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lead others to believe?*



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# CONTENTS

<i>Trouble Times Ten</i> by Dave Lambert .....	1
<i>Ruled Out</i> by Randy Southern .....	79
<i>Galen and Goliath</i> by Lee Roddy . .....	157
<i>The Prophet's Kid</i> by Jim Ware .....	227
For Parents and Teachers .....	302





**Trouble Times Ten**

*by Dave Lambert*



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## CHAPTER

# 1

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The cool water closed over Ben's head, shocking him. He panicked for a moment, holding his breath as his arms flapped frantically. Then he felt strangely calm. Surely his parents saw him fall off the dock and would rush to lift him out of the river.

He looked up. The sun was there, high above him, a bright spot filtered by the wavering water. All Ben had to do was move toward the light. He expected to see his father's face beside the sun at any moment. Ben moved his arms and legs, trying to push himself upward, toward the sun, toward the air. But he'd never had to swim before and didn't know how.

Thrashing wildly now, Ben wanted to scream. But he was afraid to open his mouth. His lungs felt as if they were about to burst.

He felt mud beneath his feet, and hope surged through him—he could push himself toward the surface now. He bent his knees and pushed himself upward with all his strength. But his feet sank into the soft mud, and he floated upward only a short distance. Then his exhausted arms reached hopelessly toward the sun. He coughed out the air he had held in his lungs all this time and watched it shriek toward the surface in huge dancing bubbles. He gulped in the murky, bitter water of the Nile, and everything went slowly black around him, fading . . .

And then Ben gasped, unsure where he was. One hand groped around him for someone, something—

And what he found was his blanket. He touched the thing he was lying on. He tried to stop his loud gasping. He heard his father's snoring.

He wasn't in the Nile River, or even beside it. He was on his own sleeping mat on the floor of his family's home near Rameses, in Egypt.

He heard his mother stirring. "Ben?" she asked softly. "Are you all right?"

Ben opened his mouth to answer, but his throat tightened and he felt tears burn his eyes. No, he didn't want to cry after some little nightmare. Only babies cried about nightmares. He closed his eyes and concentrated on stifling the sobs that formed in his throat. Then he felt a movement near him and opened his eyes. His mother was settling onto his sleeping mat beside him. She held a dim oil lamp in one hand. Ben couldn't help it. He buried his face in her shoulder and cried.

When he finished crying, he leaned against her, enjoying the warmth of her hand on his back. His mother was plump and soft and not much taller than he was. They sat in a small circle of lamplight. Their floor was sand, covered in most places by rugs or sleeping mats. Ben could just make out the hunched form of his father across the room. From the small room next to theirs came the sleeping sounds of his grandparents.

"Was it the river dream again?" his mother asked softly. Her sweet voice calmed him, as always.

Ben nodded.

His mother was quiet for a while, then said, "It's all right to be frightened. It was a frightening thing. But you're ten years old now. All of that was long ago."

Yes. Ben remembered the young man who saved him. After Ben lost consciousness in the river, he awoke lying on a sandy bank. An Egyptian man, young, strong, and dripping wet, leaned over him. His expensive clothes, dark with water, were clinging to him.

When Ben began to cry, the serious expression on the man's face changed to relief. "He'll be all right," he said and then stood. Suddenly Ben's father, his face twisted with emotion, appeared and gathered Ben up in his arms. Ben hadn't seen that man again. But he would never forget his handsome face.



Ben's mother stretched and made herself more comfortable on the mat. "When Moses was a baby," she said, "his mother put him in the Nile in a basket to save him from Pharaoh's men, who were killing the young children of our people. The river saved his life." She smiled. "Do you think Moses would be afraid of the river?"

Ben sighed. No, Moses wouldn't be afraid. Moses wouldn't be afraid of anything. Every Israelite knew the story of Moses. He'd been raised in Pharaoh's own household, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, who had found that basket floating in the rushes along the river. Every Israelite also knew how Moses had rebelled against the treatment his people received from the Egyptians. He had fought a cruel foreman who was beating Hebrew men. In his rage, Moses had killed that Egyptian and then fled for his life.

"But he won't stay away forever," Ben's father and the other men all said. "He's the only one strong enough to stand up to Pharaoh. He is a hero of the Israelites, like Abraham and Jacob and Joseph. He'll come back when we need him."

Yes, Moses would come back. And he wouldn't be afraid of Pharaoh.

No, Moses wouldn't be afraid.

But Ben was afraid of everything. Water. Rats. Bullies. The dark. Loud barking dogs. The list of things Ben was afraid of was long.

Why couldn't he be more like Moses?