



"Anxiety is not only a pain which we must ask God to assuage, but also a weakness we must ask Him to pardon."

—C.S. Lewis

18-Jun-10

## *Beating the Rat Race (Part Four)*

Numbers 9 contains another incident in which the command to be still plays a noteworthy part. On this occasion, [Moses](#) uses these words to some of the men of Israel who had a serious question about taking the [Passover](#). [God](#) had told the children of Israel that they needed to keep the Passover at its appointed time, on the fourteenth day of Abib/Nisan. The Passover lamb was to be eaten at twilight, and the participants were to observe the ritual according to the instructions that God had given in Exodus 12.

However, while trekking through the wilderness at the beginning of the second year of their journey, certain men had become defiled by contact with a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover on Abib/Nisan 14. They presented themselves before Moses and Aaron that day and complained: "We became defiled by a human corpse. Why are we kept from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the children of Israel?" ([Numbers 9:6-7](#)).

This account reads rather plainly, but because of what Moses says in response, we come to understand that these men were not just excited—they were probably close to terror! We can imagine that they came rushing up to him, greatly agitated, saying, "Moses, why can't we take the Passover, even though we touched the body of a dead man?" In all likelihood, they thought that, by missing the Passover, they were facing the death penalty! As Moses verifies a few verses later, if an otherwise undefiled person "ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his [sin](#)" ([Numbers 9:13](#)). Misunderstanding this statute, the men cry, "We are as

good as dead!"

Notice Moses' reply to them: "Stand still, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you" ([Numbers 9:8](#)). Then God spoke to Moses, giving him the instructions that we now know as those for taking the second Passover. If one is defiled, on a journey, or sick, he may take the Passover one month later, on the fourteenth day of the second month, and satisfy his obligation to God.

For us, the lesson in Numbers 9 is that Moses needed and asked for stillness—both in movement and in speech—so that he and afterward they could hear God's instruction. We cannot hear God speak when we are distracted by other things. Moses knew that to hear God, one has to give Him full attention, and that is best done when one is still. The best place, the best time, the best environment to hear what God is trying to tell us is one of [peace](#) and quiet.

A similar incident that illustrates the need to be still occurred when the children of Israel found themselves boxed in by mountains on two sides and, on the third and fourth sides, trapped between the armed forces of Egypt and the waters of the Red Sea. Actually, God had led them exactly to this spot, first to "gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD" ([Exodus 14:2-4](#)), as well as to test the Israelites, to see if they would trust Him.

The next few verses relate that Pharaoh assembled the cream of his army and pursued the fleeing Israelites to this very spot. "And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD" ([Exodus 14:10](#)). The Israelites were, at this point, very far from being still. Knowing that they were no match against these elite troops, they were certain that they and all their children would be slaughtered—or at least rounded up and sent back to cruel slavery in Goshen. Convinced of their imminent demise, they turned on Moses:

Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, "Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?" For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. ([Exodus 14:11-12](#))

Moses, however, was too good a leader and too righteous a man to falter even under these urgent and dire circumstances. He appealed for calm: "Do not be afraid. Stand

still, and see the [salvation](#) of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." ([Exodus 14:13-14](#))

What happened here is very interesting. The Israelites were terrified, knowing that this professional army of Pharaoh would shortly slaughter them. Not being an army but just a mass of former slaves, Israel had no visible means of defense. They may have had a few swords among them, having just spoiled the Egyptians, but being slaves by profession, they did not know how to use them. They could see no way out of the situation; they were going to die there by the waterside.

After forty years of experience learning the psychology of sheep—and thus people, in many respects—Moses knew what he had to do. He told them to calm down, to be still, and not to let fear paralyze them. Why? So that the Israelites could "see the salvation of the LORD," the deliverance that God would bring to them. If they were riled, agitated, and fearful, they would miss it. They would be so busy agonizing over their cruel fate that they would either ignore or be distracted from recognizing God's work on their behalf.

Notice that he brackets his command to stand still with another one: "You shall hold your peace." Being still is the first step, which needs to be followed by shutting up. Nervous or restless movement and incessant, woe-is-me murmuring are counterproductive, useless wastes of energy and breath. God wants us to focus on good, positive approaches to solving our predicaments—and the most sure and constructive solution is to trust God to provide a way of escape ([I Corinthians 10:13](#)).

We sometimes become so wrapped up in our trials that we fail to see God's hand in working out our deliverance from them. An agitated state of mind makes us blind to what God is doing because, essentially, it is very selfish, centered on our situation, our fears, and ourselves. The best thing we can do is to stand still—to relax, to return to a state of calm and reason—and try to observe the salvation that God is working out in our lives.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

---

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Baptized in the Sea](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Because Israel experienced a type of baptism in passing through the Red Sea on the

CGG Weekly: Beating the Rat Race (Part Four) (18-Jun-10)

last day of Unleavened Bread about 3,500 years ago (Exodus 14:29; I Corinthians 10:1-4), Richard Ritenbaugh rehearses basic scriptures on baptism. The etymology of baptism - from the Greek baptizo (to immerse) from the root bapto (to dip), symbolizing death, burial, redemption, and resurrection (Romans 6:4) - requires the practice of total immersion. Baptism represents the destruction of our carnal selves and a resurrection to a new life. Baptism is not for children because one needs to be mature to understand its meaning and eternal consequences. It is a one-time event, a break-off point involving repentance (Acts 2:38) and commitment to a lifetime of bearing fruit, motivated by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

---

*From the Archives: Featured Article*

[By the Waters of Ahava](#)

by Ted E. Bowling

Ezra faced a dilemma: Should he ask the king for military protection or trust God for the Jews' safety? Ted Bowling takes us through his decision-making process as an example to us during our trials.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---