

## Exodus 14:15-15:21 (Part II)

### Introduction

Last week, we saw over, and over, and over again that the parting of the Red Sea can only be fully understood in connection with the creation of the world. What started 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 created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1, so now He’s *beginning a new creation*. In Moses’ victory song in Exodus fifteen, he writes:

- 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**.

What God is beginning here in Exodus chapter 14 is a work of creation that will equal, and in the end, even surpass the first work of creation in Genesis 1. We’re going to come back to this theme next week. (I thought it would be this week) So if you weren’t here last week, I’d encourage you to go back and listen to the message in preparation for next week. For right now, though, we’ll still be picking up where we left off with the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14.

**I. Exodus 14:15–22** — 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 divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. 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. 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, and the waters were divided. **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.

Picture, if you can, looking out onto a newly created pathway through the depths of the Sea – a channel of dry ground with the Sea on both sides. And now imagine being told to go into the midst of the Sea, following that path that’s just now been opened. Do you think you’d just walk right in without a second thought? At the very least we might ask how thick the *walls* are that are holding the Sea back. And the answer is, “The waters of the Sea *are* the walls on the right hand and on the left.” That Hebrew word for “walls” always refers to the tall, high walls surrounding a

city.<sup>1</sup> Do you think you would think twice before stepping down between those walls of water and attempting to cross to the other side? I know for sure that I would. In fact, we could ask how anyone could be so full of courage – or so full of stupidity – as to attempt the crossing of the Red Sea. Because as we know, both the Israelites *and* the Egyptians went into the Sea.

When it comes to the Israelites, the fact that the Egyptian army was right behind them certainly played a part in their decision to “go forward,” but that still can’t have been all there was to it. A pathway leading into the depths of the Sea on one side, or the Egyptian army on the other? From just a human perspective, I can honestly say that I’m not sure which one I would have chosen – if I could even make any choice at all. But in the end, the Israelites had seen enough displays of God’s power in the plagues to *believe* now that if God has parted the Sea, He’ll be able to *keep it parted* until they’ve made it to the other side. As the Psalmist says, the Israelites “*rebelled* by the sea, at the Red Sea.” (Ps. 106:7) But then once the waters had been parted (in spite of Israel’s rebellion), the only way to fully explain why the Israelites went down into the Sea is to say very simply that it must have been “by faith.” The writer of Hebrews says:

➤ Hebrews 11:29 — By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.<sup>2</sup>

They *believed* God – that He would bring them safely across.

But now what about the Egyptians? Obviously, they are not acting “by faith” when they go into the Sea after the Israelites. Not only did they have to deal with the scariness of two walls of water on either side of a path through the depths of the Sea, but they also know full well that chariots and any kind of moist ground absolutely do not mix. To drive chariots onto a seabed that only hours ago was covered with water is so unbelievably insane that some wonder if the Egyptians even knew what they were doing. But the Scriptures clearly imply that the Egyptians did know exactly what they were doing! And then there’s this, too: The Egyptians must have known that the God who was parting the Red Sea was the same God who was responsible for all their suffering in the plagues. There’s no way they could have thought this was the work of their own gods. So what in the world can the Egyptians be thinking when they go right in after the Israelites? Well, we know one thing they were thinking! We read in the very next chapter:

➤ Exodus 15:9 — The enemy said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.”

The Egyptians are like a ravenous wolf that smells blood. But even a ravenous wolf has never acted in as suicidal a way as these Egyptians. In the end, there’s only one possible explanation for the insanity and the stupidity of this Egyptian army. God Himself says in verse 17: “And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them.” (cf. 14:1-4) In other words, if it was not for God’s “hardening,” no Egyptian in his right mind would have ever dared to go into the Sea after the people of Israel. Clearly, it is God’s *will* that the Egyptians pursue His people into the Sea – whether they would *otherwise* want to or not. And so we read in verse 23:

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<sup>1</sup> In those instances where the word for “walls” is used metaphorically, the basis for the metaphor is still the high walls of a city. (cf. 1 Sam. 25:16; Song of Solomon 8:9-10)

<sup>2</sup> The point here is *not* that it was by faith that the waters of the Red Sea were parted.

**II. Exodus 14:23** — The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, *all* Pharaoh’s *horses*, his *chariots*, and his *horsemen*.

Not a single Egyptian exercised any caution. Not a single Egyptian stayed back to see what would happen. Not a single one of Pharaoh’s chariots was willing to give up the chase. All of them, without any exceptions, went in after the people of Israel into the midst of the sea.

Why? Why is God “herding” and “corralling” and driving the Egyptians into the Sea? Why is God so careful that not a single Egyptian soldier should have a change of heart and choose a different path – that not a single Egyptian soldier should slip away and be unaccounted for? What is God doing? What, exactly, is His *agenda*? We read in verses 24-25:

**III. Exodus 14:24-25** — And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.”

I’m not sure how far God allowed the Egyptians to get before the ground was too soft for their chariot wheels. My guess is that they had very nearly reached the other side when all of a sudden the panic set in. Just as their quarry makes it safely up onto the shore, suddenly the Egyptians become bogged down on the seabed. Just as they were about to catch their prey, suddenly the Egyptians are struggling just to make forward progress. It’s like that terrifying nightmare where you’re trying to move, but you just can’t. And now the walls of water looming up on either side of the Egyptians seem to have “death” written all over them.

For how many years have the Egyptians been the undisputed masters of the people of Israel? For how many years have the Egyptians enslaved and oppressed and persecuted the descendants of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? For how many years, with apparent impunity – with apparently no consequences at all? And yet now, on this day, we hear the Egyptians crying out to one another: “Let us *flee* from before Israel, for Yahweh fights for them against the Egyptians.” Finally, the eyes of the Egyptians are fully opened to see what’s really happening. Only now that they’re opened, it’s already *too late*. When God finally lifts His hardening of the Egyptians’ hearts, He does so only just in time to send them all fleeing right back into the heart of the Sea.

**IV. Exodus 14:26-28** — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.

Why was God “herding” and “corralling” and driving the Egyptians into the Sea? Why was God so careful that not a single Egyptian soldier should have a change of heart and choose a different path – that not a single Egyptian soldier should slip away and be unaccounted for? What was God’s *agenda* all along? It was vengeance, and wrath. Death, and judgement. And *in* all of this

vengeance, and wrath, and death and judgement – His own great *glory*. Remember what God said in verses 17-18:

“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 Yahweh, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

Now this is very, *very important*. What will it *mean* for the Egyptians to know that God is Yahweh? First of all, it will obviously mean that they know that Yahweh is supreme – that Yahweh is the only true God who is over all other “gods.” But it will also mean that they know this: *This Yahweh*, the one who is the only true God, has chosen the Israelites to be *His people*. For the Egyptians to know that “God is Yahweh” is for the Egyptians to know that the only true God is the God **of Israel** – and so therefore the Israelites are His treasured possession. What was it the Egyptians said as they were filled with panic on the bed of the Sea? – “Let us flee from before *Israel*, for **Yahweh fights for them against the Egyptians.**”

And so what we see here is that the glory of God’s vengeance and fury, and His meting out of death and judgment on the Egyptians is all the **same thing** as His salvation and deliverance of His people. We can’t understand God’s *vengeance* without seeing that this is a window into God’s *salvation* – into *our own* salvation. That’s why after describing the Egyptians’ fate—how as they fled into the Sea, the Lord threw them into the midst of the Sea, and how the waters returned and covered all the host of Pharaoh so that not one of them remained—immediately after that Moses goes on to write these most amazing and beautiful words:

**V. Exodus 14:29** — *But* the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

What an awesome, overwhelming contrast! In the song of Moses in the next chapter, we hear Moses and all the people of Israel saying together:

➤ **Exodus 15:1** — I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; **the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.**

There’s the vengeance. But then Moses and the people go right on to say this:

➤ **Exodus 15:2** — The LORD is my strength and my song, and **he has become my salvation.**

In verses 4-7, the Israelites celebrate with these words:

➤ **Exodus 15:4–7** — “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

There again is the vengeance and judgment, until we read in verse thirteen:

- Exodus 15:13, 16-17 — “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode... Terror and dread fall upon [the peoples]; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have created. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

So on the one side of the coin is salvation and deliverance. And it’s on the other side of that *same* coin that we have vengeance and judgment. Once he finishes recording the song of praise, Moses sums everything up yet again in verse nineteen:

- Exodus 15:19 — For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them, *but* the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea.

What Moses loves to celebrate is that *the very thing* that was for the Israelites a wall on either side – that *very same thing* is now for the Egyptians a tomb and a grave. The *same waters* that opened up to provide a way of escape for God’s people – these are the *very same waters* that have now closed over the Egyptians.

And so the overwhelming message of this passage is that God’s *zeal* to save His people—to save us—is also His *zeal* to utterly destroy the enemies of His people. If God is zealous to rescue and deliver His people, then He is equally as zealous to take vengeance on any who would ever rob Him of His glory by seeking to hurt, or mistreat, or oppress His people. This is something that may be difficult for us to grasp, but it’s very important. In order for us to be fully comforted by God’s power to save us, then we must learn to be equally as comforted by His power and His determination to mete out vengeance and destruction and retribution – because in the end, these two things—our salvation and the destruction of the wicked—are two sides of the *same* coin. So, do you delight in God’s salvation? Then by default, you and I must also delight in God’s power to destroy and swallow up His enemies.

No, we never take pleasure in the suffering of the wicked. We never, ever take matters into our own hands. We never stop praying for the salvation of the wicked – as we ourselves have also been saved. None of this has anything to do with personal vindictiveness. And yet if we’ve ever prayed for deliverance from the hatred and the evil of this world (as we *ought* to), then we need to know that this is the same thing as praying that God would send out His fury and consume all the wicked in this world like stubble. Maybe now we can start to make sense of all those Psalms that pray for God’s curse on the wicked. Have we ever learned to pray for this? Have we ever learned to pray, as the Psalmists do, for God’s curse to be poured out upon all those who refuse to repent? Are we fully **convinced** of the *reality* and also of the “*goodness*” and the *glory* of God’s terrible vengeance and wrath?

And why is it so urgent and so important that we get all of this, and really grasp it in our hearts? Let’s go on, now, to read the conclusion to Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea:

**V. Exodus 14:30–31** — Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great hand that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Did you see the contrast here between “**the hand**” of the Egyptians and “**the great hand**” of Yahweh? It was the mighty hand of the Lord that saved Israel from what once appeared to be the mighty hand of the Egyptians – the Egyptians that Israel now sees dead, washed up on the seashore. When the Israelites first lifted up their eyes and saw the Egyptians coming – when they first saw the approaching “hand” of the Egyptians – what does Moses tell us that they did? They “**feared greatly.**” (Exod. 14:10) And it was this *fear* of the Egyptians that drove the Israelites into speaking their treacherous words of rebellion. But when the Israelites “saw the great hand that the Lord used against the Egyptians,” what does Moses tell us that they did? Now, *instead* of greatly fearing the Egyptians, Moses says that they “**feared the Lord.**” And it was this new fear of the Lord that moved Israel to then *believe* in the Lord and in his servant Moses. And so in chapter fifteen, all the people sing together:

- Exodus 15:6, 12 — Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy... You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.

### **Conclusion**

The truly urgent question for us today is: “Whom do you **fear**?” The Egyptians or Yahweh? Whom do you fear? The world with its threats and hatred, or the Lord who metes out vengeance and destruction and retribution? When we fear the wicked, we’ll be tempted to rebellion, and disobedience, and compromise. But when we learn to fear *only* the Lord, then we’ll be able to walk always in obedience and faith. To fear the hand of the enemy is to give in to despair; but to fear the Lord – whose mighty hand “shatters the enemy” – brings peace and the assurance of our salvation. Listen to what the Lord says to all of His people in Isaiah:

- Isaiah 51:12–13 — **I, I am he** who **comforts** you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy?

Jesus says:

- Matthew 10:28–31 — **Do not fear** those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather **fear him** who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. **Fear not**, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell us to fear having our own soul and body destroyed in hell; rather, He tells us to fear *Him* who can and will destroy the wicked – both soul and body – in hell. You see, there *is* a difference! Notice, too, that Jesus does *not* say to gloat over the destruction of the

wicked; rather, He tells us that *we* are to *fear* the one who *will* destroy the wicked – both body and soul – in hell. And it’s in this fear of this God that all other fears are utterly banished and driven away. It’s in this fear of this God that we can have comfort, and peace, and joy – even though this whole world should all be arrayed against us. Really. Listen to what the Apostle Peter writes:

- 2 Peter 2:4–9 — For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

When we fear Egypt, we’ll be tempted to rebellion, and disobedience, and compromise. But when we learn to fear *only* the Lord, then we’ll be able to walk always in obedience and faith. To fear the hand of Egypt is to give in to despair; but to fear the Lord – who is *determined* to reveal the goodness and the glory of His terrible vengeance – this brings us peace and the full assurance of our *salvation*. So therefore, this is what the Lord says to all of us this morning:

- Isaiah 8:12–13 — Do not fear what [others] fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.