

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

I. Week ONE: Four weeks ago, we saw that the parting of the Red Sea can only be 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* (cf. Day 3 of Creation) – with “the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” In the parting and crossing of the Red Sea, God is beginning a new work of creation that will equal, and in the end, even surpass the first work of creation in Genesis chapter one.

II. Week TWO: Three weeks ago, we saw how in the parting of the Red Sea, there’s also a really strong emphasis on vengeance, and retribution, and judgment.

God very carefully and very purposefully entices, and corrals, and herds the Egyptians into the Sea after the Israelites – all so that He might bring the waters of the Red Sea back upon them, destroying them all. And so we saw that one of the main points of Exodus chapters 14 and 15 is that 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 retribution and judgment. In the end, our salvation and the destruction of the wicked, are two sides of the *same* coin.

III. Week THREE: It was two weeks ago, then, that we saw how the destruction of the wicked (week 2) is intimately connected with the theme of a New Creation (week 1).

Whereas in the pagan creation myths we have battles and wars between the gods of creation and order and the gods of chaos and disorder that live in the sea, in the Bible, there is no hint of conflict or battle or war in Genesis chapter one. In the Bible, the Creator God is the one who first brings the deep into being, and then causes the dry land to appear just by His simple word of command. The Bible’s message is clear: There is only one God, and He alone is supreme and sovereign over all His creation. It’s only *after* the Bible has completely refuted all the pagan myths of creation that it then adopts the language of those same pagan myths for its own purposes – as we saw two weeks ago.

Remember that in Exodus 14 and 15 we have the very first time in the Bible where God is ever described as a warrior who goes out to do battle. And who is the enemy that Yahweh, the “man of war,” goes out to fight? Seven hundred years after Moses wrote the book of Exodus, the prophet Isaiah says:

- Isaiah 51:9b–10 — **Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the sea monster [tannin]? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?**

Looking back on the exodus, Isaiah describes the sea as a living, breathing enemy of God's people. Isaiah pictures the Red Sea as the sea monster from the *creation myths* of the pagans just ready and waiting to devour the people of God. But, of course, the Sea is just a symbol, representing the real enemy of God's New Creation. The real enemy of God's New Creation is the Egyptian armies that are seeking to swallow up the people of God. Isaiah borrows the name for the monster of chaos in pagan myths (Rahab) and gives that name *to Egypt*. Ezekiel calls *Egypt* the "sea monster" in the deep. The Psalmist writes:

- Psalm 74:12–15 — God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters [tannin] on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

And so we read in Exodus fourteen:

- Exodus 14:30 — Thus... Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

The great and powerful army of the Egyptians is like the carcass of the sea monster washed up on the shore – now no more than food for the "creatures of the wilderness" to feast upon. In the Bible, God *does* do battle with Rahab – with the sea monster living in the deeps. But this battle happens *not* in Genesis –not in connection with the first creation; rather, it always happens in connection with the New Creation, which is only just beginning here in Exodus fourteen. But, of course, even here in Exodus, we know that the sea is no more of a rival to Yahweh than it was in Genesis one!

In Psalm 74, the Psalmist starts out with the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14, and then moves right back to the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis chapter one:

- Psalm 74:12–17 — God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters [tannin] on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams. Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

When God divided the Red Sea and then brought it back upon the Egyptians—when God broke the heads of the sea monsters and crushed the heads of Leviathan—He was opening up the way for the *beginning* of a New Creation – a creation that will equal and, in the end, even far surpass His first work of creation in Genesis chapter one.

IV. Week FOUR:

Most of us probably know what happens with Israel in the days, and years, and centuries to come. Most of the history of Israel is the story of Yahweh's mercy and patience and longsuffering, in the face of Israel's constant sin and rebellion and faithlessness – until finally, one day, God did as He had always warned He would do. God sent his people back to *Egypt* –

back into slavery. Not *literally* to Egypt, and not *literally* into slavery, but this was the picture God used to describe the exile of His people to live in a foreign land. Moses warned the people of what would happen if they refused to walk in God's ways:

- Deuteronomy 28:68 — The LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt... and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.

By the time of Hosea, seven hundred years later, the word of the Lord through Moses was about to become a reality.

- Hosea 8:13 (cf. 11:5) — [The Lord] will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.

Can you hear the horror of these words? Can you feel the utter devastation in these words? **Yahweh** will send *His people back to Egypt* – because of their iniquity and sin. Hosea clarifies in chapter nine:

- Hosea 9:3 — They shall not remain in the land of the LORD, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.

So we see that in reality, this time “Egypt” is actually “Assyria.” Assyria is to be understood as nothing less than a *second* Egypt* where the people of Israel will be “enslaved” and “oppressed” once more. After Assyria, it will be the city and empire of Babylon that takes over the role of that second Egypt. What a truly terrible thing this is, especially in light of all the victory and the glory of Exodus 14-15 when God first brought Israel *out* from Egypt! Are you beginning to see that what's at stake here is not just a Jewish nation? What's at stake here is nothing less than God's New Creation. The New Creation that God first began when He led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground, and then drowned the Egyptians in that same Sea.

Why does God describe Israel's exile to Assyria as a return to the land of Egypt? On the one hand, it's meant to reveal the “terribleness” and the hopelessness of our sin. On the *other* hand, it's meant to set us up for a never-before-imagined revelation of the redeeming power of God – of God's power to bring about a “*second exodus*” and so to call into being a whole New Creation. So listen to the prophet Isaiah:

- Isaiah 43:16–21 — Thus says the LORD, **who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters**, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. **Behold, I am doing a new thing**; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

* Cf. Isa. 10:24-27; Jer. 51:36-37

The Israelites have been sent back into the slavery and oppression of Egypt. But this is only preparing the way for God to do something far, far *greater* than what He did at the parting of the Red Sea. That was just the beginning and the shadow of the New Creation. But in this *second* exodus from Egypt, God will bring His New Creation all the way to its glorious completion. So Isaiah says in another place:

- Isaiah 51:9–11 — Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. **Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the sea monster [*tannin*]? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?** And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

What makes this second exodus so much greater than the first exodus from Egypt? The answer is simple – It will never, ever again, need to be repeated. Isaiah says that the people that God creates in this second exodus will have *everlasting* gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away forever. And the reason for this everlasting gladness and joy is that Yahweh, the “man of war” is once more going to go forth to battle. If there was a battle at the first exodus (in the beginning of God’s New Creation), then there will be an even greater, and a more wonderful, and a more terrible battle at the second (when the New Creation is finally completed). So Isaiah says:

- Isaiah 27:1, 6 — In that day **the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the sea monster [*tannin*] that is in the sea...** In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.

In that day when God completes His New Creation, He will utterly and finally destroy all the enemies of His people. He will slay—once and for all time—the monster that is in the Sea. And so now listen to what Isaiah says in chapter eleven:

- Isaiah 11:10–16 — In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand **yet a second time** to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim... **And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt [the Red Sea], and will wave his hand over the River [the Euphrates River] with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.**

Can you *see*? When God gathers His people the second time (in the second exodus), He will lead them across the Red Sea in the *south* on dry ground, and across the mighty Euphrates River in the *north* on dry ground, and then they will all live *together* in the land as *one* people – in perfect unity and love; in everlasting gladness and joy. Here is how the Old Testament pictures the creation of a new people, all completed and perfected – all beautiful and glorious. Can you see how in every way it's patterned after the beginning of God's New Creation, when He first parted the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 14? This creation of a new people will be so glorious and wonderful that it will actually require, in the end, the creation of a whole new heavens and earth. Once again, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah:

- Isaiah 65:17–18 (cf. 66:22) — “For behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth**, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, **I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness**.

So... as the people lived in exile and slavery first in the land of Assyria, and then in the land of Babylon, they clung to this *hope*. They believed that there would come a day when Yahweh would once again do battle with the monster in the sea, and this time destroy him once and for all. They believed that there would come a day when God would once more make a way through the sea on dry ground, and bring them home (cf. Exod. 15:13-18) – this time to live forever in perfect unity, in everlasting gladness and joy. They believed that one day, God would equal and even far surpass His first work of creation in Genesis chapter one. (cf. Isa. 65:17) Indeed, the completion of this second work of creation would so far surpass its beginnings in Genesis 1 and Exodus 14 that the beginning would no longer even be remembered. (cf. Isa. 43:16-21; Jer. 16:14-15; 23:7-8) Can you imagine living in such *hope*? Shouldn't we all know what it is to live in just this kind of hope?

Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of how God *did* gather His people from Assyria and from the land of Babylon and plant them *together* back in the land. This was a marvelous and mighty work of God, but it was still clear to everyone that this couldn't yet be what they had all been looking for. There was nothing yet here to truly surpass what had happened when Israel came out of Egypt. There was nothing yet here to truly require the creation of a whole new heavens and earth. And so even after they had been gathered back in the land, the people could still pray this prayer to the Lord:

- Nehemiah 9:36–37 — Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

In the midst of these circumstances, it might have been easy for the people to question and doubt – to wonder if God was really going to do all the miraculous things that He had promised. Do we ever question? Or perhaps more likely, do we ever simply fail to live lives that are anchored in hope? God spoke once more through the prophet Zechariah, assuring His people that He had not forgotten, He had not changed His mind, He would still do just as He had promised.

- Zechariah 10:8–12 — “I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as they were before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. **[Yahweh] shall pass through the sea of troubles and strike down the waves of the sea, and all the depths of the Nile shall be dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.** I will make them strong in the LORD, and they shall walk in his name,” declares the LORD.

You see, God comforted the people by helping them to see that their return to the land was actually still the shadow of the greater things to come – of the true *Second Exodus* that all the prophets foretold. Their return to the land, as small and insignificant as it might have seemed, was actually a guarantee of the New Creation (read Ezra and Nehemiah in *this* light!), when the monster in the Sea would be finally destroyed once and for all, and God’s people would live forever in the land in perfect love and unity and with everlasting gladness and joy. And so the faithful men, and women, and children in Israel lived each day *in hope*. Believing, waiting, longing, looking – in hope. And what a hope this was!

Conclusion

Can you imagine living with a *hope* like this? But shouldn’t we all already know what it is to live with just this kind of hope? “Week Four” is “The Hope of a Second Exodus and the New Creation.” Next week, we’ll see exactly how God brings His New Creation to its completion and perfection. We’ll see how God does, indeed, dry up the sea – slaying the monster in the sea and gathering all of His people *home*. But for right now, all we need to see is what it means to live each and every day of our lives anchored in—and defined by—hope. Truly, hope is essential, central, and fundamental, to the faithful living of the Christian life.

Holiness and Christ-likeness are grounded in HOPE.

- 1 John 3:2–3 — Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And **everyone who thus HOPES in him purifies himself** as he is pure.

Love for the saints is grounded in HOPE.

- Colossians 1:3–5 — We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of **the love that you have for all the saints, because of the HOPE laid up for you in heaven.**

Comfort in death is grounded in HOPE.

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 — We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, **that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those

who have fallen asleep... For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **Therefore encourage one another with these words [with this HOPE].**

Perseverance in trial is grounded in HOPE.

- Hebrews 12:1–2 — Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him [HOPE] endured the cross, despising the shame**, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Joy is grounded in HOPE.

- Romans 5:1–2 — Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we **rejoice in HOPE** of the glory of God.
- Romans 12:12 — **Rejoice in HOPE.**

May we live each and every day of our lives anchored in—and defined by—hope.

- Romans 15:13 — May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.