

"Moshe's Lament"

By Wade Rockett

*Exodus 14:10-15:1*

Water. It had to be water.

The Lord God could have said, "Moses: Lift up your staff and I will dig a tunnel to the Promised Land." I have no problem with tunnels. A spelunking expedition out of Egypt? I'm in.

But no. He says to me, "Moses: Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites might go into the sea on dry ground."

Look, I can handle small, manageable, amounts of water. Drinking amounts. Bathing amounts.

But several metric tons of water on either side of me, held back by wind? Not so much.

When I was a baby, my mother put me in a basket and shoved it out onto a river. That may be the source of my anxiety about drowning. I'm no therapist. I'm just saying here.

It's like this all the time with me and the Lord God. Whenever I hear, "Moses, lift up your staff," I get this little twitch in my right eye.

It started when we first met. I was presenting what I thought were very reasonable concerns about the plan He was proposing, and in the middle of it, He turns my staff into a snake. I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

The next thing I know, I'm having these audiences with Pharaoh - the most powerful man in the world - where I get to tell him what the Lord God is going to do to his kingdom next.

Pharaoh says, "What now, Moses?"

"Plague of frogs," I say. "Let my people go?"

You can imagine how that went over.

But he did let us go, eventually. He let us go right up to the edge of the Red Sea before he sent his army out to kill us.

There I was, with soldiers behind me and the sea in front of me, and everyone looking at me with terror in their eyes.

So I pushed away the pictures in my head, of water closing over my head, pouring into my lungs, dragging me down into the darkness with my robes swirling around me. I lifted my staff and stretched out my hand, just as the Lord God said, and I hoped it wouldn't turn into a snake.

After a few seconds, we could feel the wind starting to pick up. In a few minutes it was tearing at our clothes, throwing sand and seaspray into the air. The only light was this weird flickering from the cloud of fire and smoke behind us. I could see the wind driving the water back, opening a path in front of us.

And everybody looked at me as if to say, "You first, Moses."

A situation like that, all you can do is move forward. So I stepped out onto the seafloor and started walking, and the children of Israel came after me.

At first we were walking on damp sand, but then as we got deeper we were sinking up to our ankles in deep muck. The wind was roaring in my ears but I could hear people shouting, crying, laughing. It was crazy. It was like walking in a dream.

All the time I'm staring straight ahead; but out of the corners of my eyes I see the water on either side, churning and thrashing, the wind holding it back. I see that we're only halfway through, and part of me just wants to curl up in a ball and close my eyes, and maybe when I open them again I'll be back at my father-in-law's, tending sheep.

Then I feel this tug on my sleeve. I look over. It's my sister Miriam.

"Hey, Moshe," she says.

"What?" I say.

"Knock knock."

Unbelievable. "Who's there?" I say.

"Faith," she says.

"Faith who?"

"Faith forward or you might thlip on the rockth."

"That is the stupidest joke I've ever heard," I said.

She said, "Yeah, but it made you laugh."

Which I guess is true. And soon we were up out of the water and on the other side. When the sun came up the wind died down, and the water came rushing back, sweeping Pharaoh's army away.

Now we're camped out on the Red Sea shore. People are dancing and singing. Miriam, I should point out, sings a lot better than she tells jokes.

It was a rough time getting to this point, a hard, strange, scary time. But I imagine the worst is over. These directions I got before we left Egypt say that the Promised Land is pretty close by; so things ought to go pretty smoothly from here on out.

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