

Exodus 14:15-15:21 (Part I)

Introduction

This morning, we finally arrive at the parting and the crossing of the Red Sea. What we have in chapter 14 is the narrative, story account, (14:15-31) and then what we have in chapter 15 is the poetic, musical description of what happened in Moses' "victory song." (15:1-18) The fact that we have these *two* different descriptions of what happened, one right after the other, shows us already what a big deal this crossing of the Red Sea really is. In fact, after the narrative in chapter 14 and the song in chapter 15, Moses follows this up with yet another short narrative description (15:19-20) followed by yet another song! (15:21) We'll see this morning, and over the coming weeks, that we really can't read the narrative apart from the song, or the song apart from the narrative. (cf. Stuart) They go together. So this morning, we'll be focusing especially on Exodus 14:15-22 (narrative), but we'll certainly be bringing in other verses from the song in chapter 15.

We're coming now to something in the Scriptures that's truly of "epic" proportions. We can't ever overestimate the meaning of this crossing of the Red Sea in light of the big picture of God's *salvation plan*. So let's pray together that God would give us understanding. And let's pray that this understanding would fill us with an invincible, fruitful, obedient faith.

I. Exodus 14:15 — The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward."

Moses is not actually the one who has been "crying out" to the Lord with unbelieving and rebellious words. But God is speaking to Moses as the representative of the people of Israel, who *have* been crying out to the Lord with unbelieving and rebellious words. (14:10-12) So the Lord says to Moses, as the leader and representative of all the people: "*Why* do you cry to me?" In other words, in spite of the approaching Egyptian army which Israel now sees with its own eyes, in spite of Pharaoh drawing near and there being no place to run, there's still no excuse for Israel's fear and unbelief. (cf. Psalm 106:7-12)

"Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward." **But** – to go *forward* is to walk right into the **Sea**. At this point, any direction at all seems to be obviously impossible. But to go forward would have seemed the *most* impossible out of all the impossible options. The Sea is an impassable barrier. It's not an exaggeration to say that to walk into the Sea is to walk into a watery abyss of death. That's just the honest truth. Let's just state a few more things that should be obvious to everyone. The Sea is alright for fish, but not for humans. Even for those humans who can swim—which most if not all of the Israelites could not swim—the Sea is far too vast to swim across. Even for those humans who have boats—which none of the Israelites did—the Sea could easily swallow up any boat that they might have built. The Sea is beautiful when you're standing on the seashore and watching the sunset, or when you're sailing on the Sea on a breezy summer day. But we know that at any moment, the Sea can become a completely uncontrollable, chaotic, "monster" that devours people whole — not to mention their ships. The depths of the Sea have become the watery grave of multitudes of people. So in the end, the Sea is really, from one perspective, the ultimate *enemy* of human life. In fact, it's only from this perspective that we can

begin to appreciate even more, and then praise God even more for His creation of the world. Remember that in the beginning, when God first created the heavens and the earth...

- Genesis 1:2 — The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the **deep**. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the **waters**.

The Psalmist describes it like this:

- Psalm 104:5–6 — [God] set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved. You covered it with the **deep** as with a garment; the **waters** stood above the mountains.

In the beginning, the world was completely inhospitable and deadly to all human life. In the beginning, the entire world was covered with the waters of the deep as with a garment. So at that point, to put a human being on planet earth would have been certain and immediate death. And so what did God do? On the third day of creation, God said:

- Genesis 1:9–10 — “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the **dry land** appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.

Isn't this a beautiful and wonderful thing? The appearance of the “dry land” means a place where us human beings can live! In other places, the Bible describes the appearance of the dry land in even more dramatic terms. As part of God's creation, the Sea is something good, but there's still that sense in which it's a terrifying enemy to all human life. And so after describing how God covered the earth with the deep as with a garment, and how the waters stood above the mountains, then the Psalmist goes on to celebrate:

- Psalm 104:7–9 (cf. Prov. 8:24-31) — At your *rebuke* they **fled**; at the sound of your thunder they took to **flight**. The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them. **You set a boundary that they may not pass**, so that they might not again cover the earth.

So after first creating the deep, God then *rebukes* the deep so that it flees away to the place appointed for it – leaving the dry land as a place where human beings can live. The book of Proverbs describes the appearance of the dry land like this:

- Proverbs 3:19–20 — The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the **deeps** were **split asunder**, and the clouds drop down the dew.

So after first covering the whole earth with the deep, God then split the deep asunder (God caused the deep to burst apart), so that in the very midst of the great deep there would now be dry land.

Again, this is truly an awesome thing for us as human beings to celebrate! Here we have the power of our Creator to conquer the Sea and give to us a place where we can have life. Only

now, in Exodus, this same Creator has just given His people, who are trapped by the Sea, the command to pack up and “go forward” – the command to walk right *into* the Sea. This is one of those things that it’s just difficult to process. Not only does it seem just plain ludicrous to people with common sense (think about it!), but now we can see that it also seems like a reversal and an undoing of what God did in creation! After creating the dry land for people, God is now sending His people *into* the Sea.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.’” So only now are we really prepared to read what comes next. The Lord said to Moses:

II. Exodus 14:16 — Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and **split it asunder**, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on **dry ground**.

If we weren’t already so familiar with this story, we’d be dizzy right now with astonishment. The way that looked and appeared to be the most impossible of all the impossible options – the way that looked and appeared to be an impassible, insurmountable obstacle – *is not!* So what is it that we have here? Not the reversal and the undoing of creation, but instead we have—as it were—a second mighty work of creation – a kind of “copy” of the first. The Israelites are to go **through the waters of the Sea on dry ground!** Three more times, Moses uses this same language to describe what happened that day:

- Exodus 14:22 — The people of Israel went **into the midst** of the sea on **dry ground**.
- Exodus 14:29 — The people of Israel walked on **dry ground through** the sea.
- Exodus 15:19 — The people of Israel walked on **dry ground in the midst** of the sea.

That word for “dry ground” is the *same* word that we find on Day 3 of Creation.¹

- Genesis 1:9² — “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the **dry land** appear.”

The purposeful connection here with the theme of creation is obvious.

When our English translations speak of “dividing” the Sea, that’s actually a very strong word that means to “break open”; or we could say, “split asunder.” So we’ll read again in verse 21:

- Exodus 14:21 (cf. Neh. 9:11; Ps. 78:13; Isa. 63:12) — The LORD **drove** the sea back... and made the sea dry land, and the waters were **split asunder (broken apart)**.

¹ *Yabbasah* (dry ground) appears only 14 times in the Bible. Nine of those times it refers either to the parting of the Red Sea or to the Creation of the world. One time it refers to the parting of the Jordan River (Josh. 4:22)

² Genesis 8:14 — In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. [*yabas*] *Yabasah* is the main word used for the parting of the Red Sea, but see also *harabah* and the additional connection to the flood:

Exodus 14:21 — Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea **dry land** [*harabah*], and the waters were divided.

Genesis 8:13 — In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried [*harab*] from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. [*harab*]

Do you recognize this word that describes the parting of the Red Sea as the exact *same* word that's used in Proverbs to describe the parting of the deeps on the third day of creation?

- Proverbs 3:19–20³ — The LORD by wisdom founded the earth... by his knowledge the **deeps** were **split asunder (broken apart)**.

In another place, the Psalmist looks back on the parting of the Red Sea and describes it like this:

- Psalm 77:15–16 — You with your arm redeemed your people... When the **waters** saw you, O God, when the **waters** saw you, they were **afraid**; indeed, the **deep trembled**.

Once again, do you recognize this description of the parting of the Red Sea as the *same* way that another Psalmist looks back and describes the parting of the deeps on the third day of creation?

- Psalm 104:5–6 (cf. 106:7-12) — [God] covered [the earth] with the **deep** as with a garment; the **waters** stood above the mountains. At your **rebuke** they **fled**; at the sound of your thunder they took to **flight**.

In Genesis 1 it was the “**waters**” of the “**deep**” that were split asunder. (Gen. 1:2, 9)⁴ So the Psalmist writes of the parting of the Red Sea:

- Psalm 106:9 (cf. 77:16; Isa. 51:10; 63:11-13) — He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry... he led them through the **deep** as through a desert.

And when Moses composes a song celebrating the parting of the Red Sea, he writes:

- Exodus 15:8 (cf. 15:5) — At the blast of your nostrils the **waters** piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the **deeps** congealed in the heart of the sea.

And here, once again, this “piling up” and “heaping” and “congealing” (sticking together) of the waters of the Red Sea reminds us of the waters that on the third day of creation were all “gathered together into one place.” (Gen. 1:9) The Psalmist writes:

- Psalm 33:6–7 — By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He **gathers** the waters of the sea as a **heap**; he puts the deeps in storehouses.

The language of the parting and crossing of the Red Sea is overwhelmingly the language of *creation*. When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because they saw the Egyptians marching

³ Genesis 7:11 — In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep **burst forth [were split asunder]**, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

⁴ Genesis 7:11 — In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great **deep** burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. Genesis 8:2 — The fountains of the **deep** and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained.

after them, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and split it asunder, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.’”

III. Exodus 14:17–20 — And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the **darkness**. And it **lit up** the night without one coming near the other all night.

Remember that in the beginning the deep covered all the earth; but what does Genesis say was over the face of the deep?

➤ Genesis 1:1–2 — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and **darkness** was over the face of the **deep**.

If, on day three, God split asunder the great deep and caused the dry land to appear, do we remember what God did on the very next day of creation – Day 4?

➤ Genesis 1:14–18 (cf. 1:3-5) — And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens... to **give light** upon the earth.” ... And God made the two great lights... and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to **give light** on the earth... and to separate the light from the **darkness**.

And so now, here in Exodus, what do we have? We have the pillar of fire and cloud separating the light from the darkness — **giving light** to the people of Israel on one side, while intensifying the **darkness** for the Egyptians on the other.⁵ The words for “lit up” and “darkness” are the **same** words that we find in Genesis on the fourth day of creation. Not only will God conquer the deep to give His people **dry land**, but He’ll drive away the darkness of the night to give His people **light**.⁶ And then we read in verse 21:

IV. Exodus 14:21–22 — Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back **by a strong east wind [ruah]** all night and made the sea **dry land**, and the waters

⁵ The words for “lit up” and “darkness” are the same words that we find in Genesis on the fourth day of creation.

⁶ This reminds us of the creation connections in the ninth plague (in this case, the *reversal* of creation):

Genesis 1:1–2 — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and **darkness** (*hosek*) was **over** (*al*) the face of the deep.

Exodus 10:21 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be **darkness** (*hosek*) **over** (*al*) the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 10:23b — ...but for all the people of Israel **there was light** where they lived.

Genesis 1:1–3 — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and **there was light**.

were **split asunder**. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on **dry ground**, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

That word for wind is also the word for “breath,” or “spirit.” So when Moses writes his song of celebration and praise, he describes this wind by which God parted the waters of the Red Sea as the powerful *breath* of God Himself.

- Exodus 15:8 (cf. 15:10; Job 4:9; Ps. 18:15) — At the **breath [*ruah*] of your nostrils** the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

So should we think now that it’s a coincidence when we read in Genesis chapter one:

- Genesis 1:1–2⁷ — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit/wind/breath [*ruah*]** of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Clearly, we’re meant to assume that something is about to happen. It’s the breath of God, hovering over the face of the waters, that’s about to create order and beauty out of that which is formless and void. In the beginning, it was by the powerful breath of His nostrils that God created the heavens and the earth. On day three of creation, it was by the powerful breath of His mouth that God split asunder the waters of the great deep so that the dry ground would appear. We read in Psalm 33:

- Psalm 33:6–7 (cf. Job 26:13) — By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the **breath [*ruah*] of his mouth** all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a **heap**; he puts the **deeps** in storehouses.

And so also, we read about another day, thousands of years later, when God split asunder the waters of another deep so that His people could cross over on dry ground:

- Exodus 15:8 — At the **breath [*ruah*] of your nostrils** the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a **heap**; the **deeps** congealed in the heart of the sea.

Conclusion

Over, and over, and over again, we see that the parting of the Red Sea is only fully understood in connection with the creation of the world. What starts out looking like a reversal, or an undoing of creation itself as God tells His people to “go forward,” *into the watery depths of the Sea*, ends up being instead a *second* mighty work of creation – a sort of “copy” of the first. The people of God are to go *through the waters of the Deep—on DRY GROUND* – with “the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” The way that looked and appeared to be the most impossible of all the impossible options – the way that looked and appeared to be an impassible, utterly insurmountable obstacle, *is NOT, after all*. And that’s *because* even as God

⁷ Genesis 8:1 — But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a **wind** blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.

created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1, so now He's *beginning a new creation*. In the song in Exodus fifteen, Moses celebrates:

- Exodus 15:16 (cf. Deut. 32:6) — Because of the greatness of your arm, [the peoples] are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have **created**.⁸

What God is beginning here in Exodus chapter 14 is a work of creation that will equal, and in the end, even surpass that first work of creation in Genesis 1. But it *begins* here with the new creation of a *people* that God has saved and redeemed from Egypt by causing them to walk *through* the waters of the Deep on Dry Ground.

And so what we can know from this *beyond all shadow of a doubt* is that when it comes to our ultimate good and salvation – when it comes to this New Creation – there is nothing—absolutely nothing—that God cannot and will not do. When it comes to *your* ultimate good and salvation – when it comes to you're being created anew – there is no obstacle—not a single one—too big or too great for the Maker of heaven and earth. So what God would have us do is learn to **pray** as Hezekiah did when he faced the impossible odds of the Assyrian army:

- Isaiah 37:16 — O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth...

When the disciples had been imprisoned, and then beaten and threatened, “they lifted their voices together to God and said”:

- Acts 4:24 — Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...

When Jeremiah was overwhelmed with the impossibility of any future for God's people after the Babylonian captivity, he prayed:

- Jeremiah 32:17 (cf. 10:11-16) — Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you...

The Psalmist sings:

- Psalm 121:1-2 (cf. 146:5-6; 115:15; 134:3; 124:8) — I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

What God wants you and me to know is that when it comes to our ultimate good and salvation – when it comes to the New Creation of which we are all a part – there is nothing—absolutely nothing—that He cannot and will not do; there is no obstacle—not a single one—too big or too great for the Maker of heaven and earth.

⁸ See especially Durham; cf. Stuart; Currid; see also the discussion in Hamilton. Cf. Psalm 139:13; 74:2; Gen. 14:19, 22

As we're only *just* beginning to see this week, the crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground is not just a second mighty work of creation; it's the beginning of an even *mightier*, even *more wonderful* work of *creation* – one that *begins* with *us*. And *so* – God is calling us to trust Him, and to rejoice greatly in Him, not only when we don't see how, but also when we don't understand why. (cf. 14:31)

What do we learn from the crossing of the Red Sea? Well, so far, we learn to say with the Apostle Paul – and now with the deepest possible conviction:

- Romans 8:35–39 — Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.