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**Stuck Between Promise and Fulfillment:  
A Travelogue  
Exodus 17:1-7**

Living stories. We say that God is still speaking, but do we understand that to mean these old Biblical tales as well? That these texts have yet more to tell us? Not just in the words, but in the *stories*? First person narrative is an important way of interpreting scripture – not the only way, but sometimes we get too caught in our heads, deconstructing, and so must enter the story in a new way...a personal way. This morning I am attempting to get personal, to engage the Word of God from a *different* perspective. Three perspectives, to be exact. And so will you pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You, O God, Great Storyteller. Amen.



It seems like such a long time I've been on this journey, and the wilderness is endless. I must have aged 200 years since that time back in Egypt. And that was a hard life – hard enough to break a woman's back, not to mention her heart. The death of hope and the death of children. Sure, we had our own homes and our own community – but what is that when faced with daily reminders that we are used for others' lives –for THEIR benefit: their homes and their gods' temples. Thank YHWH for Moses. Although – I know it sounds like heresy, but I'm sure I can speak it to you ... you look as if you are enduring such a journey yourselves. I...I sometimes wonder if the God of our people has forgotten us. –Now hold on! – I hear some of you thinking, “no way.” I know you have your convictions that you'll never feel that way, but believe me, it can happen....in cold nights and hot days. Days of hunger and thirst.

The hunger came first. Of course our bodies, accustomed to the benefit of captivity, weren't ready for the barrenness of our wandering. So when we felt the rumble in our bellies and the children cried out, we did too. Moses. With his high hopes and high words. Leading us away from security – albeit security within our enslavement – and into this nothingness before us and behind. Where *is* that land of promise? Do you think it's just a myth of our families, so long in Egypt that we've created these Abrahams and Sarahs? Perhaps....no, it has to be true.

But it's such an old promise. Who's to say this God of my ancestors will still hold to it when I get there? Moses may have gotten us this far – but he's brought me to drought. I'm parched, bodily and spiritually. If he and this God can't quench my thirst, then I may as well die and go down to my ancestors. Maybe they can give me a reason for this journey I've been on. A little manna here, an river-crossing there...sure it's wonderful at the time and Moses a hero – but I want this promise fulfilled! After enduring such hardship, shouldn't we get a break? Surely God would lead us to an oasis in this great desert.

I'm done – too thirsty to keep talking. Go find someone else to help you through your wilderness wandering.



Sure, I've had my doubts. After all, I don't exactly have the best resume for this kind of work – raised an enemy Egyptian, a murderer, then a poor shepherd. I'm not much of a speaker, either, so I know it wasn't my words that did the convincing of Pharaoh. And of course it's hard trying to be a voice of courage and hope when these people put so much trust in me – trust me and hate me. Every day I wake up wondering if today will be the day they snap. The land a hell around us, just trying to survive the “slings and arrows,” so to speak. Life is hard, and I have no doubt that being a people waiting for God's promise makes it even harder. You live in hope, but when the world around you seems hostile to your very existence, you sometimes want to curl up in a cave and wait for it all to be over; it's hard to keep leading in such times.

I have to be honest with you, and I really hope you won't hold it against me. The truth is, I'm not any different from the rest of them. No, really! They see me talk with God and do amazing things – but anyone can do this. We're all called – I've just had this specific call to be a guide. That burning bush was eye-catching, but what really caught me was knowing that I could stand on holy ground in the middle of my mundane life (in fact I was herding sheep). And doesn't everyone have a mundane life? Just the other day Aaron came up to me all excited. He turned me around and I immediately saw what had taken his breath away: the sunset was awe-inspiring, and we both knew we were again on holy ground. Thank God for those experiences. They remind us of our path. Hmph! They get us through.

Of course, those moments don't last. And really, what proof do these people have that God's promise exists for them? A little bread from heaven? Even watery destruction of an enemy only lasts so long as a miraculous experience. Soon we begin picking those miracles apart, coming at them with supposed reason and logical explanations. We all do it – either that or we forget them just as quickly. Like today, when little Rivka found a small, bright flower and brought it to Samuel who had broken his leg. The smile she brought to him and to his litter bearers' faces was glorious; but it was soon lost again in annoyance at their burden.

And now the whole crowd wants me to CREATE for them some *water*. Water out of nothing! They don't seem to realize just how human I really am. I guess I should get to it. I have a call to answer. Good luck on your own journey, and may you always have plenty.



It's funny, isn't it? The stories that stick in people's memories? My people Israel pass down traditions of seemingly no significance – except, of course, to the storyteller or to that particular tribe. Even I don't quite get what meaning they've given to that snake. It does make for a good story, though.

I am pleased that they've held on to the memory of our covenant. It sure gets strained at times, that's certain, but it's so important. Too bad they still just don't get it.

Yet generation after generation they remember I love them. Love in the fullest sense of the word. Even you have held tightly to the promise – and I love you for it too. It's this fulfillment piece I know you're looking for, just as they are. Wandering in the waterless wilderness like my people Israel. Although for you the wilderness is a world of politics and injustice. Every once in a while

you experience my presence. If not in a burning bush, in a sunset, or in a child – maybe even in worship and song. But each of these fades for you, and you again pick up your traveling gear in search of the Promised Land of world peace.

And here you find my people grumbling again, even after all I've given them. Have you lost patience with them and their constant crying for the relative ease of Egypt? Or can you empathize with their fear and need for comfort? Do you compare their longing for the Promised Land with your longing for the day when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb (Is. 11:6) and when nations shall beat their swords into plowshares (Is. 2:4)? Can you recognize their plea for guidance in your prayer for “my Kin-dom come”? (Mt. 6:10).

Call me biased, but Jesus knows what he's doing when he greets the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:5-42). The water he offers will never run dry and extends beyond the religious troubles between his and her people – beyond the social expectations shutting them off from each other. Beyond what she can comprehend with mind and into what is deeply true. //  
The living water continues to fill body and spirit, continues to be offered and available.

My people Israel don't realize that water is here in the desert as well, ... in the journeying. You think the fulfillment of my promise is out there – somewhere – when really I stand right here on the rock of Mt. Horeb, before your leader and before you, revealing what is already available. Not from thin air, mind you, because the veins of life-giving water and spirit already flow through this rock. My life force is all around you on your travels, available for you to tap into at any moment you thirst.

You, my people, seek the fulfillment of promise in time to come, when Christ has returned to make all things right. But I say to you, you are the fulfillment of my promise. You have within you the promise of Christ – my Holy Spirit. And working through you is the living water, my spring for all the world. Fulfillment is not a one-time thing, someday, but keeps coming *everyday*. Your journey, not the getting there, is the keeping of my promise. My kin-dom come is YOUR work to be done.

Now, it is time to continue your travels. I do not send you off, because I go with you. But I do say I love you, and I promise that my promise is true.

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Amen.