

Sermon 45, Crossing the Red Sea into the New Creation, Exodus 14¹

Proposition: Moses narrates the Red Sea crossing in terms reminiscent of the first creation, depicting it as a new creation and resurrection from Egypt, the land of death, all performed by Yahweh through His Angel and His Spirit.

- I. Creation & New Creation
 - A. The Waters of Chaos, the Sea of End
 - 1. The Locust Army, 10:13
 - 2. Swept by the Sea Wind into the Sea of End, 10:19
 - B. The Wind/Breath/Spirit of God Moves on the Face of the Waters, v. 21
 - C. “Let There Be Light!”: Pillar of Cloud and Fire
- II. Darkness & Dawn
 - A. Toward the Sea at Dusk, vv. 1-14²
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- III. Down Into Egypt & Up Out of Egypt, Gen. 12:10, Ex. 13:18
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last week we looked at the surface of the text of Exodus 14. There we saw God’s stated plan to get glory over Pharaoh, and how He carried it out by shaking off the Egyptians into the Red Sea. This evening, I want to take a different approach to the text. Instead of looking at the surface of the text, the stated actions and intentions and lessons, I want to look at the themes of the text, and specifically the connection between those themes and other great textual movements of Scripture. So we’re going to look at four major points of connection between this text and others that together add up to some of Scripture’s biggest themes. Thus, I want you to see how the Red Sea crossing looks like creation and is clearly meant to be a foreshadowing of the new creation. I want you to see the darkness, and the dawn that follows it — how God conclusively defeats His enemies just as dawn breaks. I want you to see the themes of descent into the realm of the dead and ascent to the high places of

¹ This sermon is heavily dependent on L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), ch. 4.

² This point and the next two are verbatim from *Ibid.*, 49.

communion with God on His mountain. And I want you to see Pharaoh, the dragon wallowing in the Nile, and Yahweh the dragon-slayer who vanquishes him just as He will someday conclusively overthrow the great Dragon, the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. Brothers and sisters, this chapter is deep. Ultimately, it shows us Israel brought through the chaos waters by the Son and Spirit of God, up out of Egypt into the new-creation world of order, victory, and peace.

I. Creation & New Creation

The first thing I want you to see in this chapter is its basic structure with regard to the waters. In the beginning, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the waters. That invocation of the pre-creation chaos is very much present here. Indeed, it's a theme through much of Scripture: through the waters, to the mountain, for worship. We see God as the ruler over the sea in Psalm 89, and Christ as ruler over the sea in Ps. 72: "I will set His hand on the sea, and His right hand on the rivers." We see Jesus calming the waves and then trampling on them. In Heaven, there is no more sea because God has definitely banished chaos from His orderly Kingdom at the consummation. I could go on and on here, but already you know that the theme stretches through the entire book because it appears at the very beginning and at the very end.

A. The Waters of Chaos, the Sea of End

And speaking of the end, the name used throughout this passage for the Red Sea, translated as such by the LXX and subsequent translations, is literally "the sea of end." Lots of discussion has taken place about the Hebrew words here, which are *yam* = sea and *suph*. We know that *yam* is the sea. But what on earth is a *suph*? It sounds kind of like the Egyptian *tuph*, which means "reeds," and thus the popular rendering "sea of reeds" or Reed Sea; Jonah also uses the word to refer to reeds. But it could also be based on a root that means "the end." And that meaning, whether that is *the* meaning or whether it's just a word that sounds similar is definitely referenced in this text. This sea is the final boundary, the sea of end. You meet your final fate there, drowned in the chaos waters. At least, it was the sea of ending for Pharaoh's army, all his horses and chariots.

1. The Locust Army, 10:13

Notice, anyway, how this particular body of water has featured thus far in Exodus. We've only seen its name once, but in what a context! Locusts can be compared to an army. They are, for instance, throughout the book of Joel. In one rather obvious sense (in hindsight), the locust army that Moses calls up over Egypt in the 8th plague is a stand-in for Pharaoh's army. How do we know this?

2. Swept by the Sea Wind into the Sea of End, 10:19

Because the locust army of the 8th plague is blown by the *ruach*, the sea wind, right into the sea of end. And there they meet their end. The foreshadowing is deft. Blink and you'll miss it. But it's there all right. Moses is most definitely saying "God can bring up this army, use it to devastate His enemies, and then blow it right into the sea. It was Yahweh who turned this wind so that it blew the locusts away. Hint, hint, Pharaoh!"

And folks, this is not the only place where this theme appears.

B. The Wind/Breath/Spirit of God Moves on the Face of the Waters

Oh no. Come back to the beginning with me. Waste and void, waste and void, and darkness on the face of the deep. *And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* As you know, the Hebrews used the same word for wind, breath, and Spirit. The wind from Yahweh that blew those locusts into the sea? You could say that it was an act of the Holy Spirit, and you would not be wrong.

So it happens with the locusts, in a little preview of coming attractions. And then it happens again, at the biggie, the real Red Sea crossing. The Spirit of God blows a powerful east wind that opens the sea. He moves upon the face of the waters, and when He moves He makes a way through the sea, a path through the deep waters. In the beginning, as Milton has it, He sat dove-like brooding on the vast abyss and made it pregnant; now the Spirit of God blows on the sea and through the dry channel He opens come marching the hosts of Yahweh. Anyone remember how God divided the waters from the waters, and how He called the dry land Earth and the called the waters Seas? Well, at the Red Sea He did it again. The Spirit was there. The wind was there, rippling over the face of the waters. Anyone with eyes to see, particularly after the little incident with the locusts, could hardly miss the parallels.

C. “Let There Be Light!”: Pillar of Cloud and Fire

On that first day of creation, God also separated the light from the darkness by saying, “Let there be light!” And there was light. And what does Yahweh do at the shore of the Red Sea? Why, He shines His own light, the light of the divine fire, over the massed ranks of Israel as they wait through the night for His wind to open up the sea. Meanwhile, He presents darkness to the Egyptians. It’s the 9th plague all over again, only not three days long this time. And instead of the sun’s light, Israel more obviously partakes of the Son’s light. The cloud and darkness menaced Egypt, while the fire and light comforted Israel. The same God shows Himself as the God of creation who divided water and land, light and darkness. And now He’s at it again. Plus, the dramatic setting highlights the same truth.

II. Darkness & Dawn

If you look at the time scale of the chapter, it clearly takes place over the course of a single night. Moses does not go out of his way to emphasize this; the hints he drops are so sparse that I must admit that I missed them my whole life, until I was working on this sermon. But the overall story is actually really clear.

A. Toward the Sea at Dusk, vv. 1-14

Israel moves toward the sea and camps. Soon they sight the dust of Pharaoh’s chariots. God swings into place as a shield between Egypt and Israel. And then the sun goes down. Why the darkness?

B. Amidst the Sea at Night, vv. 15-25

The answer is simple. Israel is crossing into a new life, and there is no time more significant for such a venture than dawn. That demands that the crossing, going down into the waters of chaos, take place at night. Most of us don’t fancy going into the sea at night. Have you ever been on the

beach at night? It's a terrifying thing. It's pitch black, no lights out there — just the roar of the ocean ready to swallow you. And that is the near-death experience that all of Israel's sons partook of.

C. On the Other Side of the Sea at Dawn, vv. 26-31

Yet they climbed out on the far shore at dawn; just as the day broke and the first rays of morning sun streamed onto the faces of the ascending Israelites, God hurled the sea back onto the Egyptians.

1. Marching off into the Sunrise

They were going into the sunrise, toward their rendezvous with God at Sinai. The meaning could hardly be more clear: Israel is traveling toward the light and leaving Egypt behind in the dark.

2. Heading East, toward Eden

Anyway, the Pentateuch goes on to make a big deal out of this idea of traveling eastward. The Tabernacle, for which God will give instructions in the second half of this book, was always pitched with its gate and door on the west end. The farther in you penetrated, the closer you got to God's presence, the farther east you had to travel. The same goes for Israel ascending eastward out of the Red Sea. They are on their way back to the East, where God planted a garden and walked with Adam in the beginning.

III. Down Into Egypt & Up Out of Egypt, Gen. 12:10, Ex. 13:18

Well, as though the creation imagery and the direction of travel, along with traveling from darkness into light, were not already charged with significance, there is another linguistic quirk that relates this new creation to salvation from the depths of Sheol. That is the Bible's insistence, from the very beginning, that Egypt is down. This fits with our way of speaking too. We make our maps with North uppermost, and thus any travel in a southward direction we can "down." Here in the American West, we have another linguistic quirk: To go east is to go back. We only speak of going "back East." But to go on to California is to go "out West." The way we talk is a remnant of the pioneer days. Even people who did not come from the East speak of going back East, for that is simply how our society conceives of making the trip back to New York, Boston, Savannah, Philadelphia, and other colonial-era cities along the East Coast of our republic. Well, Israel consistently conceived of Egypt as down, not because it was south but because, I think, it was associated with death and the realm of the dead in their minds. We spoke last time of how Egypt's #1 symbol is the pyramids — big tombs. Egypt is the land of death, the realm of the dead, famous to this day for mummies and embalming. Already, then, we see talk in Genesis 10 of Abraham going down to Egypt, and in Ex. 13 we see Israel described as going up out of Egypt. This is an ascension from the land of death to the realm of life. It is a key aspect of the new creation. The parallel with the NT teaching on resurrection from the dead as the beginning of the new creation is only too obvious.

IV. Pharaoh the Dragon & Yahweh the Dragon-Slayer, Eze. 29:3, Isa. 27:1

Finally, a fourth theme that ties this chapter to the rest of Scripture is the major prophets' depiction of Pharaoh as a dragon and Yahweh as a dragon-slayer. Remember how Pharaoh was

going to learn that Yahweh was God? Well, maybe 800 years later, Ezekiel made the same threat against him.

Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt. Speak, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God:

“Behold, I am against you,
O Pharaoh king of Egypt,
O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers,
Who has said, ‘My River is my own;
I have made it for myself.’
But I will put hooks in your jaws,
And cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales;
I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,
And all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales.
I will leave you in the wilderness,
You and all the fish of your rivers;
You shall fall on the open field;
You shall not be picked up or gathered.
I have given you as food
To the beasts of the field
And to the birds of the heavens.
Then all the inhabitants of Egypt
Shall know that I am the LORD.” (Eze 29:2-6a)

So notice Pharaoh’s grandiose boasting here. He calls himself the creator, the one who made the Nile for himself. And in response, God labels him a *tannin*, a water dragon along the lines of Leviathan, and threatens to throw him out on the land where he can’t move or breathe. A beached water dragon, devoured by coyotes and jackals and vultures! That’s the picture here. God is the great dragon-slayer. In other words, as the Beast principle tries to rise up and exert itself in the Messianic state time and time again throughout history, God pushes back and demonstrates (again) that the state cannot and will not save. Instead, as Isaiah promises, God is the dragon-slayer who will ultimately slaughter the singular seed of the serpent who is behind all of the sin and evil in history. That is the dragon, the old serpent who is the Devil and Satan. His head will be smashed, indeed, has been smashed, at the cross. He is simply in his death throes now, twisting and whirling and lying to us that he is still alive.

In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong,
Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
Leviathan that twisted serpent;
And He will slay the reptile that is in the sea. (Is. 27:1)

In what day? The last day, ultimately, though also the day we call Good Friday. The dragon in the sea, aka Leviathan, aka Satan, will be stabbed by the sword of the LORD, and he will not recover.

So here's what I'm suggesting: the Red Sea crossing is a version, a pre-enactment, of Satan's final defeat, with Pharaoh and his chariot army playing the villain and the Son of God starring as Himself. It's a stirring thought. Indeed, it is part and parcel of the new creation. Satan has wormed his way into the first creation, and the whole world lieth in the Wicked One. But God is making all things new.

A. Pharaoh's Chariot Army, v. 7

B. Swept by Yahweh Into the Sea of End, v. 27

Pharaoh's chariot army was swept into the sea of end and there they met their end. The wet kiss of death on their right hands, foreheads, and lungs did them in once and for all. But the upshot of it is that God's people were free to travel on to the mountain for communion with God.

God will slay the dragon who stands to make war on the saints and persecute the rest of the church's offspring. That means that we do not need to fear the demon-influenced empires that persecute and threaten the saints. Yahweh rules them, and He can and will lead us through the darkness of death into the light of morning, the morning of the eternal Sabbath day. Brothers and sisters, Christ walked that path through death and out the other side. He did it as the pillar of cloud and fire. He did it again during the original Holy Week. And now we have to follow Him. Are you ready to go through death, to descend into Hell, following your Messiah? Or would you have turned yourself in to the Egyptians before you crossed that sea?

Don't believe the dragon. It is not better to slave in Egypt. It is better to serve the one who walked the boneyard path for you, and lives. Jesus saved His people from Egypt, as His little brother Jude wrote centuries after this event. And He is saving you from sin through resurrection and new creation, out of darkness into light, out of the waters of chaos onto the solid rock of the mountain of God. His Spirit has separated you from the mass of corruption which is fallen humanity. Believe, follow, and live. Amen.