

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on Exodus 14: 10-16, 19-22

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This meditation exercise on Moses parting the Red Sea in the midst of the Israelites' complaining is especially for those wishing to discern God's purposes in their lives and move forward in that. If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see [*Savoring God's Word*](#) or the recording [*Meditating on Scripture*](#) (scroll to bottom of page).

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Before answering the question below, sit quietly for about two minutes. To help center yourself, try the following:

- Breathe in and out deeply five or six times. Relax your neck and move it around. Then let your arms go limp and relax the legs and ankles. Relax each part from the inside out.
- Use the palms up, palms down method described in the introduction to turn your distractions over to God. (Rest your hands in your lap, placing the palms down whenever you think of concerns you need to turn over to God. Turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord.)

Ask yourself the following question to help focus your thoughts for meditation on today's passage: **When have you been involved in a project much bigger than yourself? How did you feel about it?**

Close your eyes and take a few minutes to quietly consider the events of your life and see if anything comes to you.

Group leader: After group members have had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above (see bullets). Then present the above "quiet question" and let them reflect quietly for a few minutes. Repeat the question and ask them to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so. After group members share, thank them and comment that it's helpful to hear the variety of ways that God speaks to people.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

Read silently the passage printed below, noting the explanations in the right column.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

EXODUS 14:10-16, 19-22

ITALICIZED

ISRAEL COMPLAINS

{Read note at the right.} 10 *As Pharaoh approached*, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were *terrified* and cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

MOSES TALKS BACK to their TERROR

13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over *the sea* to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

THE ANGEL KEEPS WATCH

19 Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

GOD MIRACULOUSLY DELIVERS ISRAEL

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over *the sea*, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

WHEN PURPOSES ARE NEARLY DEFEATED

1. When we venture out for God into the purposes we believe He has instilled in us, we often go through this scenario:

WORDS & PHRASES

AS PHARAOH APPROACHED At this point, Moses and Israel have watched God bring the ten plagues on Egypt to force the Pharaoh to let Israel go. They have left Egypt for freedom, but here come the Egyptians chasing them.

TERRIFIED Their terror is evidenced by their appalling remarks as they overlooked the cruel way they were treated in Egypt. (vs. 11-12)

THE SEA Most scholars agree that the Hebrew words would be better rendered, "reed sea" or "marsh sea." This then refers to a body of water north of the Red Sea and not the Red Sea itself.

- Terror and complaints: We wonder, Why did I get into this? What made me think I could do this? Why did God let me do this? I want out!
- We talk back to our terror: God got us into this--God will get us out. Hold on!
- God keeps watch: There's silence or a standstill and the suspense is staggering.
- God miraculously delivers: Our dream finally comes true.

Inside each of the three shaded headings in the chart below, write a purpose, cause, job or calling in which you are now involved -- planning an event, raising a child, staying married, volunteering in a certain position, and so on.

Then below each shaded space, place a check mark in one of the rows to indicate where you are in that calling: terrified/complaining? talking back to the terror? keeping watch with God? finding a miraculous deliverance? Or, write in your own stage and check that.

	Purpose 1:	Purpose 2:	Purpose 3:
Terror & complaints			
Talking back to terror			
God keeps watch			
Miraculous deliverance			
Some other stage: (write it in)			

2. *Complaints*: Terror robbed the Israelites of their clear thinking. Look how they behaved:

WHAT THE ISRAELITES SAID	HOW THEY ERRED
Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? vs. 11	They accused Moses (who God chose to help them) of sabotaging their chance for a decent burial.
Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" vs. 12	They distorted their memories of their terrible life in slavery.

When have you, in terror, done one of the following?

- lashed out at the person who helped you most
- acted as if the alternative isn't so bad after all
- been the leader and received all this terror and complaining?

3. *Talking back to terror*: Moses encouraged the Israelites by doing the first two things in this list below. Which, of any things on this list, have you done or said to encourage yourself or others?

- Pointing them to a certain future (you will see the deliverance, vs. 13).
- Urging them to have confidence in God (God will fight for you, vs. 14).
- Remembering God's past track record of rescue.
- Listing reasons why what you're doing is important within God's kingdom.
- Other: _____

4. *The angel keeps watch*: How are you during lulls in the storm? (Check as many as you like.)

- I obsess over solutions, as if my obsessing will solve something.
- I sometimes manage to pray about the situation.
- I try to forget about it so I won't be bothered.
- Other: _____

5. *Miraculous deliverance*: How do you respond when the tension is released and the problem is solved?

- I'm so relieved that I forget to thank God.
- I call people and tell them about it.
- I record it in my journal.
- I have a party with my friends and try not to gloat over my enemies.
- Other: _____.

If any of the above questions are too difficult, hold them before God for a few minutes and then go on. Don't worry about getting an answer, but be open to what may come to you in the next few days.

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Before reading the passage again, consider these cues. Use them to set the scene for this scriptural event may have occurred.

GEOGRAPHICAL CUES: EGYPT VERSUS THE DESERT

The Israelites were treated cruelly in Egypt, but Egypt had a lot going for it -- fertile land, the water of the Nile River and a surplus of food and bread (Exod. 16:3).. The Israelites left behind the lush Nile Delta region and headed for another beautiful area -- Canaan. But in between lay a desert with little water and almost no trees. In the desert they faced nomadic tribes, outlaws, lack of water, sparse vegetation, serpents and wild animals. ¹

GEOGRAPHICAL CUE: THE SEA

Many scholars believe that the "reed sea" was Lake Timsah. The Scripture itself provides clues for the imagination: it was deep enough to create walls of water on the side and when the walls were released, there was enough water to drown the pursuing Egyptians -- 600 chariots and all (Exod. 14:7, 22, 28-30).

Read the scenes below and then choose one of them to picture. As you do so, put yourself in the place of Moses or a typical Israelite:

Israel Complains: The Israelites were trapped between the sea and the mountains with the Egyptians approaching. The Egyptian Pharaoh was coming with his 600 chariots as well as other chariots and horses (14:7).

Moses Talks Back to their Terror: God had already warned Moses that they would be hemmed in, that the Egyptians would pursue them, and that He, God, would "gain glory" (14:1-4). What a challenge for Moses to communicate this to Israel.

The Angel Keeps Watch: At this point, Moses had already stretched out his hand over the sea and God had told him the Israelites would walk through it on dry ground (14:15-18). It must have been a suspenseful night with the angel hovering. Imagine the angel and the cloud as they moved from in front of Israel to behind Israel and in front of the Egyptians.

¹V. Gilbert Beers, *The Victor Journey through the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), Beers, pp. 64-65.

We don't know if the angel was visible, but the light shown on Israel and the Egyptians waited in the darkness.

God Miraculously Delivers Israel: Given a way out through the water, the complaining Israelites picked up their gear and walked over the dry ground. Imagine the wall of water on the right and left. We don't know if they could see the underwater creatures or how the wall looked.

Read the passage aloud and use the above material to imagine how this scriptural event might have occurred.

Group leader: Have group members read these cues and scene descriptions silently. Then ask a group member read the passage aloud while the others picture the passage.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

Consider now the all-important question that should be addressed whenever Scripture is read: How is my life touched by this passage today? Read the passage aloud again and ponder the following question for about five minutes: **What scene or dramatic moment emerges from the passage and stays with you?** For example, you might want to picture:

- the Egyptians approaching in their 600+ chariots
- Moses raising his staff and stretching his hand over the sea
- the angel of God moving to come between the Israelites and Egyptians
- phrases (circle one): Do not be afraid; stand firm; be still.

After several minutes, write below about the scenes or images that resonate with you from the passage.

I hear . . . or, I see . . . _____

Group leader: Have a different group member read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold and ask them to fill in the blank. After the group reflects quietly for a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something in the next few days. What might that be? Reflect quietly for at a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I need to know for my life right now?** If nothing comes, that's fine. Watch for insights in the next few days, but for now, simply sit in the quiet and enjoy God's presence.

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO KNOW: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so. Encourage them to listen respectfully and prayerfully to other group members.

PRAYING (5-10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to respond to God about this meditation. **How do you feel about what you sensed (or didn't sense)? What is it you most want to say to God at this time?**

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week (try using a different version of the Bible besides NIV) or use the following passages:

- Jeremiah 29:11-13 (God gave purpose to Israel.)
- Isaiah 49:6-12 (God's purposes for Israel) (light to the gentiles!!)
- Exodus 3:1-12 (God calls Moses from the burning bush)
- Exodus 15:1-13 (song of victory sung by Moses and the Israelites.)
- Exodus 15:20-27 (Miriam's song of victory)
- Psalm 105:1-10 (account of the crossing of the sea with emphasis on God's role)
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