

After 3:Before 4

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1 - After Session 2

In the 2nd session, we have seen the use of the past experience of the Jewish people recorded in Numbers 21.4-9 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness'. This was the basis of our writer declaring to Nicodemus that there would come a time when Jesus 'must' be lifted up as a mercy of God in the midst of the judgement of God that is already manifest in his ancient people and also in the world. We saw that this mercy and justice emphasised that God is a Father who 'so' loves the world that He has sent his only Son, not to condemn the world but to save it.

Our writer's understanding of the death of Jesus climaxes at the final chapters of the Gospel. There, in those chapters, the death of Jesus turns away of the wrath of God and God's merciful provision of a Saviour in the light of our disobedient actions which dishonoured his glory.

It is an obedient Son, who is presented to us, throughout the Gospel as One who is always found honouring his Father, in a way that we ought to have done but did not.

As we receive the Spirit of Jesus, we find that we share his Mind and his knowing of the Father and so are equipped, by trusting this Spirit, to actually, moment by moment, find his life coming to expression in each of us.

Water of the Spirit

In the 2nd session, we considered the offer of Jesus to the Samaritan woman of living water whilst they considered how water was so central to their daily life: she as having to come to draw for her daily needs, he as being thirsty in the midday sun [chapter 4]. The question of taking water into one's own body became a powerful image of the taking into oneself of the the very Spirit of God - a matter which is yet to be developed by our writer in the 7th, 14th and 16th chapters of the Gospel. This discussion with the woman anticipates the necessity of us receiving the Spirit of God if we are to worship Him in a way that it is in accord with his very Being and Divinity. For God is spirit and He desires worshippers who worship him 'in spirit and in truth'. It is the Spirit who we shall see will lead us into all truth in regards of God's Being.

He who enters our body and merges our life with his

John uses these powerful images, which, as metaphors emphasise the taking into oneself physical elements such as food and drink, that enter us and merge with our life. So the image of eating the body and drinking blood of Jesus indicates the merging of his life with ours as we receive the benefits of his incarnation for us and of his death as a life poured out for our sakes. It is these images which occupied us in After 1:Before 2.

The richness of the eating and drinking in Israel's past

Like the material of Numbers 21.4-9 concerning the brass serpent lifted up by Moses, these narratives are taken from the Exodus of the Hebrews as they escaped from the tyranny of Pharaoh of Egypt. They went on to enter into the wilderness with their God where as a nation they would be alone with Him and learn of his life with them.

While in the wilderness, water was drunk, and bread was eaten. These matters are recalled by John our writer, and applied to the body of Jesus, concerning how we are to eat his body and drink his blood.

2 - After Session 3

In the session 3, which we have just completed, we considered the Exodus from Egypt, particularly the Passover. At this time in the encounter with the Egyptian Pharaoh, the anger of God comes on the Egyptian people because of their leader's stance against God and his attempts to manipulate God.

But to our amazement, an element in the narrative is that the wrath of God is coming on all, Egyptian and Hebrew alike. Both are within the sphere of that destructive work of God coming on people on that fateful night. The Hebrews, as all God's covenant people find, are present where God's judgements are. However, He makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews at this time as He remembers and honours his covenant.

John's Gospel makes the feast of the Passover central to his Gospel's presentation of how God provided Jesus as the Lamb of God - God's Lamb for us. And, not simply as the Jewish feast recalls the lamb given for them but this time for the world.

So we must familiarise ourselves with the Passover night and learn the answer to the question that a Jewish boy asks his father at the feast of the Passover, "Father, why is this night unlike any other night?" So we take a look at the readings in Exodus 11-17. My comments on these passages will bring out the implications for a reader of the Gospels.

Exodus 11 - Salvation through Judgment - a stunning defeat for the Egyptians, their Pharaoh and their gods.

The narrative summary:

- 1-2 The Lord decides to bring yet another plague on the Egyptians. After this Pharaoh will let the Hebrews go. They are to ask the Egyptian people for gold and silver.
- 3 Moses' reputation among the Egyptians
- 4-7 Moses predicts the destruction of the first born of the Egyptians, whilst the Hebrews are exempt.
- 9-10 He also predicts that Pharaoh and his servants would beg them to depart. Noting Pharaoh's previous obstinacy.

1 - The overwhelming of a strong man who enslaved God's people.

1. There will be one more plague [11.1] and after it Pharaoh will not only allow them to go, he will drive them out of his country completely. "Drive" in the sense that he will have to let them go because he is overwhelmed, but "drive" them also in the sense that he will pursue them to the end, seeking to destroy them rather than have them serve the Lord in the wilderness.

2. In the sight of the average Egyptian, Moses has been elevated throughout the course of this encounter. So much so that when asked, the Egyptians give of their wealth to the Hebrews so that they may leave. This is truly a plundering [12.35-36] of their country, and yet the Egyptians are willing for the plunder to happen, since their leader has clashed with Another, who is stronger. To maintain their liberated life style, these Hebrews, these former slaves, these people of their God, must go.

2 - Defeat for those who enslave: redemption for the slaves: Salvation through judgment

3. Moses' announcement to Pharaoh is that at midnight, at the height of darkness, the Lord will strike the first born of each family of the people. The first born are valued in the land as carrying the inheritance and future of the country. These first born are the pre-eminent ones, the ones who have the first place in every household and royal house as well.

4. But against the sons of Israel, not even a dog shall bark. In this way Egypt [and Pharaoh in particular] will understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. Further, it will be something which the people who serve Pharaoh will come to understand as well, for they shall insist that the Hebrews leave.

5. What this means is that redemption for Israel, is registered in the hearts of those who enslave her; they see it as a danger and defeat for themselves. This defeat is not simply a matter of knowing that their leader - Pharaoh - has been defeated, but that each one of them has suffered hurt and has personally come to know the distinction between Israel and Egypt. This experience will repeat in the experiences of their opponents in the wilderness as well.

3 - *The distinction of holiness, of the relation between God and His people.*

This distinction is a work of the Lord. It is a conviction that this nation is reserved as holy in the midst of others. Other nations will learn that to touch what is holy for the Lord of Israel, is to suffer pain, hurt and loss - it is to be overwhelmed by a greater power.

For the Egyptians, it is to see all their glorious ones dishonored and overcome. To treat Israel as profane, and not holy, is to imagine that one has control, by force, over them, rather than it being the case that the Lord had allowed it for a time. It is to attempt to get between God and his people insofar that you wish them to serve you instead of him - and that is to attempt to break into a holy and reserved relationship. It is to find that when He makes a call on his people to serve Him, one must not get in the way of them in this matter; for this is to oppose His will. It is to have your house plundered and to have your slaves taken from you; it is to recognize that they were the people of Another Lord who has come to claim them. It is to come to the realization that those that were used, were really used illegitimately - as those to whom you had no right. It is to learn that, in a fallen world, it is possible to have power but that does not imply that you have a God-given authority in a matter. The proof manifests itself in that you lose it when God intervenes for his little ones.

The Pharisees, as false shepherds of God's people, attempted to annex God's people as their own. They found that the kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to another nation which was showing the fruit of repentance within it [Matthew 21.38,43]. So it is that every shepherd and leader of God's people must understand that he is handling something holy, reserved for Another, the Bride of a jealous Bridegroom. A people about whom God has made a distinction, and shown that they were always His by redemption - holy to the Lord.

6. It is to learn that there is an insane force that will not submit [11.9-10] to God in this world. It is a leadership by a rebel over the peoples of the world which will go to its own destruction in pursuit of its exercise of power. It will not yield its will - unlike the people of Egypt, Pharaoh will not let them go.

And yet there is another side to this willfulness - it is that the Lord has hardened the heart of Pharaoh. It is that He has cemented Pharaoh in the deception of his rebellion. The Lord's action has forced into the open another distinction. It is that the people of Pharaoh can see what is happening, but the leader is cemented in his madness by the Lord. The revelation to the people is clear but not to the Leader who holds power over them. In this way we see that the Pharaoh is a type or pattern of Antichrist figure [similar to others mentioned in Scripture Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 26]. He is a man with power over others but driven by satanic forces and

desires.

This distinction shows that the target of redemption is people, those made in the image of God - they are susceptible to his revelation, even if held under the bondage of their leader.

4 - The Egyptian people can see it.

The Lord gave the Hebrews favor in the sight of the Egyptian people [11.3] and they understood [11.8] but they were not free to go. One day, there would come a redemption that would include them. And it would lead not to the release from a man who mastered them, but from a rebel angel who enslaved them - Messiah will do it, and all the earth will see it, publicly done, and on a cross - a salvation through judgment.

Exodus 12 - Salvation through Judgment: death for the Egyptian first born, a passover for the Hebrews

1-2 The month Abib is to be the start of the year.

3-5 The Passover is established. Each family is to take an unblemished male lamb or kid from flock on 10th day of month

6-7 They are to kill it on the 14th day; place the blood on the doorposts and lintels of their house

8-11 They are not to eat it raw or boiled, but roasted, and they are to eat it all as they stand dressed, ready for a journey.

12-13 Why called a Passover? Blood protects them from the destroying angel.

14-20 The later Festival of the Passover: on 14th of Abib they are to eat unleavened bread, [bread with no yeast] for 7 days. Do it for all generations forever.

21-23 Moses tells them how to offer the lamb, sprinkle the blood and their purpose.

24-28 He tells them to instruct their children in the nature of this ritual. The Hebrews do as they are commanded.

29-30 All the first-born of Egypt are killed.

31-33 Pharaoh and his people urge the Hebrews to depart

34-36 In preparing for their departure, they receive gold, silver and garments from the Egyptians.

37-39 They journey from Raamses to Succoth. There are 600,000 men plus women and children. They bake the unleavened cakes and take them with them.

40-42 The time they had lived in Egypt was 430 years.

43-51 Requirements for the Passover, carefully observed by the people who exit Egypt the same day.

1 -The Passover Lamb as the Gift of God

1. This event which was to take place was so significant that it is the beginning of the Hebrew year [12.2] from now on. It is something that every year, makes the fresh start. What ever a past year may hold in the memory of the people, this event will establish the new year as hopeful, and new.

2 - A matter of eating the flesh and relying on God's promise about the blood.

2. There is to be found from within their daily stock of food a particular item, it is a year old lamb from their flock [12.3,5]. They are to take it on the tenth of the

month and separate it from the sheep and the goats. It is for a holy, a separated, purpose - it is going to be eaten, but eaten for a particular purpose which God will show. Its meaning is centrally located in that it is something normally eaten, and that it is flesh and blood. All this is done simply trusting in the word from God about it.

3. They are to decide on the number of lambs according to their households, but if households are too small for a whole lamb, then according to what each man ought to eat. That is, the criterion for a shared lamb overrides the distinction of the households, in favour of the fact that each person shall have a full share in the lamb. This is a matter of eating, in which the whole people shall participate, individually and fully - no one misses out; each is prepared for and each must be internally satisfied by what he has eaten.

4. The lamb chosen must be unblemished, a clear sign that it is required by the Lord for a holy, separated purpose [12.5]. Its selection is left to those who have had it for a year among their flock - and are in a position to appreciate its worth to themselves by virtue of its perfection by comparison to its lesser fellows - and they select it willingly, releasing it to the Lord's purpose.

5. It is a personally selected lamb, a personally eaten lamb, but it is killed in concert with the whole of the assembly of the Hebrews [12.6]. It is something in which they all share together, its meaning is to be common, consistent with the fact that their calendar will reflect this permanently [12.14].

It shall be killed at twilight and in such a way as its blood is released from its flesh for a purpose. Once done, what immediately follows is for the blood to be painted on the sides and lintels of the doorway of the house, so that it may be visible to a person passing outside. [12.6-7]. From the point of view of the eater of the lamb, its blood is shed in its death first, and then its flesh is eaten. Its blood is used with reference to what is happening outside the house, it is for Another to see and know the trust in His word of those in the house; that they are using His provision. Inside the house, the flesh is eaten as all food is, as a provision of life and strength to go forth from the meal in the power of what is supplied.

3 - The blood is salvation "from" God; the flesh is salvation "to" God.

The two actions are to be done on the same night as the judgment will be enacted - they shall put the blood on the doorposts and eat the flesh on the same night [12.7-8]. In this way they draw from the Lamb its covering blood, which preserves their life in the midst of judgment. They also eat of its flesh which gives them life to go forth to serve the Lord in intimate shared life in the wilderness.

6. The lamb shall not be boiled or raw. It shall be the subject of fire. It is roasted quickly and eaten with bread. In this way the two things eaten are flesh and bread.

4 - No leaven [mixture] in the bread [2 Corinthians 5.6-8]

The bread is holy in its function as well; this is shown in that it is to be prepared quickly, with no yeast taking time to rise, and in a holy, unmixed way, where no yeast is at work within it.

The taste of this meal is not sweet, the lamb is accompanied by bitterness, provided by something which accompanies its eating. The herbs indicate that there is something bitter about this meal that is not found in the lamb itself but in

the accompanying setting of the meal.

It shall be entirely consumed by the eaters, for its purpose is entirely reserved for this. But whatever is left over, by virtue of the eaters not eating it, is not to be used as common, or for any other purpose, but burned up completely by morning. You eat it once for all, and yet you make a memorial of it year by year [12.7-10,14].

5 - You eat to walk away from slavery.

The way of its eating is that people are standing up - it is a meal not enjoyed for itself but for the purpose for which it is ingested. It is eaten quickly, with an eye to what is happening all around on that night. It is eaten by those who are dressed for action, for walking away from an old life, for leaving of slavery, for escaping an enemy, for service to the Lord. It is eaten quickly, as those who are not savouring a nice meal for itself, but to get it into one's stomach so as to walk in the strength of it for as far as this salvation night will take them [12.11].

7. The reason for treating this roasted lamb this way is because it is the Lord's Passover. It is stated in 12.11-12 in such a way as you could attribute the Passover to the lamb eaten or to the event of the wrath of God which He is executing that night. 12.11 speaks of the lamb eaten as the Passover. 12.12 as the act of the judgment of God upon Egypt as the Passover. And in 12.13 we have what the Passover is in respect of the Hebrews who are being saved.

For it is both - it is salvation through judgement. 12.12 speaks of what it means for the Lord to Passover the land - for the Egyptians it is a passing "through" their land, it is a destruction - a smiting of the Egyptians [12.23]. 12.13 indicates what it means for the Hebrews - it is that He sees the blood; and because it is there for Him to see then He "passes over" them, so that no plague falls on them [12.23].

8. They are to observe this memorial permanently, [12.14] and in the promised land where they are to go [12.25]. Their dwelling in the land is always to be controlled by this memory of how they have come to be there - by salvation through judgment. It is a judgment in which their salvation was effected through the slaying of a lamb, whose blood shielded them from the wrath of God and whose flesh was the life strength in which they walked to freedom from slavery into the freedom to serve God in a temporary wilderness place and then finally in a land of their own.

Exodus 14 - Passing through the Sea: Egyptian army is routed.

1-4 The Israelites are commanded to make camp in front of Pi-ha-hiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon. This is a strategic move, for the Lord predicts the pursuit by Pharaoh.

5-9 Pharaoh regrets he let them go, musters his troops, 600 chariots and pursues them; overtaking them encamped by the sea.

10-14 The frightened Israelites cry to the Lord and berate Moses, who tells them to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

15-18 The Lord instructs Moses to open the sea with his rod, assuring him that the Egyptians will be drawn in and dealt with.

19-20 The pillar of the Lord moves between the Israelites and the Egyptians. It becomes a pillar of darkness to the Egyptians while it is light to the Hebrews.

21-25 Moses stretches out his rod, a strong east wind blows the water into a heap. The people of Israel pass through the sea. The Egyptians follow. In the morning watch

*the pillar of cloud and fire clogged their chariots. The Egyptians panic and retreat.
26-29 The water closes over the Egyptians.
30-31 Israel sees them dead, fears the Lord and believe in Moses.*

Exodus 15 - The victory Song about “salvation from” and serious Lordship expressed as the basis of knowing the “salvation to”.

1-3 The song of victory celebrating the rout of the Egyptian army. God is their protector.

4-10 The immediate victory is rehearsed and extolled.

11-18 The victory will now frighten their enemies – the Edomites, Moabites and Canaanites.

19-21 Miriam, Moses sister and the women join in.

22-25a Travelling for 3 days into the wilderness of Shur they come to Marah, a place having bitter water. Moses, prompted by the Lord throws a tree into the water; it becomes drinkable.

25b-26 The Lord warns them to obey Him, lest He put on them the diseases He put on the Egyptians.

27 They camp at Elim, a place of 12 springs and 70 palm trees.

1 - The Victory Song of Moses and the sons of Israel 15.1-3

1. Throughout Scripture, whenever a significant triumph of the Lord is experienced in the lives of His people, they sing a song. Indeed, when God is promising in advance a new thing He is going to do for and with Israel then He often speaks of a celebratory “new song” which they will sing afterwards.

This is very obvious in the case of the heavenly host who are gathered around the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne in Revelation 5. They sing a song of victory also.

We have already seen the revelation of the Lord [YHWH] to Moses under this new name that He has revealed [Ex 3.13-16]. On that occasion He said that this would be His memorial Name forever. Here, in this song, there is a celebration of the victory which YHWH has won over His and the Hebrews enemies.

The song speaks to the Lord about what his people have come to see of Him through His works on their behalf. It is sung by them to Him as their response to His work on their behalf; in that sense it is a song of praise and acknowledgement of His power and awesome nature.

2 - The Song celebrates the immediate victory over the Egyptian army. 15.4-10.

In the current setting the works of the Lord are the occasion for learning something of His character and Person.

He has become their strength, their song, because He has become their salvation. They learn that He is a warrior on their behalf in respect of the Egyptians. The overcoming of the army was a demonstration of the strength of the Lord's “right hand”. It is an expression of his anger against the Egyptians.

The wind God used is seen as the blast of his nostrils, and his congealing of the deep waters, making them still was the instrument of judgment against the pursuing Egyptians.

3 - The use of the elements indicates the need for a universal perspective.

That God has used for His purposes the elements of the physical universe, the plagues and now the wind and the sea, indicates that He is the God of the whole world. The Hebrews are celebrating a particular victory which relates to their own slavery at the hands of the Egyptians – but what they learn of God will require them to consider Him as One capable of greater and broader things. Further, they themselves will have to learn that He can turn these things against even them [verse 22-26].

4 - A decisive victory that now has a forward reference 15.11-18

The Lord is compared to the other gods but no comparison can be made as to His holiness and power [v 11]. The plagues of Egypt had been a mocking of the Egyptian gods as well as a judgment on Pharaoh and his people. The rescue of God's people as a revelation of his lovingkindness to them was the theme from their own perspective [verse 13]; but the judgment upon the gods and those who serve them is also true at the same time. We have explored this theme before, and will see it pre-eminently in the death of Jesus, that God saves through judgment.

Now a forward reference is discerned by the writer of our history [v.14]. The Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites and the inhabitants of Canaan have seen in the Exodus at the sea a fearful omen of their own possible encounter with the God of these redeemed slaves.

The Passover of the Lord [Exodus 12.11-13] was used to describe how the wrath of God passed over the Hebrews with the protecting blood of the Passover Lamb on their doorposts. This was their deliverance in the midst of His judgment; and it showed clearly the distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. So here [verse 16-18] the countries who have yet to encounter the redeemed slaves whom God has purchased [16c] on their way to the promised land will also have to let them pass over to their promised destination. In this sense the prior work at the Sea, has the power of a forward preparation of others; they should think twice about resisting them!

The reference to God planting the Hebrews in the “mountain of Thine inheritance”, “the place...of Thy dwelling”, the “sanctuary” implies that the writer has in mind Mt Zion; which was not captured until the time of David. That this is referred to here implies that the Exodus at the Sea was a formative and powerful event which not only fixed Israel's sense of redemption and being a special people whose God fights for them; it also impressed the surrounding peoples as well. An understanding which the subsequent hiring of Balaam to curse Israel by Balak, the king of the Moabites, also shows [Numbers 22-24].

5 - Miriam, Aaron's sister prophesies as well [15.19-21].

The ladies lead in the celebration of this song by Miriam, who has a timbrel in her hand. Just the first lines of the song are given to indicate that the subject matter of her song is the same as we have seen already in this chapter.

6 – The movement from knowing the Lord as Saviour to knowing Him as a governing Sovereign - as Lord. [15.22-27]

It is at this point there is a natural transition to the exchange taking place within

the people who are exulting over their salvation experience and their God. Previous to this the focus had been upon the salvation “from” the pursuing Egyptian military. The perspective was that of looking back – and the mood was one of celebration and thankfulness for past deliverance. Their knowledge of the Lord was of His power in what He had done for the salvation of his people.

Now, at the leading of Moses, the movement is forward. The journey from the Red Sea into the wilderness of Shur for three days led them to the need for water. What water they found was bitter, which is why the place was called Marah in Hebrew.

Now an often-repeated movement takes place. The people grumble at Moses, he goes to the Lord, Who shows him what to do. This constant interface between a complaining people, a leader who knows God, and the bringing of small deliverances marks the pattern of the wanderings.

Moses throws a tree into the bitter water and it becomes sweet. [A similar picture is later used in the vision of Ezekiel concerning the many trees growing alongside the banks of the river of God which “heal” the water i.e. they make it sweet [Ezek.47.7-9]. This image of the trees is used in the Revelation to John [22.1-2] as well. It is of the tree of life growing beside the river of life in the heavenly setting – it is for the healing of the nations.]

[At verse 25-26 there is a difference between the Septuagint [LXX] text and the Hebrew text. The LXX has it that God tested not “them” [Heb] but tested “him” i.e. Moses. The LXX continues on in verse 26 to have all the pronouns as singular; again as if referring to Moses. Most English printed texts side with the Hebrew here.]

7 - The test to discern between mercy and injustice.

The test God utters to the people [Moses] instructs them as to the way they shall relate to Him. They are to listen to His voice and obey it. When they obey like this, He declares that He is their Healer. By “Healer” He means the withholding of his plagues He used against the Egyptians. In other words it is a promise not to be wrathful upon them; for that is what those plagues meant. All this is consequent upon their obedience.

In this way, He is teaching them that if they had taken his handling of the Egyptians as a favouring of them over the Egyptians as a partiality in His character, then they would be wrong. What they will discover is that the way He handled the Egyptians He is perfectly capable of bring upon them also. The revelation of His Character is that whether they are Israel or the Egyptians, obedience to His voice was required. For His judgment is not partial [as to persons]; it is consistent and just with reference to obedience or disobedience.

What God has done is to save the Israelites out of the hand of the oppressing Egyptians. That oppression, along with the idolatry of the land was wicked – and that wickedness was the true basis within His character for the judgments He brought against the Egyptians.

In the midst of those judgments He has saved the Hebrews who cried to Him. This is, in respect of Israel, a revelation of His mercy. In this context Pharaoh is seen as a vessel of His wrath [Romans 9.14-24] and Israel as a vessel of His mercy in the generation in which they lived.

But should Israel draw the conclusion that they are safe from such judgments of God, as His discipline upon their redeemed life, they should understand that

He cannot be unjust in Himself; obedience to His voice will be their protection [healing] from such things.

Within Israel, under the Old Covenant, this led to the thinking that when there is lack of health, or disaster, then there has been disobedience and so they went to God to inquire about this. And that is how they understand their circumstances throughout the Old Testament.

Under the New Testament, the persons of God's temple are, in Christ Jesus, justified and sinners both at once. They are also redeemed as to their persons but yet awaiting the redemption of the body; a body in which sin as a power still operates and yet by the resident Holy Spirit may be resisted and put to death moment by moment. Ill health and bodily weakness accompany the people of God as a sign of the tension of living in the 'now' and the 'not yet' of God's salvation of His people.

Exodus 16 - The provision of Bread from Heaven - the drive of their "flesh" prompting Israel to desire slavery again.

1-3 Journeying from Elim they come to the wilderness of Sin. Here they murmur about the lack of bread

4-8 The Lord promises bread from heaven, which they must gather in six days, taking a double portion for the seventh day. Moses and Aaron, thinking of themselves as just the servants of the Lord, warn the people that the murmuring is against Him. They promise them flesh in the morning.

9-12 The Lord, in the glory of the cloud addresses them that in the evening they shall eat quail and in the morning be filled with bread.

13-22 In the morning they gather and eat the manna. But some, disregarding Moses, try and store it. It goes foul.

23-30 They gather for six days, taking a double portion for the seventh, which does not go foul. The holy Sabbath is introduced.

31-36 They call it manna and describe its taste. They set aside an omer [= 1/10 of an ephah] in a jar as a memorial. It never stops for the whole of the 40 years.

On the 15th day of the second month since their departure from Egypt, the people are found grumbling against Moses and Aaron [16.2], but really it was against the Lord Himself [16.7-8].

1-The "way" of dying pre-occupied them.

Their objection is that they are in a wilderness, and that they would rather have died by the Lord's hand in Egypt than to be die by hunger in the desert [16.3]. What their mind is focussed upon is that in Egypt it was a quick death for those who died that Passover night; here in the desert it will be slow. They are thinking about what death means for them: and therefore on the manner of the death, its method and occasion.

2 - The meaning of death they had forgotten.

What this comes to mean is that they have forgotten that any "dying by the Lord's hand in Egypt" was to have come under his wrath as a judgment. That was a judgment they have already been saved from. In focussing upon the way people

can die and choosing one way or another, they have forgotten to see why it is that people die at all. The Passover was a death that was associated with an expression of God's wrath: it was something which spelt out the meaning of death itself.

And further, they had forgotten why the Egyptians had died - they had stood in the way of the people of God worshipping their God. They had thwarted the plan of God to save his people who were groaning under slavery; and His ultimate plan was to save them that He might dwell among them.

3 - The problem of the flesh - it is immediate gratification.

What they were thinking of, in their immediate hunger was a comparison with their current position as saved people in the desert. They compared the time when they were in slavery but with food to eat. And they preferred the satisfaction of their immediate needs as a possible exchange with their salvation experience of hunger. This was a problem of the flesh.

Such a problem looks to the desires being currently met. But in such a way that ultimate meaning of the situation is blurred or lost. The treasuring of freedom from slavery can be the only underlining corrective to immediate set backs and needs taking the centre stage.

The issue of the "flesh" will be taken up later in this series. Significantly, it will be seen that the flesh is always something which is considered to have been dealt with in the death of Jesus [Colossians 2, Galatians 5]. It is seen to be an issue which is involved in considering what we are saved "from"; whereas what we are saved "to" is the risen life of Jesus: which is to share in His life by union with Him.

When Paul is considering the death of Jesus he will think on "the flesh" which Jesus assumed at His incarnation: when he thinks of His resurrected life Paul will speak of the "body" of Jesus. "Flesh", in this sense, comes to a death; a "body" is concerned with rising.

4 - The provision of bread from heaven.

The Lord makes a promise to Moses and Aaron [16.4-5] that He will rain bread from heaven for them. This bread from heaven:

[a] must be gathered everyday. It is "daily bread" - it is "given" every day and it must be "taken", gathered every day.

[b] in needing to be gathered daily will constitute a test for them. It is a test as to whether or not they will "walk in My instruction" [16.4].

[c] It will display that God has put into their hearts that they must daily feed on what He provides. And this will demonstrate that they will walk as He instructs. It will show His Lordship over them.

[d] shall not be gathered on the Sabbath. Rather, they shall find that as they prepare it on the day before the sabbath that it will be enough for two days.

Notice that this whole matter is a provision of grace - it is something which the Lord provides for them as a gift. Just as rain is a gift from God which comes down upon the earth in a way that its coming [or its being giving] is not within the control of the recipients; so the bread is said to be rained "from heaven" [16.4].

What the people of God must do is gather it, take it to themselves. Their action is to be a response to grace - and it is food for them only as it is that. The

supply is not in their hands, the receiving is.

5 - God's constant supply of the bread from heaven is a provision against the return to slavery to which our flesh will drive us.

Moses' response makes clear that the Lord does not want them desiring Egypt on the basis of hunger. At evening they will know that the Lord has brought them out of Egypt and He will provide for them here in the wilderness. That is, God's provision for us once He has saved us is itself a corrective to us ever wanting to return to slavery because of the desires of our flesh.

6 - The memorial as a witness. Not just an event, but a constant witness.

There was a provision for generations to come to have an opportunity to "see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness".

There is here a provision for the generations to come to know that the Lord fed their forefathers in the wilderness.

Exodus 17 - The provision of the Water of Life.

1-4 The people move from the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim [See Num 33.12-14 which speaks of two stations Dophkah and Alush, on the way, to Rephidim. Probably not much happened there]. At Rephidim the people murmur for lack of water.

5-6 Moses asks advice of the Lord, Who promises water from a rock as Moses strikes it with the rod with which he struck the Nile.

7 Moses calls the place Massah [trial, test] and Meribah [contention, litigation]

8-13 Amalek fights against the people. Joshua fights while Moses, Aaron and Hur pray.

14 A note is made that Amalek is to be made war with constantly and to be wiped out.

15-16 Moses built an altar to the Lord calling it YHWH Nissi, "the Lord is my banner".

1 - The waterless camping place as a provision of the Lord. 17.1

As the congregation journeys further and further into the wilderness of Sin it is "according to the command of the Lord". This wilderness is between Elim and Sinai [Exodus 16.1]. The camp is made at Rephidim, in a place where there is no water. Now, this is remarkable – the Lord has led them to make camp in a place where there is nothing to drink; surely the most basic reason for making it a stopping place at all!

Is this the deep reason for the "quarrel" they have with their leadership? Are they basically showing their disdain for the leader who would lead them to a camp where there is no water at all? This circumstance, to which the Lord has led them will now cast the focus onto the relationship between the people and the Lord Himself. This is made clear by verse 7; Rephidim was remembered and named by Moses, not so much as the provision of water, but as a test [Massah] and a quarrel [Meribah] with the Lord; "was He among us, or not."

2 - The wilderness as a provision of the Lord. 17.1

The people are clearly being led, and they have no option but to follow the leader. This throws their focus entirely upon the Lord and his prophet Moses.

Later in the Bible, the Revelation to John, given after the life and ministry of

Jesus and his Ascension into heaven will think of Israel as a woman, from whom the Messiah has come [Rev 12]. She gives birth to the Messiah and then as He is caught up to heaven, a war in heaven follows and Satan and his angels are cast to the earth as defeated. In this terrible anger of defeat Satan persecutes the woman. In this dire situation Revelation speaks of her as drawn into the wilderness where God has appointed a time for her there to be shielded from the presence of Satan. The wilderness is a provision of the Lord for an unwilling people to learn to relate and then be the better for it.

That it is a wilderness points to the lack of luxuries and the soft life. Things are back to basics of food and drink. Their dependence on God is always before them and in their constant cries for provisions. Nothing has changed for us today. So we should not be put off by this position of being dependent creatures. What the wilderness means then, is that it is a time in Israel's life when she was forced to attend to her relationship to God. "Forced" not because dominated, but because she was by nature and her sin, unwilling for this salvation and needed to be focused on Him in a way which she could not avoid. She was required to relate by virtue of her precarious position and so her deep need of God's help and care. In this way the wilderness is a gracious provision itself.

This enforced inter-relating between a people and their saving God is reflected in all the subsequent history of Israel. It is the watershed of their knowledge of God.

It also tells us what sort of knowledge is meant – it is personal knowing, the sort that is derived from going through tough times together. Paul, the apostle of Jesus, will speak of it as a time when the people were "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" [1 Cor 10.1-5]. They were immersed into a relationship with their leader by going through things together. It is this relationship between them that was established by the very adventure itself.

3 - The exchange between the people, Moses and the Lord 17.2-7

To quarrel with Moses over the absence of water simply serves to highlight the relation between Moses and the Lord. To quarrel with him is to "test" the Lord. This directs the people to their relationship to the Lord and explains that Moses is simply taking his direction from Him. In this way Moses is asking that they relate to the Lord in the way he does. As He has saved them and led them through such wonderful rescues He will surely know what He is doing now [verse 2].

But the people are very thirsty and are driven by their anxiety and desire for drink for themselves, their children and their livestock. They also question the salvation worked for them in the light of their current precarious position. So they accost Moses with the claim that "you have brought us up from Egypt..."

In their eyes the person who had arrived into their Egyptian-based bondage was Moses with a message that they were about to come out of Egypt.

We, the readers of the Bible, know that it was in answer to their own cries for release that God had acted on their behalf in sending Moses in the first place [Exodus 6.2-8]. Perhaps the people had forgotten their cries, or had ceased to believe that they would be heard. It was their unbelief in that matter of their prayers that portrays Moses to them as an instigator of release that they always seem reluctant to participate in. Perhaps they feared the cost. But Moses understands that even as the bush burns, it was not consumed [Ex 6.3].

Had they now, here at Rephidim, concerning the deliverance that initially, they were so reluctant to embrace, forgotten it had ended in Egypt with a mighty destruction of Pharaoh's army? This is not to judge them, but to simply point out that for the rescued ones, their viewpoint is 'that was then, this is now' - this is the issue of Rephidim. It wasn't that they had forgotten the wonderful rescue. It was all too clear to them at that time that the Lord was among them as cloud and fire and mighty deeds - it was impossible to say otherwise.

But new circumstances of a waterless camp now present a new challenge to their relationship again, more faith is called for; and it will ever be so. They are now committed to a life of trust in the Lord for every circumstance. Here they are not coming submissively and asking the Lord for water, they are quarrelling with Moses; so this constitutes a "test" of the Lord by them. There is an attitude of demand here, expressed with an underlying questioning of the whole life into which they have now been led. And so is He still "among them"?

Moses is, of course, helpless of himself to do anything about the water. He also fears for his life [verse 4]. The Lord instructs Moses to "pass in front of the people..."; he is to visibly lead and to take some action in an open accessible way. He is to "take some elders with him"; it is not to be a focus on his own person, there are also to be credible witnesses [verse 6b] who will be drawn in to stand with Moses in his action. He is to take his "staff"; this is a sign to all that the same instrument of deliverance at the Red Sea will now be in evidence again - this signals something is about to happen.

And if the rocks are an example of the seemingly waterless environment, so offensive to the rebellious anxious people, then the staff, as a symbol of his care for them will be used again. For with the same staff that he "struck the Nile" in judgment against the Egyptians worshipping of a river they thought provided their life; now the people of God will see a rock struck in judgment. Instead of their own rebellion bringing God's wrath upon their heads, this rock will be struck on their behalf and will bring forth water to drink, life for the people of God; even as they question God's provision. All this will be in the sight of the elders of Israel, who cannot but testify to what they have seen.

Paul uses this powerful image of the rebellious setting of this portion of Exodus to show that the rock that followed them was Christ [1Cor 10.1-5]. Using the section we have just studied, we see that Paul has in the back of his mind Exodus 16 concerning the manna, and Exodus 17.1-7 concerning the water. Paul sees this as God feeding the people supernatural food and drink. And he says that the people were being followed by a Rock, who was the their food and drink; and this Rock is Christ. Here, in Paul, understood to be the person of the Messiah who was God's provision of food and drink to his people. John's gospel says the same in another way.