I. Intro.

A. *Khag Sameakh!* **Happy Holiday!** (in Hebrew)

1. If we were a Jewish congregation telling God's big salvation history, that's how I might greet you because what we're talking about today is a BIG deal, a really big deal to Jewish people.

a) 2 of the biggest feasts in the Jewish year are the very stories we're honoring today:

1st is Passover (which celebrates God's deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt)

and 2nd is Shavuot (the festival of weeks), which celebrates God's gift of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, 7 weeks after celebrating Passover

b) No, the Jews aren't really celebrating either of these feasts right now, because these feasts are actually in the springtime.

2. But in terms of salvation stories from the Hebrew Bible, today we're focusing on the big event!

a) This is THE great salvation event of the Old Testament … the central memory for the old People of God (before the church became the new people of God)

b) This is the primary salvation act that the Jews always refer back to … the defining moment for them: the beginning of their identity as the chosen, covenant shalom people

c) We will see that over & over in the Bible after this big event, they make reference back to what God did for them in delivering them from Egypt & giving them the Torah

B. In our Xian telling of the salvation history, **we refer to it not as 2 separate things but as <u>Exodus-Sinai</u>, as one combined event in the big sweep of God's activities**

1. This is the high point in O.T. salvation history … *(look at timeline and notice highest point rising up, before the time of Jesus)*

2. If I were to ask you, "In all of God's saving work in history, what were the 2 biggest, most influential events?" what would you say?

C. Well, Exodus-Sinai is one of the 2 highest points on our Xian Heils. Timeline: the other being the one marked by a cross (you might say "Jesus + the Holy Spirit")

1. That one is also a combined salvation event we will call the <u>Christ-Pentecost</u> event

a) In the big sweep of Heilgseschichte, the birth, life, death, & resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit are related things that happened in a relatively short time …

b) Much like the Exodus deliverance and the Sinai covenant are important related things that happened in a relatively short time

2. As Xians of course, Jesus features biggest in how we understand salvation history, but we'll focus more on that after Xmas in 2015

II. (Review big story)

A. Today's focus:

1. Largely on the story of God's unlikely hero Moses, & the unlikely collection of people he leads out of slavery … a people partly descended from those patriarchs & matriarchs we heard re. last wk.

2. As one study Bible put it: This is *"the definitive story of the establishment of Israel as a people freed from human tyranny who became slaves to their own loving God."* (New Oxford Annotated Bible, 3rd ed., NRSV, p. 82 HEBREW BIBLE)

B. (Exodus overview)

1. After Jacob's family has been in Egypt for many generations, there is a change of dynasties, and a new Pharaoh comes to the throne who doesn't know the Joseph story …

a) as those descendants become very numerous, Egypt puts them into slavery, along with other foreign groups

b) Thru God's providence & his parents' cleverness, baby Moses is saved from genocide and ironically gets adopted by Pharaoh's own daughter, growing up in the royal palace.

2. Moses grows up & eventually begins to identify with his native enslaved people.

a) One day Moses takes matters into his own hands & kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave. When Pharaoh finds out, Moses has to flee for his life into the Sinai wilderness

b) Out there in the wilderness, YHWH the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, appears to him in a burning bush, calling Moses to return to Egypt & ask Pharaoh to let the slaves go

3. With his assistant Aaron, Moses returns to confront the most powerful king in the world who, of course rejects the request

a) But after 10 plagues brought on by YHWH, Pharaoh finally lets the slaves go … only to change his mind when he sees his cheap labor vanishing … he sends his army after the escaping slaves

b) This repeats the story we just heard Jim retelling: The people, trapped against the shore, are terrified seeing the approaching army and complain against Moses for leading them out from slavery just to die in the desert!

4. This sets up God's ultimate salvation act up to that time:

a) Moses says these key words: *(read 14:13-14)*

b) And with that, God parts the waters, allowing the multitude of slaves to cross through the waters on dry ground, while God keeps the army at bay with a shield in the form of a pillar of cloud.

c) After the people cross through, the Egyptians again start pursuing them, but Moses stretches out his staff and the waters close in, drowning Pharaoh's army.

The victory is God's because God does the fighting.

We'll come back to the significance of this divine victory shortly … but the slaves are now free!

5. Of course, trusting God to get them out of Egyptian oppression is hard enough … trusting God to keep providing resources out in a harsh desert with no food or water: that is even harder

a) Now they have the discouraging task of surviving as a large group in the desert and making their way to some unknown promised land

b) While heading toward Mt. Sinai, the people already start testing God by complaining about a lack of water, until God provides water when Moses' staff strikes a rock

c) Finally arriving in front of Mt. Sinai, God tells Moses his purposes for freeing the people and calling them out to Mt. Sinai … purposes that are summarized in *Exo. 19:3-6* ***(read)***

First they are reminded of God's deliverance of them from Egypt [PPT grace] This is God's grace

Then they are called to keep a covenant with God, [PPT covenant people] which will make them God's treasured possession … the chosen people

But they are chosen for a mission as Cindy pointed out from Abraham's story last week & here comes the mission: [PPT for a mission] that they are a "priestly kingdom & a holy nation".

(a) This means they're consecrated for service to God, since priests act as connecting points between God & other people …

(b) This then is the solution begun, which was promised in the covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be blessed to be a blessing to others [blank PPT]

6. For the people to understand how awesome and holy this YHWH is, God is revealed on the mountain in fire, smoke and earthquake

a) Only Moses is allowed up to the top of the holy mountain for direct contact with YHWH

b) And up there is where God delivers to Moses the gift of the heart of God's instructions to his chosen people: what we usually call the Ten Commandments … but that too needs a little more explanation after a bit.

C. Now we've walked thru the main events of book of Exodus and a bit about how they fit within the Heilsgeschichte …

1. But what's their significance? Why do they matter?

2. Let's finish this teaching with a closer look at two very important themes from the Exodus-Sinai event: Holy War & "the 11 words"

III. Exodus deliverance is the greatest salvation event of the OT, but it's also much more than that …

A. It's the model & foundation for Holy War, which is grossly misunderstood in our violent world today

1. Unfortunately the phrase "holy war" is in the news these days with the rise of militant Islamist groups who claim to be fighting jihad against the enemies of God.

2. For thousands of years warriors have claimed that God is on their side or they are on God's side

a) The difference: When YHWH fought for the Israelites, they did NOT need to fight.

b) That's a big difference & it becomes a key point when we try to understand the problem of warfare in the OT compared to Jesus in N.T.

3. Let's look at Holy War in the Bible to see how God dealt with the problem of evil

B. Holy War in the Bible

1. Too many people pick random stories of OT warfare, some of them with God's people doing bloody things in God's name. Is that what Christians are allowed to do, or supposed to do today?

a) The key for us to understand OT warfare is to see that God intended to be direct king over a people who did not have a king of their own. With God as their king, this is called theocracy.

b) In YHWH's theocracy, there was a radical new idea: God, not God's own people, takes responsibility for dealing with the evil that breaks down shalom

c) But like most of us, God's people usually wanted to take matters into their own hands & protect themselves, not trusting God to do it for them

d) So we need to understand what God's original ultimate will was for fighting evil, and then we can view other warfare stories as showing us how God's people fell short of that ideal

2. Holy War went through several stages in the Bible, based on God's people being less & less cooperative with God's will

a) Original plan for Holy War: <u>God fights FOR the people</u> [PPT Holy War1]

In God's sin solution, God's own people have only to be yielded and trusting of their sovereign God to defeat evil for them

This is what we saw today when the people face the army bearing down on them but God shields them & eventually drowns Pharaoh's army while the Israelites just stand & watch.

In fact the ten plagues themselves are also part of God's Holy War plan where God combats evil & no human violence is called for.

But as you can imagine, standing still & trusting God is very hard to do … In fact, God's chosen people quickly began to get involved in the fighting themselves, which is 2nd stage …

b) 2nd stage: <u>The people fight WITH God</u> [PPT Holy War2]

During the time of the judges, God called on just a few people, like the woman Deborah, or Gideon & his handful of men to defeat Israel's enemies.

YHWH was still their king but there was no standing army, so the people had to be called forth for each battle.

And when the people fought, it was more of a mopping up exercise after God's miraculous power had already won the victory

But as we will see in a few weeks, the people were not content with a king they couldn't see, so they eventually became a nation-state with a human king, which was another step away from God's original Holy War

c) 3rd stage: <u>The nation-state Israel fights FOR God</u> [PPT Holy War3]

In 2 Samuel 24 we read that King David established a standing army, which was a sin against the rules of Holy War.

Now the people began to trust in the horses & chariots of their own army, rather than in YHWH. Their security was placed more in an institution than in YHWH.

Eventually the apostasy and injustices of God's own people became so great that God could not tolerate it anymore and God stopped defending his chosen people, which allowed the northern kingdom of Israel to fall to the Assyrians

d) 4th stage: <u>God fights AGAINST Judah</u> [PPT Holy War4]

When the Babylonians defeated kingdom of Judah & took the leaders off into exile, the people wondered whether YHWH really was the greatest god, because they never imagined **this** happening to Jerusalem and to their king from the line of David.

In Jer. 19 & 21 we read that YHWH was not defeated when the Babylonians overtook Jerusalem. Rather, God was actually fighting against his own people, so that they might repent from their evil ways.

After going into exile, God's prophets began to envision God doing a new thing: bringing them a Messiah (a suffering servant leader) who would fight evil again in the original way. You can read about this in Isaiah 42 & 53. This leads to …

e) Final stage in Holy War history: Jesus the Messiah fights evil in the original nonviolent way again [PPT Holy War5]

In Jesus God's intentions were fulfilled and in fact even expanded beyond the Exodus

Jesus conquered evil through a love so great that it was willing to suffer & be killed rather than to kill

On the cross & then thru the empty tomb, Jesus exposed the evil powers of this world for what they are: NOT all-good and NOT all-powerful.

3. So we see that in Jesus's way of restored Holy War, evil is defeated by the power of divine love, rather than by human violence.

a) God's intentions for defeating evil were not ultimately fulfilled until Jesus the promised Messiah showed us how YHWH the warrior overcomes evil without resorting to human violence

b) But about 1300 years before Jesus, God gave us a preview in the Exodus of how salvation against evil works when God's people stand back and let God fight evil on their behalf [blank PPT]

4. So I've given some detail of why the deliverance of those slaves is such a huge event in O.T. history, basically the high point, in combination with the covenant @ Mt Sinai

IV. But why does that covenant matter so much?

A. Because this newly formed people of God's own had to have some framework, some way of actually being that chosen shalom covenant community.

1. If life beyond the rules of Egypt is a total free-for-all, chaos and not shalom is the result.

a) Within the new freedom God had given them, there also had to be some boundaries

b) The primary purpose of this law was to teach them how to be a shalom community

2. That's why the covenant at Mt Sinai was both divine grace and divine demand, both gift and opportunity

B. In the drama, you heard contemporary versions of what we usually call The Ten Commandments

1. But in the drama, you heard basically the same words twice & they sounded quite different the 2nd time … This is kind of like the difference between seeing the Ten Commandments as only law, or also as grace

2. In the original Hebrew language, It says "God spoke all these 'words'".

a) That's why there is a Jewish tradition of referring to this passage not as the Ten Commandments, but as the "Eleven Words"

b) Certainly God has expectations, covenant demands of the people, but did you notice that demands are not the first word here?

c) The first of these 11 'words' is not a command at all. It's a word of grace*: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* [PPT Eleven words]

3. This is the connecting point between the Exodus deliverance and the covenant at Sinai:

a) Without God's salvation for the people at the Red Sea, there is no basis for God's law given at Sinai

b) Before the demands of the law comes the word of God's grace!

C. Do you get the significance of this first of the eleven 'words'?

1. The reason for obeying the other ten 'words' is because of the 1st one!

a) We don't obey the commandments out of fear or out of duty, but out of gratitude!

b) If you or someone you know tends to think of the Bible as merely a rule book, a set of "thou shalt nots", it's probably because you think the essence of it is captured in the Ten Commandments …

> You might have a God-image of a scowling finger-wagging bearded old man who only says 'thou shalt"
>
> But do you have those commandments grounded in grace, which is the first word?

2. In our YOTB I invite you to think a little differently about this great part of Scripture we find in Exo. 20.

a) I don't know about you, but this YOTB material prompts me to stop calling them the Ten Commandments and start using the phrase "the Eleven Words".

b) This must not be a way to just shirk our covenant responsibilities as the people of God … But merely changing what I call them may help remind me that the first word is grace, not a commandment.

V. Conclusion [blank PPT]

A. On our Heilsgeschichte timelines, you see there's an asterisk (*) by the Exodus-Sinai event

1. That marks it as a crisis or turning point for the people of God, & there were several of these.

2. For the old people of God, the Exodus-Sinai experience marked a supreme example of their being loved and chosen by God – chosen

for a mission

B. But how faithful would they be to YHWH & their chosenness?

1. This is basically one of the 3 questions you see on the timeline, which we will keep coming back to ("How faithfully are God's people cooperating?")

2. It's also a good question for us to close with today

   a) God thru JC has "parted the waters" of sin to provide a way for us escape from the pursuits of the devil.

   b) Through the Eleven Words and other instructions given to us in the Bible, we have been shown how to live as the church, the new people of God … trusting God rather than human violence to combat evil …

   c) <u>How faithful will we be to that chosenness?</u>