the law is symbolic, it helps us to read Israel's history particularly, especially when we're seeing some of the odd and obscure laws, they seem to be included for some reason other than relevance to everyday situations of judgment. This isn't a comprehensive legal system and it is a system that has many odd laws within it, laws that don't seem to be related to everyday life but rather help us to read the symbolism and the significance of specific events in Israel's history.

Nor should this be treated as a timeless system of justice. What we have here addresses

divine justice to a particular time and a set of social realities. It is not something that we should apply in a contemporary situation as if it applied to us in the same way as it did to the people of Israel after they've been brought out of Egypt.

These are laws given to a specific culture in a particular time and place that applies principles of divine justice to those particularities. Our particularities are different, there are ways in which the law is accommodated to the hardness of people's hearts and if we were to apply a system of justice to our own society based upon God's commandments we would find that we'd be accommodating to very different problems within our society and there would be a need to do similar sort of things, to have laws that recognise specific aspects of sinfulness in our society. This chapter begins with laws concerning slavery and release.

It's important to observe that the laws here are arising out of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Now they have to release their own slaves. There's a principle of Israel's continuing life that must arise from the foundational principle of its national existence which is that they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Now they must also give freedom to their slaves under certain conditions. Slavery isn't seen as a bad thing in principle in scripture. From our historical perspective where we have the brutal legacy of race slavery it can be very hard for us to understand why the scriptural writers don't entirely condemn the practice of slavery and typically appear to condone it and maybe even on some occasions present it as a good thing.

Slavery is mentioned at various points with some prophetic blessings and curses for instance in relationship to the story of Canaan or the way that Esau is to serve Jacob. We see concubines and maidservants in characters like Hagar, Zilpah and Bilhah. Jacob is reduced to the status of a servant by Laban but then gains great wealth through service.

The story of Joseph's slavery is an important one and in all of these stories we're seeing some windows into what slavery was like. Slavery is not idealised by any means. It's not a positive situation for the most part but nor is it presented as something that's universally vicious and evil.

Indeed in the story of Joseph we see slavery presented in a very positive light in certain regards. Through the Lord's help Joseph brings the whole nation of Egypt first into a feudal relationship and then into outright slavery to Pharaoh. In Genesis chapter 47 verses 13 to 26 Joseph's divinely given wisdom enables him to make the people by whom he was enslaved the servants of Pharaoh and this is a good thing in fulfills the divine promises that other people would serve Abraham and his seed.

It brings the Egyptians under the wise and divinely blessed and provident rule of Joseph. It saves their lives from famine. Our concept of slavery and servitude is powerfully shaped by the notion of slavery being involuntary or coercive and lifelong but that is an



unhelpful way to understand most forms of biblical slavery which occurred on quite a spectrum of differing degrees of dependency and voluntariness.

Man-stealing and kidnapping for slavery were subject to the death penalty in Deuteronomy chapter 24 verse 7 and also in this chapter. In perhaps the majority of cases biblical slavery was not strictly involuntary although it was an undesirable state to which to be reduced. The slavery was a means of managing the dependence of the poor and the indebted in a society without welfare state.

It was also part of the criminal justice system as it was used of a means of providing restitution to people who had been wronged. Israelites could also enslave foreigners taken in war and could buy foreign slaves from others something that they couldn't do in the case of Israelites as we see in Leviticus chapter 25 verses 42 following. Finally people could voluntarily enter into the state of service to another if they wanted security and membership in a good master's household.

So as dependents biblical slaves had certain securities but they also had many limitations on their freedom. Paul can say that the heir as long as he is a child does not differ at all from a slave though he is the master of all and that analogy between slavery and childhood isn't illuminating one in many respects. The slave was unlike the hired hand a member of the household in some level.

He didn't have the autonomy of the hired hand and rather than having his employment ended or his pay cut he could be beaten as a form of punishment. The master had a duty to provide for him as a member of his household and like the child his rights of free movement, his bodily autonomy and such things as his rights of marriage were curtailed. However also like the child this period of dependency and limited freedom was typically intended to be temporary.

It was one that had a clearly and legally established ending point in and ideally it was supposed to lead to the learning of greater self-discipline and providence from a master who had proved himself in these regards. The system of slavery then is seen as a positive way of securing the survival of dependent and improvident people in society. It ensures that they are protected and provided for by provident masters into whose service they come.

It's seen as a way that God blesses those who are faithful and wise bringing other people under their authority and provision. As in the case of Joseph people coming under the rule of a wise and provident master could be saved from much of the fear that they would be in if they had to provide for themselves and found themselves unable to do so. This extends the influence of people who are wise and able to provide in certain situations and the level of their responsibility.

It can also be a form of judgment upon the wicked as the Lord makes them the servants

of the righteous. Now this is not an ideal situation by any means. We should not idealise this but this is the sort of situation that was much better than many of the alternatives and the harshness of slavery is mitigated in many ways in scripture.

The biblical slave is guaranteed the rest of the Sabbath in the fourth commandment. In this chapter we see that there are clear requirements established for the release of different kinds of slaves after certain periods of time. There are protections provided for concubines.

Departing Hebrew slaves were supposed to be sent out with gifts and the Lord consistently reminds his people that they were once slaves in Egypt. He declares that he will bless those who are faithful in treating their servants and the entire story of the exodus is a repeated reminder that the Lord hears the cry of the oppressed slave. So the state of slavery to men is not celebrated in scripture.

It's a state of immaturity akin to that of childhood and the Lord's intention is always that his people gain maturity and independence through obedience and faithfulness. The biblical expectations upon the slave were equivalent or similar at least to those upon children to grow in responsibility through faithful obedience and like childhood it's very negative for people to return to the state of slavery. Rather people are expected to grow beyond it and the strict law-bound character of slavery like that of childhood can provide a means of maturation.

Biblically slavery is oriented towards manumission and blessing and slave owning is a means by which the righteous and the provident can come to provide for and protect many dependent people training them towards independence or fully absorbing them into the life of the family. While we have clear continuing forms of dependency relations in society it's very good that we've moved beyond slavery in many respects. There is still logic of slavery in our employment systems in our relationship to our governments.

We think of them in different ways but the logic of slavery is still at play. But the sort of slavery spoken of in scripture was necessary and served good purposes in a less developed society. As society matures such an institution fitted for a more childlike stage in humanity's life should be left behind.

So we can read these commandments, see the way that God is orienting his people towards growth, maturity and freedom and we can see them as good within their context. We can learn and apply them to our own context without seeking to translate them or to re-pristiniate some system of slavery that we have rightly moved beyond. These commandments then concerning slavery come first as they correspond to Israel's own liberation.

It's institutionalizing Israel's own release and there are parallels to be found in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 12 to 18. If your brother a Hebrew man or a Hebrew

woman is sold to you he shall serve you six years and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you and when you let him go free from you you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor and out of your wine press.

As the Lord your God has blessed you you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you therefore I command you this day. But if he says to you I will not go out from you because he loves you and your household since he is well off with you then you shall take an oar and put it through his ear into the door and he shall be your slave forever and to your female slave you shall do the same.

It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years so the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do. Once again we should remember that the slave within the house was in many ways treated like a child within the house that's ruled by their parents and in such a situation a master might give his slave a wife. The law considers such a case and in that case the wife would be left in the house of the master when the slave went free in the seventh year.

Such a situation would involve the wife remaining in the house and the released slave having the right to visit her and have conjugal relations but she would still serve for a period of time. We can see such a situation in Judges chapter 15 verse 1 where Samson has conjugal visitation rights without cohabiting with his wife. If the male slave however wants to bind himself to his master his ear can be bored to the doorpost.

The boring of the ear suggests the opening of the ear for hearing and obeying and listening. The ear is the organ of hearing and can be connected with obedience. You hear and you obey.

There's also a reminder of the Passover. The doorpost is the site on which the blood was placed and as the ear of the slave bored to the doorpost with blood trickling down was seen it would remind Israel of its own status as servants within the house of God as those who had committed themselves to the service of a good master and wanted to be members of his household. The Sabbath year one way or another then was to occasion a change in the slave status.

It was either to lead to him going free or to him becoming a committed member of the family. The female slave is a different case. The female slave was sold into the family in order to become part of the family and there's a betrayal here if the female slave is not actually taken as a wife for her master or for her master's child and such a woman is to be treated as a full-fledged daughter.

It was one of the ways in which a poorer family could rise up in status. The young woman

becoming a concubine of her master's servant or of the master himself and she was supposed to be treated according to the law of daughters with the protections that that gave her ensuring that she would not be abused or taken advantage of and her husband if he took another wife was not to diminish her food her clothing or her marital rights. Her standing within the family was to be protected and the law of God exists in part to protect such people who'd be very vulnerable in a system like that.

The laws that follow are laws concerning violence in decreasing severity so there's intentional murder and manslaughter in verses 12 to 14, assaults of greatest severity in verses 15 to 17, assaults intended to wound or intentional or unintentional wounds in verses 18 to 27, animal violence to humanity if the animal is owned in verses 28 to 32, dangerous inanimate property in verses 33 and 34 and then finally animal violence to another animal. These laws contain elements related to the fifth commandment and also to the sixth commandment but primarily the sixth. It's dealing with situations of violence but also to an extent the honour of father and mother.

As we look through such bodies of material we'll often notice that laws can't neatly be divided up into particular categories. They do loosely categorise under certain headings but they blur into each other in different ways. There are laws concerning manslaughter and the cities of refuge.

The cities of refuge don't seem to have been set up yet but the manslayer seems to have been able to have fled to God's altar. There are some peculiar commandments here. One of the most peculiar is the law concerning the men fighting and wounding the pregnant woman.

A similar law can be found in other Near Eastern bodies of legal material but here I wonder whether there is some connection with things that we've seen earlier on in the story of Genesis. And in the legal material of the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy there do seem to be reflections back upon the narrative. We'll also see this in the book of Numbers.

Here Amy Silver has suggested that there might be a connection between the story of Joseph, Benjamin, Jacob and Rachel. In chapter 44 of the book of Genesis in verses 27 following we read, Then your servant my father said to us, You know that my wife bore two sons. One left me and I said surely he has been torn to pieces and I have never seen him since.

If you take this one also from me and harm happens to him you will bring down my grey hairs in evil to Sheol. Now therefore as soon as I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us then as his life is bound up in the boy's life as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us he will die and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. There are a few interesting connections to observe between these things.

First of all the word for tragedy or harm that's used is one that's found outside of the story of Jacob and his sons only in reference to this law. It speaks about the one who went out from me. The same language that's used of the child or the children that go out from the pregnant woman who's been struck.

The pregnant woman is someone who brings forth children. Now that's very strange. How often in these cases are you dealing with twins? Why would it be said that when her children come out? It's a very strange thing to say.

You would say when her child comes out but this is children plural. The reference to life for life etc. might also remind us of the way that the soul of Jacob is bound up with the soul of Benjamin.

Here is a woman that has been struck by men who have been striving. Jacob striving with Laban. The striving between the neglected brothers, the unloved children of the handmaids and of Leah and their father and then the struggle that they have with their brothers by Rachel.

And Rachel through this striving is struck and two of her sons are seemingly lost. Joseph and Benjamin. We should consider the possibility that this is actually a reflection in part upon that narrative of Genesis.

That in a symbolic law we are being presented with that story and the linguistic connections are there to trigger our awareness of it. To help us to realise that there's some sort of connection here and that that connection could be illuminating for our reading of the Genesis narrative and the Genesis narrative can be illuminating for our reading of the law. A question to consider.

What are some of the analogies that you can see between Israel's release from slavery in Egypt and the different forms of release that are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter? The laws of Exodus chapter 22 refract the fundamental principles of the Ten Commandments in different situations. In chapter 21 verses 1 to 11 there are laws concerning slavery and the giving of Sabbath rest. I believe that corresponds to the first and the fourth commandments.

In chapter 21 verses 12 to 36 we have laws concerning violence and the honouring of father and mother relating to the fifth and the sixth commandments. In verses 1 to 15 of chapter 22 we have laws concerning property and theft the eighth commandment. In chapter 22 verses 16 to 20 we have laws concerning marriage and sexual and spiritual faithfulness the seventh and the second commandments.

In chapter 22 verses 21 to chapter 23 verse 9 we have laws concerning oppression and false witness relating to the ninth and the third commandment and these are both bracketed by not oppressing the sojourner. Laws concerning Sabbath and Thanksgiving

conclude this section and I believe that relates to the fourth and the tenth commandments. So all of the commandments are covered within these three chapters as different parts of miscellaneous case law are related to the core principles that we see in chapter 20.

Civil and criminal law both come under this along with laws relating to personal and familial practice. This isn't neatly divided into different jurisdictions there are ways in which it relates to ministries that will have to be performed by various different parties. This chapter begins with laws concerned with property.

Property crimes within the old testament are never punished with death unlike in other ancient near eastern societies. The laws concerning property here are also concerned with taking responsibility for property in your possession. There are more laws in scripture that deal with situations of theft in books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy and Numbers.

Some of the laws elsewhere allow for lesser punishment for voluntary restitution. However double restitution is the norm. The thief loses as much as he sought to gain from his crime.

So if he sought to take one item from someone he has to restore two because he loses what he sought to take from the other person. It's the principle of an eye for an eye. However if a man steals and butchers an animal the penalty can be greater.

Destroying capital in the case of an ox is a case in point. The ox is not just a form of property it's something that enables a man to work to work his field to plough his land and so an attack upon the ox is an attack upon a man's ability to work his land. There are similar concerns in this chapter about clothing.

If a man's cloak is taken he can't sleep warm at night and so the cloak must be restored at a certain point. There are laws here concerning defence of yourself and your property in the case of a burglar. In that sort of case if the burglar's life is taken at night there is no blood guilt for doing so.

At night it's not clear what a person's motivations are. It's far harder to assess a situation but in the daylight it's easier to get things under control so if the burglar's life is taken then there are serious consequences. There are laws concerning failure to look after things that might damage other people's property, a sort of pollution.

You can think of the ways in which fire can be set loose. We could think of the ways a river could be poisoned. All of these would come under this principle.

So property is not just about protecting your property it's taking responsibility for your property and the ways it can damage other people. Elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy property also includes your responsibility to give to other people, your

responsibility to allow the poor to glean your land for instance. There is also law here concerning mismanagement of your own property and destruction of other people's, failure of safekeeping.

If something is put in your charge and you lose possession of it or you damage it or something goes wrong with it you need to take responsibility in some of those cases whereas in others for instance if the owner was there when something went wrong with something that was put in your safekeeping by him you do not have to pay in the same way. Some of these cases had to be brought before God for adjudication. Perhaps God here refers to the judges or perhaps it refers to the prophet, someone who's going to declare God's judgment upon the situation and his decision in the matter.

We can think maybe of Solomon and his judgment concerning two women. Solomon didn't just reflect upon legal precedent and think about the particular laws that might apply. He gave a wise judgment that illuminated the situation with divinely given wisdom and maybe that's the sort of thing that's being looked for in these sorts of cases.

There are laws then that follow concerning marriage and sexual and spiritual faithfulness and here I think we've moved from the eighth commandment, the commandment concerning theft and stealing, to the second and the seventh commandments. The second commandment concerning idolatry and the seventh commandment concerning adultery. The first of the laws concerns the seducer.

The seducer has to marry the woman that he seduces although there is a veto of her father and elsewhere in scripture we see that the woman was consulted to give her consent in these cases but it was a situation where the father would adjudicate and act on behalf of his family representing his daughter in that particular matter and the seducer here has to pay a bride price and marry the woman. Now it's worth thinking about what a bride price is. We've seen elsewhere in the beginning of chapter 21 the case of someone buying a female slave who would later be married.

Now the payment in that situation is not a bride price. That's the payment for a slave or the payment for one who is a prospective wife who's bought from her father and that money is used by her father whereas in the case of the bride price the money was given to the father or to the brother and kept in trust presumably for the woman to be used when she needed it. It gave her some financial security.

It gave her something to fall back on if her husband proved unfaithful that she had this security given to her in that money. In the case of Leah and Rachel we see them complaining about the fact that their father had consumed the money that had been given for them. This was their money.

He was supposed to keep it in trust. He could use it and have benefit of the use of it but he couldn't consume it and if he had consumed it he was treating them as if they were

slaves that had been sold to Jacob rather than those who were free wives who could fall back on that money if Jacob mistreated them. There are various other such payments that we have in scripture connected with marriage.

We can think of the gifts that are involved in marriage that can be given to the family of the bride given as a sign of respect to them and a sign of the joining together of two families not just two individuals. But the requirement that the seducer had to pay this amount of money was important. It meant that the woman was not put at a disadvantage because she had lost her virginity.

If she were to marry someone else the bride price would already be paid and so it would give her a sense of security that someone could not just seduce a woman and get away with it and end up with her losing her honour. Many such laws can be startling for us. They relate to a society that is very different from our own with very different values, very different practices around marriage and there's no reason why we should re-pristiniate these, why we should treat these as applicable in our own society.

Yet they are examples of God's good law related to specific historical and cultural situations and we can learn lessons from them. We should also hold some of our own prejudices up to examination. For instance as members of a more egalitarian society we might see some sexual double standard here, a way that men and women are treated very differently in relationship to marriage.

But scripture in that respect is highlighting something about reality itself that there is an asymmetry in marriage and marriage is in part designed to ensure not equality but fairness, that the two parties in marriage do not take advantage of each other but are joined together in one with a common good. The commandment that follows concerns the sorceress and I think she's here because she represents spiritual adultery. As a woman she represents the bride but yet has abandoned the Lord and given herself to familiar spirits.

The commandment that follows this concerning bestiality is an example of a more general sin of sexual immorality or fornication being classified under the seventh commandment concerning not committing adultery. Now when we see that commandment we think it can be narrowly applied to marriage relationships but it stands as a heading for a great many sins of a sexual nature. Keeping the seventh commandment requires the honouring of the marriage bed, it requires opposition to a great many sexual sins and forms of fornication that push against that or undermine that and it's not just narrowly focused upon adultery as we would think of it, it's a lot broader than that.

The next law concerns sacrificing to any god other than the Lord. Here I think we're seeing the association between the seventh and the second commandment. There is a natural association, an affinity between these two commandments, one that's especially



seen in the explanation following the second commandment.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for either lord or god. I am a jealous god visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. The jealousy of God is a marital jealousy, a jealousy for his bride.

He does not want his bride to abandon him for any other. And there are further statements concerning this in exodus chapter 34 verses 11 to 16. Towards the end of that it warns them against making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice their gods and you are invited you eat of his sacrifice and you take of their daughters for your sons and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

What we're seeing here is the blending together of the sins of sexual immorality and adultery and the sins of spiritual adultery and idolatry. Those two things belong together. The next section concerns laws against oppression and this whole section is bracketed in verse 21 and in verse 9 of chapter 23 with statements first of all you shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him for you are sojourners in the land of Egypt and then you shall not oppress a sojourner for you know the heart of a sojourner for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

And so that whole section belongs together. If we were writing the Ten Commandments we would have a commandment against the abuse of power. However the expansion of the law here makes clear that there is such a command that the command particularly of the ninth commandment relates to this abuse of power.

God is concerned for the stranger and the oppressed. Israel was once a stranger in Egypt and in the book of Genesis Hagar was a stranger in the house of Abram and Sarai and she was oppressed there. God hears the voice of the oppressed and if they oppress people they will suffer the same judgment.

They're supposed to learn from what happened in Egypt. They're supposed to treat their slaves in a way that gives them freedom, that orders slavery towards manumission and to exemplify a society that has God's own fierce hatred for oppression. The warning not to oppress the stranger and the foreigner was not without relevance to Israel's life in the wilderness.

They went out of Egypt with a mixed multitude with many foreigners around them and so they were not just a group of natural born Israelites. They were surrounded with people who were not Israelites who were going to become part of their nation over time that needed to be adopted in and they had to show respect and care and concern for them not to oppress them in the way that they themselves have been oppressed. The text then goes on to talk about the widow and the fatherless.

This isn't just the orphan or the person who's been bereaved. It's a concern in particular for people without a man to provide and protect for them and God is the heavenly father. He hears the cries of all such persons and God describes powerfully his anger at the mistreatment of the vulnerable, the helpless and the oppressed.

God's attitude towards the mistreatment of the widow and the orphan is not just expressed as some sort of principled objection. Rather God is made furious by it and God will act for them. God also speaks to the charging the interest, the way that predatory interest can be a means of controlling others, of indebting them and we can think of the way that indebtedness would often lead to slavery.

God wants to ensure that his people are not reduced to that state. Where at all possible he wants people to give charitable loans, loans that do not make our brothers losses an occasion for our personal gains. The Christian teaching against usury that has existed for centuries but has fallen into neglect is something that really needs to be revisited.

There are many things that can be learned from it. One of the concerns is that we do not have business dealings which are just abstracted from our concern for our neighbour's well-being. There is the general expectation of sharing in each other's profit or loss and not profiting at the expense of others.

The laws that conclude this chapter relate to giving first fruits and firstborn to the Lord. It's a sign of Israel's own dedication to the Lord. They are consecrated to God.

They bear his name and they should not bear it in vain. They must give the first fruits of their land and they must give the firstborn of their sons. We might see a clue to the meaning of circumcision here as the firstborn animal was staying with its mother until the seventh day and then sacrificed on the eighth.

In the same way the sons of Israel had to be circumcised on the eighth day. It was a sacrifice of the sons of Israel to the Lord. And this whole section I believe should be classed under the ninth and the third commandments together.

The ninth commandment relates to not bearing false witness but not using the legal system as a tool of oppression. It's not just about lying. It's not just about bearing witness in court.

It's about using the structures of justice, the structures of power as means of oppression and I think we see that even more clearly in the book of Deuteronomy. I think it's also about bearing the name of the Lord. Israel is consecrated to the Lord.

They bear his name and as a result they must give their first fruits and they must give their firstborn and they must act in a way that bears that name in a righteous manner that does not cause God's name to be blasphemed among the nations but brings honour to him by their actions. A question to consider. Reflect upon the connections between

the various laws in these chapters and the ten commandments.

Do you agree with the ordering that I have suggested? What insights occur to you when reflecting upon the associations? Exodus chapter 23 is the final chapter of this section of the book of the covenant. These laws continue to refract the fundamental principles of the ten commandments in the different situations of life. It's not a comprehensive system.

It's just some example case laws that help us learn these basic principles of justice and jurisprudence. The laws concerning slavery and rest of Sabbath are given in chapter 21 verses 1 to 11. Laws concerning violence and honouring father and mother in chapter 21 12 to 36.

Concerning property and theft in chapter 22 verses 1 to 15. Concerning marriage and sexual and spiritual faithfulness in chapter 22 verses 16 to 20. And then we've moved into sections concerning oppression and false witness in chapter 22 verse 21 to 23 verse 29.

The part that we're in now. And then there are finally some laws concerning Sabbath and Thanksgiving in chapter 23 verses 10 to 19. And some movement through the commandments starting with the first and fourth then the fifth and sixth then the eighth then the seventh and the second together and then the ninth and third together then the fourth and the tenth together.

At least that is my reading of it. This section has a particular focus upon false witness and upon bearing the name of the Lord I believe. It's connected with the section from verse 21 of the previous chapter.

Both of them deal with the fact that they should not oppress the sojourner. They were sojourners in Egypt. And these bracketing statements help to hold all that material together.

It deals with both judicial and non-judicial forms of false witness. So we can think about rumours and slander or malicious witness or perjury in the context of court. The law recognises the power of popular opinion and influence here as well and the fact that justice is often not found on the side of the majority.

There are dangers on all sides that it highlights. It points out the danger of instinctively siding with poor people. This is something that might surprise us.

Christians have often spoken about having a preferential option for the poor. But yet this text is very clear that there must be impartiality in justice. And we should not instinctively side with the poor, with the victims, with the oppressed etc.

God clearly and strongly opposes oppression. But justice must seek the truth and be

impartial rather than tipping its scales in favour of either party. A desire for instance to do away with social inequalities can be dangerous because it can lead us to undermine justice and to serve a particular party rather than actually serving the good and the true and the just.

We can start to deal with social groups for instance rather than with particular persons and the justice of their cases. Starting to think more about who is doing what to whom and as a result of one party being preferred over the other we will start to privilege them when we see them doing something and undermine the other party when we see them doing the same thing. That is not how justice is supposed to be run.

Justice must be impartial. The importance of active concern for other people's property, even that of our enemy is highlighted after this. Once again it moves beyond the logic of friend and enemy relations and partiality to more universal principles.

We must uphold what is right and good and just over our preferences, over our friendships, over our family attachments, over any of these sorts of things and this emphasis upon impartiality and absolute principle is something that is an important part of the law in general. Justice must be done to the poor and the oppressed and their case must be heard and not perverted or God will judge. The poor man's lawsuit must be heard and rightly adjudicated.

A false charge is a matter of extreme seriousness and those who kill the innocent and righteous will be condemned. The law then is not a matter of kinship and familiarity, it's not a matter of social conflict nor must it be a matter of personal animus, of vendettas, of favouring one party over another for personal reasons. It must be consistent, it must be just and it must be equitable.

The danger of corruption and bribery is highlighted as a challenge to this. It must be a society of rigorous and consistent principles of justice and the tasks of judges, of witnesses, of jurors and other parties is a weighty one, a task whose seriousness is underlined at every point in this treatment. The book-ending statement concerning the stranger is a reminder that they were oppressed.

Their recognition of what it was like to be oppressed and a sojourner must guide their own practice. They have been placed in the shoes of people like the stranger Hagar and they must act accordingly. Israel must always see the world not only from the side of those with power and privilege but also from the side of those who are marginalised, of those who are the sojourners, as those who are poor and without privilege and power.

From this we move into legislation concerning the Sabbath year and the Sabbath year is given for the land to give support for the poor of the land, rest to the land itself and food to the animals. There's a sense here that the land is a commons, it's not an absolute possession which people can dispose of however they please. It belongs to the Lord, it's

been given as a possession and they must treat it in a way that recognises that it is never fully theirs.

It is something that belongs to God, that he has given to them to use and that they must always use it in a way that honours his title over it and the needs of those around them. The focus on the Sabbath as described here is to give rest to others. Rest is a form of justice, it's a means by which oppression is prevented and by which it is ensured that people who could easily be oppressed or overworked are given relief.

They must celebrate three annual feasts, the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of harvest and the feast of ingathering. The feast of unleavened bread connected with Passover, preceding Passover and leading to the feast of first fruits. The feast of harvest is the feast of Pentecost and the feast of ingathering is the feast of tabernacles.

The festal calendar will be further developed in Leviticus chapter 23 and these are days of national assembly. They are key times in Israel's annual life. The feast of unleavened bread is at the beginning of the spring barley harvest.

The feast of harvest is at the end of the wheat harvest and the feast of ingathering is at the end of the agricultural year. They must take the sacrifices of the Lord with the utmost seriousness and only give God the best. None of these things should be adulterated in any way.

And there is this strange commandment at the end which is also found at the end of the series of commandments in Exodus chapter 34 verse 26 and then repeated again in Deuteronomy chapter 14 verse 21. In each case it's a climactic statement to not boil a kid in its mother's milk. The importance of keeping life and death separate might be part of the point here and this also has the effect of placing restrictions upon food that give a recognition that all comes from God and is subject to him and a mindfulness about our food and where it comes from and the way in which it's made and processed and the dignity with which things are treated is part of the purpose of this I think.

When we consider what is meant by boiling a kid in its mother's milk we must recognise that it's taking something that was for the kid to have life, its mother's milk, and we're using that as a means of its death. We're using that to prepare it for our food. What this commandment forces people to do is to consider the dignity of the animals themselves.

The kid should not be prepared for its food in what was supposed to be its food. There's something about that that dishonours the kid and the milk and the law that we must hold those things separate forces us to consider the dignity of animal life and the way that we cannot just treat animals as our pure possession. We must give honour to them and we must eat them in a way that shows that they have a life and a dignity of their own.

Pay attention to how many of the commandments in this book of the covenant are

devoted to animals and taking care of them. God created the animals, he delights in the animals and one of the tasks that we have as human beings is to take care of and concern for the animals. God declares that he will send his angel before them.

This seems to be a theophanic figure, a manifestation of God's own presence. He's the messenger of God himself and seems to be identified with God at least in my understanding. Looking back at Genesis the angel appears on a number of occasions.

It wrestles with It appears to Abraham and to Sarah and declares that they will have a son in Genesis chapter 18. Here we have a section of sanctions following commands. There are three warnings to listen to the angel, a warning against worshipping foreign gods and again another warning against the gods of the Canaanites and these frame two blessings.

Blessings for obedience to the angel and then a blessing upon obedience more generally. There are consequences for obedience and disobedience. They must utterly shun Canaanite idolatry and be faithful to the Lord.

If they are faithful, God will bless them with food, with health, with fruitfulness and he will drive out their enemies before them. God is the God of nature and as Israel serves him, nature itself will support them. This section deals with principles of holy war which can be troubling for us.

It's important to remember that this war is primarily a war of God against the Canaanites. The Israelites have to remove the Canaanites but just the Canaanites. It's not a war against paganism in general.

They have to root paganism from the land but not paganism as such from all over the world. No right was given to them to fight in the name of the Lord to develop a greater empire. In Genesis chapter 15 God declares that the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure.

God gives them time before he judges them. The Canaanites could also leave the land and go elsewhere. Recognising these things can at least relieve some of our problems.

It doesn't actually solve many of the difficulties and questions that we might have about this but at least gives us a clearer sense of what's in view. The emphasis here is upon driving them out, removing them from the land, not exterminating them but removing them from the land so that they go elsewhere presumably. A question to consider what are some of the ways both in our treatment of animals and in our separation of death and life more generally that we can be mindful not to boil a kid in his mother's milk.

Exodus chapter 24 concludes a period of law with a section of narrative. It's the ratification of the book of the covenant. The leaders of Israel are summoned to worship in verses one and two.

The point of the law is worship and relationship with the Lord which this chapter really underlines. The bond between the Lord and the children of Israel is more personal than contractual. Many have seen this in terms of a suzerain vassal treaty, the sort of treaties that exist between kings and tributaries within the ancient near east but what we see here is something that goes beyond that.

The bond between the Lord and the children of Israel is more personal and more like a sort of marriage covenant. The three priests, the 70 elders and Moses are summoned up the mountain. You should note that they stand at different points.

Once again we can relate this to the order of the tabernacle. Moses is the prophetic uber-priest, the levite prophet by whom God establishes the entire system while Aaron functions within the system. Moses writes down all of the words as a written testament and then later on he reads the book of the covenant, the contents of chapters 21 to 23 to the people and then they are sent to it.

Moses builds an altar at the base of the mountain with 12 pillars representing the tribes of Israel and there's a repetition of the people's ascent to the words of the book of the covenant. There may be two distinct stages here. Moses explaining the words of the book of the covenant first, relaying them in his own words and then reading the book out to the people.

There are two stages of the covenant ratification as well. There are the burnt offerings and the peace offerings that Israel practices with the associated blood rite and then there is the meal of the elders Aaron and his sons and Moses before the throne of the Lord. Through these rituals a formal covenant bond is established between God and his people.

This is a marriage. There's already a bond between the Lord and the Israelites through Abraham but this is a further development and an intensification of that relationship. This covenant is not an arrangement between two equal parties.

There are mutual commitments but God is the one who establishes the covenant and the people are the ones who are called to submit to it. The covenant is not just the rules but it's also the promises. God has declared his commitment to the people and the conditions that come with it are always shaped by that fundamental commitment of God to his people, his deliverance of them and these conditions are not something that undermines the Abrahamic covenant as Paul makes very clear in the book of Galatians.

The Abrahamic covenant is not conditional in the same way. There are conditions here that will shape Israel's relationship with the Lord but the Abrahamic covenant that underlies it and that provides the basis for God's relationship with Israel in the first place is not conditional. The burnt offerings and the peace offerings atone for and consecrate the people to the Lord and express their communion with him.

Half of the blood is thrown against the altar and half is thrown against the people and it's a formalizing ritual. You can maybe remember the ritual of Genesis chapter 15 where the animals are divided in two and the smoking fire part and the flaming torch goes through the midst. As in the case of Genesis 15 this rite provides part of the foundation for the enduring practice of sacrifice which repeats and recapitulates this rite and event.

It points back to the fundamental relationship between God and his people and every time they sacrificed it was referring back to this reality. You can think also of the way that this is related to Christ in Hebrews chapter 9 verses 15 to 22. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

For where a will is involved the death of the one who made it must be established for a will takes effect only at death since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood for when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people saying this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you and in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed under the law almost everything is purified with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

The elders, the priests and Moses have an audience with the Lord himself, an intimate audience. They see a manifestation of the Lord upon his throne and they see his feet on this sapphire and pavement. God invites them into his royal presence in safety and there's a communication here of fellowship and closeness.

Moses is then summoned further up the mountain where he goes with his assistant Joshua. God will there give him the tablets of stone and behind he leaves her who represents the elders and Aaron who represents the priesthood. They will be the leaders of the people in his absence.

God's authority in the law is underlined here. We're also seeing more of the principle of the relationship between Sinai and the tabernacle, the altar at the base, the way that the elders can go into the middle realm, the people have to go in the surrounding area, the courtyard and then Moses can go into the very presence of God himself and we'll see more about these connections as we go further. And at this point I think we should also notice some allusions back to the story of Noah and the covenant with Noah, not least in the order of the days.

There are two sets of seven days and then there's a 40-day period in which there's an ascension up. You can think about in Genesis chapter 7, first of all in seven days I will send rain on the earth and then later on and after seven days the waters of the flood



came upon the earth and then further the rain fell upon the earth 40 days and 40 nights and the waters increased and bore up the ark and it rose high above the earth. So we're seeing two sets of seven, we're having a period of 40 days and during that 40 days raising up the ark to God's presence.

Moses ascends to God's presence during the 40 days and 40 nights and so I think there's some sort of correspondence here that we're supposed to notice and as we get into the next chapter we'll see that it continues and there's obviously something deeper going on here. The Sabbath principle should also be noticed that Moses is admitted to God's presence on the seventh day. There has been a decreation in the events of the exodus and the plagues and now there is a new covenant and a new humanity being established on this mountain just as there was a new covenant and a new humanity formed through Noah.

A question to consider, how did the events of this chapter help us to understand Jesus's statement about the blood of the covenant at the Last Supper? In Exodus chapter 25 we have the beginning of the preparation for the construction of the tabernacle. The people of Israel received gifts from the Egyptians but now they will give gifts to the building of the Lord's tabernacle. This is a house being built from people's hearts.

If things such as the law of the firstborn, the feast of unleavened bread, the Passover and the song of the sea serve to institutionalize the deliverance from Egypt and perpetuated in the life and the practice of Israel, the building of the tabernacle will serve the same purpose with regard to Sinai and the encounter with the Lord there. The tabernacle is a portable Sinai, a movable mountain and the story of Exodus begins with Israel building for Pharaoh and ends with them building a house for the Lord to dwell in their midst. There is a sort of symmetry to it, the first half concerned with the service of Pharaoh, the second half with the service of the Lord.

The tabernacle's construction is also ordered according to a creation-like pattern in Exodus chapter 25-30. In Genesis 1 verse 1 to 2 verse 4 we see that creation has two stages. On the first three days the order of creation is formed by the division between light and darkness, waters above and waters beneath, land and sea.

And on the second three days each of these realms is filled and distributed to ordained rulers. Day four corresponds to day one, day five to day two, day six to day three. And in Exodus chapter 25-30 we see two sets of phases dividing the construction of the tabernacle.

There are pattern phases and there are ordinance or generation phases and these are marked out by phrases so make everything according to the pattern that you've seen on the mount or this must be done throughout all your generations. So one concerned with the pattern, the other with the continuing practice and the delegation. The pattern phrases which occur in the first half in chapter 25 verses 9 and 40, chapter 26 verse 30,

chapter 27 verse 8 refer to the forming stage of the new creation.

And the ordinance or generation phrases occur in chapter 27 verse 21, chapter 28 verse 43, chapter 29 verse 9 and chapter 30 verse 10. These refer to the filling stage where the new formed order is filled and apportioned to rulers. The first day of the tabernacle building begins with the formless raw materials assembled for the construction of the tabernacle.

This is what happens in verses 1 to 9 as they devote certain things to the Lord. And then the ark, the table and the lamp stand are formed on that first day. They're covered with gold and they represent the radiance of God's glory presence.

There will be other things that are formed of other materials but these are formed of gold. They're specially representing God's presence. The ark and its cover represent God's throne and footstool.

The table might be seen as the earth beneath the heavens and the lamp stand is the light of the first day. We should also observe the way, particularly in the following chapters, that the spirit of God assists in the building of the tabernacle. This is also something that human beings are establishing as creators under God's direction and instruction.

In the creation story of Genesis chapter 1, God creates the heavens and the earth. And in the formation of the garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 2, he plays out a similar pattern of creation with man as a witness. Now there is a further movement still as God is teaching man to create under his direction.

We'll also see as we get further on in the book that there are themes of assessment and blessing and Sabbath just as we have at the end of the story of the creation. The ark of the covenant also reminds us of Noah's ark. Even though the word for ark isn't the same, we've seen already some similarities between the ascent of Sinai and the ascent of the ark upon the waters leading it to Mount Ararat and the establishment of a new covenant there.

There's a similarity between Moses' ascent into the cloud and the ascent of the ark upon the waters. So two sets of seven days followed by a 40 days and 40 nights period. Now the ark of the covenant reminds us again.

Once again there's a construction of a particular type of wood box that God gives the instructions for that must be overlaid with something inside and out with specific dimensions. But there are sharp contrasts of course. One is covered with pitch, the other is overlaid with gold.

And the Hebrew letters used for the covering of Noah's ark in Genesis chapter 6 verse 14 are taken up again to refer to the covering or the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

Noah's ark was lifted up by the waters and the people must provide liftings up or contributions for the building of the tabernacle. On the first day of a new year the tabernacle is established later on in the book and the covering of the ark is removed in Genesis chapter 8 verse 13.

Again a new creation event. Perhaps the tabernacle should be seen as a sort of building of a new ark that God is going to lead his people through the wilderness and his presence among them within this vessel is perhaps a new form of ark. To dwell in the hostile environment of a flooded world Noah had to build a world in miniature, the ark, and dwell in that realm for a period of time.

For God to dwell in our hostile environment, a world of sin, a world that rejects him, a world that is impure in his spotless and pure holiness, requires a different sort of ark, a glory ark, that contains God's glory presence in our midst without that presence breaking out and destroying us. It allows for communion between God and man without God's holiness destroying the worshipper. The ark of the covenant then and its cover represent God's throne in the inner chamber of the tabernacle or this sort of palace tent.

It's a throne and a footstool, the footstool being the ark and the throne being the cover. We should probably relate the furniture of chapter 25 to the details of the previous chapter. The ark of the covenant represents God's throne.

God was seen enthroned in the previous chapter. The elders, the priests, and Moses representing Israel ate before the Lord and the table of showbread is the continued representation of that communion between the people and God in God's tabernacle or his tent. The golden lampstand represents the assembly of burning like the burning bush with the presence of God in its midst.

There's a pattern shown to Moses as we see in Numbers chapter 8 verse 4 on the mountain so perhaps we should think that there is a heavenly archetype for this. This is something that Hebrews suggested that there is a heavenly tabernacle that corresponds to the details of the earthly tabernacle. This is a sort of heaven model on earth, a model of God's presence in our midst.

God's heavenly throne is represented in an earthly model. When we get to it we should also contrast the building of the tabernacle with the building of the golden calf which is sharply contrasted with it. Israel's life will later be coordinated around the tabernacle.

It will be symbolically mapped onto the reality of the encounter with God and the continued presence of God in their midst thereafter. God isn't bound to a particular place but his special presence will move with them and his throne will be set up among them within this special tent. Understanding the nature of the tabernacle first as a portable Sinai, a movable mountain and then as a new creation and then as something related to Noah's ark will help us to see how the sacrificial system works in relation to it.

The tabernacle is a continued representation of these things. It relates to heaven above, it relates to Sinai, it relates to the garden of Eden, it relates to the original creation as a whole and it relates to Noah's ark. And as Israel orders its life around this building its symbolic practice will relate it to all of those past events.

It's a way of continuing the reality of those events and developing those events in their significance in the continuing life and practice of the nation. This is not just a past event. When they leave Sinai behind they will take Sinai with them in some sense and that will be taken with them in the tabernacle.

It will be a continued place of encounter with God, of meeting and fellowship with the heavenly bridegroom. It will be a way of entering into the realm of heaven itself in a model. A question to consider.

In Hebrews chapter 8 verses 1 following we read, Now the point in what we are saying is this. We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices.

Thus it is necessary for this high priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth he would not be a priest at all since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

For when Moses was about to erect the tent he was instructed by God saying, see that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. But as it is Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it is enacted on better promises. How can meditating upon the meaning of the tabernacle, its connection with Sinai and its connection with heaven and then thinking about the connection between the tabernacle and Christ help us better to understand what the new covenant means in this regard.

In chapter 26 of Exodus we have the second stage of the construction of the tabernacle which is the structure and the covering of the tabernacle itself. As we saw in the previous chapter the pattern of the original creation is being played out here. God starts with things formless and void and in the chapter that precedes this there are materials gathered together, raw materials given up by the people.

And then there is the establishment of light, the gold objects at the very heart of the tabernacle that represent God's presence with his people. The next stage, the stage that we have now reached relates to the establishment of the firmament. The firmament is the division between heaven and earth it's the marking out of the realm of heaven and here we have a new heaven realm divided from the rest of the earth just as God divided the garden of Eden from the rest of the land so God divides this particular realm within the structure of the tabernacle from the rest of the world.

This will be a place where God dwells in the midst of his people in a special way where he meets with his people and for that reason it's separated from the world and it's structured according to the logic of the original creation in the same way that we see Eden being. This chapter begins with the creation of different coverings or drapes for the tabernacle, moves to the actual frame of the tabernacle and then to the internal veil and the covering of the entrance to the tabernacle, the screen at the entrance. And the materials that are prescribed for the construction actually matter.

Bases of silver for the frames for instance in verse 19 and gold bars and rings at the top is a ladder-like construction but there's also something more about it that should be noted it's that movement from silver to gold and in the next chapter we see that the external surroundings have a movement from bronze to silver so there's a different layer as it were there's an ascent into God's presence a movement from bronze to silver to gold. Also the hooks that bind together the covering of the goat skin outside of the internal covering of the linen the linen drapes those are held together by bronze hooks and that connection again shows as you move out there's a movement from gold which is that which characterizes the interior of the tabernacle think about the gold of the Ark of the Covenant or the gold of the lampstand or the gold that's used in the construction of the table of the presence and then to silver that's beyond that and then to bronze there is a symbolic ordering to these materials we'll also see the other materials are important as well the use of linen and wool that mixture is an important thing mixtures tend to be associated with things that are special and holy it's mostly white linen with cherubim on them and it's similar to the clothing of the priest so there seems to be a connection between the priest's garments and the garments of the tabernacle as it were the tabernacle is in some senses like a body that's clothed and the high priest is like a person who's wearing a tent and so there's a connection between the house or the tent and the person and the way that Israel is represented in this tent is important and we'll get into that more as we look through this the drapes inside the tabernacle involve you being surrounded by glorious cherubim and the light of the lampstand it's like entering into the glory cloud or at least going near to the glory cloud God's glory presence is nearby in the presence of the holy of holies and Israel can come near as they eat before his presence much as they ate in the presence of God before his throne they did not have the full access that Moses enjoyed but that is what belongs to the realm of the holy of holies the most holy place once again we need to remember that the tabernacle is a portable Sinai a movable mountain it's a place where they will encounter God and relate to God as they move around it's a vessel in some sense because it's being moved from place to place it's portable but it's also a place where God will be especially present in the midst of his people it has outer curtains of goat's hair uses bronze clasps to hold these together and this exterior structure is less glorious than the internal drapes then on top of that there are ram skins dyed red and a sort of durable leather covering on top of that we don't know exactly what it was but we know that it was used for sandals these four levels maybe represent symbolic levels of Israel's life that internal level connecting

very much with the priesthood it's the same color and form of their garments maybe the goat's skin layer outside of that is related to the leaders of the people and then the ram's skin is related to the rest of the nation those who are set apart as representing Israel as the firstborn in the event of the Passover and then on top of that there is something that is a form of leather that has often been suggested as a sort of leather from the sea maybe of dolphins or something like that and that would represent the people of the mixed multitude so there's a movement out in Israel's life again there's a movement from a more glorious form to a less glorious form maybe we should also recognize here some image of Sinai itself where the external cloud of God's presence was a darkness and then as you went inside that you got to see the glory of God and so that movement is one that Moses makes but for the people outside it would have looked like a very dark and foreboding place perhaps and so maybe it's translating that into an architectural structure another thing to notice is we see cherubim here again we saw cherubim in the garden of Eden they were placed there to guard the garden of Eden after the sin of man and here they appear again this is God's throne room this is God's palace and they are guarding the entrance they also represent this as the realm of God's special presence the place where it's dangerous to come in if you're not prepared if you're not atoned for if you're not provided for there's a dividing veil and this partitions the tabernacle into two parts once again it's a more glorious material the way it's described it's not just linen it's held together as it were by the linen but it's primarily characterized by the blue purple and scarlet yarns that construct it it should be made again with cherubim skillfully worked into it and it involves hooks of gold and bases of silver so we're seeing similar sort of symbolism here and the way that the tent represents a different level or movement into a greater degree of glory a number of people have suggested that this was probably more of a tent-like structure than many presented there would be sloping walls it wouldn't just have a box or rectangular like shape there are ways in which that rectangular shape is part of its construction but the external part would look more like a tent God would pitch his tent in the midst of his people and a number of the layers particularly of the external layers are designed for functional purposes to ensure that it is protected against the elements for instance against rain we also need to bear in mind that many of the details that would be involved in the construction of the tabernacle are not actually given to us we have to presume that Moses received some of these things in a visionary form on the mountain he saw the pattern to use and he was given some sort of verbal pattern but much of it would also be from memory of seeing the pattern that God had given him a question to consider one of the most defining features of the tabernacle and the later temple is the veil the veil that divides the most holy place from the holy place that partitions this building and that partition is one that has deep significance God dwells on the other side of the veil the veil divides you from God's presence God's special presence but it also allows you to come near it allows you to approach without being destroyed because it's a barrier between you and God in that sense it is a sort of protective hedge dividing people from the realm where God's holiness dwells how does the reality of the veil provide a metaphor for understanding the

religion and the pattern of faith of the old testament and the difference formed by Christ opening up of the veil in the new in exodus chapter 27 we find the instructions for the construction of the altar the courtyard and the instructions to tend the lamps and to provide oil for them the tabernacle as we've remarked before is the institutionalization of the encounter at Sarniai it's also a replay of the pattern of creation the most focal point of Israel's religious practice was the altar this was the outer altar it's the altar of bronze in contrast to the golden incense altar that would be within the holy place altars were always an essential element of worship within the patriarchal period we see several altars being constructed and this particular altar would have been a square of around seven and a half feet or just under two and a half meters and around four and a half feet or 1.35 meters tall it was moved around by bronze poles inserted in the sides and when they set it up they presumably set it up by filling the hollow wooden altar with earth and stones which among other things would have protected the structure from the fire upon it the altar was likely placed on an elevation although probably not a stepped one as we see in chapter 20 that's restricted it was reminiscent of Sarniai itself of course this invites us to think of Sarniai itself as an altar the association works in both directions in chapter 19 verse 18 the smoke from Sarniai ascends like that of a kiln so Mount Sarniai is like an altar and then the altar is like Mount Sarniai it's important to consider how symbolic structures work and how analogical reasoning works more generally a lot of the logic of the tabernacle is based upon associations between things on different levels so there's an association between the tabernacle and heaven itself there's an association between the tabernacle and eden there's an association between the tabernacle and mount sarniai and all of those different associations are in play and the symbolic movements that occur relative to the tabernacle are all ways of negotiating those symbolic spaces too so it's a re-entry into eden it's an entry into heaven itself in some sense it's an ascent of mount sarniai and thinking about it in this way will help us to understand a lot of the logic that underlies the sacrificial system things ascending to god from the altar then among other things related to things ascending sarniai it was also a means by which access to the tabernacle itself occurred and so ascend mount sarniai and then you enter into god's presence animals were not killed on the altar but they would be killed near the altar and then offered upon the altar it's worth remembering this fact because often we over emphasize the importance of killing as the element of sacrifice we think that that is the element that really makes sacrifice work it's the real logic behind it but isn't really the most important thing tends to be elsewhere it's the presentation of the blood or the consumption of that up in fire whatever it is it's not narrowly focused upon the actual act of killing the horns of the altar are also given particular importance here one could go to the horns of the altar as we see elsewhere for refuge among other things we see that in the story of joab as an example the horns of the altar also had a part to play in certain ceremonies as blood would be placed upon them and they obviously had symbolic importance for that reason we should also notice that the altar is bronze we've seen already the movement from gold to silver to bronze that there is a symbolic movement from the most glorious to the slightly less glorious to

the lesser glory still and here i think we're seeing that again there's a decrease in the level of glory it's an access to god it's not necessarily the most holy place where things are in gold we should also remember that there was another altar the incense altar which was of gold and that was in the holy place but maybe we should see an analogy between this altar and that altar on some level the courtyard marks out sacred from profane space it also represents the more general realm of the israelites before the mount of sinai it's 100 cubits by 50 cubits and perhaps some connection with the ark should be considered which was 300 cubits by 50 cubits it's maybe a tabernacle ization of the area of the courtyard so the tabernacle is 30 by 10 dimension and now you have the fusion of those two things the courtyard and the tabernacle brought together maybe that's part of what's going on it's surrounded by linen hangings and perhaps these represent clouds the positioning is something that a number of people have speculated about and it seems quite likely that the ark of the covenant and the altar were at the diagonals of the two squares of the courtyard so if you split the rectangle of the courtyard into two squares of equal size and you drew diagonals for both of those squares in the one the center thing would be the ark of the covenant and in the other it would be the altar which again suggests some connection between those two things the third day of creation involves the separation of the land from the sea and the third day in the formation of the tabernacle involves the establishment of the brazen altar which presumably would have turned to green over time maybe related to the grass of the third day of creation the second part of that day and the tabernacle court was that division of land from the sea of the general wilderness or the gentiles this was a sort of space in which israel was brought up from the sea of the more general nations and brought into god's presence in some sort of land the establishment of the court then divides the land beyond it from the land within which is a sacred space rather than profane space it's setting out as it were the boundaries of the sea so that it could not pass the final thing we have in this chapter is oil set up for lighting the lamp in the tabernacle needs to be kept burning and oil is important for this both morning and evening erin and his sons had to tend to this task and that tending to the light maybe represents something of the more general task of the priests and the levites in keeping the light of god's word burning in israel the light of god's presence and that light seems to have symbolic importance in places like first samuel in first samuel chapter three verses one to three now the boy samuel was ministering to the lord in the presence of eli and the word of the lord was rare in those days there was no frequent vision at that time eli whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see was lying down in his own place the lamp of the lord had not yet gone out now there are three things there there's the light of the word of the lord as god's word is heard in the voice of prophecy and in the voice of scripture there's the eyes of the high priest his vision his insight his wisdom and then there's the lamp of the lord and that threefold connection i think is brought out in a literary level in first samuel chapter three i think here it's represented by the task of the levites and the priests to tend to that this can of course be connected to the order of creation the fourth day involved oil for the lampstand which corresponds



to the great lights created on the fourth day of the original creation so you have the original light created on the first day and then you have the light that's corresponding to that placed in the heavens on the fourth day now here i think we can also see a shift from a forming stage where everything needs to be made according to the pattern that's the phrase that recurs throughout the forming phase to a new phrase throughout their generations so this emphasis upon succession and delegation and filling and there i think we've seen that movement and this occurs on the fourth day of this new creation a question to consider if you think about the process of moving from the entrance of the tabernacle courtyard past the altar and into the holy place what might the visual effect of that movement have impressed upon you about what it means to come near to god exodus chapter 28 concerns the clothing for the priest most particularly the high priest these are the things that surround the priest and the priest's glorious garments correspond with the tabernacle as we'll see there's holy garments for a holy house and the garments of the high priest are like a tent in many respects the connection between the person and the house should be recognized i've already observed the way that the construction of the different parts of the tabernacle correspond with the days of creation and here we'd see events corresponding with the fifth day the fifth day also corresponding with the second day the second day concerned the structure of the tabernacle itself and now we have the priests and their dress that corresponds with the tabernacle it is this clothing that enables them as it were to fly across the face of the firmament to be like the angels who enter into the realm of the lord in his heavens the construction of these garments was entrusted in people who had been filled with a spirit of skill the gifts of the spirit for the forming of the house it's worth noting here and later on in the discussion of the formation of the tabernacle that the spirit is deeply involved in equipping people to create this realm the spirit is the one who creates this using people that he has filled with his gifts to understand the garments of the high priest it might be helpful to step back a bit and to think about the purpose of garments more generally garments can be extensions and surroundings of us they glorify us they can represent authority and standing and status when someone takes on a new office there is a process of investiture they put on new garments robes of office maybe a particular chain or there is a coronation in which they take the crown upon themselves they also cover nakedness nakedness can be connected with shame it can also be connected with immaturity in childhood an infant is naked because they haven't yet achieved glory but nakedness can also be seen in terms of guilt and a loss of integrity we fear nakedness because it represents exposure to judgment to the gaze of some other party clothing then covers that nakedness it protects us from the gaze of judgment of other parties but it also gives us glory it's a way in which we express for instance our individuality or a way in which we express a particular office that we hold or function that we're performing Aaron is wearing the world there's vegetation you can think about the linen there's animal the wool there's precious metal there's precious stones and then they're expensive dyes and all these different things are part of what he's wearing and human beings are distinguished from the animals among other things and the fact that we wear

clothes we dress ourselves with the world and to actually be naked is to be peeled to lose something of the covering that is natural to us it's natural for human beings to wear clothes every culture you go to pretty much human beings wear clothes that can change from culture to culture there are different standards of dress and different fashions from time to time but we all wear clothes it's something that's a virtual human universal Aaron's garments represent the tribes among other things he stands for Israel he is dressed in a symbolic manner the purpose of his garments are in part for covering nakedness we see that in places like verse 42 but they're also given for glory and beauty it's natural for a human being when they grow up to want to wear garments that are glorious garments that express something of their status their individuality that distinguish them from others in one way or another the clothing of the high priest has many different connotations that we can think of too it's like military dress a lot of it is metallic and heavy it's a sort of chain mail at certain points a weaving involving gold as the weft perhaps you have gold and then you have the warp as some other sort of precious thread it is a garment that serves a purpose as he goes into the presence of the lord the high priest memorializes Israel before the lord and is also marked out with a special thing that represents his status the blossom on his forehead that represents him as the high priest as holy to the lord the high priest that stands for Israel in part as a kingdom of priests the garments are also nuptial and in Isaiah chapter 61 verse 10 and 11 we see something of this particular connection i will greatly rejoice in the lord my soul shall exalt in my god for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation he has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels for as the earth brings forth its sprouts and as a garden causes what is sewn in it to sprout up so the lord will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations the connection then between the clothes of the bridegroom and the clothes of the priest should be noted here and the headdress of the priest seems to be connected in part with the headdress of a bridegroom the priests represent the divine bridegroom to the bride the priest is perhaps best understood as a sort of palace servant now palace servant or minister within the palace is someone who represents the king to his guests the authority of the king he is one who acts in the name of the king but he is one who is under the king as one who has to serve the guests in certain ways and so on the one hand he represents the king to those that come into the house but on the other hand he serves those who come into the house on behalf of the king and here he represents the divine bridegroom to the bride serving the bride in the name of and as a symbol of the divine bridegroom the garments of the high priest are also like a tabernacle around him they're made using similar materials to the tabernacle and we can see some more specific correspondences the ephod for instance could be compared to the holy place it goes from the waist band to the shoulder and much of its significance seems to be related to what it carries to the onyx stones and also to the breast piece that is placed upon it we have a number of references to ephods in scripture and they seem to have some sort of cultic purpose often associated with some sort of judgment or divining and

in places seem to have an idolatrous purpose here the importance may be particularly the relationship between the ephod and what it carries upon it the breast piece the onyx stones are engraved with the names of israel and the different tribes of israel it's a memorial to the lord it brings the people of israel to god's mind as it were calling him to act on their behalf to act recognizing that they are his people on the other hand if they are sinful it brings them to mind in a more negative way you can think of the way we have memorials so someone who wears a wedding ring that can be a memorial of their spouse it's something that brings their spouse to mind and the bond that they have with their spouse and so the breast piece and the onyx stones have that sort of memorial purpose within the structure of the high priest garments the breast piece is attached to these things among other things it doesn't seem to be supported by those but it is attached to them and the ephod maybe was some sort of waistcoat type thing and then there are the two onyx stones on the shoulder and then there's this connected plate that lies over the chest of the high priest and that plate or that breast piece has precious names and stones again more of them and the square shape of it suggests maybe a relationship with the holy of holies there's a movement also in glory the holy of holies is connected with gold and here the breast piece is a golden object with precious stones on it and once again it serves a memorial purpose it is also the place where the urim and the thummim are held those are stones of judgment and it seems that they were consulted as a means of consulting god in numbers chapter 27 verse 21 we see one example of this and he shall stand before eleazar the priest who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the orim before the lord at his word they shall go out and at his word they shall come in both he and all the people of israel with him the whole congregation and then in first samuel chapter 14 verse 41 therefore saul said oh lord god of israel why have you not answered your servant this day if guilt is in me or in jonathan my son oh lord god of israel give oran but if this guilt is in your people israel give thummim and jonathan and saul were taken but the people escaped from this sort of verse it seems that the orim and thummim served a purpose akin to taking lots they were sacred lot taking and it was a means of determining a decision between two binary choices and so one of the stones will be connected with one decision and the other with the other the robe of the ephod could be connected with the curtains of the tabernacle once again we're seeing similarities in the sort of construction the sort of materials that are used and it has bells and pomegranates at the bottom the pomegranates represent presumably fertility and blessing in that sense and maybe some of the nuptial themes connected with this as a bridegroom's dress a dress that represents the divine bridegroom to the people and so the high priest symbolizes the divine bridegroom with the pomegranates the bells have to be there in order that he can go into the presence of god and the high priest moves with the sound of these bells in verse 35 it is necessary that he should not die maybe it's the musical sound of worship that they represent he comes in with this tinkling of bells that represents the music with which god should be approached now it's worth pausing for a moment here and considering the way that a lot of this garment seems to be designed to protect the high priest he's coming into a

dangerous realm he's coming into the realm of god's presence and if he does not come with the right memorials if he does not come covered up in his nakedness and if he does not come with the proper sound then he will die he will be judged it's a dangerous realm it's god's presence it's the realm of the king and if he is not welcomed then he's in trouble on the forehead of the high priest there is a golden plate or blossom that's placed this is again engraved like a seal like the breastplate and the onyx stones and the fact that these three objects are all engraved in that same sort of way suggests that there's a connection between them the breast piece is connected with the holy of holies it has that square shape it's something that is made with the most precious materials here we have another gold thing that represents the budding or the blossom of the high priest and we can think of that in terms of Aaron's rod that blossoms it's the same sort of word that's used and it's a token of his authority of his particular standing as the representative of Israel so we have the onyx stones we have the breast piece and then we also have the blossom and all of these have a particular significance that maybe attaches them with the holy of holies in discussing the blossom or the plate on the forehead we are told that Aaron is to bear guilt for the people in the holy things so both the tabernacle and the high priest garments have some sort of atoning purpose or connection with the process of atonement and here we should reflect upon the importance of the day of atonement when the high priest has to divest himself of his glorious garments go through the process of atonement and then put on those garments once more the other priests have garments of lesser holiness they cover their nakedness so that they do not die the high priest wears eight garments an ephod breastplate robe turban frontlet or this little plate or blossom and then a tunic sash and undergarments the regular priest wears some version of four of these it has coat sashes cap or some sort of headdress and then linen undergarments and so there are similarities between them that connect the two of them but make very clear that the high priest has a higher level of glory a glory that's associated with the holy of holies not just the holy place and there's an elevation of the garments from Aaron's body they move out from his body from that inner level of the linen undergarments out until you have the most glorious elements of the garments representing the holy of holies one thing this might alert us to is the connection between the tabernacle and the human body the tabernacle is a sort of body and those sorts of connections with the body are even more clearly seen in the case of the temple where there are elements of the temple that correspond to all different parts of the body there are five tables on either side of the holy place with five lampstands on each thinking about the two hands on the two hands and then there are five fingers that correspond with those different elements there in the holy of holies there is hidden the tablets of the law which relates to the way we must hide the law of god in our hearts there's the presence of god particularly found in that realm the heart of the human being is the place where god's presence should be found and then we have things like the two trunks of the pillars of yakun and boaz connected with the legs of the human being the altar that may relate to the earth that lies beneath us and the way that the bronze sea is like the reproductive organs of the human body that give life and from

which life can flow incense might be related to the function of the nose the lamps to the function of seeing and all these different elements suggest that there is some correspondence between the tabernacle and the temple and the body and when in the new testament we're told that we are a living temple that christ body is the temple this is not coming out of the blue this is something that should be understood from the logic of the old testament itself and one of the things that we are seeing in the clothing of the high priest is a marking out of the body of the high priest according to the logic of the tabernacle and so the logic of the tabernacle is written onto the body of the high priest now it's important to think about the way that the whole sacrificial system works the way the tabernacle works it works according to a sort of analogical system where things are mapped onto each other symbolically and there are all these different layers of connections it's a more poetic system than we're used to we're used to things that are more prosaic rather than analogical and poetic but this is actually how the system of scripture works it works with a sort of concrete logic where human beings can be mapped onto animals onto particular types of plants where clothing can represent something of a building and a building can represent a mountain or can represent heaven and all these sorts of connections help us to see the way that the universe is all connected and these connections are connections within which divine meaning can be found and lives can be lived in tune with a deeper reality so our task when thinking through these passages is to observe these connections to see the different analogies and correspondences that are at work and then having understood the basic logic of the system to understand how that logic can become the framework within which meaningful communication occurs so this is all just the framework like the different words that you might have in a dictionary or the different structures of a grammar and then you actually form sentences with these things and those sentences can be found particularly in the practice of the sacrificial system and so when we get to the book of vivicus we'll see that logic of the sacrificial system working within the language and the grammatical structure of the tabernacle structure and the dress and the priestly structure and the way that that relates to animals and all these other things. A question to consider where in the new testament do we see allusions perhaps to the clothing of the high priest and what further light might these references shed upon the meaning of these things within the old testament itself? Exodus chapter 29 concerns the ordination of Aaron and his sons.

This follows very naturally from the previous chapter in which the clothing of the high priest and the other priests was described. This corresponds to the sixth day of creation. It's the formation of a new humanity.

It corresponds with the day in which man was created as the image of God within the creation, charged with exercising stewardship over it and the priests are anointed just as the spirit of life was breathed into Adam and his creation. So this follows very naturally from what has just gone before. There are close parallels here with Leviticus chapter 8

where the actual performance of this ritual is described also in Exodus chapter 40 which is another description of the same performance.

What is the priest? The priest is the household servant in the divine palace. His task is to do all the things that would be the responsibilities of such a household servant within a palace. A steward within the house.

He's supposed to guard the house. He's supposed to serve at the table. He's supposed to maintain and clean the house.

He's supposed to represent the authority of his master to the guests and also to serve and minister to the guests. But then he also represents the people in some ways to God. He maintains not just the house of the temple but the house that that house represents.

The house of Israel. Ordination, this rite that's described in this chapter, is a filling of the hand quite literally. It's the way it's described and that's literally what happens in verse 20.

The priest is filled with his hand with the things that he will minister to the Lord with. The rite begins with the gathering of different materials and then the washing with water. The ordination ritual is a seven-day process.

The first day involves washing with water, being invested with priestly garments and being anointed. And we maybe can see some parallels between this and the logic of baptism. There are three sacrifices that need to be brought forward.

There's the purification or sin offering, the whole burnt offering and the consecration offering. So the first one is a bull for the sin offering. Then there's the two rams.

One for the whole burnt offering and another for the consecration offering. They must wait in the entrance of the tent of meeting. The purification or sin offering for the priest here is different from the regular one.

As in the case of the regular rite, it is performed with a bull that represents the high priest. But it seems as if the blood is placed at a different point. For the regular sin offering or purification offering, the blood is placed on the altar of incense in the holy place.

We see this in Leviticus chapter 4. But here it seems as if the blood is placed on the bronze altar in the church's courtyard. Now when we look through these rituals, we'll see particularly in this case a number of ways in which it diverges from the typical ritual. And those divergences are important to notice because they help us to understand the logic of this one.

This is a very unusual sacrifice because it's performed for the sake of priests that are not

yet ministering in the holy place. And because the priest is not yet a minister in the holy place, he can't defile it. So the blood of the sacrifice is not taken in there.

Later on when he does minister within the holy place, the blood of the sin or purification offering will be taken into the holy place and it will be placed on a different altar. This also suggests that there is some analogy between the bronze altar and the altar of incense. The altar of incense represents something about the priest and the bronze altar more maybe commoners of Israel.

There are two rams involved in the rite. There's the ram of the burnt offering and the ram of consecration. And in both of these cases, as with the bull, Aaron and his sons put their hands on the animals but they do not kill the animals which is unusual for a sacrifice.

Moses rather is the one who performs the role of the priest in these rituals. He is the prophet who's establishing this whole system. After the offering of the whole burnt offering, the consecration ram is offered.

Now the consecration ram is like the peace offering in many respects but there are significant differences. This is a rather anomalous rite. Moses for instance received the breast of the ram of ordination and the wave offering of the thigh is established as the perpetual Jew of Aaron and his sons.

However, they do not receive it as they usually would as a sort of direct contribution. In Leviticus chapter 7 verses 29 to 34, we get a sense of the more usual typical practice of this rite. In the case of that rite, it seems that Aaron and the priest receive meat from two different quarters as a direct contribution from Israel and then also as a wave offering from the Lord.

They wave it up to the Lord and then it's received back as it's lifted up and then received back from him. Here however, Moses gets the priest's portion of the wave offering of the breast and the thigh goes to Aaron and his sons. Stepping back a bit, as we look at the practice of the consecration offering, blood is placed upon both the priest and the altar.

It's placed on the horns of the altar, the four horns, and then other parts of the blood are placed on the right ear of Aaron and the tips of the right ears of his sons and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet. When you include the fact of circumcision with this, it seems as though the four tips of the human body are touched with this blood, representing the connection between the altar and the priest who serves it. We've already seen connection between the clothing of the priest and the tabernacle and the particular places that are touched are connected with specific functions, with hearing, with the action of the hands, with the going of the foot, and then with the procreative purpose of the genitalia.

Perhaps we should see the priest as a sort of living altar, one whose soul should ascend in service and also in prayer and worship, and we see that connection with the altar of incense perhaps there. A similar rite of touching blood to different extremities of the body is found in the cleansing of the leper rite in Leviticus chapter 14. The filling of the hand of the priest is also something that equips him to serve God and the bread that is placed in his hand, perhaps we should see that as representing human beings.

The bread placed before the Lord, the 12 loaves, represents Israel and here perhaps we're supposed to see human beings anointed with the spirit as being represented by bread anointed with oil. This process is not just anointing and preparing and consecrating Aaron and his sons, it's also preparing the tabernacle and its realm as a realm of service. So it's the setting apart of the altar as we see in verses 35 to 37.

Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it and the altar shall be most holy. Whoever touches the altar shall become holy. That connection between the holy altar and the holy people who are connected with it and that way in which the priest and the altar are connected by having blood touched the four tips of themselves helps us to see something of the logic of this system.

Now with the reference to seven days here I think we've moved into the stage of the Sabbath of this new creation week. This is establishing the rest where finally the service of the tabernacle is established and Israel knows the presence of God in their midst and this consecration of the altar and the tabernacle and the priests connects with God's consecration of the Sabbath day. This is the Sabbath realm and at the end of this we're having the statement of coming to rest.

I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their guard and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. It's a coming to rest of the story and that practice of the daily sacrifices evening and morning again is this perpetuation of the rhythm of creation.

There's been a new creation and a new humanity and that humanity is delegated with the task of continuing this pattern of the original creation evening and morning evening and morning and the sacrifices that correspond to that. A question to consider. There are a number of passages in the New Testament that seem to allude back to the practice of priestly ordination and particularly the washing involved in referring to baptism.

Can you think of some of those passages and how might they help us to understand the meaning of baptism? Exodus chapter 30 contains five sections concerned with the incense altar, the mustering money, the bronze labour, the anointing oil and the ingredients of the incense. You could maybe recognise it starting off with a gold item then with a collection of silver then a bronze item then an oil and then a special incense. These are materials that correspond with the gathering of materials at the very



beginning in chapter 25 when the tabernacle is first presented to us.

The incense altar establishes a continual ascent to God and I think this continues the theme of Sabbath that is present at the end of chapter 29. The tabernacle is like an ascending ladder to God's presence and the fact that the altar of incense is placed just before the veil in front of God's throne suggests it is representing some sort of ascent. You could maybe connect it with a sort of Jacob's ladder.

This is the way that you go up into God's presence and it also represents prayer. I think we see that in places such as Psalm 141 verse 2, let my prayer be counted as incense before you. See similar themes in Revelation 5 verse 8 and 8 verses 3 to 4. Maybe it can also be connected with the pillar of cloud and fire.

This altar is gold again like other elements of the holy place and the most holy place and it's square like the most holy place. It's a fifth of the length and the width of the bronze altar. It also has horns and it corresponds with the bronze altar in various ways.

We noted in the ordination rite for the priests that in the ordination rite the blood is placed upon the horns of the bronze altar but it seems on other occasions the purification blood is placed on the horns of the gold altar. So there seems to be some correspondence between them. Incense creates a pleasing environment.

Some have suggested that it covers up the smell of flesh and blood, the butchery that is characteristic of the tabernacle. I don't think that's necessarily the case. The smell of the meat burning would be a pleasant smell for the most part and the scent of the incense I think is doing something else.

We can think of the connection between incense and perfumed realms of love. That's often where we find the language of incense in places like Song of Songs and elsewhere and God's palace at the heart of Israel is where the bridegroom meets his bride. One could maybe see it as a sort of wedding chamber.

One of the natural consequences of this incense would be that there would be a glorious perfumed cloud that marked out the tabernacle and it would connect with the glory cloud of God's own presence. It would also give priests and worshippers a sense of going up into the clouds and it would also leave a mark upon people. Everyone who had been in that realm would smell of that realm.

They would carry that scent with them wherever they went. Once again we have the expression here, throughout your generations, which is that catchphrase for the second stage of the creation work that we have in this seven day pattern. It's the filling stage and here it I think ends that particular pattern.

The full purpose of the burning of incense can be discussed on a number of fronts. One area that might give us some insight is the stories of places like Numbers 16 verses 44-

50 where it seems to serve as a propitiatory act in Korah's rebellion. The offering of incense is something that brings a sweet smelling aroma to the Lord and it appeases him.

And there I think it represents the true worship of Israel and appeases God concerning the rebellion of the false worshippers, the false priests. So now we've had the gold item and we move on to the gathering of silver. The gathering of silver in the census tax is something that has puzzled many people, the exact meaning of it.

There seems to be some danger in numbering the people. If you number the people you're inviting judgment upon yourself and we see a story concerning that in 2 Samuel chapter 24 and 1 Chronicles chapter 21. Both of them tell this same story of David numbering the people and being judged for it severely.

There even Joab has a sense that this is a wrong thing to do, that this is a dangerous thing to do. Maybe it's assuming God's prerogative, that God is the only one who can truly number his people. To number the people is a claim to control them, a claim to have mastery over them.

And to do that is to court God's displeasure. Now here God seems to allow for the possibility of censuses being taken but yet he requires that a poll tax be taken whenever that happens, the same amount for each person and that it be given to the tabernacle. Now some of this money seems to have been used to construct the tabernacle.

In chapter 38 verses 25 following, the silver from those of the congregation who were recorded was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels by the shekel of the sanctuary. A beaker a head, that is half a shekel by the shekel of the sanctuary, for everyone who was listed in the records from 20 years old and upward for 603,550 men. The 100 talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil, 100 bases for the 100 talents, a talent a base.

And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the pillars and overlaid their capitals and made fillets for them. Now this doesn't seem to be an annual census but it does seem to be recurring or at least allow for the possibility of a census occurring on other occasions. But it is discouraged by the fact that it would be unpopular when you're taking a poll tax of the people.

It would be a disincentive to numbering the people. The people belong to God and you need to be very aware of numbering them for your own purposes. And so God gives a conditional law here.

If you are going to take a census you're going to have to take this poll tax too and that poll tax is going to be unpopular so it's a discouragement from taking a census unless there's a very very good reason to do so. There are some chronological questions in the

relationship between this and the census at the beginning of numbers but it seems that the tax was taken and then the census numbers were still being crunched as it were and that was given in the second month whereas the first month was when the tax was actually received. The labour comes next.

We've had gold, silver and now bronze. Water is connected with ritual purity and once again there's some natural symbolism here. Water has a very natural connection with purity.

It's what we use to wash and cleanse ourselves. And washing hands and feet before serving was necessary if you're going into the holy place. You are operating on holy ground and it seems likely that the priests were working with bare feet just as Moses had to go towards God's presence removing his sandals because he was stepping on holy ground so the Israelite priests have to remove their shoes, their sandals as they come into the Lord's presence.

The labour is made of bronze and belongs to a realm of lesser glory. It's not actually used for worship. It prepares for worship but it's not actually an element of worship itself.

Hands and feet are those parts of us that come most in contact with the world and must be cleansed first. They're the things that we use to do things, to walk and to act. Perhaps they're also connected with themes of procreational life.

In chapter 38 verse 8 we see that the bronze basin and its stand of bronze were made from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting. It seems to have some gendered connection for that reason and I wonder whether we're supposed to connect it with procreation for that reason. Perhaps the connection between springs and wells and women should be brought to mind here.

The final sections of this chapter concern the anointing oil and the incense and both of these involve a special recipe that is holy to the Lord and not for common use and under no circumstances should it be made for regular use. In both cases this would have the effect of having a smell or scent or product that is deeply evocative of the realm of the tabernacle. Whenever people smelt it they would know that it belonged to the tabernacle, that something had been in that realm.

It was a unique smell so that the scent would evoke only one particular place and those who spent time there would take that smell with them. Such a substance I believe should be connected in certain ways with the spirit. A question to consider, how can reflecting upon the incense and its place within the worship of Israel help us to understand certain dimensions of our own worship as Christians? Exodus chapter 31 involves the appointment of artisans to build the tabernacle followed by the appointment of the Sabbath as the covenant sign.

This might alert us to a way to read this alongside the previous chapter. In Genesis chapter 1 to chapter 2 verse 3 there are seven days of the original creation. However in the rest of Genesis 2 we have a second creation pattern playing out which follows a similar pattern on a smaller scale.

Here I think we have something similar. This is something that James Jordan has observed. Mapping it onto the seven days of the tabernacle's creation might also help here.

So in the tabernacle's creation we have seven days. First day the golden items at the heart of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, the table of the presence and the lampstand. The second day is the tabernacle itself, this firmament, the division between these new heavens, the heavens where God will dwell among his people and the rest of the realm outside.

The third day is the bronze altar and the courtyard, the land that's taken up from the sea. The fourth day is the oil for the lamps, the oil that keeps the light burning inside the tabernacle. The fifth day concerns the garments for the priests which enable them to operate within the heaven realm.

They correspond with the tabernacle as the fifth day corresponds with the second day in the original creation. The sixth is the consecration of the priests, a new humanity being set up for a particular purpose. And then the seventh day is the completion of the installation of the priests and the establishment of the daily pattern of worship.

Now there seems to be some interesting parallel between this and chapters 30 and 31 and here's a suggested order. So first off we have the golden altar of incense. This is another golden item at the heart of the tabernacle corresponding with the events created on the first day of the original tabernacle creation.

So then it was the golden Ark of the Covenant, Table of the Presence and the lampstand. Now there is the golden altar of incense. Next in the order is the census tax.

Now this might seem strange, I mean how might the census tax fit into this pattern? Well I think it makes more sense when we go to chapter 38 verses 25 to 28 where we see that the census tax was used in the construction of the things that are involved on the second day of the tabernacle's construction. On the third day the next thing in the sequence is the bronze laver, the bronze basin and this corresponds quite naturally with the bronze altar and courtyard, it's land and sea. The bronze altar corresponds to the land and the bronze laver corresponds to the sea.

The fourth is anointing oil for the priests and this corresponds with the fourth of the previous one which is oil for the lamps, oil for the priests, oil for the lamps. The fifth is in the original one it's garments for the priests and now it's incense. Now this might seem a

weaker connection but perhaps it's associated with the clouds that fill the realm of the heavens that the garments of the high priest equip them to operate within.

The sixth day is the consecration of the priests and the sixth day in the next sequence is the calling and setting apart of the artisans and so there is a correspondence between two sets of humanity set apart. One group involved with serving in the house and the other group involved with making the house and then finally we have the appointment of the sabbath here as the concluding part of this entire section from chapters 25 to 31. In chapter 32 the narrative resumes.

Now this is interesting and there's a curious pattern to be observed but can it tell us anything? Does it actually help? I think it can help us and one of the things that it does help us to see is first of all the completeness and the ordering of these things. These are not just random elements there is a logic to them and we can understand them better by associating them with each other. So the basin and the altar are connected together.

They're connected together by being made of bronze in both cases but they're also connected by the fact that they belong to the third day. They're connected to land and sea then and on the first day we can see the connection between the altar of incense, the golden altar of incense and the other items created on the first day. The things that are light at the very heart of the tabernacle and then we can see things like the connection between the oil for the lamps and the way that that corresponds with the anointing oil for the priests.

Maybe we're supposed to see that the priests themselves are supposed to be a sort of human lampstand corresponding to the physical lampstand. This chapter concerns the artisans appointed to construct the tabernacle. So Bezalel the son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Judah.

This is presumably the grandson of Hur the Judahite who led the people alongside Aaron, the one who held up the arms of Moses along with Aaron. He's one of the leaders of the people. He's a sort of princely character.

He's not a king but he seems to be a lead civil ruler and his grandson is the one that's helping to build this. This might help us to understand the importance of the king or the ruler as the one who tends to build or be responsible for building the temple. The messiah is the one who as the great Davidic king will lead the construction of the temple.

Solomon as that great king in the Davidic dynasty is the one who builds the temple and this task of the king is here born by a descendant, a direct descendant of Hur who is the lead Judahite. Bezalel is filled with the spirit of God similar to the way Joseph is described in Genesis chapter 41 verse 38. Maybe we should also see this as reminiscent of God's breathing into man the breath of life in the original creation.

He's someone who's equipped to build according to God's pattern. If we go back to the original creation God creates with no man being there to see. He declares what he has done and reveals it to man and then he also performs an act of creation in the second chapter of Genesis which is witnessed by Adam and Adam is presumably to take that pattern and learn it and exercise it himself.

By contrast both with God doing something without man being present and God doing something in front of man for man to see and learn from here we have God giving a plan and patterns for the tabernacle and then equipping man to build according to that plan and pattern. Here Bezalel is someone who's a new Adam, someone who's raised up to a higher level than the original Adam as a co-creator or someone who creates under God. He is given a helper a holy ab someone who serves alongside him and equips him and helps him in his particular task.

Now a holy ab might remind us of the way that Eve is given to Adam in Genesis chapter 2 and it seems to me that that is something we're supposed to see as a connection. From the appointment and establishment of the artisans we move into a discussion of God's sabbaths. God's sabbaths are a sign throughout the generations of Israel that they have been sanctified and redeemed.

In being delivered from Egypt they were set apart for the Lord as his own and there is a death penalty for profaning the sabbath and they're also cut off from the people. There's two aspects here so there's the profanation of the sabbath which relates to an offence and trespass against God and then there's being cut off from the people this is a violation of the people and within the sabbath we can see both of those dimensions. The sabbath is oriented Godward it's something that we remember the sabbath day to keep it holy it's something that belongs to God it should be kept holy but it's also something that involves right treatment of neighbour that you do not make your neighbour work on that day and that twofold aspect is reflected in the punishment here both death in a punishment for a religious crime but also being cut off from the people in the fact of having wronged your neighbour.

Violation against God and neighbour then are both seen in the violation of the sabbath. The fact that all of this material is summed up and concluded with the sabbath commandment is something that maybe should get us to go back to the earlier commandments and think about why that is so important. First of all the sabbath is the end of the creation sequence so it's a very natural place to end in that respect but also even within the ten commandments themselves where it's not the final commandment it would seem to have a particular importance there it is the central commandment along with honouring your father and mother that is expressed in a positive form all the other commandments are do not yet remember the sabbath day to keep it holy is a positive command an expression of how things ought to be taking rest yourself giving rest to your neighbour and remembering God's great works and creation and redemption that is

at the very heart of what it means to live as the people of God and in the book of the covenant in exodus chapter 21 to 23 we see a similar thing it begins with the theme of sabbath and it ends with the people into rest he has delivered them from slavery from this non-stop work and now he wants them to give their neighbours rest he wants them to keep this cycle of sabbaths and feasts as a memorial to his work in creation and in the redemption the bringing together of redemption and creation bringing together of the agricultural feasts which concern creation and then the great redemptive historical feasts which concern God's work in history these hold these two elements together we should probably note the many similarities that there are here between the description of the sabbath and the description of circumcision as the sign of the covenant in genesis 17 circumcision is the sign of the abrahamic covenant and the sabbath is the sign of the mosaic covenant relates also to the sign of the noahic covenant the covenant with noah which is the rainbow in genesis chapter 9 verses 9 to 14 we read and God said to Abraham as for you you shall keep my covenant you and your offspring after you throughout their generations this is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you every male among you shall be circumcised you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you he who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised every male throughout your generations whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised so shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people he has broken my covenant the similarities between this and the sign of the sabbath should be noted the sabbath is a sign of israel's release and the continued practice of the sabbath and the sabbaths more generally the different feasts that arise from the fundamental feast of the sabbath is a way of declaring themselves to be a liberated and a liberating people a people who continue the pattern of what God established in creation and a people who have been as they have been redeemed by this creator God established as a liberating people who extend that pattern to others so their servants so that their animals so that their land also enters into rest a question to consider bezelel is given a number of different gifts and abilities and talents by the spirit in order to equip him for the building of the tabernacle how might this understanding of the gifts of the spirit help us to understand the gifts of the spirit within the new testament after the making of the covenant in chapter 24 of the book of exodus there is a large body of material devoted to the building of the tabernacle the instructions for it in chapters 25 to 31 and then suddenly we get this new passage of narrative a very pivotal narrative within the whole story of scripture let alone the story of exodus there's an interruption to the story of the tabernacle which will be resumed later on in the book this story is a very familiar one to us we've heard it since our childhood perhaps but there are many questions that maybe we've never thought to ask simply because of its familiarity we've never actually probed deep enough into some of the puzzles that it raises perhaps one of the most basic things

we should ask is why worship a golden calf in the first place what purpose is the calf actually designed to perform if you haven't read the story before and read it for the first time and ended halfway through verse one with the people speculating about moses perhaps being dead because he hadn't returned yet from the top of the mountain what would you think would happen next would you have guessed that they would ask to make a golden altar and for that to serve as their god it's a puzzling course of action likewise it can be difficult to understand all the aftermath why is there such a long aftermath to this and what is the purpose of what happens next what is the underlying logic of this story rabbi david foreman has a very interesting reading of this passage which i found very persuasive and which i substantially follow one of the keys to understanding his reading is recognizing that the request to make this golden image is in response to the apparent death of moses moses the man who brought them out of egypt has died it seems and what is the response they don't seem to mourn rather there's a crisis as moses has died they need something and why don't they just establish aaron as lead in his place that doesn't seem to be good enough there seems to be something more that they need they ask aaron to make them gods because moses the man who brought them up out of egypt seems to have died they need an alternative to the mortal moses moses is as a god to them and what they are looking for is not a replacement for the lord so much as a replacement for moses in chapter 4 verse 16 moses is described as god to aaron and later on as god to pharaoh and when we think about that language of being a god we tend to think about it exclusively in reference to the creator god but elohim can be a more generic word for judge or ruler moses is a power but israel isn't supposed to worship any other power moses is like a god with a small g for israel but now he's died and there's a crisis they aren't looking to the lord they're looking for another god to replace moses they attribute taking them out of egypt to moses now they use different language for that than they use of god god's bringing the people out of egypt is typically described using a different verb from moses bringing the people out of egypt now what are they looking for in such a god what they seem to want is a blast shield between themselves and the lord they want a mediator a go-between someone that they can relate to almost as a substitute for god and as you go through the book of exodus you'll see a lot of this playing out moses is in a partnership with god they believe god and they believe moses his servant in chapter 14 and they complain against moses particularly moses is the complaint department they can't complain to god so directly so easily so moses is the one who constantly bears the brunt of their complaints and their objections and their grumbling but god himself the lord seems to be a dark and unknown being to the israelites they want moses to go between them to shield them from god and to relate to moses rather than relating to god very directly they're very fearful of him and want moses to interact for them for instance in chapter 16 verses 2 and 3 the whole congregation of the people of israel grumbled against moses and aaron in the wilderness and the people of israel said to them would that we had died by the hand of the lord in the land of egypt when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full but you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger so god seems



to be this unknown being this terrifying being who lies behind moses and aaron who deal with him who are in partnership with him but you can complain against moses but not really against god in the same way god is an untethered power a great dark power lying behind moses and in chapter 20 we see a similar thing the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking the people were afraid and trembled and they stood far off and said to moses you speak to us and we will listen but do not let god speak to us lest we die moses said to the people do not fear for god has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin the people stood far off while moses drew near to the thick darkness where god was in response to the complaint about the manor god had tried to show them grace to feed them in the wilderness to show that he wasn't just the great powerful god who could defeat the egyptians he was the god who was with them who's for them who's going to give them food who's going to show his love to them and the importance of the ten commandments is similar god is making clear that he is the one who took them out of egypt and what they are trying to do in part is by emphasizing the human moses they have this sort of demigod figure who gives them someone to complain to and someone to attempt to control and so what they're looking for at this point is a replacement for moses in many ways they're looking for someone to relate to as a substitute for relating directly to god as a sort of blast shield for them while god is trying to come close to his people his people are trying to turn away from him to avoid him to avoid relating to him as he wants to relate to them and the people gather themselves together against erin it says here gather to erin but where we find this language elsewhere in numbers 16 verse 3 and numbers 20 verse 2 it's the language of rebellion gathering together against and erin seems to do his best to try and channel the rebellious crowd as he can okay we'll construct this golden idol but we'll worship the so it's a replacement for moses but we're not replacing the lord when moses returns the people abandon the golden car fairly quickly it seems and let moses destroy it also erin's weak response to moses becomes more understandable in the light of this they weren't trying to replace the lord just the missing in action moses the god is described as having brought them out of egypt but using the verb that's usually described for moses as part in that not the verb for the lord's part in that and we should think back now to the commandments at the end of exodus chapter 20 in verses 22 following and the lord said to moses thus you shall say to the people of israel you have seen for yourselves that i have talked with you from heaven you shall not make gods of silver to be with me nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold an altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrificed on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings your sheep and your oxen in every place where i cause my name to be remembered i will come to you and bless you if you make me an altar of stone you shall not build it of hewn stones for if you wield your tool on it you profane it and you shall not go up by steps to my altar that your nakedness be not exposed on it they were not trying to replace the lord then they were trying to replace moses with a god of gold something that they had been explicitly commanded not to do and we should probably reflect here a bit upon the meaning of images and the purpose

of images images can be a way that people try and intermediate between themselves and the divine a symbolic medium that stands between them and god a person can relate to the image rather than relating to god it's difficult to relate to god you can't really control god in the same way you can't really grasp god but you can do with the image they're sort of masks and they're also blast shields protecting you from direct encounter and it can be a substitute for a direct relationship when you relate to the image you relate on your own terms you can master the image in terms of your imagination you can project onto it you can make it what you want it to be but when you're relating to god himself that's terrifying and so the image is a way of protecting you shielding you from that actual encounter with the living god and a sort of worship characterized by worship of images seems to produce a masking of people themselves the people rise up to play or to laugh a laughter or play can be a sort of mask it shields us from the significance for our own actions if i'm just joking or just playing it's the denial that my actions have serious import and in the same way when worship becomes a masking of god we can also try mask ourselves and our deeper selves that are exposed by his gaze the place of the golden calf can be better understood when it's seen in juxtaposition to the tablets of the testimony tablets of stone those tablets protect but they also reveal they aren't things fashioned by human power they're the writing of god himself in a form that can be understood and related to human life so it's not an idol that we've put forward projecting onto god a safe mask that we can relate to instead of relating to the living god rather it's god speaking into the situation of his people god declares that the people have corrupted themselves and that he will destroy them and here we can have maybe some sense of the background in the story of genesis chapter 6 where god describes the corruption of the whole earth in the days of noah and there are lots of parallels between noah and moses here we've already seen some in the previous chapters but here they continue god declares to moses that these are your people who you brought out he's identifying the people with moses rather than with himself and then he calls for moses to leave him alone and that he will wipe out everyone and start anew with moses alone now that is a very similar thing to what we see in the case of noah god wipes out everyone and then starts anew with one person but moses starts his speech by claiming that the people are the lord's people it's a direct response to god's statement they are his people the people are still engaged in the idolatry though so moses can't yet ask for forgiveness rather what he does is he questions the purpose of god's anger what is the end of this anger what will this anger achieve he appeals to the egyptians and to the forefathers so on the one hand the egyptians will blaspheme the name of the lord when they believe that the lord has just taken them out of the wilderness to destroy the israelites and he also appeals to the forefathers the forefathers to whom god had made great promises that he would multiply them so he doesn't appeal to god's forgiveness or his mercy nor does he apologize for the people this isn't a time when any of those things will work because the people are still engaged in the sin rather he highlights god's covenant purposes displayed in his actions towards abraham isaac and jacob and his deliverance of israel

from egypt and all that is achieved at this particular point is that god doesn't destroy the people all that moses is saying is do not destroy the people he's not saying forgive them he's not saying have mercy upon them even he's saying do not destroy them you cannot carry out this anger and moses takes the tablets down the mountain and he breaks them he doesn't seem to have been commanded to do so was he being disobedient in doing this he shatters the tablets in the same place as the israelites said that they would observe the covenant in chapter 24 and then he grounds the calf to powder and makes the people drink it maybe we could see some parallels with the law of jealousy in numbers chapter 5 here moses's anger flares up and it's the same response as god had to the sin of israel moses had told god not to be angry but then he is angry in the exact same way himself what is the reasoning behind this aaron tries to pacify moses's anger and he uses words that are almost exactly the same as moses uses when he tries to pacify god's anger note how close the language is between verses 11 and 22 moses is the one who is protecting israel from god's wrath by enacting god's wrath wrath has to be enacted but if god were to enact his wrath the people would be wiped out moses by enacting the wrath as a human being for god is able to preserve the people from the full force of god's wrath while identifying fully with god within the situation he's fully identified with god's wrath he has the same response and yet his inaction of that is not one that will destroy the people prophets can sometimes act as representatives of god as ones who stand in god's part relative to the people and the prophet can often enjoy a certain purview given by god with a seeming degree of liberty to pursue different courses of action in the name of the lord so david can consult nathan concerning his desire to build a temple and nathan says yes the lord is with you in this and then the lord says no actually i do not want david to build the temple and that seems to suggest that the prophet could speak on behalf of god in situations and god could check if they went against his will but in many situations they could speak as a sort of even without being directly told to do something rather than having everything dictated to them they are inspired by the spirit of god and given a degree of autonomy as they act out god's purpose within the limits that he has given them so what moses does here is a very strong prophetic action he stands on god's side relative to the people and enacts god's anger towards the people his fierce wrath the wrath that god couldn't express himself without destroying the people he stands in the way of god's wrath by enacting the wrath himself and he summons all who are on the lord's side to come to him we can maybe think of the lord's side in a richer sense than just fighting for god more generally on the lord's side is identifying with god's posture relative to this act and it is the sons of levi that come to him at this point they stand on god's side enacting god's anger with moses note the reminder of levi's action in genesis chapter 34 where levi along with his brother simeon is characterized by a zealous anger but not in a way that's positive here they stand with the lord they stand on moses side with the lord and then they act in the name of the lord with his vengeance with his jealousy with his zeal and they are blessed for that they're set apart they're ordained for divine service they represent from that point forward god to the people they stand as god's servants within the house of israel moses

now returns to the lord and asks for forgiveness he identifies himself fully with the israelites if god is going to blot them out moses asks for the lord to blot him out too god then declares that he will send his angel before them and he will bring them into the land but the lord will visit their sin upon them when he visits them his glorious presence will no longer accompany them rather moses and the angel will bring them into the land and god won't really relate to them in the same way anymore they're no longer really identified as his people this chapter ends then on a very negative note we're wondering what's going to happen next how is the purpose of the exodus going to be fulfilled after this setback a setback that there seems there's no recovery from a question to consider what are some of the similarities and contrasts between the construction of the golden calf and the construction of the tabernacle a second question to consider how can we see the pattern of the story of the fall playing out in the story here exodus chapter 33 comes at an extreme crisis point in the narrative israel has sinned with the golden calf and moses has dissuaded god from destroying them by in part enacting wrath against israel on the lord's behalf then he has asked for forgiveness insisting that if god is going to blot out the israelites he must be blotted out too this is an extremely daring and risky move god responded by saying that he would send his angel before them and that his presence would not accompany them and when he did visit them he would visit their sin upon them the bond between god and his people seems to be severed so god is going to fulfill his promise he's going to send an angel before them but ahead of them not in their midst god is not going to associate with them if god comes near to them they will be destroyed by him god refers to them also as the people not his people anymore and this is underlined again at the beginning of chapter 33 they are the people that moses has brought out of egypt god is practically disowning them god won't go with them lest he destroy them or consume them he will bring them to the place he said but he's no longer going to do so as their god and the part played by moses in this story is incredibly important moses is the intercessor the intermediary the one who interacts with god on behalf of the people on the basis of god's character purposes and covenant and it's god says that in the day that he visits the people he will visit their sin upon them and this is followed by a plague being sent upon the people because they made the calf there's something about that particular passage that should remind us of something that we heard just a couple of chapters earlier concerning the census tax god says whenever there is a numbering of the people a census of the people there must be this poll tax paid every single person must bring forward half and this will make atonement for the people lest god visit them with a plague and the word for plague here is the same likewise the word for numbering the people or counting the people is the same for god visiting the people at the end of chapter 32 and there seems to be a connection and i think it helps us to understand the logic of that particular law concerning the census the logic being that when that person is being counted they are being brought into sight they've been brought into god's attention as a distinct person not just a member of the mass but they're being brought to god's mind and as a result of that atonement must be made for them lest in counting them up god visit their sin upon them we might think of it

in part as has the people are being reckoned up the numbers of them there is also a reckoning that occurs and if they're not prepared for that god will visit them with a plague and this is what happens at the end of chapter 32 as people are being reckoned up and counted god takes personal note of them and god will judge those who do not have atonement made for them and the challenge that moses had at this point is that of rehabilitating the broken relationship between god and his people it's dangerous for god to be near such a sinful people because his holy presence threatens to destroy them but we should notice that there is some softening of the tone in the statement at the way that moses is associated with the people he has thrown in his lot with them god speaks of them as you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of egypt so moses and moses people he is associated with them he has thrown in his lot with them and they will go to the land but god is not going to go with them nevertheless whereas in the previous statement that the lord made he spoke about the place about which i have spoken to you even distancing himself as it were from the land of canaan here he declares the nature of the land of canaan in a way that reminds you of the promises that have been made earlier so maybe there's a softening that we can hear here also while that earlier speech ends on a threatening note nevertheless in the day when i visit i will visit their sin upon them this speech ends slightly differently with a statement that suggests that god would go with them if he could but he can't because he would destroy them if he went with them and so it's for the sake of the people in part that he is not going with them all of this should be seen against the backdrop of all that *saniyya* means god has come close to his people he wants to be among his people with his people he wants to be their god and for them to be his people it's a marriage ceremony and now the people have rejected him they've forsaken him and directly broken that command that was given to them at the beginning this is a full event so we've seen all the ways in which the seven-day pattern is playing out in chapters 25 to 31 and then there is a fall and at this point there's a sort of expulsion this is being thrown out of the garden of eden but they've broken the primary commandments the ways that god told them to worship him to not have gold and silver idols before him the action with the golden calf is an action of spiritual adultery it's as if the newly married man arrives back to his house to find his wife in bed with another man the betrayal is severe and the anger of the lord should be seen against the background of this it's not just that god is a holy god wanting pure justice it's that god loves his people has taken them to himself god wants to be near to his people and his people even after being taken out of egypt even after having god come close to them even after god having led them through the wilderness and protected them and provided for them they still turn their back on him they still go after other gods just as they've been told not to the response of the people at this point though is encouraging the people had taken off their jewelry to form the golden calf but now they take it off in mourning for the lord from whom they have been separated and there's a contrast between these two things and a connection as well this is a reversal of what they did earlier and the people are mourning the right thing they are still going to be led into the land god says but god is not going to go with them and that is what

they're mourning they're mourning the fact that they have lost the relationship that they could have enjoyed with the lord the golden calf had been a way to avoid having to deal with the living god a blast shield that they could shield behind and not have to relate to god but now they see what they have lost they have lost the relationship with the living god and they mourn at that point moses has to pitch the tent of meeting outside of the camp this isn't the tabernacle although the tabernacle is elsewhere called the tent of meeting because it functions in the same way it rather becomes the tent meeting when it's created but this is the place where he meets with the lord and he intermediates between the lord and the people the lord speaks to moses and a man speaks to his friend but moses has to step away from the people in order to relate to the lord so moses has thrown his lot in with the people but he also can relate to the lord and he does so by stepping away from the people and going to a place where the people are at a safe distance the lord told moses to bring up the people but never let him know whom he would send with him and this is the key point that moses presses here is god going to go with them in their midst or is he just going to send an angel before them at some distance ahead of them and prepare the way for them but not have any dealings with them the lord had expressed his special regard for moses knowing him by name and moses asked to be shown the lord's ways as evidence that he moses has indeed found favor in god's sight he's asking for some sort of reciprocation that he too might know the lord by name so that he might find favor in his sight in the future he asked the lord then to consider that the people are his lord you asked me to bring these people up these are your people you commissioned me with this particular task this people is your own people you cannot disown them at this point the theme of knowledge is very important in moses's speech the lord had not made known to moses whom he would send with him but he had known moses by name and now he wanted to know the lord so that he might have favor in his sight in the future and then he also wanted it to be known that he had found favor in his sight to understand moses's intercession within this passage and the passage that proceeds it's important to see the way that moses is using every bit of leverage that he has his relationship with the lord the way that god has known him especially the way that god has shown grace to him the way that god has called him and commissioned him and every single bit of that he uses as leverage for the sake of the people so that god would forgive them that god would restore them and that god would go up in their midst that god would identify with them again that they would be his people note the way that at the end he adds in something where we might expect moses to say for how shall it be known that i have found favor in your sight and for it to end there it actually concludes with the statement i and your people it's not just moses he wants to include the people he has thrown in his lot with the people and he wants god to recognize the people that the people will be blessed with him on account of his relationship with god that they too would be blessed and that they would be restored in relationship with god that god once more would identify with them and go up in their midst indeed it's in god's presence with them that they are a distinct people if god is not present with them they're just like any other people on the planet it's the fact that god is

with them that they are his people that makes them different the divine presence is absolutely crucial if god does not lead the people personally and with his presence in their midst then what's the point that's the evidence that they are the lord's people the chapter ends with god promising mooses an epiphany a revelation of his glory that mooses will see who god is and that in seeing this something of the knowledge imbalance will be resolved that mooses will know the lord in some way as god has known him that god has known him in a very intimate and special way and now he will know the lord and that that knowledge will help him going forward to have favor in the sight of the lord we should be observing the continued allusions to the story of noah within this particular account we've seen them from the very beginning of the story at sinai the seven days the seven days the 40 days and then the ascending up the mountain the way in which the ark of the covenant is described in a similar way to noah's ark and now we've seen a number of examples with god telling mooses that he would cut off the people and start a new people with mooses that's similar to the story of noah in this chapter it continues mooses finds favor in the sight of the lord just as noah did in genesis chapter 6 we can also think of god's statement about giving them rest that's another statement that reminds us of noah and so noah is in the background here mooses is playing the part of a noah but a noah who intercedes and restores the people that god is about to destroy he's not a noah that goes into the ark he's a noah that stands and reasons with god and intercedes for a people that god is about to judge the epiphany that follows is mysterious and we'll discuss it in much more depth when we talk about chapter 34 but there are things to be noted for instance mooses talks to the lord as a man speaks to his friend face to face however only a few verses later we're told that no one can see the face of the lord and live what we need to recognize is that when we're using language about god it's used in analogical ways it is important to recognize that such language is accommodated to us it's not something that should be taken literally in a way that would set up contradiction between these two statements rather such language of god is analogical it's limited it takes us a certain distance but only so far and it needs to be held in check by those things we know about god those statements that show the ways in which god cannot be contained by his creation that god is beyond his creation exceeds its categories and is not limited by those things so when we read statements that god spoke to mooses as a man speaks to his friend face to face we need to see in some sense god does speak to mooses face to face but in another sense mooses does not see the face of the lord as we see later on in that chapter and both of those statements need to be held together neither one should be allowed to remove or evacuate the content of the other a question to consider what are some of the ways in which mooses in this chapter and the chapter that precedes it presents us with a type of christ in his intercession for us and in his work in atonement in exodus chapter 34 there is a renewal of the broken covenant and it's important to recognize that this isn't an alternative covenant it's a renewal of the covenant that has already been made many of the details that we have in the establishment of this covenant are exactly the same as we've seen earlier on and the actual content of the covenant that is stipulated here is pretty much taken from the

book of the covenant in chapters 21 to 23 the exodus we must remember was supposed to be a manifestation of god's name and his character god reveals himself to moses in the burning bush at the very beginning revealing his name he proves his power and his glory over the egyptians in the plagues and he proves his character to israel bringing them out and taking them to himself in the event of the exodus and saniai the lord makes himself known to moses as moses is known himself to the lord he declares his mercy his grace his slowness to anger his steadfast love and faithfulness and his forgiveness and judgment as integral to who he is these are attributes of god but they're not just attributes they are essential to god's nature when we talk about god and his attributes his attributes aren't something that's added to him they're not accidental to him god doesn't just happen to be loving and merciful and gracious and compassionate those things are integral to who he is they're integral to his divine nature moses responds by bowing and worshipping the lord and then requesting that god go up in the midst of them but he gives a very strange rationale listen to what he says if now i have found favor in your sight oh lord please let the lord go in the midst of us for it is a stiff-necked people and pardon our iniquity in our sin and take us for your inheritance now the strange thing about this rationale is we've seen this description of the people as a stiff-necked people earlier on in this particular account in chapter 32 verse 9 and the lord said to moses i have seen this people and behold it is a stiff-necked people now therefore let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and i may consume them and then later on in chapter 33 for the lord had said to moses say to the people of israel you are a stiff-necked people if for a single moment i should go up among you i would consume you now the strange thing about it is that god previously gave the stiff-necked character of the people as an argument to destroy them and then as an argument not to go up in their midst but here moses presents the stiff-necked character of the people as an argument for god to go up in their midst it's all very strange now i think we can be helped to understand this by looking back at the story of noah as we've seen as we've gone through this passage even from earlier on in the story of sinai the story of noah is not far in the background in chapter 8 verse 21 we read of genesis and when the lord smelled the pleasing aroma the lord said in his heart i will never again curse the ground because of man for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth neither will i ever again strike down every living creature as i have done now again the strange thing about that statement is we find something similar to it just a few chapters earlier in chapter 6 verse 5 we read the lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually once again a rationale for judgment at the beginning of the story becomes a rationale for grace at the end how then are we to understand this what is the logic of moses' argument well it seems as if the relationship between god and his people is being refounded on a somewhat diminished basis a basis that takes account of and that makes accommodation for the deep flaws of the people the divine expectations placed upon the relationship seem to be lowered and also the expectations as a result placed upon the people are lowered once the flaws of the people are taken into account the burden



placed upon the relationship and the role of man within it is somewhat reduced we should be clear however that there is loss here that god wanted an intimacy with his people that just will not be possible with such a flawed and sinful people accommodation has to be made for their sin in a way that restricts the intimacy that god can enjoy with his people moses concludes by asking for pardon for their iniquity and that god would take them as his inheritance let us be your legacy don't abandon us that's the message that moses is concerned to get across looking back over these last few chapters we've seen moses interceding for the people going through a number of different stages first of all calling god not to destroy them that destroying them would not serve god's ends then judging the people in anger in order to express god's anger so that god would not judge them in his anger then aligning himself with the people so that the people will be saved by his association with them and then even beyond that stepping outside of the people so that he could continue the relationship with god without the people being destroyed by his presence and then seeking favor in god's sight and seeking the favor that god showed him to be given to the people and now here pressing forward that final point pleading with god to condescend to be near to a sinful and flawed people recognizing their frailty their sin but nonetheless going up in their midst marking them out as his special possession and making his home among them this final request can be made on the basis of god's own self-revelation he has revealed himself to be merciful and gracious showing forgiveness and steadfast love and faithfulness after this the covenant is reissued and the new covenant statement is roughly patterned after the first four of the ten commandments and in terms of the commandments that we find within the book of the covenant in chapters 21 to 23 the first four commandments concerning having no other gods before the lord not making graven image not taking the name of the lord in vain and remembering the sabbath day and these roughly correspond to the case laws that are given within this particular section what is underlined in this section is the way that the covenant is about a bond between god and his people it's not just about moral laws or requirements at the very heart of the covenant is a relationship between god and his people and all the rituals all the rights everything else the tabernacle everything like that is designed for god to relate to and be near to his people and so at the very heart is faithfulness god is a jealous god god loves his people and he has a love that will not let go of his people and for that reason his people must be faithful to him they must not whore after other gods they must not build idols and there is the warning here against gods of cast metal which of course refers back to the the laws concerning the feast of unleavened bread and the firstborn of their sons refer to the events of the passover god has claimed his people for his own they are his firstborn son and for that reason they need to give god his due this is a statement i think of the third commandment that we should not bear the name of the lord in vain god has placed his name upon the people he has placed his claim upon the people as his own and they must honor that in their behavior and their practice and that i believe is at the very heart of what the third commandment means the next section from verse 21 following refers to the law of the sabbath this is the way in which they honor the lord by remembering his great deeds of

salvation his deeds in creation and give rest to their servants as he has given rest to them and this also expands out into festal occasions not just the original sabbath but the feasts that extend that sabbath principle there aren't included in this section any of the commandments that really relate to the horizontal relationships of the people that's interesting we don't have the fifth commandment here rather the commandments here underline the vertical relationship between god and his people that very part of the relationship that has been compromised by the events with the golden calf this story ends on a very strange note indeed in many ways it ends with themes that are similar to where the story of the golden calf begins with moses being given the tablets after 40 days and nights on the mountain then descending with them to the people as moses goes down the mountain unbeknownst to him his skin is shining however the word for shining is a strange one it's related to the noun used for for instance the horns of the altar it's a word that could mean to grow horns we've seen this actually within images if you've ever seen michelangelo's moses michelangelo's moses has strange things horns growing out of his head like a bull why is this word play here might there be some significance to it i believe there is some significance to it the story starts off with a designed to replace moses after he has been on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights and has not appeared it ends with a shining bull one who's shining as if you were golden one who has as it were horns and it's playing off the beginning of the story the golden calf was a replacement for moses it was designed to be a god or a power before the lord that they could relate to instead of relating to the lord but now moses comes down from the mountain he comes down as one who is set up not as a calf but as a bull one who has grown horns one who's shining one who's golden as it were the people were concerned about moses the man and moses the man seemed to be mortal and to have failed to have died in the presence of the lord and so they wanted a sort of cast metal object to relate to that they could relate to that and it will be a blast shield to protect them from the lord but now moses comes down from the presence of the lord shining proof that he's been in the very presence of god himself and that he has survived this is a god that a human being can relate to this is a god that mankind can come close to this is a god who is not far off a god who is not distant but a god who wants to come near to and relate to his people and so moses the man is proof of something of the intent of the covenant the intent of the covenant was always that god's people would come near to him that they would relate to him not relate to him from a distance behind blast shields of golden calves and other idols protecting them from encounter with the divine no the intent was that god would have fellowship with his people that he would be their god and that they would be his people and that god would be close to them and that they would be close to him aaron and the people respond once again but now they respond in fear to come close to moses but moses calls them near and he speaks to them and addresses them with god's word and after he has declared god's word to them he covers up his face with a veil thereafter when moses spoke with the lord he would remove the veil turn to the lord and speak to him and once he'd spoken to the lord he'd come down and speak to the people and then once he had finished speaking to the people he would put

the veil upon his face again until he spoke to the lord once more there might be some parallel here between the description at the very beginning of this story and the very last words of chapter 31 when god finished talking to moses he gave him the tablets when moses finished talking to the people of israel he put on the veil and there may be some similarity or some connection between the tablets and the veil the tablets in some sense veil the face of god so that we can come close that we can approach that we can relate to him without being consumed or without being dazzled god revealed his glory to moses but sheltered moses in the cleft of the rock in some ways the tablets of stone may be parts of the rock designed to protect us from the dazzling glory of god but yet to enable us to come close to come into encounter with god in the same way the veil of moses hid something about the true intent of the covenant about the true destiny of the people of god to come close to god in that way in a way that will be transfiguring and yet it enabled people to have some relationship with that fact some intimation of it some inkling of what the covenant was all destined towards a question to consider in second corinthians chapter 3 paul reflects and meditates upon the story of moses and the veil how can the story of moses and the veil help us to understand the purpose of the new covenant in paul's understanding in exodus chapter 35 to 40 what is given in the form of instructions in chapters 25 to 31 is repeated in the form of reports upon work that has been executed this section however begins with the sabbath this might be fitting for a section that's concerned with man's work under god's pattern of working his six days of labor and his sabbath present us with the pattern of our own labor and the sabbath is also the sign of the covenant and a central point of the entire narrative it's the feast to the lord that they were looking for at the very beginning it's rest from toil liberation from slavery a sign of all of these things is the center of the ten commandments it's the beginning of the case laws of the book of the covenant and the ending of them it ends the instructions for the tabernacle as the sign of the covenant and this is just before the golden carp and now it resumes on the same theme the theme of the sabbath god has delivered his people from unending toil and now he wants to bring them into his rest and that principle of rest is at the very basis of everything that they must do there is however an interesting addition in the law concerning the sabbath here which concerns not kindling a fire in all your dwelling places on the sabbath day this has been understood in various ways some jews understood it as not having any fire at all but the mainstream view was not building up your fire often this will be seen in terms of the work that is taken to build up a fire now i think there's probably something more going on here there is only one occasion in scripture where there is a death penalty applied for breaking the sabbath and that's in numbers chapter 15 verses 32 to 36 on that occasion it's someone gathering wood in preparation for a fire or for building up a fire and it's a strange connection with this particular command here in nehemiah people are rebuked for trading on the sabbath but no one is subject to a serious penalty so why is the fire so important there are many dimensions of the significance of a fire that may help us to understand the rationale here so the fire is the sign of all domestic labor perhaps god started the first week by making a fire by creating light until the modern day every sort

of light was formed by a sort of fire and so god's creating light on the first day is the forming of a fire and maybe that's part of what's in view that that work that god started by making a fire is a work that we should not do on the sabbath maybe that's part of it the hearth is also the heart of the home it symbolizes the entire life of that realm it's the center of gathering and fellowship it's the most basic and fundamental of all technologies fire is used to transform one thing into another as something passes through the fire whether we're cooking a meal or whether we're engaged in metallurgy all of these things involve transformation through fire it's the most basic technology just a few chapters earlier erin said that he threw the gold into the fire and out came the calf beyond this the fire was the center of domestic labor it was the place where meals were prepared and other things like that it's often symbolically connected with the wife and the mother at the very heart of the home and these elements of its symbolic importance might help us to understand why there is a law concerning the sabbath and fire it's also connected with god's own presence god is a consuming fire god displays himself in the form of fire a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire the ceremonial fire of god's presence is at the heart of the people and that is to be kept burning and maybe the point is that we dim our fires and don't build them up while god's fire is built up on the sabbath day so god's presence is prominent on the sabbath day and we reduce our presence for the sake of emphasizing god's presence the hearth of god's house rises up and the hearths of our houses are reduced so that god's light god's fire would be most prominent on that day the sabbath ends god's week but it could be seen as beginning ours man's first day in the creation is a sabbath and the first day anticipates the last day man is now functioning as a creator under god's direction man has been placed in the task of building this particular edifice this tabernacle and so god is equipping man to engage in a creative work of a realm for his dwelling moses gives a commission to the people first of all the commission to gather materials together to contribute to the building effort and then also a calling to participate in that building effort the materials to be gathered are to be given from people's hearts these are a free will offering this is a popular building with a large number of contributors and a large number of creators and in the construction people return with a host of contributions and skilled abilities and it's a building formed of people's hearts and skills and lives men and women freely contributing we might reflect upon the contrast between the way that pharaoh's heart was hardened but the people here are stirred in their hearts to give it's a very positive sign also after the events of the golden calf where they also contributed elements they contributed the gold from their earrings one of the effects of all of this the fact that people are contributing it's a popular building effort is that it's an externalization of the people the people are represented as they give to this building they exercise their skills in constructing it and it can symbolize them it's an externalization of their life and their skills and their abilities and their persons and god can dwell in their midst in that building in a way that symbolizes him dwelling in them as a people bezelel and holiab are skilled and divinely empowered for their task they're also divinely gifted to teach others the holy spirit is overshadowing their work just as the spirit overshadowed the

work of the first creation a question to consider how could we contrast the construction of the golden calf and the construction of the tabernacle exodus chapter 36 continues the description of the construction of the tabernacle and its contents a description begun in chapter 35 and the description here is almost verbatim repetition of the relevant sections in chapters 25 to 30.

These chapters should be seen as the obedient answer to the earlier chapters and this is particularly important in light of the intervening events concerning the golden calf it also follows literary conventions that we find elsewhere in ancient near eastern literature of the period but the most important point is that they are following god's instructions to the letter it underlines the movement from pattern to image the way in which they're taking god's pattern and bringing it into practice it also has the effect of stressing just how important the tabernacle is by giving it so much space within the text chapters 25 to 31 and 35 to 40 are almost entirely devoted to the tabernacle in a book that considers such great events as the giving of the law at Sinai the plagues upon Egypt and the exodus from Egypt and the institution of the Passover other things like that it seems strange that so much space is given to the tabernacle and the fact that it is should be an indication of just how important this particular thing is this could also be considered in relationship to things such as the genealogies of first chronicles or the descriptions of the territories of the various tribes in the land of Joshua by giving so much space to boring details to details that just rehearse things that we've maybe read elsewhere as well their importance is driven home to us we are as the reader being challenged to think and meditate upon these details to consider even if the details are not particularly illuminating that they are details of something immensely important and central the amount of column inches as Jonathan Sachs puts it given to the building of the tabernacle within the book of exodus is a curious feature of the book that should raise many important questions why does a book about the deliverance and foundation of a nation give so much attention to the building of a sacred tent and Sachs suggests that a people formed of newly liberated distinct tribes surrounded by a large mixed multitude would be in danger of division as they do not yet have a clear unity they are always in danger of being reduced to an undifferentiated mob as we see in the golden calf event and the unification of the people in the Sinai event and in the construction of the tabernacle arises from and perpetuates the meaning of that event is a crucial part of the movement of the people from slaves to a new unified nation it's a symbolic way of founding the continued life of Israel upon the event of Sinai furthermore the tabernacle is the divine palace at the heart of the people around which the people are gathered under the rule of the lord this is a crucial part of the nation building it's also a victory building pattern the lord has vanquished his enemies he's delivered his people he's established a new political order and now he secures his unrivaled kingship and then builds his palace in the midst of the people one interesting detail that's worth noting is the return to the language of the tabernacle or dwelling place from the language of the tent of meeting tent of meeting language is used for days four to six in the earlier creation pattern that

we see in chapters 25 to 31 and tabernacle is used for days one to three the distinction suggests two different aspects of the tabernacle two different ways of seeing it the tabernacle is primarily the dwelling place of the lord but it's secondarily the meeting place where Israel met with the lord and tent of meeting language for instance is typical language in the book of Leviticus where the focus is upon interaction between god and his people but in this chapter it's tabernacle and god's dwelling there that is prominent god is the source of skill in people's minds and willingness in their hearts and god is the master of men's hearts whether the heart of pharaoh or the hearts of israel at this point as they willingly give to the construction of the tabernacle and express the skill of the mind that god has given to them the story of the exodus begins with laborers being starved of materials that they need for the construction of bricks for building houses for pharaoh and now we have a superfluity of materials for building the house of the lord the materials themselves probably largely came from the spoiling of the egyptians and from trade with the midianites and other peoples in the wilderness and we should also bear in mind that the israelites had been involved in construction work as slaves in egypt one of the most materially and technologically advanced societies of their day so they probably had a lot of expertise to bring to this particular project we don't know exactly how everything was constructed though because many of the details that we have are insufficient many of the popular images that people have of the tabernacle may be quite badly wrong and it may have been more like a typical tent in its structure we are given a verbal description of some details but many of the details seem to have been given through a vision to moses so moses saw the things on the mountain he saw a pattern he saw an archetype in terms of which the tabernacle should be constructed we see this expressed in the book of hebrews for instance the two principal persons involved in the construction of the tabernacle are bezalel the son of her and a holy ab bezalel's name means the shadow of god and he's the son of ory which means the lord is light or my light or fiery or light of the lord and maybe we should see in this themes of light and shadow darkness and light these are the themes that come at the very beginning of the creation story god creates light and he creates day and night the tabernacle is the protecting shadow of god in which israel can take refuge for instance in psalm 91 verse 1 he who dwells in the shelter of the most high will abide in the shadow of the almighty a holy ab means father's tent and both names reveal something about the meaning of the tabernacle the tent is the tent of the father of israel and israel is god's firstborn son it's also the protecting shadow of the light given god in which israel can take refuge bezalel and holy ab are not architects moses is the one who receives and reveals the plans from the lord and bezalel and holy ab are the helpers or as it were the sons given to him to perform the building work with a holy ab as the assistant to bezalel so we have the source of the plans which is god the prophet who reveals the plans moses the master builder bezalel and the helper of the master builder holy ab and then the others who assist them god gives the plans of the temple in a similar way to david david is the prophet who reveals the plans to solomon solomon is the one who oversees the building of the temple and hyrum is the one who works under solomon's direction in the new

covenant we see a similar pattern god the father is the one who establishes the new temple and gives the plans as it were the son is the one who reveals the plans the spirit is the one who orchestrates the building work and people like paul and others are the ones who work under the spirit's direction as gifted master builders it is not an accident that paul's profession was that of a tent maker and the metaphor of building a building for the establishment and the growth of the church is something that we find throughout the pauline epistles and elsewhere in the new testament this is a new tent that's being built it's following the same sort of pattern that we see within the old testament hearing the details of the construction of the structure again we should consider the gradations of holiness that we've already seen as you go further up and further in you move in gradations of holiness from bronze to silver to gold and such gradations of holiness give a sense of the gradual approach to god's glorious presence at the very heart a question to consider the use of cherubim imagery in the tent is an arresting detail especially when we consider the resistance to imagery more generally in the presence of god why do you think cherubim imagery is so prominent within the tabernacle and what connotations and scriptural associations might help us to understand its purpose exodus chapter 37 tells us about the construction of the ark the table the lamp stand and the altar of incense these are all of the golden items of furniture in the tabernacle earlier on we identified two seven days sequences the first one in exodus chapter 25 to 29 and then another in exodus chapter 30 to 31 the first sequence begins with the ark the table and the lamp stand and the second sequence begins with the altar of incense and here we have all of the golden items listed together in their earlier order the list of items in exodus chapter 35 to 40 is not an exact and identical repetition of the instructions of the earlier chapters there are variations in the order and other details variations that invite the reader to discover something more of the underlying logic of the elements of the tabernacle for instance the altar of incense is both distinct from but associated with the other first day golden furniture of the tabernacle furthermore its placement here is back to back with the description of the bronze altar a burnt offering in chapter 38 verses 1 to 7 which is strikingly similar in detail so we're being invited to see a connection between these two pieces of furniture perhaps the ordering in chapters 35 to 40 is more spatial so you have a movement from the tabernacle structure itself in chapter 36 to the items within it in chapter 37 to the courtyard and its furniture in chapter 38 to the priestly garments in chapter 39 the ark of the covenant comes first the ark of the covenant has two parts to it the ark and the mercy seat and these function as the footstool and the throne the lord was understood to be enthroned above the cherubim you find this in first samuel 4 verse 4 2nd samuel 6 verse 2 2nd kings chapter 19 verse 15 1st chronicles 13 6 psalm 80 verse 1 psalm 99 verse 1 and isaiah 37 verse 16 all of these verses suggest that god was seen as the one who was enthroned above the cherubim this was not just an incidental detail of god's presence it was seen almost as a title for the lord so the mercy seat was god's throne and the ark was god's footstool in egypt thrones and footstools could be placed in tombs along with mummified pharaohs they were seen as part of the furniture of royalty and within the tabernacle the ark and the mercy seat are

the tabernacle's furniture of royalty for the lord the throne and the footstool the cherubim of the tabernacle seem to have had two wings and one face each whereas the cherubim of ezekeiel throne vision in ezekeiel chapter 1 have four faces and four wings in that case they're hybrid creatures they're associated with the mobile throne of the lord and the tabernacle is god's portable palace symbolizes god's imminent presence in the midst of his people but also symbolizes the highest heavens in which god is enthroned above all powers yet surrounded by angelic hosts cherubim seraphim etc as the participants in the divine council the presence of the cherubim here maybe alerts us to the fact that god is seen to be surrounded by heavenly creatures creatures that participate in heavenly rule with him certain parts of the old testament might suggest that there are a number of different gods with a small g who are powers alongside god none of them are to be worshipped and all of them are creatures relative to god who is the sole creator but there are powers there are angelic forces there are forces that are over nations and other things like that and so god is surrounded by such creatures as the cherubim and are his servants his ministers and then there are also false gods associated with demonic forces and fallen angels the tabernacle was a portable palace and the furniture generally had rings attached and poles by which they could be carried from place to place however the description of the ark suggests that it was the only piece of furniture that always had the poles within it this is presumably to minimize the risk of its being handled inappropriately after the ark we reach the table and we should note that some of the golden vessels that come with the table go beyond just the presentation of bread there are plates but there are also dishes for incense there are bowls and flaggons for drink offerings the table contained both bread and wine suggesting that the holy place might be seen as a sort of room for the honored guests of the lord to entertain the priests would eat the bread after a week as we see in leviticus chapter 24 verses 5 to 9 and the bread would be served along with frankincense as a pleasing offering to the lord in chapter 24 of exodus mooses the elders of israel aaron and his sons ate a meal before god's throne and i believe that the table in part represents this it's the access that israel has to god's presence it's the table of the lord most high and a sign of his favor towards israel whom he brings into his royal banqueting house the description of the lamp stand is a bit confusing it seems to be made entirely of gold though without any underlying wooden structure the lamp stand is described in ways that might suggest botanic associations so it has branches blossoms flowers etc it could maybe be seen as a burning tree like the burning bush of exodus chapter 3 it gives light to a room that would otherwise be in darkness so it serves a very practical purpose in that regard some have suggested astronomical associations perhaps with the seven major heavenly bodies the sun the moon mercury venus mars jupiter and saturn we have prophetic symbolism associated with lamp stands in zachariah chapter 4 and in revelation chapter 1 the seven stars represent the seven angels of the churches the lamps upon the lamp stand elsewhere are seen as bearers of a divine or an angelic light the stand that bears this light may be associated with the people so the people are the lamp stand and they bear the light of the lord most high perhaps we might also think of



the day of pentecost on that day the church is anointed with the oil of the spirit and lit flames above each head like lamps on a lamp stand the altar of incense comes next and that's connected with the bronze altar that follows it in chapter 38 verses 1 to 7 the altar of incense has horns like that altar it has dimensions that are scaled down from the larger altar but are corresponding to it in other ways the altar of incense was situated inside the holy place before the veil and incense seems to be connected with prayer it's a sweet smelling aroma continually ascending to the lord now when we read the descriptions of the tabernacle the danger can be that we focus far too narrowly upon static objects or inert pieces of furniture but furniture in a home for instance is an invitation to corresponding forms of life chairs we can think of as an invitation to sit down and to enjoy conversation and fellowship with other people a bed is an invitation to sleep and maybe also for sexual relations a table is an invitation to a shared meal the furniture of the tabernacle should be seen in the same sort of way the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat correspond to god's enthroned presence in the midst of his people the table of the presence corresponds to israel's honored place at the lord's table to the communion that god extends to his people the lamp stand corresponds to the glorious light and the illumination that god gives in the darkness of the world the altar of incense corresponds to the prayers of the people that ascend to his presence the bronze altar corresponds to the offering of ourselves and our works to the lord through symbolic substitutes so that we can enter into his presence the bronze sea corresponds to god's cleansing of us the furniture of the tabernacle then as we will see is a stage that's been set for a lively play as we go through the book of leviticus this will become quite apparent the drama for which this furniture exists is one in which sinful human beings can enter into the presence of a holy god and be blessed there the chapter ends with the holy anointing oil and the pure fragrant incense elements that came later in chapter 30. my suspicion is that they're here because they belong to the interior of the tabernacle like the other elements of this chapter. a question to consider reflecting upon the furniture of the tabernacle how can it be seen to correspond with elements of our own worship as christians? we've had the instructions for the tabernacle itself and then the furniture within the tabernacle and now we see the courtyard and its furniture in chapter 38.

it begins with the altar of burnt offering. now food was offered to god in a number of different ways by presenting it before him perhaps by pouring out a drink offering before him on the altar or by sacrifices consumed with fire on the bronze altar. fire sacrifice was common within the ancient world and god is operating within a symbolic medium that would have been very familiar to the israelites the sacrifices upon the altar were means by which worshippers could offer themselves and their works to the lord and draw near to him.

the courtyard can be divided into two squares of equal size and commentators often suggest that the bronze altar is in the center of one of these squares and the ark of the

covenant is at the center of the other. the altar itself is of bronze it's of lesser holiness than the furniture within the tabernacle which is of gold while still being a holy item in many respects. it's part of the path into god's presence it's a boundary between heaven and earth and the fire on the altar first came directly from god himself in leviticus chapter 9 verse 24 where god burnt up the sacrifices with fire coming down from heaven.

the horns of the altar are probably not a connection with a bull. that is an attractive association but it doesn't seem to actually be the case. refuge from vengeance can be sought at the altar we see this in chapter 21 verse 14 where the willful murderer can be taken from the altar where he has sought sanctuary.

in first kings chapter 1 verses 50 to 53 and 2 verses 28 to 34 we have stories in which people try to grasp the horns of the altar to find refuge adonijah and then later on in the story of joab. the horns probably represent divine judgment in some way. grasping onto the horns of the altar might be a way of appealing to god's judgment over man's.

altars could be desecrated by having their horns removed as we see in amos chapter 3 verse 14 that on the day i punish israel for his transgression i will punish the altars at bethel and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. i have suggested previously that the altar has some association with the high priest and that the high priest has the horns of his body purified his right thumb his right big toe his right ear and his genitals by circumcision and these are consecrated also in much the same way as the altar. like the altar offers sanctuary the high priest is also connected with sanctuary in numbers chapter 35 verses 25 to 28 we read and the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he has fled and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil but if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the boundaries of his city of refuge to which he fled and the avenger of blood finds him outside the boundaries of his city of refuge and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer he shall not be guilty of blood but he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest but after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession the connection of the altar then with sanctuary and the connection of the high priest and the levitical cities with refuge probably suggests some connection between those two things the altar is also like a mountain representing different parts of israel which is also connected with the golden altar of incense inside the tabernacle note the way that israel was ordered around mount sinai in chapters 19 and 24 in leviticus chapter 4 and 5 we see that blood was placed in different places depending upon the person who had sinned so the base of the bronze altar seems to represent the lower earth but if the priest sins there is blood placed upon the horns of the golden altar of incense inside the tabernacle but if it's a leader of the people that sins then it's placed upon the horns of the bronze altar and if it's a sin of a poor person it's placed against the side of the bronze altar and at the base so there is symbolism

connected with where the blood is applied and the person who has sinned the basin is described next while it's mentioned in chapter 30 earlier in the second seven day sequence that we identified now it's classed along with the bronze altar and the courtyard which show that these things belong together they all are elements of the third day they're bronze and over time they would turn green which perhaps connects with the covering of vegetation upon the earth which god establishes at the second stage of the third day note that the bronze altar represents the land and the bronze laver can be seen to represent the sea should also observe that the basin is connected with women we've seen elsewhere in scripture that women are often connected with wells and springs and sources of water and in numbers five we see that the woman suspected of adultery was made to drink some holy water presumably from the laver the only time that we see someone drinking water from the laver to my knowledge and it seems likely that some gendered significance is involved that this water is associated with the water of women and it's for this reason that this particular item of furniture is singled out as being formed from a donation of a particular group of people all the other things were formed from the general contributions but this in particular is formed from a very particular group of individuals and what they have given within the worship of the tabernacle more generally we see a number of ways in which gendered symbolism is included not least in the stipulation of the sex of sacrifices men and women aren't interchangeable within the system but each have particular symbolic import associated with them in particular then the laver is made with the serving women's mirrors the serving women are elsewhere mentioned in first samuel chapter 2 verse 22 while the priests and the appointed levites were exclusively male there seemed to have been some women who assisted presumably with female offerers or when some of the sorts of tasks ascribed to the serving men in places such as numbers chapter 4 verse 23 and following the basin is used for washing things to be brought near to god whether persons or sacrifices it isn't given the same attention as the other elements within the courtyard the courtyard itself or the bronze altar but yet it is something that's anointed with the anointing oil in chapter 30 verse 28 as elevated water we might also think of the bronze holy water as water from above it's connected with the water of the firmament the waters above in contrast to the waters below which would be the areas outside of the courtyard the court itself divides the realm of the tabernacle precincts from the wider world it's holy space albeit of a lesser sanctity from the interior of the tabernacle this chapter records all of the materials used for the tabernacle it's a reminder of the census back in exodus chapter 30 there are 100 talents and 1 775 shekels as the amount that corresponds to half a shekel for each of 603 550 persons and the persons counted seem to have been the males over 20 capable of going to war as we see in numbers chapter 1 to 2 where that same number of persons are mentioned again a question to consider in what ways can we connect the bronze altar with the golden altar of incense in exodus chapter 39 there's a repeated emphasis upon everything being done according to mooses's command there is a thorough observance of everything that god has instructed and we find a similar expression used of noah in genesis chapter 6 verse 22 7 verse 5

and 7 verse 16 noah obeys god's commandments concerning the ark in great detail and mooses and the people observe god's instructions concerning the tabernacle in great detail and we've already seen some of the associations between these two things the ark and the tabernacle are performing similar purposes the tabernacle is a new sort of ark it's a place for god's presence in a world of chaos the construction of the tabernacle could also be sharply contrasted with the construction of the golden calf which was much more haphazard here we have great attention given to the detail and to constructing things according to a pattern that has been given by the lord in the case of the golden calf no such care was taken we haven't commented upon the different colors of the yarn to this point they're clearly important as we see in numbers chapter 4 verses 4 to 15 this is the service of the sons of kohath in the tent of meeting most holy things when the camp is to set out erin and his son shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it then they shall put on it a covering of goat skin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue and shall put in its poles and over the table of the bread of the presence they shall spread a cloth of blue and put on it the plates the dishes for incense the bowls and the flagons for the drink offering the regular show bread shall also be on then they shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet and cover the same with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take a cloth of blue and cover the lampstand for the light with its lamps its tongues its trays and the vessels for oil with which it is supplied and they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of goat skin and put it on the carrying frame and over the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue and cover it with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take all the vessels of the service that are used in the sanctuary and put them in a cloth of blue and cover them with a covering of goat skin and put them on the carrying frame and they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it and they shall put on it all the utensils of the altar which are used for the service there the fire pans the forks the shovels and the basins all the utensils of the altar and they shall spread on it a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary as the camp sets out after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these but they must not touch the holy things lest they die these are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry the high priest's garments contain materials used in the inner layer of the tabernacle and also associated with the veils and entranceways but their clothing is not just associated with the tabernacle it also has associations with some clothing that regular israelites would wear in numbers chapter 15 verse 37 to 41 we read the lord said to mooses speak to the people of israel and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and put cord blue on the tassel of each corner and it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the lord to do them not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes which you are inclined to where after so you shall remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your god i am the lord your god who brought you out of the land of egypt to be your god i am the lord your god the tassels on

israelites clothing would seem to connect their clothing with the clothing of the high priest reminding them of their priestly status or at least their belonging to a nation a kingdom of priests the high priest isn't just someone who acts on behalf of regular israelites in some sense he also symbolizes israel as a whole and all israelites participate to some degree in his status while we have light that is associated with the eyes in the tabernacle with the lamp stand and we have food associated with the mouth in the table of the showbread and we have incense associated with the nose in the altar of incense we don't really have sound and it's something that happens later with the introduction of music through david in particular and his introduction of musicians to the worship of the tabernacle and the temple later on the one set of sounds that we do have are the bells on the clothing of the high priest bells that bring a sound in with him as he comes into the presence of the lord perhaps we should see this as some sort of precursor for the music with which we'll enter into god's presence in the future the high priest has garments that connect him with the tabernacle on his forehead he has a turban which has a gold plate or blossom on it saying holy to the lord and we could see that gold plate as being associated with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat the whole of the tabernacle is a sort of body image just as the body of the high priest is dedicated in its various parts anointed with blood and with oil so different parts of the tabernacle are anointed in a similar way there's an association between the body and the building or the body and the tent the tabernacle is a garment like building made of cloth and other fabrics and the clothing of the high priest is tent like clothing there's an analogy between these two things and they help us to understand the way in which the high priest represents the tabernacle and the way that the tabernacle represents the body the tabernacle more generally can symbolize the righteous man if we reflect upon the different parts of the tabernacle we can see analogies with different parts of the body the most holy place which is the seat of god's presence which contains the ark of the covenant with the tablets of stone inside represents the heart and the mind of the human person god should dwell in that realm and his law should be meditated upon should be hidden within our hearts whereas if you go out to the holy place you have things that are associated with the senses you have the altar of incense and the incense is connected with smell jesus taught that the lamp of the body is the eye and the lamp stand represents sight and the eyes it gives illumination enables us to see but also symbolizes the eyes more generally the table of the presence is associated with the mouth and food that we take into ourselves the ear hears the tinkling of the bells of the high priest's garments the tabernacle structure itself is the skin or the body that's over us terms are used for the construction of the tabernacle which remind us of the body it has ribs and it has shoulders there are faces too the altar is the place where we offer up our life and our works through symbolic substitutes and the laver is the place of cleansing where we wash the bounded courtyard represents a well-ordered life in our public affairs the laver could also be connected with our procreative capacity which is why i think is particularly associated with women and with the spring or the well and these other symbols that are associated with women in scripture such symbolism gets

developed further on in scripture in such things as solomon's temple or the poetry of the song of solomon or in the new testament as that imagery is developed further in prophecy in places like revelation or in the teaching that the body is the temple of the holy spirit both individual and corporate in the temple of solomon for instance there are two pillars set up at the entrance which very naturally connect with pillars of legs in the holy place you now have five tables on each side and five lamp stands on each side which very naturally connect with the fingers on each hand the water chariots associated with the bronze sea which suggests the movement of water out of the tabernacle into the world invites association with other imagery of waters flowing out from the temple and giving life to the world imagery that's used of the bride in song of solomon chapter 4 verse 15 in verse 32 it's referred to as the tabernacle of the tent of meeting this terminology is usually separated it's usually called either the tabernacle or the tent of meeting but this highlights that it's both dwelling place and meeting place it's dual function it's place of god's dwelling and it's the place of communion with god and the people bring the tabernacle to moses the way that this is described in a context that's so full of references to the original creation suggests to me that we may think back to genesis chapter 2 and the bringing of the woman to the man at the end of that chapter the woman that's formed out of his side built up in the same way as the tabernacle is built the construction of the tabernacle is done by the people under the leadership of bezelel and the holy ab and through the gift of the holy spirit it's the spirit and the bride creating this tent it's a bridal tent and the bridegroom would come to dwell in it and be represented by the male priest within it but i think we are justified in seeing some gendered symbolism here they finish the work and moses blesses them there's a new creation event here this time with man as the creator under god it ends in a manner reminiscent of genesis chapter 1 verse 31 to 2 verse 3 and god saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good there was evening and there was morning the sixth day thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them and on the seventh day god finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done so god blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it god rested from all his work that he had done in creation a question to consider how might reading this passage against the backdrop of genesis chapter 1 and 2 help us to understand more fully what is taking place in the building of the tabernacle and how it drives forward god's original intent in the first creation exodus chapter 40 begins with god instructing moses to construct the tabernacle on the first day of the first month after a full year has passed there are continued reminders here of noah and the flood in genesis chapter 8 verse 13 it's on the first day of the first month after the year on the ark that the waters are finally dried from the earth this isn't the only connection between the story of noah and the story of moses and the israelites in the building of the tabernacle in both cases exact conformity to god's commands concerning the instruction is emphasized there are two periods of seven days followed by a period of 40 days and 40 nights in chapter 24 and there is the elevation on the top of the mountain there is the creation of a wooden box of specified dimensions overlaid inside and out there is the

threat of all people being cut off and only one spared there is someone who finds favor in the sight of the lord there is the establishment of a new covenant as in the story of the flood there's the passage of the full year and the turning of a new page in both stories there are statements at the end of a great judgment that reference the reason earlier given for the judgment as a basis for mercy at the end genesis 6 verse 5 reads the lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually but then in chapter 8 verse 21 and when the lord smelled the pleasing aroma the lord said in his heart i will never again curse the ground because of man for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth we see a similar thing in exodus in exodus chapter 32 verse 9 and the lord said to mooses i have seen this people and behold it is a stiff neck people and in verse 33 verse 3 go up to a land flowing with milk and honey but i will not go up among you lest i consume you on the way you are a stiff necked people but then in chapter 34 verse 9 we read and he said if now i have found favor in your sight oh lord please let the lord go in the midst of us for it is a stiff necked people and pardon our iniquity in our sin and take us for your inheritance so we can see noticeable similarities with the story of noah at this point but there are also contrasts while the first day of the first month with the removal of the covering of noah's ark the first day of the first month the story of the exodus is the establishment of the covering of the tabernacle while noah's ark was a temporary safe place for man in a world returned to its original chaos the tabernacle is a place for the dwelling of the holy god in a sinful world the tabernacle like noah's ark is the establishment of a divine order within a chaotic fallen and sinful world and it enables holy god and sinful man to coexist the tabernacle should also remind us of the sanctuary of eden in various ways it's an ordered realm where god and man can enjoy fellowship and the connections with the flood highlight among other things the urgency of such coexistence where such coexistence does not exist you'll have the situation of egypt with creation itself rising up against humankind the tabernacle then is a cosmic symbol it's a symbol of a rightly ordered society in creation if the beginning of exodus was about the breakdown of creation and plagues and judgment upon sin and a final wiping away of enemies in the rush of water as the dawn came the book of exodus moves us to a point where there is a renewal of the creation the cosmic and the social order this is why the sabbath is such an important symbol for the mosaic covenant it's why the seven-day pattern appears on a number of occasions in these chapters it's why despite all of the great and exciting events recorded within it the construction of a tent in the wilderness occupies about a third of the book of exodus the establishment of the tabernacle is the seed of a new cosmic order is a sort of eden suited for a fallen and a sinful world the tabernacle is also a sort of sabbath tent a sanctification of space as the sabbath was a sanctification of time if the ark was how noah escaped the sinful world destroyed in the flood the tabernacle is how human beings will be able to escape the fate of places like egypt and enjoy communion with their creator acting as creators under him as we see in these final chapters it's the political constitution also of the delivered israelites as a nation in fellowship with the lord all of the different parts of the tabernacle were created

but now moses assembles all of these pieces together in a single structure it's important to notice that while the people made the elements of the tabernacle and brought them to moses in exodus chapter 39 verse 32 to 43 the entire work of setting up the tabernacle is described as if it were personally performed by moses himself in verses 16 to 32 now it's highly unlikely that moses did this himself but he is seen as the one who's responsible for it so the people do the tent and then he is the one that puts everything together moses and the people are united in the task but they are placed over against each other in the narration of the construction performing different parts moses's part is one in which he largely plays the role that god did in genesis 2 verses 1 to 3 god finished his work and blessed and consecrated the sabbath day and moses finished the work of the tabernacle and blessed the people and consecrated the tent you should be able to hear some of the parallels if you listen carefully and moses saw all the work and behold they had done it as the moses blessed them then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all in it and consecrate it and all its furniture so that it may become holy you shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils and consecrate the altar so that the altar may become most holy so moses finished the work then the cloud covered the tent meeting and the glory of the lord filled the tabernacle and then back in genesis chapter 1 verse 31 to 2 verse 3 and god saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good and there was evening and there was morning the sixth day thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them and on the seventh day god finished the work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done so god blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it god rested from all his work that he had done in creation we might see in this another suggestion that the tabernacle itself is comparable to the sabbath day in some respects if the sabbath is the day where god rests from his labors the tabernacle is the place where god will rest among his people and the story ends with the theophanic cloud of god's presence coming upon the tabernacle and the glory of the lord filling the tent the story ends then with god taking up residence in the tent in the midst of his people even after all of the crisis of chapters 32 to 34 the descent of the cloud is similar to the coming of god's glory upon mount sinai in exodus chapter 19 now the tabernacle is a movable mount sinai for them to travel within their journeys that meeting with god at that mountain is something that will now travel with them will now be the terms in which they relate to god the tabernacle is the place of god's special dwelling now god is present in all places but he is present in a particular intentional and manifested way in the tabernacle he's present to be near to and commune with his people he's present to forgive and to be addressed in prayer he's present to lead and to provide he's present to judge and to bless and the tabernacle symbolizes the higher heavens of god's particular dwelling and orders men according to the pattern of those higher heavens in such a way then israel is formed in the image of god as his firstborn son the tabernacle like the ark is not a static construction but something designed to be moved from place to place and the story of the exodus ends not with israel settling in a particular location but with god's presence in their midst in their continued journeying the lord is traveling with his bride



gently leading her through the wilderness to the land that he has promised to her the ark is still moving and has yet to come to rest on god's own mountain that he spoke of in exodus chapter 15 verse 17 the story of exodus then begins with life in bondage within an unjust and oppressive society under pharaoh it moves to god's liberation of his people through plaguing the egyptians with the powers of his creation and delivering them through the passover and the red sea and in the wilderness we see a reversal of the themes of the plagues as creation is wielded by its creator to give life and provision to his people in need where it had once caused destruction and death in the place it now gives life and sustenance in the ten commandments in the book of the covenant we see a reversal of egypt in another way god establishes a just society founded upon and perpetuating liberation from slavery and the second phase of the book involves the instructions for the tabernacle followed by the law of the sabbath followed by the incident with the golden calf moses intercession for israel and god's gracious response followed by a return to the law of the sabbath and then the building of the tabernacle it's a there and back again pattern again so the book is a highly structured one with a theological and literary unity and purpose it's all giving us a deeper understanding of what it means for god to be near his people what it means to relate to the holy god how we relate to creation who god is all of these questions are being addressed within the book of exodus what does it mean to live in a just society what does it mean to be free all of these questions are within the book of exodus however its concluding note is not with some theme of political theory what it means to be free in an abstract way but it's about god dwelling with his people god coming near to his people the god who created all things traveling with his people through the wilderness as the ark was a movable vessel so the tabernacle is a movable vessel traveling through the wilderness to the promised land it will one day land on that particular mountain and god will establish his people there and bless them in that land but to this point they are traveling as it were upon the sea and they're moving towards that point where god will ultimately give them a rootedness in the land and complete their liberation and that seed of a new creation will take root and germinate into a new nation settled in a new land a question to consider reading through the book of exodus it's very clear that the purpose of the events of the exodus is in large measure perhaps primarily a theological one god is revealing who he is and god is coming near to his people exodus is a revelation of god's relationship to israel and to the nations it's a revelation of god's name it's a revelation of god's presence it's a revelation of god's glory of his forgiveness of his character what are some of the ways in which you see the theme of god's self-revelation serving to hold the book of exodus together