



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 13– STUDY QUESTIONS EXODUS 14:10-31

DAY ONE

1. What thoughts from last week's reflection and/or commentary had special meaning for you?

Read Exodus 14:10-14

2a. As today's passage begins, the Israelites look back. What did they see (verse 10)?

b. What was their response?

3a. Immediately, the people turn on Moses and blame him for their predicament. What questions do they ask of him (verse 11)?

b. How would you describe their attitude towards Moses at this time?

4. In verse 12, the words of the people become more desperate and pointed. Summarize this verse in your own words.

5a. In verse 13, Moses responds to the fearful jeers of his people. He gives them three commands. List them here.

b. What does Moses say about the Egyptians at the end of verse 13?

6. CONNECTION: The Israelites experienced God’s miraculous deliverance and they have been on a spiritual high, but when they “looked back” and saw Pharaoh’s mighty army advancing on them, they were overcome with fear. They were facing their first major crisis of faith. They froze in terror and lashed out at the one whom God had chosen to lead them. They cried out to the Lord for help and as we will learn, He came to their rescue. No matter how many times we have witnessed God’s power, fear can so overwhelm us that we’re unable to see any way out. We, too, can become paralyzed and unable to help ourselves. Yet, God will never abandon us when we cry out to Him. Briefly describe a time when you were overcome with fear and were blind to any possible solution to your dilemma. What did you do and what was the outcome?

Rather than looking back over their shoulders in worry or fear, people of faith should only look back to recall how God was always with them through times of trouble. This passage closes with verse 14 – one of the most encouraging verses in all of scripture. Record the verse (good memory verse). Begin your prayer today asking God to keep you focused on Him and His faithfulness.

DAY TWO
Read Exodus 14:15-16

7. In yesterday’s study, the Egyptians were rapidly advancing upon Moses and his people. The Israelites were paralyzed in fear and angry with Moses, whom they blamed for their circumstances. What were the words Moses spoke to them as yesterday’s passage closed?

8a. According to the beginning of verse 15 from today’s passage, the Lord is speaking to Moses. What question was asked?

b. The tone of God’s words almost seems to be admonishing. Why might God have asked Moses this question in such a way?

9. Read verse 15 again. In his quandary, Moses cries out to God in a prayer of desperation and God answers him with words that sound rather reproving. Consider, is there ever a time when prayer can get in the way of God’s plan? Why or why not?

10a. God then gives Moses a direction for the people. What is it (verse 15)?

b. What do you think the people’s response to this might have been?

11a. The previous direction was given to the Israelite people. Next, the Lord gives Moses three directives. What are they (verse 16)?

b. Record the proposed result here.

12. Commentators connect verse 16 to Genesis 1:9-10. What similarities or connections do you find between these two passages?

13. CONNECTION: The Lord had a plan for Moses and the Israelites. He had no intention of letting them perish, but their predicament was nonetheless scary and definitely required a lot of faith. Read Hebrews 11:1 and record St. Paul's definition of faith (good memory verse).

That definition surely applies to the precarious situation in which the Israelites found themselves. But St. Paul's definition of faith connects, not only with the major faith-jarring events of our lives, but also with the minor faith-shaking predicaments we face every day. Yesterday you described a situation in your life that caused you to look back in fear. In today's lesson we are directed not only to look forward, but also to move forward in faith. Describe a current situation in your life where you are moving forward in spite of obstacles or uncertainties.

Read Hebrews 11:1 again and spend some time in prayer today connecting faith to the situation you described.

DAY THREE **Read Exodus 14:17-18**

14a. Moses goes on to tell the Israelites of God's plan and of His ultimate victory. According to verse 17, what will the Egyptians do because of their hardness of heart?

NOTE; Once again, we come across the troubling concept of God hardening people's hearts and then punishing them for their actions. Today we might explain this as God using the "hardness" of a person's heart to accomplish or further His plan and the person whose heart was hardened then suffering the consequences of his or her own poor choices.

b. To whom does "them" refer? Refer to Exodus 14:16 from yesterday's study.

15. As verse 17 continues, we see the Lord's plan unfolding. What will the Lord gain for Himself through all of this? Give a complete answer.

16. Look back at your answer to the previous question. How do you think this situation could accomplish God's stated purpose in verse 17?

17. Explain, as you understand it, how will it happen that the Egyptians will come to know the God of Israel, according to verse 18.

18. CONNECTION: Imagine Pharaoh's highly trained, well-disciplined soldiers driving their chariots in organized formation, armed with the best weapons available at the time. Pharaoh's orders were to pursue the ill-organized Israelite fugitives, who were making their way on foot. In the midst of this seemingly impossible situation, Moses heard the Lord say that by this whole situation, "the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." Describe a situation you have experienced or witnessed when God's glory showed through in spite of unfavorable conditions and/or others' unbelief.

Today when you pray, remember those who do not know the Lord or recognize His mighty power. Pray that God reveals His "lordship" to them and also to you in the journey of life.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 14:19-22

19a. The Egyptians were advancing dangerously close to the Israelites. Pharaoh and his chariots seemed to be closing in on them. Today's passage shows us the next step in God's marvelous plan to deliver His people. Describe what happened, according to verse 19.

NOTE: Many commentators propose that the unnamed "angel of God", in this context, refers to God Himself.

b. Up to now, the Israelites have experienced God as a leader and a deliverer. Today they see Him in a new role. What is it and how is it manifested?

20a. According to the beginning of verse 20, where did the cloud settle and what did it do?

b. What did this accomplish (end of verse 20)?

21a. According to verse 21, what did Moses do?

b. What three things did the Lord do?

22. Why do you think God instructed Moses to perform physical signs to manifest the Lord's mighty power?

23a. Describe in your own words what happened next according to verse 22.

b. Read Hebrews 11:29. According to that verse, what enabled the Israelites to take this courageous action?

24. CONNECTION: The Israelites were called to take a tremendous step of faith - to walk out onto the dry ground of the parted Red Sea. We, too, may, at times, be called to step forth onto unsure ground with confidence in God. We probably won't need God to part the sea for us, but there are situations in our lives every day that need the loving intervention that only God can provide. Describe a recent time when you, stepped out in faith, into what seemed to be an uncertain or questionable move, to do what you believed was God's will. What happened as a result?

Read and record Psalm 20:7-8. Write a prayer today beginning with these words.

DAY FIVE

Read Exodus 14:23-25

25a. The Egyptians don't seem to have been intimidated by the astounding situation that has just occurred before their very eyes. Record the words of verse 23 that indicate this.

b. Spend some time considering the Egyptians' possible motivations for this foolhardy act. List all the possible reasons they might have had for rushing after the Israelites without first thinking it through.

26a. According to the beginning of verse 24, how was the Lord present in this situation?

b. Verse 24 states two things that the Lord did. Record them here.

27a. Precisely how was it that the Egyptians were slowed down?

b. What did the Egyptians decide to do when this happened and why?

28. Read the accounts of this event in the following passages and note any new insights you draw from each.

Joshua 2:8-11

Wisdom 19:6-8

Isaiah 43:1-2

29. CONNECTION: Pharaoh's army was well equipped for battle. The Egyptians' state-of-the-art-vehicles had at first been a tremendous advantage as they pursued the Israelites. In the end, their top-of-the-line chariots became worthless; in fact, the chariots became the problem that caused their downfall. There are things in our lives like that: Things that are a source of great pride and satisfaction – the latest and greatest. Ultimately, these high-tech, much-loved treasures have no real lasting value and are of little or no help when the going gets rough. Think of something in your life that you pride and value, but will be of little worth or use if you are faced with one of the huge problems life can hold.

It is fine to HAVE things – it is a mistake to let things HAVE us. Does the thing you described above HAVE YOU, or do YOU HAVE it? Record some thoughts to share with your group.

Read Matthew 13:44-46. Let thoughts of the things that are truly of great value lead you into prayer.

DAY SIX

Read Exodus 14:26-31

30. As today's passage opens, we find the Egyptians in great distress. Pharaoh has ordered his armies to follow the Israelites onto the dry ground of the parted Red Sea. According to verse 26, the Lord gives Moses another instruction – one that will reverse the miracle of the parting of the sea. Record the instruction here.

31a. In verse 24 we were told that God threw the Egyptian army into a panic at the “morning watch”. For the Israelites, this would have been between the hours of 3AM and 6AM. According to verse 27, when did the waters return to normal?

b. Using verses 27-28 for your answer, describe the results of Moses' obedience to God's command?

32. In contrast to the plight of the Egyptians, the children of God were miraculously protected. Verses 29-30 paint an awesome word picture. Describe the scene, using your own words.

33. Today's passage ends by stating possibly the most significant and primary reason for this dramatic and miraculous rescue performed by God for His people. What is it? Give a complete answer.

34. Throughout Scripture the sea is a symbol of chaos, often inferring death; yet the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea is symbolic of new life—the baptism of Jesus in the New Testament. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: [1221] “...above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism.” Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 and record St Paul's words about his ancestors.

35. Consider the following as metaphors for things that happen at Baptism. Record what each might symbolize, (i.e. freedom from sin).

Pharaoh is drowned with his armies.

The Israelites passed through the sea.

The Israelites are delivered from the Egyptians.

The Israelites are freed from slavery to a pagan people.

36. CONNECTION: In our passage today, we see both the Israelites and the Egyptians in the process of crossing the Red Sea; yet, the outcome for each group is drastically different. Sometimes the very same set of circumstances can happen to people that result in very different outcomes. Try to recall such a situation you have experienced and record some details. What made the difference?

Read [Genesis 50:20](#) and record Joseph's words to his brothers who, out of jealousy, had sold him into slavery in Egypt. Let this thought lead you into prayer.



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 13– COMMENTARY
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EXODUS 14:10-31

Exodus 14:10-14

Chapter 14 is the story of the miracle at the Sea of Reeds. It is not, however, the original form of the story. The tale of the crossing of the sea was first told in song, as we shall see in the next lesson. The song has a number of details that were added later; the story grew in its telling. The prose version, as we find it in this chapter, also adds a few touches to increase its drama.

The Israelites have just settled into their seaside camp. Now they see the army of Pharaoh, the Egyptians advancing on them. Their response is great fear, which turns to doubt and despair. They express these emotions in language that will become all too familiar as Exodus continues: they “cry out to the LORD” and they complain against Moses: “What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ... For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” So much for the joy of freedom.

Moses, the prophet, speaks instead of faith and confidence: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today.” This is the proper response for any believer in any time of uncertainty or fear.

Moses reminds the people that the real conflict is not between Egyptians and Israelites, nor between Pharaoh and Moses. The real battle is between YHWH and the gods of Egypt. As we noted earlier, ancient peoples believed in many equal gods, each one governing a particular land, or people, or element of nature. Israel will come to know that their God is supreme, indeed, he is LORD alone [Deuteronomy 6:4]. YHWH will conquer Egypt’s gods and control all the forces of nature. Speaking of YHWH as a shepherd/warrior/king, Moses says: “the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

This last advice is especially important as we learn to pray the scriptures. Silence is not only golden, it is absolutely essential.

Exodus 14:15-16

Now the LORD speaks: “Tell the Israelites to go forward,” that is, toward the sea, not back to Egypt and its slavery. Moses is told to “lift up his staff,” the emblem of God’s authority, and as a gesture of authority to “stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it.” Moses is thus to act as a

god, issuing orders to the deadly, uncontrollable sea [Genesis 1:6-10; Psalm 77:17-21; Job 38:8-11; Mark 4:39-41]. Of course, the humble Moses knows well that he is but the instrument of YHWH. Whenever Moses does exactly as he is told, God works through him. Here he is not to speak, but simply gesture. The LORD will do the rest.

A most remarkable sign is promised: “that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.” The people will not swim, nor wade, nor slosh through standing water, but walk as though on dry ground. They will then know that YHWH is God, Lord of heaven, earth and sea.

Exodus 14:17-18

YHWH continues: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them.” We would expect an army in pursuit to do exactly this. But YHWH is setting a trap. He will use the pride of Pharaoh to motivate the whole army to pride also, bringing them to the same hardness of heart as their king. In this way, not only Pharaoh but all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers will provide glory for the LORD.

In the previous lesson, we looked at the Hebrew word for glory, kabod. We noted that it is similar to another word meaning “to stiffen.” Twice the Hebrew text uses this word, kabed, in describing the “hardened” heart of Pharaoh [9:7, 10:1]. Through the kabed of the hearts of Pharaoh and the whole Egyptian army, kabod will be given to the LORD.

Exodus 14:19-22

Though it is YHWH who is among the people, the text respectfully refers to a messenger, “the angel of God”, a manifestation of the invisible God [3:2]. The LORD, who is their leader, who was going before the Israelite army, will now also serve as protector; we are told that the holy presence “moved and went behind them” [Isaiah 52:12]. So also, the visible form of that presence, “the pillar of cloud ... took its place behind them ... between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel.”

As in the story of the ninth plague, what served as light for Israel appears as darkness to the Egyptians, separating the holy from the unholy. Those who believe can perceive the presence of God; those without faith remain “in the dark.”

These images of light and darkness, day and night continue to be used in the Bible and in both Jewish and Christian tradition to speak of faith. Psalm 139 speaks of the night being as clear as the day to God, who sees all; Catholic liturgy uses this image in its Easter Proclamation: “Of this night (of Christ’s resurrection) scripture says: the night will be as clear as day, it will become my light, my joy.” St. John of the Cross uses the image of night to describe how the Christian draws closer to God in prayer. At first, our prayer may be emotionally satisfying, but these feelings must be replaced by pure faith. This faith is like a night to the senses. Then the person learns to desire to love God utterly, beyond all thought or reason, beyond all human ability; this

purification is like night to the soul. But St. John writes: “O guiding night! O night more lovely than the dawn! O night that has united the Lover with his beloved, transforming the beloved in her Lover.” What at first appears dark and obscure turns out to be the clear and certain path.

Obedient to the LORD’s command, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. A hot, dry wind from the desert blows through the night, and transforms *yam suf*, the Sea of Reeds, “into dry land; and the waters were divided.” This may be understood in natural terms as a drying up of the marshland, so that the deeper lakes on either side were separated. Or, by the coinciding of the wind with the time of low tide, the level of the shallow sea was significantly reduced, exposing underwater rocks or reefs as a kind of footpath through the sea.

The next detail has often been depicted by movie-makers as a high wall of water on either side as the people descend to the bottom of the sea. This grandiose interpretation is unnecessary. Once the dry land bridge appears, water on either side will still stop the pursuing Egyptians, as effectively as a wall. The people will not be cut off by the army of chariots speeding around and ahead of them.

Exodus 14:23-25

As planned by God, “the Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.” But what can be trod on foot is not always suited to iron-wheeled chariots and horses. The sand or reef “bridge” that served the Israelites will collapse under the weight of the chariots.

Now an early morning lightning storm occurs: “at the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down,” that is, glanced with fire or lightning, “upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.” The relatively soft ground under them “clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty.” The proud army is caught in the muck of the *yam suf*, exposed to lightning, perhaps hail, and a possible flash flood. The pursuers now feel pursued: “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them.” YHWH’s favor toward Israel is being made known; God is beginning to be glorified by the Egyptians.

Exodus 14:26-31

Moses is once more the instrument of providence. “He stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth.”

Another dramatic note is added: “as the Egyptians fled before the returning waters, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea,” like a child tossing pebbles into a pond.

The Egyptians drown, but the Israelites have escaped the sea. They have finally departed from the land of Egypt, the place of slavery.

The last verse of this section is especially significant: “Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians.” Time and again the prophets and psalmists of Israel will celebrate in song and poem the miracle of the sea [Psalms 66:6; 74:13; 77:19; 78:13; 106:7-12; 114; 136:13-15; Isaiah 43:16-17 and 51:10; Nahum 1:4; Habakkuk 3:15]. It is not the death of the Egyptian army that is noted, but the awesome way in which the sea parted, allowed Israel to pass through, and returned, like a gate in a wall opening and closing again. The parting of the sea is the great image of salvation, and appears again in Christian reflection on baptism [I Corinthians 10:1].

Having seen this *great work* of God, “the people feared the LORD”, that is, held YHWH in great reverence, “and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.” Any doubts about YHWH’s care for his people and all the disqualifications of Moses are no more. Israel knows that there is no god greater than YHWH, and that Moses was indeed sent as his prophet.