



Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of
darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in
wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Moses a reflection by Revd David Blackwall

Moses fully enters the Old Testament scene when his people are slaves in concentration camp conditions under Pharaoh's harsh task masters. On the face of it, Moses is a most unlikely candidate to move those promises forward.

Moses could write a most unusual CV as an Israelite. As a male he should have been killed at birth but survived and was brought up in Pharaoh's Palace by Pharaoh's daughter and spent 40 years there (a cuckoo in the Palace!) until he was seen murdering a task master maltreating one of his countrymen. He ran to faraway Midian and spent 40 years shepherding Jethro's sheep. This was a time for reflection with a nomadic life-style and important training for the future.

Then comes a baptism of fire! A deeply spiritual moment at the Burning Bush, 'Take off your shoes, you are standing on holy ground', God says. "I am not deaf to the cry of the people of Israel. I will give them a land as I promised". Moses is aware he is in the presence of God but then comes the bombshell ... 'I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt'. Imagine the 'runaway' tackling the most powerful ruthless man in the world. The support of God's presence gave him a new found confidence.

The 600,000 men plus women and children are freed from their taskmasters through the Red sea and into the desert but they are a loosely knit together people from 12 different tribes with no infrastructure to help gel them. God appears and leads with a cloud by day and fire by night. Food appears but water is not always abundant. The people are quick to grumble saying, "We were better off in Egypt". On one occasion when under pressure, Moses loses his cool. His faithfulness, humility and trust in God slip – much to God's displeasure ... to Moses' later detriment. In spite of these 'downs', the people have had amazing opportunity to see God's hand at work – fulfilling his promise, 'I am with you'.

Moses has the role of PROPHET delivering God's word to Pharaoh and to the people, receiving miracles and the covenant of God.

Moses has the role of JUDGE in people's disputes and creates representatives from each tribe to help. On Mount Sinai he returns with 10 basic commandments ... 4 relating to their relationship with God and 6 to each other.

Moses has the role of PRIEST constructing the Tabernacle - a sense of the abiding presence of God and his holiness. Symbolically, at the edge of the Camp, it is a constant reminder of God's presence and support. This is 'holy ground' and when Moses goes inside a cloud descends as he speaks with God demonstrating their intimate relationship together – and begun at the Burning Bush.

You may like to think about the following- What are the parallels between Moses and Jesus? How do these teach you about God? As God called Moses promising, 'I will be with you' – this sustained Moses throughout. Can you see how God has similarly supported you in the past or present?

HYMN REFLECTIONS for Lent and for Moses by Malcolm Sturgess.

Here is a question- Do you know who George Hunt Smyttan was? He wrote one hymn, subsequently rewritten by Francis Potts. In that later form it is probably known to most Christians. He wrote one, or possibly two more hymns, and then died, very young. His one famous hymn was *Forty days and forty nights*. Smyttan was born in Bombay, the son of a surgeon and medical missionary with the East India Company. He was educated in Cambridge and ordained in 1848. Appointed to a parish in Nottinghamshire, aged 27, the next year he wrote a book called *Thoughts in verse for the afflicted*. In 1870 he went to Frankfurt and died there suddenly. Nobody knew who he was then either, and he was buried in a pauper's grave, and somebody else buried on top of him. A pretty gloomy situation all round, and as befits the first Sunday in Lent, the words of the hymn are no laughing matter either. Nevertheless, with two caveats about the tune, they make an effective hymn. The tune *Heinlein* is 200 years older than the words. Some hymn books use W.H.Monk's simplified version; fortunately the new A & M has gone back to the original, much more interesting than a mere procession of minims. The custom seems to be surprisingly widespread of changing tunes altogether for the last two verses, usually to *Buckland (Loving Shepherd of thy sheep)*. The words of vv. 5 and 6 are much more optimistic, and merit a tune in the major key. It works well.

Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights,
tempted, and yet undefiled.

Sunbeams scorching all the day;
chilly dewdrops nightly shed;
prowling beasts about thy way;
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

Shall not we thy sorrows share,
and from earthly joys abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer,
glad with thee to suffer pain?

And if Satan, vexing sore,
flesh or spirit should assail,
thou, his vanquisher before,
grant we may not faint nor fail.

*So shall we have peace divine;
holier gladness ours shall be;
Round us too shall angels shine,
such as ministered to thee.*

*Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.*

Psalm 90 is one of the great psalms, often invoked in times of trouble. It is the one which gives us "three score years and ten", or 80 if we have the strength to put up with another ten years of "labour and sorrow". It was Isaac Watts' inspiration for the hymn *O God our help in ages past*. And uniquely, some scholars think it is the only psalm written by Moses. If you type into Google [Psalm 90](#), and scroll down to Enduring Word Bible Commentary, you can read one explanation. I have introduced you to Dr. Adam Carlill before - a parish priest from Tilehurst, near Reading, who has written a modern (2018) version of the psalms in metrical form. He set out as far as possible to recapture the rhythm of the original Hebrew in his translations, and then to find an existing tune which also conforms as well as possible. For this hymn he decided on the timeless beauty of the Plainsong *Pange Lingua*. Another bit of voluntary homework for you: if you type [Pange Lingua](#) into Google and scroll down, you will find a panel with a blue background, lasting 3'07", where you can follow the music and see how plainsong works. We cannot include all Adam's eight verses. I shall discretely leave out the bit about how long we might live (as does Isaac Watts, at least in the parts of his hymn we know) and concentrate on the permanence of God's help and support.

*Lord, you are our home and dwelling, through the ages of the earth.
Well before the hills were forming, writhing in the pains of birth,
from forever to forever you are God, who called them forth.*

*Father of the Years, you made us, and with dust we reunite:
"Go back down, you mortal children, back to darkness, out of sight".
For to you a thousand years are as a day, or passing night.*

*Who can know your mighty anger, who can know your fury here?
Those who honour and revere you, know your fury in their fear.
May we count our days in wisdom, knowing we will disappear.*

*Lord, return towards your servants: how much more will you delay?
Fill us with your loving-kindness, in the morning, with the day.
So may we rejoice before you, ever singing as we pray.*

*Gladden us for all the trouble, days of toil and years of pain.
Show your servants, God, the splendour of your work and loving reign.
Lord, establish our endeavour; prosper all our work again.*