

*My times are in your hand*

A believer may swing from confident trust in the Lord (1–8) to great distress and despair (9–13), and then come back to confidence and rejoicing in God (14–24). Have you noticed that David often told the Lord that he trusted in him (1,6,14; cp. Psalm 25:2,20)? When did you last tell the Lord that you trusted in him? The words of verse 5 *'into your hand I commit my spirit'* were uttered by the Lord Jesus when he died on the cross (Luke 23:46). We can trust in the Lord in every situation in which we find ourselves, however dark our circumstances. David was able to be confident in God and to trust in him because he knew God in a personal way. He could say, *'But as for me, I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God"'* (14). **How well do you know God?** We are able to say with David, *'My times are in your hand'* (15). We change and our circumstances change but God never changes! He is in complete control of all our times, good and bad. Doesn't that encourage you?

The Lord has laid up great goodness for those who fear him (19) and he will hide us away from our enemies in the secret place of his presence (20). We should never forget the *marvellous kindness* of the Lord (21). We are often far too quick to complain to God, but he still hears our prayers (22). The Lord will never fail us and he is gracious to us; this should strengthen us and encourage us to love him who means so much to us. *Oh, love the LORD, all you his saints* (23).

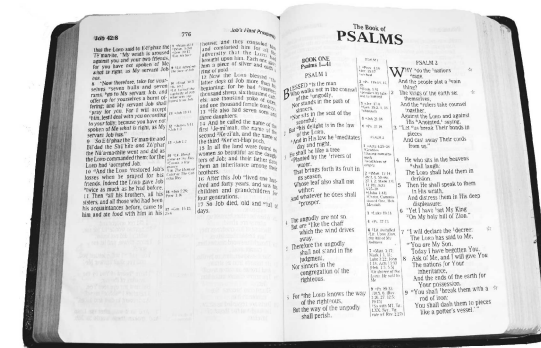
*My times are in thy hand,  
Whatever they may be;  
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,  
As best may seem to thee.*

*My times are in thy hand,  
Why should I doubt or fear?  
A Father's hand will never cause  
His child a needless tear.*

(William F. Lloyd)

# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



## June 2014

Bible readings from Exodus chapters 28 to 40  
Psalms 27 to 31

*Holy garments ... for glory and for beauty*

The next two chapters contain God's instruction for the Levitical priesthood. God did not choose Moses to be the high priest, but Aaron, his brother. This choice did not imply that Aaron was a better man than Moses – he was not (as subsequent great failures were soon to prove). The Lord has different functions for us all. If we fail to recognise that we are different, with differing God-given gifts, we will have trouble in the church (Romans 12:3–13). The names of Aaron's four sons are given in verse 1. The first two, Nadab and Abihu, were killed by the Lord for their disobedience when they offered profane fire before him (Leviticus 10:1–2).

The priestly garments for Aaron were to be made by skilled craftsmen (3). They are described as '*holy garments*'. The word *holy* means 'set apart'. These garments were set apart from all others *for glory and for beauty* (2). Isaiah prophesied of the coming of Christ into the world. He clothes his people with the *garments of salvation*. He covers us with *the robe of righteousness* and gives us *the garment of praise*. He gives us *beauty and joy that he may be glorified* (Isaiah 61:1–3,10).

Every Christian must be holy ('set apart to God', 1 Peter 1:15–16). Biblical holiness does not produce a sombre or miserable way of life. It brings beauty, joy and praise in our lives; it is warm and attractive. **Are you living as a Christian ought to live? Are you wearing your beautiful garments (cp. Isaiah 52:1)?** *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9).

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

(Nicholas von Zinzendorf; translated by John Wesley)

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*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning*

The heading of this psalm informs us that it was 'a song at the dedication of the house of David'. Bible commentators differ on their understanding of this, but many take it to refer to the time that David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan where he built an altar to the Lord and where the temple was to be built. David begins the psalm with praise to God for delivering him from his enemies (1–2). He then calls upon God's people, his saints, to praise and give thanks to the Lord (4).

David recalls a time when he had become complacent and self-reliant. *Now in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved* (6). Physical prosperity and spiritual blessing can become a snare which causes us to turn our eyes away from the Lord. We can so easily forget that there is an enemy of our souls who never rests. The sunshine periods in our lives can be more dangerous than the storms. We must never fall into the trap of thinking that we can lead a God-honouring life in our own strength. We need grace and strength from God each day.

The Lord will chastise us to shake us out of our complacency and he may trouble us by hiding his face from us (7). At such times God seems remote from us and that should trouble us enough to make us earnestly seek him and cry to him (2–3, 8–10). **The chastisement of the child of God is altogether different from the judgment of the ungodly** (1 Corinthians 11:32). The Lord chastises us because he loves us (Hebrews 12:5–6). For the believer God's *anger is but for a moment, his favour is for life* (for a lifetime); *weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning* (5). The weeping will not last! There will be joy in the morning! God will turn our mourning into dancing and he will clothe us with gladness (11). Let us praise him with songs of thanksgiving (12).

*My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.*

(Isaac Watts)

*The voice of the LORD*

This psalm opens with a threefold call to *give unto the LORD* (1–2). The *mighty ones* are most likely the angels of heaven, the cherubim and the seraphim who honour and worship God continually (cp. Isaiah 6:1–3; Revelation 4:8). Men are often slow to glorify God, especially rulers. Christians must be different! Let us *worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (2).

Storms bring fear and terror to those caught up in them (cp. Jonah 1:4–5; Mark 4:37–38). The believer should however, be like David, who saw God in the storm, and in it heard his voice. The expression, ‘*The voice of the LORD*’ is found seven times in verses 3 to 9. The God of glory thunders during the storm and his voice is *powerful and full of majesty* (3–4). God spoke and the world was created (Genesis chapter 1). The Lord Jesus spoke and the storm was stilled (Mark 4:39) and the dead raised (John 11:43–44). When Jesus comes again all the dead will hear his voice and be raised (John 5:28–29). When he speaks the sinner is brought out of spiritual death to receive eternal life (cp. John 5:25; Ephesians 2:5).

*He speaks, and, listening to his voice  
New life the dead receive,  
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,  
The humble poor believe.*

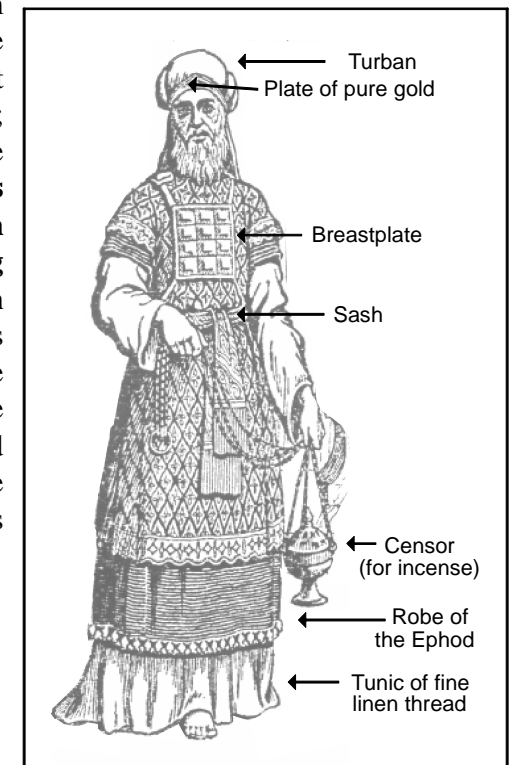
(Charles Wesley)

**The Lord is King over every storm whether in nature or in spiritual conflict.** He will give strength to his people and bless them with peace (10–11). The story is told of an elderly lady who was asked during an earthquake, ‘Are you afraid?’ She replied, ‘No, it rather thrills me to think that I have a God who can shake the world!’ We need not fear in the darkest storm if we will but learn to recognise the voice of the Lord. *The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty* (4). How should we worship our glorious, almighty God? *Give unto the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (2, 9).

*Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD*

The remainder of this chapter describes the garments of the high priest. The colours (5,15,33) are the same as those found in the curtains of the tabernacle with their clasps (26:1,6). The ephod was a two-pieced tunic, the back and front pieces being joined by two shoulder-straps, and having a waistband of the same materials (7–8). Two onyx stones, set in gold, rested on the shoulders of the ephod. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were engraved on the onyx stones (presumably six names on each stone).

The symbolism is explained in verse 12. Aaron was to *bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial*. He bore them up in prayer and carried them into the presence of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; 9:11). His shoulders are supremely strong. **He carries us on his shoulders through every trial and perplexing circumstance.** Underneath us are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). He will never fail us nor forsake us because he has promised to carry us through to old age (Isaiah 46:4; Hebrews 13:5–6).



*Aaron shall bear their names ... over his heart*

The names of the tribes of Israel were also set in the breastplate of judgment. The name ‘judgment’ in *breastplate of judgment* (15, 29–30) does not mean ‘punishment’ but rather ‘guidance’ or ‘utterance’. The *Urim and the Thummim* (meaning ‘Lights and Perfections’) were carried in the breastplate over the high priest’s heart (30). Bible scholars do not know exactly what they were. We do know that they were used to obtain guidance from God (cp. Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; 30:7–8). Where the *ephod* (15) was used to obtain guidance (1 Samuel 23:9–12), it refers to the high priest’s garment which includes the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim. Some scholars believe that the Urim and Thummim were two stones, one indicating a ‘Yes’ answer if drawn from the pouch in the breastplate, the other indicating ‘No’.

There were twelve precious stones set in rows of four in the breastplate, each stone having the name of a tribe engraved upon it (15–21). The symbolism is rich and encouraging, speaking of the love and care of the high priest for his people. *So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart* (29). The names on his shoulders (12) indicate his strength, the names on his heart set forth his love. **Our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, has us upon his heart. He loves us and is passionately concerned for us.** He intercedes for us in the presence of God the Father (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25; 9:24).

Christian, do you feel weak or discouraged? Do you feel lonely in some trial with no one seeming to understand? There is One who does understand. He loves you so much that he suffered, died, and rose again to save you. He will never forsake you. He does direct your path and will always be your guide. You are on his heart! Come to him with all your burdens and cares, *casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7)

*To you I will cry, O LORD my rock*

In this psalm we have David’s prayer (1–5) and then his praise (6–9).

- David’s prayer. He is again found crying out to God for help in this psalm (1–3). *To you I will cry, O LORD my Rock: do not be silent to me* (1). David pleaded with God not to be silent to him. Spurgeon aptly comments, ‘When God seems to close his ear, we must not therefore close our mouths’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). The apparent silence and inactivity of God is a very trying experience for the child of God. We naturally want to see God answering our prayers now, but we need to be patient and to persevere, however dark our circumstances (Hebrews 10:36). David’s prayers were cries from his heart. When did you last ‘cry’ to the Lord in your prayers? David knew that the ungodly would have a terrible end and prayed that he would not be taken away with them (3). The wicked are devious in their ways and David prayed that the Lord would righteously judge them (4–5).
- David’s praise. The psalm closes on a note of rejoicing and praise to God for hearing his prayers (6–7), and with a prayer for God’s people (8–9). He encouraged himself in the fact that God is our strength to help us in every difficult situation and that he protects us. *The LORD is my strength and my shield* (7). We are painfully aware of our own weakness and vulnerability but our God is strong (cp. 1 John 4:4).

**We must never be so preoccupied with our own troubles that we forget to pray for our fellow believers and for the spread of the gospel (8–9).** Is your faith being tried? Come to the Lord in prayer, trust in him, and your cry will soon become a song of praise.

*O what peace we often forfeit!  
O what needless pain we bear!  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer.*

(Joseph M. Scriven)

*Teach me your way, O LORD*

David now calls upon God to hear his prayer and he expresses his own responsiveness to the voice of God. *When you said, 'Seek my face,' my heart said to you, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek'* (7–8). To seek the face of God is to seek his smile upon our lives in answered prayer. God does hide his face from us when he chastises us for our sin. When this happens, we do not enjoy his presence or peace in our lives. David dreaded the hiding of God's face from him (9). Do you?

There are ups and downs in every believer's life. There are enemies and there are battles but we can be confident that God will bring us through. He has helped us in the past and he will take care of us in the future. Even when those nearest to us forsake us, the Lord will take care of us (9–10). David again prays, *'Teach me your way, O LORD'* (11; cp. 25:4). He wanted to know God's way and God's will for his life. Do you?

Most of us pass through times of discouragement or despair. What is the antidote to these things? We must never lose sight of the goodness of the Lord. *I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living* (13). We will not lose heart if we have faith to see the goodness of the Lord. He is kind and he lovingly cares for us. He will strengthen our hearts if we wait upon him in childlike faith (and that means being patient, verses 13–14). **Let us praise him and pray with expectation.**

*When doubts and fears arise,  
Teach me thy way!  
When storms o'erspread the skies,  
Teach me thy way!  
Shine through the cloud and rain,  
Through sorrow, toil and pain;  
Make thou my pathway plain;  
Teach me thy way!*

(B. Mansell Ramsey)

*HOLINESS TO THE LORD*

The robe of the high priest went under the ephod (31–36; Leviticus 8:7–8). Bells and pomegranates were set in the hem of the robe. The bells sounded out as he served in the holy place and those waiting outside would know that all was well with him and that God had accepted his offerings on their behalf.

There was a plate of pure gold at the front of the high priest's turban on which were inscribed the words *'HOLINESS TO THE LORD'* (36–38). *'Holiness'* means 'separation'. The gifts and sacrifices of the people were hallowed (separated) to God through the high priest, making them acceptable to the Lord (38). God has chosen us in Christ to be a holy people (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15–16). We are separated to God to live for him and to serve him. Are you giving him your best?

The high priest and his fellow priests had linen trousers under their robes to preserve their modesty (42–43; cp. 20:26). The worship of the people of God contrasted greatly with that of heathen religions. Many pagan ceremonies involved ritual with immoral practices. Israel had to be different. **The principles for Christian worship are obvious – there must be modesty. The way we dress is important!** The apostle Paul urges women to dress modestly and not extravagantly when they come to worship (1 Timothy 2:9–11). **Nothing must distract us from giving God our best in our worship – after all, we are a holy people**

*O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
Kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name.*

(John S.B. Monsell)

*To hallow them for ministering to me*

This chapter contains instructions for the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (1–37; cp. Leviticus chapter 8). God told Moses, ‘Take one young bull and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil’ (1–2). These were to be used as sacrifices and offerings in the consecration of Aaron and his sons.

There were three elements in the consecration:

1. Washing (4) symbolises the cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:7). If we would serve God, we must be cleansed from our sin.
2. Anointing (7; cp. 28:41) symbolises the unction of the Holy Spirit. It is through his work that we are born again (John 3:3–8; Titus 3:5) and his ministry is vital in our lives (Romans 8:12–17).
3. Sacrifice. There were three offerings – a sin offering (10–14), a burnt offering (15–18) and a ram of consecration (19–28). In each case, hands were placed on the head of the sacrifice to show their identification with it. The Levitical sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ for sinners (Hebrews 9:11–15, 23–28). The sin offering is described in Leviticus chapter 4 and was offered to atone for sin so that the guilty sinner could be forgiven. Christ died for our sins (1 Peter 3:18). Any religion that denies the necessity and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for sin is false. The man who would serve God must know that his sins are forgiven.

The consecration of Aaron and his sons was *to hallow them for ministering* to God (1). **Do you want to serve God?** You must know the forgiveness and cleansing of sin through the blood of Christ. You need the anointing (unction) of the Holy Spirit in your life (cp. Acts 1:8; 6:3; 7:55).

*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek*

This is another lovely psalm which will be a greater blessing to us if we read it several times and meditate on its teaching (this principle, of course, applies whenever we read God’s word). David here expresses his wholehearted trust in the Lord (1–3), his supreme desire (4–6), his urgent prayer (7–12) and his confidence in the goodness of God (13–14).

The believer can enjoy the peace of God in the strongest conflict because he has no need to fear. The Lord is his light, his salvation and the strength of his life (1–3; cp. Romans 8:37). Are you tormented by fear and anxiety? Christian, let the words of this psalm be fixed in your mind and impressed on your heart. The Lord will never fail you, but you must trust in him if you would enjoy his peace.

What do you desire above all things? What is your supreme desire? David could write, ‘*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple*’ (4). David wanted to be in the presence of God to worship him and with spiritual eyes to behold his beauty. Do you long to be in God’s house each Lord’s Day? If you are not enthusiastic something must be wrong. Do you long for heaven, where you will see your Saviour and King in his beauty, where you will gaze and gaze upon him with awe and wonder?

If we are not enjoying fellowship with the Lord, we will soon find ourselves seeking our joy and pleasure in the passing things of this world. If we are not delighting ourselves in him, it is an evidence of coldness of heart. If we delight ourselves in the Lord, he will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4); these desires will be spiritual desires (cp. verse 4). **How do you delight yourself in the Lord?**

*The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle*

The obedience of the Israelites to God's instructions is again highlighted. The words '*as the LORD commanded Moses*' appear seven times in verses 19 to 33. The work of erecting the tabernacle was finished one year after the exodus from Egypt (17; cp. 12:2). The Feast of the Passover was kept just a few days later on the fourteenth of the first month, one year after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt (Numbers 9:1–5).

When everything was completed, *the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle* (34). The cloud, which indicated that God was present with his people, rested over the tabernacle continually for all the people to see. They moved on when the cloud moved (36–38). Moses was so right to pray for God's presence in the midst of his people (33:12–16). Without the presence of God they would have been in real trouble on their journey to the promised land.

**The glory of God came when the people obeyed his will and did his work. True spiritual blessing only comes to those who are obedient to God's word.** If we disobey God, we should not expect to have his presence with us. Israel had rebelled against God and they repented. They then obeyed God's word and did his work. If we have been rebelling against God, let us, like Israel, repent and obey his will. We will then know his presence among us and his blessing upon our work for him.

*Round each habitation hovering,  
See the cloud and fire appear!  
For a glory and a covering,  
Showing that the Lord is near.  
He who gives them daily manna,  
He who listens when they cry;  
Let him hear the loud hosanna  
Rising to his throne on high.*

(John Newton)

*A sweet aroma before the LORD*

The burnt offering (15–18; cp. Leviticus chapter 1) was an offering that rose as *a sweet aroma before the LORD* (18,25). It was a sacrifice intended to give pleasure to God. The sweet aroma indicates that God is satisfied with the offering. In the New Testament, the expression is used in the context of self-sacrifice and a total giving up of self. The Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma* (Ephesians 5:2).

The Lord no longer requires animal sacrifices from us, but he is pleased with the sacrifice of praise and the giving of ourselves and our possessions in his service (Hebrews 13:15–16). Such sacrifices are a token of our love to him and our gratitude for all that he has done for us. They are a *sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:18). **How do you measure up? Is your life a fragrant smell to God which gives him pleasure?**

The right ear, thumb and toe of the priest were symbolically cleansed with the blood of the ram of consecration (19–28). The priest, as a servant of God, had to have a listening ear for God's voice, and hands and feet to work for God and to walk in his ways. The loss of thumbs and big toes rendered a man weak and useless to serve and to fight as a soldier. They were a token of his strength (Judges 1:6). To dedicate them to God was to dedicate all one's strength to him.

The parts of the ram of consecration used as wave and heave offerings were retained by the priests to provide them with food (26–28). It was one of God's provisions for them. If we seek to honour God and to serve him he will take care of all our needs; he will never let us down (Matthew 6:24–34).

*I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God*

The closing verses of this chapter give instructions for the daily offerings at the tabernacle. Two lambs were to be offered each day as burnt offerings (one in the morning, one in the evening). Grain and drink offerings were to be offered with them (40–41). The Lord promised to meet with the children of Israel at the tabernacle (42–43). They had great privileges but how much greater the privileges belonging to us! When we meet for worship as a church in Christ's name he is among us (Matthew 18:20). Do you come to worship God each Lord's Day with joy, with gratitude and with praise? Do you expect to meet with God and to hear him speak to you through his word?

The Lord promised Moses, *'I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God'* (45). The Lord Jesus has given us an even better promise: *'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him'* (John 14:23). How wonderful! Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The privileges that we enjoy were purchased for us at tremendous cost, even the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). **We owe it to him to honour him in our lives.**

*How blest is life if lived for thee,  
My loving Saviour and my Lord;  
No pleasures that the world can give  
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

*To know I am thy ransomed child,  
Bought by thine own most precious blood  
And from thy loving hand to take  
With grateful heart each gift of good.*

*All day to walk beneath thy smile,  
Watching thine eye to guide me still,  
To rest at night beneath thy care,  
Guarded by thee from every ill.*

(Prust's Supplementary Hymn Book, 1869)

*According to all that the LORD had commanded*

We read that *the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses* (32, 42–43). This obedience to all that God had commanded was most important. They did not deviate from God's will in the preparation or erection of the tabernacle. *Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did* (40:16; see also verses 21–32).

It is also obvious that the people were united in their work – there was no strife or dissension. The principles are obvious. **If we would enjoy God's blessing, we must be obedient to all of God's will, not just what might suit us.** We must take God's word seriously enough to render complete obedience to it. We do not have the liberty of picking and choosing what may suit us.

The erection of the tabernacle did not proceed until the Lord gave the go-ahead. He told Moses, *'On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting'* (2). The principle taught here is that we must not only do God's work in God's way, but we must also do it in God's time. We must *wait on the LORD* (Psalm 27:14) and this often means that we must *wait for him* (Isaiah 30:18).

There are many needs in God's work but we must avoid the temptation of trying to run ahead of God. We need to be prepared by the Lord whose timing is always right. The great apostle Paul had several years of preparation before he was finally sent on his first missionary journey (cp. Galatians 1:15–18). There is of course, the opposite problem of being too slow to respond to God's call, and that is probably more common among us. We fail to prepare ourselves, or to learn the lessons that the Lord would teach us, and we just do nothing. There is a harvest to be gathered in (cp. John 4:35–38).



*A perpetual incense*

The altar of incense was located in the Holy Place directly in front of the veil which separated the Holiest of All from the rest of the tabernacle (1–6). The high priest had to burn incense on this altar every morning and evening when he tended the lampstand (7–8). It was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement (10). The burning of incense was associated with prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3–4). Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, offered incense in the temple. *And the whole multitude of people was praying outside at the hour of incense* (Luke 1:9–10). The angel Gabriel appeared to him while he was offering the incense to announce that God had heard his prayers for a son.

You will remember that the ministry of the high priest foreshadowed the work of the Lord Jesus in heaven on our behalf. He prays for us (Hebrews 7:25) and appears for us in the presence of the Father (Hebrews 9:24). He is our advocate when we sin, pleading our cause with the Father (1 John 2:1). *A perpetual incense* (8) speaks of the perpetual prayers of Christ for his people. It is wonderfully reassuring to know that the Lord Jesus prays for us. He knows when Satan has designs on us to bring us low, and he prays for us (cp. Luke 22:31–32; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24). He still prays for us, even when we sin and when we fail to pray.

We are encouraged to know that Christian friends pray for us. The apostle Paul was much aware of his need of the prayers of his fellow Christians (Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25). We should pray for one another (cp. Ephesians 6:18). Do you pray much for Christians in your church and for missionaries known to you? **Do you ever wonder why God's grace and blessing are bestowed upon us when we are feeble in our prayers? It is not only that other believers are praying for us, but also the Son of God. Meditate upon this glorious fact and give him thanks.**

**The Construction of the Tabernacle**

Exodus 36:8 to 39:43 describes the making of the tabernacle with all its furnishings and the making of the priest's garments. The erection of the tabernacle is described in chapter 40. There are also details of the precious metals, etc. used in the work. The description of the furnishings and garments from earlier chapters are repeated in the accounts of the work. Compare the following:

Chapter 36:8–38	with chapter 26
37:1–24	with chapter 25:10–40.
37:25–29	with chapter 30:1–6, 22–38
38:1–7	with chapter 27:1–8
38:8	with chapter 30:18
38:9–20	with chapter 27:9–19
38:21–23	with chapter 31:1–6, 35:30–35
39:1–31	with chapter 28:1–43

*Atonement money*

When a census was taken in Israel every man 20 years old and over was required to give half a shekel *atonement money* as an offering to the Lord (15–16). The rich were to give no more than the poor, for all men are the same in God’s sight with the same needs as sinners (Romans 3:23). There were many other opportunities for the rich to show their benevolence. In New Testament times the half shekel became an annual temple tax (Matthew 17:24). The atonement money was used for the upkeep of the tabernacle (16). It did not ‘buy’ forgiveness. Only blood sacrifice can atone for sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). The atonement money was given as a token of gratitude for all that the Lord had done for his people. Our salvation is free! We are freely justified by the grace of God through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (Romans 3:24), but we will be generous givers to the Lord’s work if we really love him. Let us never be tight-fisted in our giving, *for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The bronze laver stood in the courtyard of the tabernacle between the bronze altar and the entrance into the holy place (17–21). The ritual cleansing of the priests is a reminder that sin not only renders us guilty in the sight of God but it also pollutes us and we need to be cleansed daily. We will never be sinless until we reach heaven and, alas, the influences of the world, the flesh and the devil often pollute us. We need cleansing through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). There is also *the washing of water by the word* of God (Ephesians 5:26). **Hearing God’s word preached and the daily reading of our Bibles has a purifying effect on our lives.**

We need to hide God’s word in our hearts. The psalmist wrote, *Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:9,11). Someone has rightly said, ‘This Book will keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from this Book.’ The laver was made from the bronze mirrors belonging to the women (38:8). The word of God is described as a mirror (James 1:23–25). As it speaks to us and rebukes us, let us seek the cleansing of the blood of Christ.

*Much more than enough*

Bezaleel and Aholiab’s skills were a gift from God who also gave them the ability to teach others and to train them in their skills. (35). Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God (31,34). Those with artistic gifts and skills were not allowed to do as they pleased in the work of the tabernacle. They had to do *all that the LORD has commanded* (1).

Restrictions placed upon artists and craftsmen may stifle creativity and initiative. On the other hand, unbridled freedom of artistic expression in sinful man has resulted in the most terrible perversion and pornography in the arts. If you are skilled in art and craftwork, do you thank God for these gifts and seek to use them for his glory? When men or women dedicate their artistic skills to God and work according to principles found in Scripture, their creativity is enhanced, for they serve the great Creator.

The craftsmen had a problem. They reported to Moses, ‘*The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do*’ (5). Moses was obliged to ask the people not to bring any more gifts (6). God had so worked in their hearts that they now gave generously and there was a great abundance. Where did this great wealth come from? The Lord had given the Israelites favour in the sight of the Egyptians and they had left the country with great riches (12:35–36). We must never forget that it is the Lord who gives us the health and the ability to earn and to acquire possessions. When we give to him, we are only returning to him that which is his by right.

How many churches today are able to say that they have too much in money and resources because their people are so generous (7)? There are great needs in God’s work at home and abroad. Are we doing all that we can to meet them? **When God touches a person’s heart, they will give generously of their time and money. Joyful, exuberant giving is a blessing not only to a church, but also to the giver.**

*Both men and women, as many as had a willing heart*

Moses called the people of Israel together to hear the instructions given to him by God concerning the construction of the tabernacle (1). Though there was much work to be done the Lord again insisted that the Sabbath must be observed (2–3). The death penalty for those who violated the Sabbath may appear to be harsh, but we must remember that the Lord had given repeated instructions about Sabbath-observance (16:23–29; 20:8–11; 31:13–16). Those who wilfully disobey God’s commandments have only themselves to blame for their punishment.

The application of the death penalty upon those who disregard God’s commands is not applicable to us today. The Lord Jesus did not sanction the execution of the adulterous woman (John 8:1–11). We must remember, however, that there is a day of judgment and if we rebel against God and refuse to repent of our sin, we will be cast into hell (Luke 13:3,5; John 5:28–29; Revelation 21:8).

Moses went on to repeat God’s commands concerning the offerings of gifts and skills for the work of the tabernacle (4–35). All manner of gifts were brought – gold, silver, precious stones, bronze, wood, skins, cloth, spices and oil. Those who made the offerings *came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart* (22). The willingness of the givers is stressed throughout the chapter (5,21–22,29). Everyone was expected to be involved, both men and women. There is work for everyone in the church.

The Lord Jesus willingly offered himself up to die on the cross in order to save us from our sins. He willingly suffered so that we could be freely forgiven and cleansed from our sins. **Do you offer your time, your talents and your money to the Lord with a willing heart?**

*Holy for the LORD*

God told Moses that the tabernacle and all its contents must be anointed. The priests were also anointed with the same oil. When a person or an object were anointed, they were *holy for the LORD* (32–33, 37–38). The word ‘*holy*’ means ‘set apart’. The priests were set apart from normal work to serve God. The tabernacle was set apart for the service of God.

The ingredients for the anointing oil and for the incense were very costly, some of the spices coming from distant lands such as India (there was no easy way of travelling in those times). The recipe for both anointing oil and incense was not to be used except as directed by God for the tabernacle worship. He warned that anyone who made anything like the anointing oil or the incense for personal use would be severely punished (33, 38). What does this passage teach us? The worship in the tabernacle was special, was holy, and quite different from everything in the world. Matthew Henry aptly comments, ‘It is a great affront to God to jest with sacred things, and to make sport with the word and with the ordinances of God. That which is God’s peculiar\* must not be used as a common thing.’

Every Christian is called to be holy (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 1:15). We have been bought at great price in order to live for God (1 Corinthians 6:20). We dare not use our bodies as the instruments of sin (Romans 6:12–14). The beautiful fragrance of the anointing oil and the incense would have had a great practical value in overcoming the smells of animals and the blood of the sacrifices. We need to bear the fragrant fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives – *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22–23). **True biblical holiness is attractive, not forbidding and dull.** *We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing* (2 Corinthians 2:15).

\* ‘Peculiar’ in this sense is an old English word meaning ‘special possession’.

*I have called by name*

The Lord appointed Bezaleel and Aholiab to carry out all the work necessary for the tabernacle and its furnishings. They were also responsible for making the garments for the priests, and for the preparation of the anointing oil and the incense. They were assisted by gifted artisans (1–6). The commissioning of these men is full of instruction and encouragement.

The Lord said to Moses, ‘*See, I have called by name Bezaleel*’ (2). When God calls us into his kingdom or for any special work, he calls us by name (cp. Isaiah 43:1; 45:4). God has set his love on us and he calls us by name. We are not just numbers on a divine computer. The Lord has written our names in his book of life (cp. 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 21:27).

**When God calls us to work for him, he also equips us.** The Lord said of Bezaleel, ‘*I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*’ (3). Natural gifts alone are insufficient for God’s work (6). We need the Holy Spirit and his wisdom to enhance those gifts and to bring them under divine direction. Those who possess natural speaking gifts, teaching or business skills, but lack the hand of God upon them can be a hindrance rather than a help in God’s work. God in his grace has given gifts to each of us (Romans 12:6–8). Have you recognised the gifts that you possess? Are you using them for the glory of God?

*My talents, gifts and graces, Lord,  
Into thy blessed hands receive,  
And let me live to preach thy word,  
And let me to thy glory live;  
My every sacred moment spend  
In publishing the sinner’s Friend.*

(Charles Wesley)

*The skin of his face shone*

When Moses came down from the mountain *the skin of his face shone* (28–29). He had prayed to see the glory of the Lord (33:18) and without knowing it, that glory was reflected from his face. Aaron and the people were afraid to come near to him, but he called them to himself. His radiant face confirmed to the people that he had been in the presence of God. He then gave them the commandments that the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai (30–32). Moses put a veil on his face when he finished speaking to the Israelites. Whenever he met with the Lord, he unveiled his face (33–35). John Currid observes, ‘The radiance of his face was recharged. Before the people the divine glow confirmed the message and demonstrated the authority of the messenger’ (EP COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, volume 2, page 324)

Paul refers to this passage of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3:12–18. He pointed out that in using the veil Moses was indicating that the old covenant was not permanent; it passed away with the coming of the new covenant in Christ. The unbelieving Jews (and Gentiles) have a veil over their hearts which blinds them to their need of Christ. When God works in our lives turning us to himself, the veil is removed, there is light and liberty.

**If we are walking with the Lord and enjoying fellowship with him, we will reflect the beauty of Christ in our lives.** Like Moses, we may not be aware that there is a radiance in our faces, but others will notice. Christians are different! Matthew Henry aptly comments, ‘Serious godliness puts a lustre upon a man’s countenance, such as commands esteem and affection.’

A prayer of Moses the man of God:

*Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and  
establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the  
work of our hands* (Psalm 90:17).

*The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*

Moses was with the Lord on Sinai for forty days and forty nights (as on the previous occasion, 28; cp. 24:18). Though he had no food or water, God miraculously sustained him. The Lord graciously renewed the covenant after Moses asked him to make Israel his inheritance (9). God promised him that the people would *see the work of the LORD*. He would work in an awesome manner and drive out powerful nations from Canaan (10–11). As a covenant people they would be distinct from other nations. They were not to make alliances with them, but were to destroy every trace of their false religions (12–17). God warned them, ‘*Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst*’ (12). They were to keep the appointed feasts and the Sabbath was to be observed even in the busy harvest time (18–24).

God told Moses that he *is a jealous God*. His name (nature) is *Jealous* (14; cp. 20:5). Jealousy in men is often very sinful, but there is a jealousy which arises from intense love, which desires the best for the other person (cp. 2 Corinthians 11:2). God had done so much for Israel and he wanted them for himself. He made them special to himself and cared enough to be jealous over them.

Christian, the Lord Jesus has purchased you at great cost. He died a most terrible death to save you. Do you not know that *you are not your own, for you were bought at a price* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)? Jesus commands, ‘*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*’ (Matthew 6:33). **Are you doing this, or are you provoking the Lord to jealousy by backsliding, by straying from him to go after other gods, such as living for money, for pleasure, for your hobbies, for sport? Will you continue to grieve the Holy Spirit?** Repent and be determined that nothing will usurp his place in your life, *for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God* (14).

*The Sabbath ... it is a sign*

Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights (24:18) When God finished speaking with his servant, he gave him the two tablets of stone on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. They were *written with the finger of God* (18; cp. 32:16). Matthew Henry points out in his Bible commentary, ‘they are called *tables of the Testimony*, because this written law testified both the will of God concerning them, and his good-will toward them, and would be a testimony against them, if they were disobedient.’

The Lord ended his instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle and the work of the priests by reinforcing the Sabbath principle. The Israelites had much work before the tabernacle would be ready for worship and sacrifice. However urgent and necessary the work, the Sabbath must be observed. John Currid comments, ‘The Sabbath ordinance appears here also for a very practical purpose: so that the Hebrews should not work on building the tabernacle on the Sabbath in order to get it completed sooner. The building of the place of worship on the day of worship would be a great sin’ (EP COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, volume 2, page 264).

God told Moses to tell the people, ‘*Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you*’ (13,17). It was a sign that God’s people were a holy people, separated to him (13 – ‘*I am the LORD who sanctifies you*’). It was also a sign in which the people acknowledged God as the Creator of the universe (17). The Christian Sabbath, the Lord’s Day, has an additional sign – it is the day that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. In these days when the theory of evolution is accepted as fact, when men deny the resurrection of Christ, and when Christianity has become so worldly, we need the testimony of the Lord’s Day more than ever. **God is our Creator; the Lord Jesus rose bodily from the dead; we are a holy people, special to God. Do you honour God by observing the Lord’s Day?**

*Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God*

The Israelites had promised Moses, ‘*All the words which the LORD has said we will do*’ (24:3). That promise was soon broken. While Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai, the Israelites broke the first two commandments when they turned away from God to worship the golden calf. Aaron showed himself to be a weak, pathetic and compromising leader in the absence of Moses (1–5). He had no excuse for making the golden calf, nor for encouraging the people to worship it as a symbol of God, under the guise of *a feast to the LORD* (5).

There is a great contrast between the disgraceful conduct of the Israelites and the self-effacing love of Moses who interceded for them:

- See the contempt of these rebels for one of the greatest leaders of men in history – ‘*As for this Moses*’ (1). They also had contempt for God in worshipping a dumb idol (8). Little wonder that God was angry with them and would have blotted them out of existence (9–10).
- See Moses whom they so despised. The Lord offered him a new beginning, with a new nation descending from him (10). Moses had bemoaned his lack of eloquence (4:10), but he now prayed with fervour and a moving eloquence. *Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God*. He persuasively pleaded with God that he would not destroy the people (11–13). He reasoned that if God destroyed Israel, his name would be dishonoured for the Egyptians would say that he had only brought his people out of Egypt to destroy them. Moreover, God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel) that he would multiply their descendants and bring them into the promised land. **When men pray like that, God is pleased and he hears their prayers** (14). May the Lord so move our hearts that we will pray with urgency, fervour and passion. What love Moses had for such an ungrateful, treacherous people. If we are truly burdened for the salvation of sinners, our prayers will flow from aching hearts, and God may be pleased to visit us in his mighty, sovereign, saving power.

*The LORD God, merciful and gracious*

The Lord instructed Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones which Moses had broken when Israel sinned (32:19). God told him that he would write the Ten Commandments on these tablets (28). Moses presented himself to God on the top of Sinai the next day with the tablets of stone in his hand (1–4).

The Lord descended in the cloud and proclaimed his name to Moses as he had promised (5; cp. 33:19). What is God like? There are some who believe that he was unjust, harsh and unloving in his dealings with people in Old Testament times and that he has had a change of nature since Christ came to earth. That is nonsense. The Lord does not change (Malachi 3:6). Look at the description of God in verse 6: *The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*. God has always been merciful, for he delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). He is just, however, and he will punish sin unless we repent. He is longsuffering, being very patient with us, but he will surely visit wrath upon us if we despise his goodness (Romans 2:4–5). God also abounds in goodness and in truth (or faithfulness, 6). He can be trusted completely and we can be confident and encouraged when we come to him in prayer because he is super-abundant in his goodness.

Moses was filled with awe before God and worshipped him, calling upon him to forgive the sins of his people and to take them as his inheritance (8–9). **God is worthy of our worship. Let us meditate on his wonderful character and worship and adore him.**

*Thy mercy, my God,  
Is the theme of my song,  
The joy of my heart,  
And the boast of my tongue;  
Thy free grace alone,  
From the first to the last,  
Hath won my affections,  
And bound my soul fast.*

(John Stocker)

*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest*

Moses could not contemplate leading Israel without God's presence among them and he pleaded with God for the restoration of that presence. The Lord had said to Moses, *'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in my sight'* (12). Moses reasoned with God that if he had found grace (unmerited favour) in his sight, then surely he would restore his presence to Israel in answer to his prayer (13). God gave Moses this wonderful promise, *'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'* (14). The *'rest'* that God promised Moses was the *'rest'* of accomplishment, of bringing Israel into the promised land (cp. Joshua 1:13). The Lord Jesus has promised to be with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). **God's presence with us is a great encouragement in the face of trouble and trials (Hebrews 13:5–6). His presence will also make us distinct from the world (16).**

When Moses asked God to show him his glory (18), he was asking to see God as he is. However, no mortal man could survive the actual sight of God in all his burning majesty and splendour. Even sinless angels cannot look at the face of God (Isaiah 6:1–3). The Lord told Moses that he would put him in a cleft of the rock while he passed by. He would be allowed to see his back but not his face (20–23). The Lord Jesus Christ came to show us the Father (John 1:18; 14:9) but his glory was veiled from men. The three disciples had a glimpse of that glory at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

The Lord told Moses that he would proclaim his name (that is, his character) before him. He told Moses, *'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion'* (19). Israel did not deserve any compassion from God, but he was gracious to them, giving them favour when they deserved judgment. God is sovereign in bestowing his grace (Romans 9:15–16). We cannot work to obtain it (that would not be grace); it is his free gift (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8–9). Our good news is *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). When did you last rejoice in God's amazing grace for saving you?

*Aaron had not restrained them*

While Moses was on the mountain, God gave him instructions for the great ministry to be given to Aaron as high priest. At that very time Aaron was sinning in failing to stand for truth. Moses was also receiving details for the use of the gold in the furnishings of the tabernacle, but the people had used some of that gold to make an idol.

When Moses came down the mountain with Joshua, they heard the noisy singing and shouting of the people as they worshipped the golden calf. The same people had recently rejoiced in Jehovah with singing and dancing following the miraculous deliverance that he had given them from the pursuing Egyptians (15:20:21). They were now shouting and dancing before a useless idol. They had broken their covenant with Jehovah.

Moses burned with anger on account of their wickedness and he broke the tablets of stone on which God had inscribed the Ten Commandments. He ground the calf to powder and made the people drink the gold dust with water (19–20). That gold was gone forever – unable to be used for God. If our energy and gifts are used for sinful pursuits, they are lost to the work of God.

Aaron made his excuses and shifted the blame to the people (21–23). It was true, the people were guilty, but *Aaron had not restrained them* (25). He had ordered the making of the idol (4); it did not just pop out of the fire ready-made as he seemed to suggest (24). Moses showed by his leadership that the people could be restrained (20, 26–29). Weak Christian leadership has brought chaos to many evangelical churches. **Pray that the Lord will raise up godly men, fearless and bold in their love for God and his truth, men determined never to compromise with the world.**

*Lord, save us from our golden calves  
Our sin with grief we own;  
We would no more be thine by halves,  
But live to thee alone.*

(John Newton)

*Then Moses returned to the LORD*

Moses was firm in his leadership and he was determined to deal quickly with the rebellion of the Israelites against God. He stood in the entrance of the camp and challenged the people, ‘*Whoever is on the LORD’S side, let him come to me!*’ (26). His own tribe, the Levites, rallied to him. Moses ordered them to go throughout the camp and to kill their fellow Israelites. They did this, killing about three thousand men (27–28). You may feel that the punishment meted out to the rebels was harsh, but God had commanded it (26–28), and we must not presume to argue against God (cp. Romans 9:20). There was no evidence of any repentance among the people, except the Levites, who were prepared to stand up and to be counted for the Lord and for Moses, and God blessed them (28–29).

The leadership of God’s people must be strong, but it must also be administered with love. If you were tempted to think that Moses was hard in his attitude to the people, see how he *returned to the LORD* to pray for them. Such was his love for the people that he offered himself as an atonement for them (31–32). He was prepared to be cursed and to die for them by being blotted out of God’s book of life. Moses could not bear the sin of the people. Centuries later the apostle Paul showed a similar willingness to be cursed for the salvation of Israel (Romans 9:1–5; 10:1).

God did not accept Moses’ plea. Those who had sinned against him, would be blotted out of his book, not his servant Moses. He would delay visiting punishment upon them and he told Moses to lead them to the promised land, following his angel (33–35). Moses showed tremendous love for an ungrateful, rebellious people. He was willing to spend and to be spent for them. **How do you react to those who have disappointed or hurt you? Do you pray earnestly for them (Matthew 5:44)?**

*The LORD spoke to Moses ... as a man speaks to his friend*

The Lord told Moses that he would withdraw his presence from the Israelites because of their sin. He promised to send his Angel ahead of the people to protect them but they would lose the blessing of knowing his presence in their midst (1–3). Though the people were unspiritual and rebellious they mourned the loss of God’s holy presence (4). The Lord instructed them to strip off their ornaments, this being a sign of mourning (5–6); similar ornaments had been the occasion of their sin in the making of the golden calf (32:2–4).

Moses pitched his tent outside Israel’s camp and made it a temporary tabernacle where he would meet God. The glory cloud, a symbol of God’s presence, hovered over the tent when Moses went in to pray. God’s presence was seen to be outside the camp. *The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend* (11). Moses had this precious relationship with Almighty God – he was his friend!

The Lord Jesus said, ‘*You are my friends if you do whatever I command you*’ (John 15:14). When we disobey God, we grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30–31). At such times we lose the reality of God’s presence in our lives and we become cold in heart. **The tragic thing with most of us is that we do not mourn the loss of God’s presence because we do not desire him or thirst after him, to know him better.** Does this describe you? Are you backslidden in heart? Oh, return to the Lord now, and without delay

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.*

*Return, O holy Dove! return,  
Sweet messenger of rest!  
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,  
And drove thee from my breast.*

(William Cowper)