

People of Promise
Moses
608 words

A Calming Promise

Moses:
The Humorous Half of an Impossible Task

Exodus 3:12

Something about the way God combines people with tasks makes us smile: twelve rural ragamuffins to staff Jesus' outreach team; a genius Jew to be the apostle to Gentiles and barbarians; and, in the case of Moses, a slow-of-speech shepherd to call the world's most powerful king to repent and turn loose his slaves. The way God does this may make us smile--until we're called to be the humorous half of his next odd-couple combination. Then, a promise he gave to Moses is the promise we'll need as well.

Moses himself had been one of Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt--along with hundreds of thousands (maybe as many as a couple of million) of other descendants of Jacob. For 400 years, the Hebrews had remained racially and geographically isolated by the yoke of oppression and slavery. Moses managed to escape and was working as a shepherd for a Midianite priest named Jethro, who also became his father-in-law (Exodus 2:18; 3:1). It was there that Moses was called to an impossible task by God.

Do you think you've been asked by God at times to do something impossible--like love an unlovable person? Give away an amount of money bigger than your budget? Be a perfect mom or dad to a house full of kids? Your apprehensions, and more, are what Moses experienced when God approached him with an assignment: Go back to Egypt and tell Moses to let my people go. "Right. Me, a shepherd with a staff, walk into the highest-tech country on earth and tell the king to stop with the slave-making already!?" That was Moses' response (in so many words), levied in five different objections: I'm a nobody (3:11); I don't even know your name (3:13); the Hebrews won't believe I'm from you (4:1); I'm no public speaker (4:10); and finally (the one we would have thought of first), "O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (4:13).

In time, God answered all of Moses' objections. But to calm him down and comfort him at the start, God gave him one, simple promise: "I will be with you." While this was just the beginning of Moses' theological training, Paul the apostle, at the zenith of his understanding, summarized the meaning of this promise more than a millennium later: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) Moses probably didn't know it at the time, but the promise God made to him was the foundational assumption underlying God's relationship with the slaves in Egypt. They were the descendants of Abraham, to whom God had said, "I will establish my . . . everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants . . . to be your God and the God of your descendants." Moses was a descendant of Abraham. The slaves in Egypt were descendants of Abraham. Therefore, God's presence, assured in a prior promise to Abraham, was a given. In time,

Moses would learn, as had Abraham, and as did Paul, that the promise of God's presence is the only promise an apprehensive saint ever needs.

How about you? Have you learned to rely on the promise of his presence (Heb. 13:5b)? The next time God gives you an impossible task, think of Moses:

- Are any of your objections not covered by the shadow of God's presence?
- Can you think of anything you need which he is unable to provide?
- Would God have asked you if he had wanted to send someone else?

Impossible tasks are the most exciting kind, for they are doomed to failure unless God shows up. But relax--he's promised to be there for you.