

# Historical-critical scholarship on Exodus 14-15

Based on Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*

## Comparing Canaanite literature with Israelite literature

Canaanite Hymn to Ba'al	Israelite Hymn to YHWH (Exodus 15)
Your name is Yagarriš (drive out), Yagarriš drive out Sea! Drive out Sea from his throne, River from the seat of his dominion!	YHWH is a warrior, YHWH is his name!
You shall take your eternal <u>kingship</u> , your <u>dominion</u> forever and ever... Sea verily is dead; Ba'al <u>rules!</u>	Let YHWH <u>reign</u> forever and ever.
Behold your <u>enemy</u> , O Ba'al, Behold your <u>enemy</u> you will smite, Behold you will smite your <u>foes</u> .	Your right hand, YHWH, shattered the <u>enemy</u> . In your great majesty you crushed your <u>foes</u> .

Who is the enemy in each? When does it happen in each?

### *Mythic enemy vs. a historical enemy*

Canaanite Hymn to Ba'al	Israelite Hymn to YHWH (Exodus 15)
Sea fell, He sank to Earth His joints trembled, His frame collapsed. Ba'al destroyed, drank Sea! He finished off Judge River! Sea verily is dead. Ba'al rules!	Pharaoh and his army God hurled into the sea. Pharaoh's elite troops, drowned in the Reed Sea. The deeps covered them, they sank in the depths like a stone.  You blew with your breath... sea covered them. They sank like a lead weight in the dreadful waters.

### *Myth vs. History*

- (does NOT mean unreal vs. real or false vs. true)
- Myth – outside of time and space
  - Seasons, relationships between gods (Venus and Juno)
  - Nature: storms and floods as conflicts between land and sea or sky and sea
- History – placed in a specific time and earthly place

### *Advantages of each*

- History: Commemorating an action of God in the past
  - Probably a reaction to polytheism and the worship of nature
  - Disadvantage if taken too far. Do we celebrate the exodus because it happened or because it demonstrates a timeless truth about God?
- Myth: Conveys a spiritual or supernatural truth that applies to any time
  - Liturgical year commemorations connote a timeless pattern rather than merely a past event
- Both are found within the Bible
  - Exodus 15 is very early
  - Later parts of the Bible return to myth precisely to emphasize that God's protection and salvation are not just a past event, but a timeless habit (God will do so again)

## Tracing the historical development of the image of God vs. the Reed Sea within the Bible

### *Chronological development*

- Exodus 15 (oldest): God uses Sea as a tool to defeat Egyptians (basically throws them in the sea as if from a boat, no splitting, no dry land)
  - Pharaoh and his army He hurled into the sea
  - At the blast of your nostrils the waters heaped up  
The swells mounted up as a hill; the deeps foamed in the heart of the sea.
  - You blew your breath, sea covered them  
They sank like a lead weight in the dreadful waters.
- Joshua 24:7 (pretty old): more like a tidal wave (no splitting, no passing through, no dry land)
  - Because they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between your people and the Egyptians, upon whom he brought the sea so that it engulfed them.
- J strand in Exodus 14: Dry land (Israelites not on it), sea is pushed back (not split), no depths, Egyptians drown when wind *ceases* to blow
  - The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land... at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea.
- D in Joshua 2:9: Israelites seem to pass through on dry land, still no splitting
  - For we have heard that the Lord dried up the waters of the Reed Sea before you in your exodus from Egypt.
- P (late): God splits the sea
  - The Israelites came into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall for them on their right and left... And the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea that the waters will fall back on the Egyptians, their chariotry and on their horsemen."
- Nehemiah (very late): combination of different stages
  - And you split the sea before them and they crossed over in the midst of the sea on dry ground and their pursuers you threw into the deeps like a stone in the mighty waters.
- Why would the early Israelites NOT have said God split the Sea?

### *Israelite myth comes back with a vengeance*

- Apparently they were no longer worried about sounding polytheistic, in favor of emphasizing that God's salvation is eternal, not a thing of the past.
- Isaiah 51:9-11
  - Was it not you who smashed Rahab, the writhing Dragon?  
Was it not you who dried up Sea, the waters of the great deep?  
Did you not make a way in the depths of the sea for the redeemed to cross?  
The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and enter Zion with a shout!
- Habakkuk 3:8
  - Was not your wrath against River, Lord? Your anger against River? Your ire against Sea?  
When you drove your horses, the chariot of your salvation?
- Psalm 114:1-3
  - When Israel came forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from an alien people,  
Judah became God's holy place, Israel, God's domain.  
The Sea beheld and fled; the Jordan turned back.