

## **“Do Your Kids Fuss on a Trip?”**

### **Exodus 17:1-7**

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Jackie and I had about all we could take. We had been in the car with our three small children for what seemed days, but was actually just a few hours. Nothing we said made them quit fussing, so I pulled over to the side of the road and Jackie and I jumped out of the car.

We didn't open the back doors and get in our kids' faces. Instead, we walked away from the car. We didn't walk far, but it wasn't because we didn't want to do so. After putting some distance between us and them, we stood and talked for several minutes.

When we turned to go back to the car, we tried not to laugh when we saw three pairs of eyes glued to the back window wondering what in the world was going on. I'm not sure, but I think their behavior improved a little. Perhaps that was due to the fact we said the next time we stopped, we were going to put one of them out of the car and drive off. I pray desperate parents are not held accountable for everything they say and do.

I wonder if Moses did something similar. Our text indicates that he did because God told Moses to “go on ahead of the people” when they were fussing with each other and him. Maybe Jackie and I were being more biblical than we realized when we walked away from the car for a few minutes.

What were the Israelites fussing about this time? They had no water to drink and they were thirsty. It sounds to me like they had a legitimate complaint. You can't help but sympathize with them.

Evidently, God felt the same way. He told Moses to take the staff that was used to turn a portion of the Nile into blood and hit a rock. When he did, water gushed forth and quenched the people's thirst.

There are many parts of this story that intrigue me, but my attention keeps returning to the question in the last verse that was raised by the people. **“Is the Lord among us or not?”** Have you ever asked that question? I would be willing to say you have.

**Why did they ask it?** It is obvious that they did not know God very well, and that's understandable. Their relationship with Him was as new as the land they were traveling. There was a lot more they did not know than they knew. Mystery leads to questions.

They were also afraid and fear causes you to ask a lot of questions. Water is essential for survival, especially in the wilderness. They were running out of water and had children and livestock that were thirsty. Camping where there was no water was frightening. It caused them to question Moses' leadership and God's faithfulness. I'm not surprised. Fear does this.

**What was the answer?** Was God with them or not? You know the answer to that. Of course He was. He was on this journey with them and knew every step they took. They were never beyond the point He would go.

**Why was He with them?** They were His children whom He loved with all His heart, and His love was not dependent upon how they behaved. That's good, because they were not behaving very well. They were fussing with each other and ready to stone Moses. Evidently, their bickering and complaining were so bad that Moses called the place Massah and Meribah, meaning a place of testing and quarreling. Isn't it sad that this historic place was not remembered for God's provision of water, but their fighting? It must have been really bad.

God was also with them because He was not limited by time and space as they were. God is a Spirit that resides in the hearts of His people. This would be an important lesson for them to learn, one that they struggled to learn throughout their history.

Where does Hebrew scripture find God? In the “ruah” or breath. God was not in the ark or later the temple. He was not in their sacrifices or rituals. He was in the hearts of the people to whom He gave breath, which meant He was always with them.

I believe God was with them for another reason. He travels closely with those heading down new roads. He accompanies His children on a journey from the familiar to the strange, the known to the

unknown and the old to the new, and the Israelites were on this journey. He knew their pilgrimage would be stressful as they encountered multiple challenges and God wanted to help them overcome each one.

**What difference did it make that God was with them?** They kept going. They didn't stone Moses, unravel at the seams or turn around and go back to Egypt. They faced their fears and plunged ahead.

I want to believe this experience gave them a greater appreciation for God, not because He led Moses to water, but because He was patient with them, reliable, compassionate and generous. Surely they got a glimpse of who God is and liked what they saw. Hopefully, they were humbled, grateful and more willing to be like Him as they related to one another and developed this new community of believers.

**What about you?** Where are you in this story? **Can you identify with Moses today?** Are you on the hot seat? Who is ready to stone you? How are you handling this kind of pressure? Are you seeking help from God as Moses did? Are you seeking counsel from trusted friends and assistance from others along your journey?

**Can you identify with the Israelites?** Are you traveling down new roads filled with challenges and stress? Are you afraid? What do you need? Are you praying about it?

Are you letting anger and fear bring the worst out in you and undermine your faith in God and others? Do you need to make changes in the way you respond to adversity?

**Can you identify with the Lord in this passage?** Is someone testing your patience and questioning your reliability? Do you love them anyway and are you responding with grace?

This isn't easy, is it? We need help, don't we? Let's talk to Him about it now.