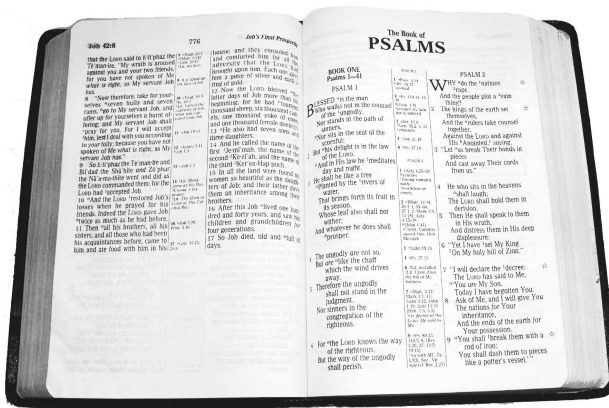


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2021

Exodus chapters 14 to 24

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The LORD fights for them

The Angel of God who had been leading the Israelites, moved behind them to come between them and the pursuing Egyptians. The pillar of cloud from which God led the Hebrews also moved behind them. One side of the cloud brought darkness upon the Egyptians, but the other side gave light to the Israelites (19–20). The Egyptians believed Pharaoh to be the incarnation of the sun-god Ra. The so-called god-man was unable to give light to his army.

When Moses stretched out his hand over the sea as God had commanded him, the Lord sent a strong east wind (21–22; cp. verse 16). The wind which God sent made a pathway through the water and dried out the sea bed enough for the Israelites to cross by foot. When the Egyptians followed in hot pursuit, the Lord troubled them (24). Their chariots became bogged down on the soft bed of the sea and they said, *‘Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them’* (25). They learned too late that God fights for his people and they were destroyed as God brought the waters of the sea crashing down upon them (26–28). *Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and his servant Moses* (31).

Are you feeling discouraged? Remember God’s promises, rejoice in the Lord and take heart! If God is for us, who can be against us? — In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:31,37).

*Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause his own;
The hope that’s built upon his word
Can ne’er be overthrown.*

*Though many foes beset your road
And feeble is your arm,
Your life is hid with Christ in God
Beyond the reach of harm.*

(John Newton)

I will sing to the LORD

The song of Moses is the first song recorded in the Bible. John Currid describes it as ‘a symphony of adoration’ (STUDY COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, volume 1, page 309 – Evangelical Press). Israel had seen the mighty hand of God at work in their deliverance and in the destruction of the Egyptians.

Moses and the Israelites sang:

- Of the victory of God over his enemies (1–12). One puff of God’s wind destroyed the Egyptians (10). Who is this God who fights for us? He is here described as a mighty warrior. *The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name* (3). God is invincible in his majesty and power.
- Of God’s mercy, redemption and guidance (13).
- Of a confidence that the dread of God would seize those nations seeking to obstruct their pilgrimage to the promised land (14–16).
- Of God’s purpose to bring them into the promised land (17).
- Of the everlasting sovereignty of God (18).

This great song of adoration and worship came from Moses, who had complained to the Lord that he was not an eloquent man (4:10). He could not remain silent following this marvellous deliverance of God and he exclaimed, ‘*I will sing to the LORD*’ (1). When God works in the lives of his people, the silent lips burst into praise. God’s victory over the Egyptians foreshadows his final victory over Satan, for the song of Moses and of the Lamb are linked (Revelation 15:1–4). Moses’ sister Miriam led the women in victory dances, saying, ‘*Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously*’ (20–21).

Do you have much greater pleasure in singing to the Lord than in the songs of this world? Do you love the psalms and hymns that we sing? Do you know them and use them in your devotions? **When did you last sing to the LORD with all your heart?** Meditate on the words of Moses in this song and worship God with gladness. *Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?* (11).

I am the LORD who heals you

The Israelites discovered that the pilgrim life was not easy and they soon became discouraged. After travelling three days through the wilderness without finding any fresh supplies of water, they forgot their song. They then arrived at Marah where there was water, but they found that it was too bitter to drink (23–24).

The people did not trust in the Lord who had done such wonderful things before their eyes. They grumbled against Moses who did what every believer should do in a crisis. He cried out to the Lord who showed him a tree which he cast into waters which then became sweet (25). God promised his people that if they obeyed him, he would not bring upon them the plagues which he brought upon the Egyptians. He said, *'I am the LORD who heals you'* (26).

We may have bitter trials or experiences which will be our 'Marah'. A grievous trial arising from bereavement, sorrow, persecution, disappointment, misunderstanding, loneliness or some baffling circumstance may be our 'Marah'. There is a tree where we find healing. Our blessed Saviour died on that tree at Calvary to save us from our sins and to heal the sinful and broken heart. **He makes the bitter sweet for his people. Hallelujah!**

*Bitter, indeed, the waters are
Which in this desert flow;
Though to the eye they promise fair,
They taste of sin and woe.*

*But there's a wonder-working wood,
I've heard believers say,
Can make these bitter waters good,
And take the curse away.*

*The cross on which the Saviour died,
And conquered for his saints;
This is the tree by faith applied,
Which sweetens all complaints.*

(John Newton)

The LORD hears your murmurings

The complaints of the people at Marah (15:24) were followed by a history of discontent against Moses and against God. The people now complain that they will die of hunger in the wilderness and that it would have been better to die at the hand of the Lord in Egypt (3). This was a terrible thing to say. That very hand of God had destroyed the Egyptians and had brought deliverance to Israel (15:6). Notice the times that the words *murmured* and *murmurings* are found in this chapter (verses 2,7,8,9 and 12; ‘*grumbled*’ and ‘*grumbling*’, ESV). This murmuring was evil in the sight of the Lord (Numbers 14:27) and would have been very hurtful to Moses (2–3). A lesser man would have gone back to the peace and solitude of Midian in his old age, rather than put up with such ungrateful moaners.

God graciously promised that he would rain bread from heaven each morning, except on the Sabbath. They were to gather up sufficient bread for each day, but on the sixth day gather up enough for the Sabbath day also. The faithless Israelites would then know that it was the Lord who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. Moreover, they would *see the glory of the LORD* the next morning (4–7). This prophecy was fulfilled when *the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud* (10). Moses also told the people that the Lord would send them meat each evening (8).

Moses warned the people that their murmuring was not against Aaron and himself but against the Lord (8). He warned, ‘*The LORD hears your murmurings*’ (8,12; cp.1 Corinthians 10:10). When we complain, we forget that the Lord is listening to our grumbling. We also forget the priceless blessings that God has so freely bestowed upon us – forgiveness and cleansing from sin, freedom from the dominion of Satan, peace with God and knowing him as our heavenly Father, the privilege of prayer, the presence of God with us, and eternal life. **When we complain, the Christian life becomes drudgery rather than a delight. Away with the moaning!** *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits* (Psalm 103:2).

According to each one's need

The Lord was very gracious in providing his murmuring people with food. He sent the bread (*manna*) in the morning and quails in the evening to provide meat for his people (12–15). He gave specific directions through Moses for the gathering of the manna. They were to gather *according to each one's need* (16). God said that he would not send manna on the Sabbath and he directed that they should gather double the amount of manna needed on the day before.

God gave us the Sabbath at creation (Genesis 2:2–3) and it was to be observed (this was before the Ten Commandments were given). The Lord was showing an ignorant people the importance of the Sabbath in a practical way. The extra manna gathered for the Sabbath did not rot (23–25). Some gathered according to their greed and this angered Moses but they found that by the next day the manna had rotted (20). Others, as perverse as ever, went out to gather manna on the Sabbath, but they found nothing (27).

The miraculous way in which God provided the manna and also withheld it on the Sabbath was intended to make the people acknowledge God (12). He provided for them *according to each one's need* and that provision continued for forty years until they reached the borders of the promised land (16). It is that kind of dependence on God which strengthens our faith and draws us close to the Lord. Jesus taught us to pray, '*Give us this day our daily bread*' (Matthew 6:11). **Our Heavenly Father wants us to depend upon him with childlike trust** (Matthew 6:25–34). He will never fail us; *my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19).

*Though troubles assail and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The Scripture assures us, The Lord will provide.*

(John Newton)

Is the LORD among us or not?

The sorry pattern of complaining continued when there was a shortage of water in the wilderness. The people asked, '*Is the LORD among us or not?*' (7). They had already experienced abundant evidence of God's goodness to them but God granted another miracle (1–7). Moses struck the rock and water gushed out before their eyes. The rock at Horeb speaks of Christ, smitten and wounded for us. Let us not tempt him by lusting after evil or by complaining (1 Corinthians 10:6–12). Moses called the name of the site of the rock *Massah* and *Meribah* which mean 'testing' and 'quarrelling'. The Israelites were never allowed to forget their foolish and sinful behaviour at Massah and Meribah.

One problem was solved at Rephidim, but it was soon followed by another. The Amalekites attacked Israel where they were weak and vulnerable (8; cp. Deuteronomy 25:17–19). Moses told Joshua to assemble some men to fight the attackers and he led the Israelites to a great victory (9–13). Behind that victory was the work of Moses in holding up the rod of God in his hands, his weary arms being supported by Aaron and Hur. Though we are not explicitly told, it is almost certain that Moses was praying. Uplifted hands indicated prayer (Psalm 28:2; 1 Timothy 2:8). Joshua needed the prayers of Moses, who needed the help of Aaron and Hur in his spiritual warfare.

The Lord commanded Moses to record in the book that he would utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven and to repeat this in the hearing of Joshua (14, 16; cp. 1 Samuel 15:33). Moses built an altar to the Lord and called it '*Yahweh Nissi*' meaning, '*The LORD is my banner*' (15). **If spiritual battles are to be won, we must be faithful in prayer, both in private and at the prayer meeting** We will not then ask, '*Is the LORD among us or not?*' but we will be rejoicing in the sure knowledge that he is.

*Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.* (William Cowper)

Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods

We read in the book of Proverbs (25:25), *As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country*. When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, heard of the great exploits that God had done for his people, he came to *the mountain of God* (Mount Sinai – referred to as 'Horeb' in chapter 3:1), bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons (1–6). It is apparent from these verses that they were not with him in the land of Egypt during the plagues or at the time of the Passover. Moses told Jethro of the mighty works of God in bringing judgment upon the Egyptians. He also described the hardship that the Israelites had suffered in their wilderness journey and told *how the LORD had delivered them* (8).

The priest of Midian did not belong to the covenant people of God, but he recognised the surpassing greatness of the Lord (Jehovah). He rejoiced in the Lord's goodness to Israel and said, *'Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods'* (11). The proud gods of the Egyptians had been humbled (Pharaoh was also revered as a god by his people). Jethro then offered sacrifices to the Lord and Aaron and the elders of Israel had a meal with him and with Moses (12).

Had the people of Israel spent more time in proclaiming the mighty acts of God which they had seen, they would have been a more contented people. If we spent more time speaking to each other (and to non-Christians) about the Lord, we would be an encouragement to others; we would also know greater blessing in our lives.

Our country has sunk into much superstition and religious confusion. The people need to know the message of the gospel and *that the LORD is greater than all the gods*. God has called us *out of darkness into his marvellous light* to proclaim his praises (1 Peter 2:9). The Lord says, *Whoever offers praise glorifies me* (Psalm 50:23). When did you last proclaim the praises of God? *Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name* (Hebrews 13:15).

Able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness

Moses spent long days judging the people, seeking to resolve their problems and their disputes (13–16). Jethro was able to see what his son-in-law failed to see – that if he continued doing this, he would break down under the burden of it all. He told Moses, *‘Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself’* (18).

The priest of Midian was a man of spiritual wisdom and discernment and Moses took his advice to share the workload. He would judge the difficult cases, while most of the problems could be resolved by those appointed to assist him (19–23). Moses, for all his greatness was not too proud to learn, and he heeded Jethro’s advice (24–26). We must always be ready and willing to listen to advice and to take correction if we are to grow in the Christian life and be useful in serving the Lord.

Many churches struggle for lack of workers. There are Christians who are sound in the faith and with abilities that they should be using for God, but they are too preoccupied with material things. They could serve, help and encourage those who are wearing themselves out in the work of the Lord. Those who serve the Lord may have to be prepared to persevere and to face disappointment and heartache in his work, but there is much joy and satisfaction in working for the King of kings. There is also an eternal reward.

What kind of men does God need in his service? Jethro had the right answer: *‘Able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness’* (21). **The men God requires to lead his church as elders and to serve as deacons must have more than natural leadership or administrative abilities.** They must be God-fearing men who love the truth of his Word and hate covetousness (cp. Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:1–13). Pray that God will raise up such men in the church today.

You shall be a special treasure to me above all people

In the third month after they left Egypt, the Israelites arrived at the Sinai desert and camped in front of the mountain (1–2). The return of Moses to Mount Sinai was a fulfilment of the promise which God gave him when he met him there at the burning bush (3:12). John Currid writes, ‘Now that Israel has arrived at Mount Sinai, God calls Moses on to the mountain in order to establish a covenant with the Hebrews. A covenant ... is a binding contract between God and man, one that God has initiated and administered. The treaty involves promises on God’s part and obligations on man’s part’ (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 2, page 12).

The Lord told Moses to remind the Israelites of his care for them. He had borne them *on eagles’ wings* and had delivered them from the Egyptians. The eagle is gentle in caring for its young but will fiercely retaliate against any who threaten them (3–4). The Lord is awesome in his power, but so tender in his care for us.

God message to Israel was, *‘If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’* (5–6). Their promise to obey God was short-lived, however (7–8). They should have been a shining light to the nations of the earth but they failed. The end result of repeated rebellion was the crucifixion of the Son of God (cp. Luke 13:34–35).

Peter takes up the words of verses 5 and 6 to remind us that we are a special people (1 Peter 2:9). Christian, just stop and think for a moment! You are God’s *‘special treasure’* purchased at tremendous cost. God loves you so much that he gave his beloved Son to die a dreadful death to save you from your sin. The Lord will never let you go and you are never out of his sight as he lovingly watches over you. **As God’s special treasure we not only have great privileges, but also awesome responsibilities.** We are to be holy people who proclaim the praises of God to a dark and needy world.

Be ready

The lesson that Israel had to learn (and which we must learn) is that we must not be casual in our approach to the worship of God. He may be our heavenly Father, but he is not our ‘chum’. God told Moses that he would come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. They were to *be ready* (11,15) to meet with him. This meeting was so important that they were to wash their clothes as a symbol of cleansing, and also to abstain from the marriage relationship as a sign of separation to God (14–15).

The Lord descended upon Mount Sinai which was covered by a thick cloud. Thunder crashed, lightning flashed and the trumpet blast which summoned the people to the edge of the mountain grew louder. The mountain shook at the awesome presence of God and the people trembled (16–19). God was showing the people that he is holy and that those who break his law are in great peril. He told Moses to warn the people, ‘*Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death*’ (12). This warning was repeated (21). God told Moses to bring Aaron with him up the mountain (24).

We have been brought into the new covenant in which we have access to God the Father through the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 2:18). We do not come to Mount Sinai to worship God, but to Mount Zion, *the city of the living God* (Hebrews 12:22). We do not worship alone. We worship with heavenly Jerusalem, with angels, and with God’s people of past ages who are now glorified (Hebrews 12:18–24). **This does not mean that we are permitted to come to worship God ill-prepared. He wants our best.** We must not be slovenly in heart nor in outward appearance. If we have good clothing, and yet come to worship God shabbily dressed, it may indicate a casual, careless attitude to God. If we come to worship in a tired frame of mind because of avoidable late nights, we do not give God our best. We are God’s ‘*special treasure*’, but we must *serve (or worship) him acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28–29).

The LORD your God, who brought you out of ... bondage

God does not save us and then leave us to do as we please. He demands our total allegiance and our joyful obedience. He has given us his Word to show us how we should live to please him. The first four of the Ten Commandments concern our relationship to God and the remaining six our relationship to other people. They are summed up in the two greatest commandments: *'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'* and *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (Mark 12:29–31). These commandments are binding on everyone and we should memorise them and teach them to our children. **How well do you know the Ten Commandments?** You can hardly keep them if you do not know what they are. Read through this chapter carefully and memorise these commandments as we think about them over the next few days.

The Lord Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17–20). The law brings the knowledge of sin and makes us realise that we fall short of God's holy standards (Romans 3:20,23). The law is vital in preparing the sinner to come to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Salvation is by grace and cannot be earned by law-keeping, but when a person becomes a Christian, the law of God is written in his heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16).

The Lord said to Israel, *'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'* (2). **The Israelites owed it to God to love him and to obey him.** The Lord Jesus has brought us out of a bondage far worse than that of Egypt. We were once enslaved by sin and by Satan and we were released at great cost (John 8:34–36; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; Ephesians 2:1–3; 1 Peter 1:18–19). **We obey the Lord Jesus because we love him** (John 14:15). It is not legalism to obey God's law, it is not bondage to keep his commandments – it is life, liberty and peace.

*You shall have no other gods before me***(Additional reading: Joshua 24:13–28)**

When the Lord Jesus was asked, ‘Which is the great commandment in the law?’ he replied, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:36–37). He emphasised the importance of keeping the first commandment, ‘You shall have no other gods before me’ (3). This does not mean that having additional gods is permitted as long as God is first. John Currid points out that the words ‘before me’ indicate ‘before my face’ or ‘over against me’ (STUDY COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 2, page 36).

Israel solemnly promised that they would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:24), but they repeatedly broke this promise (eg. Judges 2:11–12; Jeremiah 2:11–13). God has made us for his own glory (cp. Romans 11:36; Revelation 4:11), and he expects us to glorify him in our lives (cp. Matthew 5:16). If we keep the first commandment, it will follow that we will want to keep the other nine. We show our love for God by our obedience to him.

We tend to think of ‘other gods’ as pagan deities, idols of wood and stone, but there are other gods which we may honour and for which we live. Paul pointed out that ‘there are many gods and many lords’ (1 Corinthians 8:5). We live in a materialistic society where people will go to any length to accumulate wealth and possessions. Jesus said, ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’ (‘riches’ – Matthew 6:24). **We may find ourselves building our lives around ‘gods’ of materialism and pleasure-seeking without realising just how much we are sinning.** Let us be like Joshua who said, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ (Joshua 24:15).

*The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne
And worship only thee.* (William Cowper)

*You shall not make for yourself any carved image***(Additional reading: Psalm 115:1–11)**

The second commandment ‘*You shall not make for yourself any carved image*’, forbids the making and the worship of images. Pagan worshippers in ancient times believed that the god or spirit represented by an image was brought nearer to them as they bowed down and performed their ritual before it. Israel soon fell into idolatry (cp. 32:1–8). God is scathing in his condemnation of idol worship (Psalm 115:1–8 and Isaiah 44:9–20). Idols are useless blocks of wood or stone which have speechless mouths, sightless eyes, deaf ears, unsmelling noses and unfeeling hands. The Lord is a jealous God who will not share his glory with images (Isaiah 40:18–20; Romans 1:21–23). He will surely punish idolaters (5).

Some churches stand condemned by this commandment because of their veneration of statues, crucifixes, and the wafer in the Mass (which they believe is transformed into the actual body of Christ). It is interesting to note that Roman Catholic catechisms miss out the second commandment and split the tenth commandment into two to make up the number. **God requires us to worship him with simplicity, and without man-made ritual or so-called ‘aids to worship’.** ‘*God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*’ (John 4:24).

A more subtle form of idolatry has entered many churches in the past few decades. It is the technique of ‘visualising’ where you concentrate your mind, for example, on Jesus, just as you imagine him to be. Those who practise such techniques in prayer and so-called ‘inner healing’ claim that they can actually touch and be held by the visualised image of Jesus. These practices violate the principles laid down in the second commandment and are derived from occult practices. Thousands of professing Christians have been enticed into such practices. Let us beware! *Keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21).

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain

(Additional reading: Colossians 3:8–9; 4:6)

The third commandment teaches us that we must always be careful to reverence the name of God which reveals his holy character (cp. 3:13–15). God’s name may be taken in vain through word, behaviour or worship:

- Many people use the name of God when they swear or curse. Such blasphemy violates this commandment and will not go unpunished. It is permissible to use God’s name to confirm an oath (Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 26:63–64; 2 Corinthians 1:23; 11:31; Galatians 1:20). If we are not being truthful when we make such oaths, we take God’s name in vain (Leviticus 19:12; Isaiah 48:1).
- Christians are called by the name of the Lord. If we behave in an unchristian manner, we blaspheme his name and thus we break the third commandment (Luke 6:46; cp. Amos 2:6–7; 1 Timothy 6:1).
- **It is all too easy to take God’s name in vain when we worship or when we pray. We do this if we use his name thoughtlessly or lightly.** Some people keep repeating, ‘Hallelujah’ (which means ‘Praise Jehovah’) or ‘Jesus! Jesus!’ when they pray. They give little thought to what they are saying. This is not a mark of being spiritual but of being immature. When we use God’s name in speech or song, let us think before we open our mouths. Let us reverence his holy name and be thoughtful in our worship.

We must not sing non-religious songs which use God’s name in a blasphemous manner or the word, ‘Hallelujah’. Does this sound too restrictive? Remember the third commandment and take it seriously. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy***(Additional reading: Isaiah 58:13–14)**

The fourth commandment is the longest of all of the ten (8–11). Some Christians believe that observing Sunday as a Christian Sabbath is legalism. Is it any more legalistic than keeping the first three commandments? There has been much controversy about the commandment to keep the Sabbath. Some believe that Christians are not bound by it, but the Lord Jesus never once said that he had done away with the Sabbath principle. He stated that *the Sabbath was made for man* (Mark 2:27) and not just for the Jew. It was given for man's good. God blessed and sanctified (set apart) the seventh day at creation (11; Genesis 2:3). He expected the people to keep the Sabbath before he gave the law at Sinai (16:23–29).

The Sabbath prevented the exploitation of servants and even working animals were to have their day of rest (10)! The scribes and Pharisees later imposed many man-made rules for Sabbath observance. They were in constant conflict with the Lord Jesus on this issue (eg. Mark 2:23 to 3:4). The early church kept the first day of the week as the Sabbath when they met for worship and called it '*the Lord's Day*' (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Rev. 1:10).

This commandment also legislated for six days of work each week. Many of us are not required to work six days out of seven and we have generally become very leisure orientated. God's work suffers because many Christians spend increasing time and money on leisure pursuits and less on supporting the interests of God's kingdom. We enjoy more free time than believers of earlier ages. Are we using it wisely for the Lord?

Let us use the Lord's Day to give ourselves to worship, praise, meditation and works of mercy? Look at the promise of Isaiah 58:13–14. Is the Lord's Day special to you? *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

*Honour your father and your mother***(Additional reading: Ephesians 6:1–4)**

The fifth commandment teaches that we must honour our parents (12). The breakdown of family life in so much of our society and the lack of parental training and discipline of children has brought chaotic and tragic consequences. Thousands of young people are homeless and know little stability. Children are commanded, ‘*Obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord*’ (Colossians 3:20). Parents must bring up their children *in the training and admonition of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4; cp. Proverbs 1:8–9; 6:20–22). Fathers must seek to understand their children and not provoke them by making unreasonable demands upon them (Colossians 3:21).

How should a Christian young person behave when ungodly parents make demands which would cause him to disobey God? Obviously, he must place obedience to God first, but never use such a principle for dishonouring parents (cp. Matthew 15:3–6). A Christian must be sensitive to the fears of non-Christian parents who are lovingly concerned for him and may be fearful that he is becoming ‘a religious fanatic’. He should show that he is now more thoughtful and ready to help in the home than ever he was before he came to Christ. Practical Christianity will do much to convince parents that their child is far better for becoming a Christian. God will honour such a testimony.

Though adults are under no obligation to obey their parents and have their own lives to lead, they must continue to honour them. Joseph became great in Egypt, but he still bowed down in honour of his aged father (Genesis 48:12). King Solomon honoured his mother (1 Kings 2:19). The sinless Son of God obeyed his earthly parents and was practically concerned for his mother even as he hung on the cross (Luke 2:51; John 19:25–27). We are to care for the needs of our parents as far as we are able (1 Timothy 5:16). *Honour your father and your mother* (16). There is a promise with this commandment (cp. Ephesians 6:2–3).

How are you honouring your parents?

*You shall not murder***Additional reading: 1 John 3:10–15)**

Human life is sacred because man is made in the image of God who commands ‘*You shall not murder*’ (13). Cain, the first murderer, asked God, ‘*Am I my brother’s keeper?*’ (Genesis 4:9). The sixth commandment teaches us that we are our brother’s keeper. Any person daring to take another’s life deserves to die. The death penalty is the only adequate punishment for murder (Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:4). Accidental killing (manslaughter) did not attract the death penalty but if deliberate carelessness caused loss of life, the crime was considered as murder (cp. 21:28–29). This principle applied today would make killing through drunken or dangerous driving not manslaughter but murder. We are our brother’s keeper.

The appalling effects of the teaching of evolution and secularism are only too apparent. If man is only an advanced animal, as some people would have us believe, his dignity is destroyed. Life is considered a cheap thing by so many – witness the increase in violence and murder in society and the practice of abortion. Those who claim that the death penalty for murder is a barbaric practice are often the very ones who support the killing of the unborn child through abortion. We live in a fallen world with topsy-turvy values.

The Lord Jesus took this commandment to a far deeper level. He taught that anger against a brother without cause will be in the same category as murder in the day of judgment (Matthew 5:22). Moreover, if we hate our brother, we are guilty of murder in our hearts (1 John 3:15; cp. Matthew 15:19). **We cannot be right with God if we hate fellow-Christians. We must not only have an absence of hatred, but also a practical love for other believers** (1 John 3:14–18; 4:20 to 5:1). Let us think seriously about the implications of this commandment. Are you harbouring hateful thoughts towards anyone, believer or unbeliever? — *You shall not murder.*

*You shall not commit adultery***(Additional reading: 1 Corinthians 6:13–20)**

The seventh commandment was given to preserve the sanctity of marriage. A man and a woman are made *'one flesh'* in marriage and are joined together by God (Matthew 19:3–6). Adultery violates marriage and together with other forms of sexual sin it will be punished by the Judge of all the earth (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). Sexual immorality was rife in apostolic times and there are repeated warnings against adultery in the New Testament (eg. 1 Corinthians 10:8; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

We have seen an explosion of immorality in recent years. Propaganda put out on television, in cinemas and in newspapers would have us believe that extra-marital affairs are quite in order. **Christians must be different!** Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and we must honour God (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Marriage vows are made before God and must be kept. The influence of the world has taken its toll in the church. The sin of adultery has blighted the life of many a Christian and destroyed many Christian marriages. David's experience is a warning to us all (2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:15). We must not be influenced by this world's attitudes (Romans 12:1–2).

Let us be careful in our choice of reading matter and of the things we watch on television and the internet. Let us beware of foolish, flippant talk that panders to unholy desires. **Adultery begins in the heart, in the thoughts** (Matthew 5:27–28). Are you guilty of entertaining unholy fantasies in your heart? Stop! Repent and seek God's forgiveness, and sin no more (cp. John 8:11). Take Philippians 4:8 seriously and hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). *You shall not commit adultery.*

*You shall not steal***(Additional reading: Malachi 3:8–10)**

God commands, '*You shall not steal*' (15). The thief has no right to steal what belongs to others. The Bible teaches that we are entitled to have personal possessions provided that they have been lawfully gained by our own work, by gift or by inheritance. We must never allow wealth (mammon) to become a god in our lives, however; it is far better to be poor than to be a slave to material things (cp. Matthew 6:24; 19:21–22). Christian standards are very different from those of the world. The words of C.H. Spurgeon are so true, 'If faith does not make a man honest, it is not an honest faith' (quoted in *THE COMPLETE GATHERED GOLD*, page 315, by John Blanchard, published by Evangelical Press).

Eve was guilty of the sin of stealing when she took the forbidden fruit in Eden (Genesis 3:6). The first recorded sin after Israel entered the promised land was that of theft (Joshua 7:21). Judas Iscariot was a thief (John 12:6) and those crucified with the Lord Jesus were robbers (Matthew 27:38,44). Kidnapping is the worst kind of theft; it deprives a person of their freedom. In Israel it attracted the death penalty (21:16). Hostage-taking is a heinous crime in the sight of God.

Stealing was rife in New Testament times just as it is today. Paul wrote, '*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*' (Ephesians 4:28). We may shun the more obvious forms of theft, but do we steal our employer's time by wasting hours at work? Do we use his phone, his stationery or his computer for our own personal use and without his permission? **Perhaps for Christians, the most common form of theft is that described in the book of Malachi (3:8–10) – the sin of robbing God by withholding tithes and offerings.** Dare we rob God of our money or time? *You shall not steal.*

*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour***(Additional reading: James 3:1–12)**

God is absolutely just and he expects us to be fair and just. The ninth commandment is concerned to uphold truth and to prevent injustice. *'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.'* Witnesses in a court of law must speak the truth. False witnesses were used to pervert justice when Naboth was wickedly condemned (1 Kings 21:1–16), and also against the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:57–61). *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are his delight* (Proverbs 12:22).

The tongue is a part of the body which is very difficult to keep under control. *It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison* (James 3:8). We may shun outright lies, but how we need to beware of gossip. Half-truths and rumour have caused great damage in the church of God (gossip tends to exaggerate 'the facts' as they are passed on). **We must not spread gossip nor even listen to it.** Why do so many who profess the name of Christ enjoy gossip? Is it that it makes us feel so much better than our weaker brother or sister? The Lord Jesus warned that we will be judged by our words (Matthew 12:36–37). If we have anything to say about another, we should first ask ourselves, 'Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it helpful? Is it kind?' *Let all bitterness ... and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another* (Ephesians 4:31–32).

*If you your lips
Would keep from slips,
Of five things please beware —
Of whom you speak,
To whom you speak,
And when, and why, and where!*

(Matthew Mercer)

Prayer: *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.* (Psalm 141:3).

*You shall not covet***(Additional reading:– 1 Timothy 6:6–11)**

The tenth commandment, '*You shall not covet*' is concerned with the motives and attitudes within our own hearts. Covetousness (or wrong and selfish desire) lies behind many of the sins forbidden in the commandments. Achan coveted silver, gold and a beautiful garment, and became a thief (Joshua 7:21). David coveted another man's wife and became an adulterer and a murderer (2 Samuel 11:1–4,15–17; 12:9). Absalom coveted his father's throne and thus dishonoured him, a sin that led to his rebellion and death (2 Samuel 15:1–10; 18:15). There are many warnings in Scripture against covetousness which is described as '*idolatry*' (Colossians 3:5). This idolatry causes us to violate the first commandment.

Persuasive advertisements in magazines and on television pressurise us to covet material things. Loans are offered at a price so that we can indulge our lust for material things. Covetousness brings discontent and restlessness into our lives because material things and pleasures cannot give lasting satisfaction.

Paul warned that a covetous man must not be appointed as an elder or a deacon (1 Timothy 3:3,8). The desire for riches has ensnared and ruined many a believer (1 Timothy 6:9–10). Beware of the false teachers of the so-called 'prosperity' or 'health and wealth' gospel. They promise that if you give generously to God (to their organisation), God, being no man's debtor, will reward you tenfold or more. Such evil people, who appear to be evangelical, deliberately encourage covetousness. They become rich at the expense of those whom they deceive.

Let us search our hearts and repent of any lurking covetous spirit within us. *Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have* (Hebrews 13:5) *because godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6).

That his fear may be before you

Mount Sinai was an awesome sight when God spoke to Moses and the Israelites. When the people witnessed the thundering, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the smoke, they trembled and stood at a distance from the mountain (18). Why were the people afraid? They were now aware of the awesome power and holiness of God and of their own sinfulness and guilt before him. They were so filled with fear that they said to Moses, *'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us lest we die'* (19).

Those who do not know God or who rebel against him have good reason to fear him. Moses said to the people, *'Do not fear, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, so that you may not sin'* (20). There is a different kind of fear, however. There is a godly fear that worships the Lord with adoration, with awe and love. The fear of God will also keep us from sinning against him.

The fear of God also has an effect on the way we worship him. Our worship must be simple. Israel was not to use images or statues as aids to worship. Their animal sacrifices were to be offered on altars built up from the earth or made with stones that were uncut. There were to be no steps leading up to the altar lest the priest's nakedness be exposed (22–26). There was modesty in their approach to God and we too must look for simplicity in worship without the trappings of altars and decorative splendour in our meeting places. **The Lord is majestic and awesome in his power. Let us worship him with simplicity, awe and wonder.**

*O how I fear thee, living God,
With deepest tenderest fears,
And worship thee with trembling hope
And penitential tears!*

*Yet I may love thee, too, O Lord,
Almighty as thou art,
For thou hast stooped to ask of me
The love of my poor heart.*

(F.W. Faber)

I love my master ... I will not go out free

The Lord gave Moses a number of laws (20:22 to 23:33) which with the Ten Commandments were committed to writing and called *'the Book of the Covenant'* (24:4,7). The laws in chapter 21 uphold the basic rights of each individual. Though there was slavery, a slave had the right to humane treatment, something unknown in the ancient world.

When an Israelite fell into debt which he was unable to repay, he could sell himself into slavery to repay that debt. He was freed from his slavery after serving six years (2) and the rights of female slaves were particularly safeguarded (7–11). In New Testament times Christian slave-owners had to treat their slaves well (Ephesians 6:9). It was through the efforts of Christians such as William Wilberforce that slavery was abolished in Britain and its colonies.

Can you imagine a slave loving his master and renouncing his right to emancipation after his six years' service? Such a relationship was happy indeed. The slave would consider himself better off by remaining with his master when all the needs of his family would be met. Such a slave would say, *'I love my master ... I will not go out free'* (5). His ear was pierced and he served his master for the rest of his life (6). The apostle Paul often referred to himself as *'a servant'* (Greek *'doulos'* = 'a slave') *of Jesus Christ'* (eg. Romans 1:1). **The Lord Jesus took the form of a slave ('doulos' - Philippians 2:7) and died in order to save us. Do you really love him and deny yourself to follow him?** Can you say and really mean the words, *'I love my Master ... I will not go out free'*?

*I love, I love my Master,
I will not go out free,
For he is my Redeemer;
He paid the price for me,
I would not leave his service,
It is so sweet and blest;
And in the weariest moments
He gives the truest rest.*

(F.R. Havergal)

Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth

These verses contain guidelines for the judges of Israel in the administration of justice. Verse 12 deals with the punishment to be applied to those who violate the sixth commandment, ‘*You shall not murder*’ (20:13). Human life is sacred and premeditated murder brought the death penalty, but not accidental killing (12–14). Children who were guilty of violence to their parents, or of cursing them, and kidnappers were also to be executed (15–17). Slaves who suffered injury from cruel masters were to be compensated with their freedom (26–27). God also gave laws concerning the control of animals (28–36).

The *life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth* sanction (23–25) is not as harsh as some would make it appear. Punishment was to be fair and appropriate to the crime but not to be excessive. In any well-governed society justice must be seen to be done. It is a fact that this is not always so today. In many cases the punishment of violent thugs and evildoers hardly matches the enormity of the crimes that they commit. The criminal must never be given the notion that crime pays – he must pay for his crime. The Lord Jesus taught that we must not seek for personal revenge however (Matthew 5:38–41; cp. Romans 12:19–20). Evildoers must be punished through the judicial system (Romans 13:1–5). We must pray for those who wrong us and do good to them (Matthew 5:43–44). This is not easy but Christ demands it.

Killer animals were to be destroyed and there were severe penalties for those who refused to heed warnings concerning their dangerous animals (28–32). The Bible teaches us that we are responsible for our behaviour. If we are careless or thoughtless and others suffer as a result, we must pay compensation (33–36). **It is not enough to say, ‘I just didn’t think.’ The Christian must be thoughtful and considerate at all times (Philippians 2:4).** Attitudes and actions speak louder than words. Do you have a good testimony in this respect? Are you thoughtful and considerate?

Restitution

The eighth commandment teaches respect for another person's property. Theft is forbidden! Our reading today is concerned with compensation for the victims of theft or carelessness. Notice the number of times that the word '*restitution*' is used. The victims of crime often get a raw deal today but God is concerned that they be adequately compensated. If an ox were stolen in Israel, the victim received fivefold compensation because it was a working animal used in the gaining of a livelihood. There was a fourfold compensation in the case of a sheep (1). If the animal were recovered unharmed, the thief still had to repay double to his victim (4). There was also double compensation for ordinary theft, the thief losing the exact amount that he had sought to gain (7).

A man has every right to defend his property from thieves (2). Criminals who had disposed of their ill-gotten gains could not get away without paying compensation by pleading poverty. They were sold into a period of slavery so that their victims could be compensated (3; cp. Matthew 18:23–25). Arsonists also had to pay restitution for the damage caused by their fire-raising (6). Finders were not keepers when another could prove the property to be his (9).

When we come to Christ, it is not enough to rejoice in his forgiveness. If we have stolen from anyone before our conversion, we must pay compensation to the victims of our theft, however painful and embarrassing that may be (cp. Luke 19:8). Not only is this the right thing to do, but it will also provide an opportunity for testimony to the saving power of Christ.

We can never compensate God for the wrong that we have done to him through our sin. He gave his beloved Son to be punished in our place, to pay our debt (1 Peter 1:18–19; 3:18). Let us think about the wonderful love of God and give him our grateful and joyful thanks. He is worthy of our wholehearted devotion and service.

I will hear, for I am gracious

The verb translated ‘entices’ (16) indicates that the woman in question is a willing partner and not the victim of rape. John Currid comments, ‘We live in an age when sex before marriage is not only commonplace, but appears to be the norm. God is not pleased with such activity. He is not honoured by it. The message of abstention must be proclaimed to a world that is sleeping the sleep of death’ (STUDY COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 2, page 99).

The use of the death penalty in Israel for witchcraft (18), perverted sexual acts (19) or idolatry (20) may appear to be harsh. We are not wiser than God. Who are we to quarrel with God who hates the occult (cp. Deuteronomy 18:9–14) and sexual perversion (Romans 1:26–32)? The increase of such vile practices in today’s society has had terrible consequences. The gospel is the only answer to the mess in which we find ourselves. The blood of Jesus can cleanse the vilest sinner.

The Lord gave Moses laws to ensure a just, well-ordered and stable society. He is concerned for those among us who are vulnerable, especially the foreigner, widows, orphans and the poor (21–25). The legislation for interest-free loans for Israel’s poor was a merciful provision (25). Christians must show a practical concern for the poor and for those who are vulnerable, especially for believers in such a situation (cp. Acts 4:35; 6:1; 2 Corinthians 9:1–15).

The grace of God is evident in the laws he gave for Israel. If a person who had been wronged cried out to God, he promises, *‘I will hear, for I am gracious’* (27). David wrote some of his psalms after he had been oppressed by the wicked (eg. Psalms 3, 7, 55). He often began his prayers in a state of distress and ended them with praise to God. When we pour out our hearts to God, it makes all the difference to the way we view adverse circumstances. **Have you been wronged or mistreated? Have you prayed about it? Have you committed your cause to God (cp. 1 Peter 4:19)? The Lord will hear you, for he is gracious.**

In all that I have said to you, be circumspect

The Lord was concerned that justice be administered with integrity in Israel (1–9). Spreading false reports violates the ninth commandment (1,7). We must not follow the crowd in evil-doing but have the courage to make a stand for the Lord and for righteousness (2). The crowd is not always right. Justice must be without partiality (3,6). Bribery and oppression are forbidden (8,9).

The Israelite was to show love to his enemy. If he found an animal belonging to an enemy which had gone astray or fallen, he was to return the animal to him (4–5). We must show compassion to those who are our enemies (Proverbs 25:21). The Lord Jesus said, *‘Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you’* (Matthew 5:44).

The land was to enjoy a Sabbath rest every seven years (10–11). This rest saved the soil from exhaustion (a principle that has been neglected in some countries with adverse consequences). The land was not to be cultivated and any crops happening to grow on it during that year were to be left for the poor to gather (cp. Leviticus 25:1–7). The Sabbath day was a merciful provision for the servant and working animal (12–13). **We live in days of increasing stress when nervous breakdowns are common. We are the losers for neglecting our Sabbath rest.**

Three national feasts were to be observed by Israel (14–19) – Passover (or Unleavened Bread), Pentecost (Harvest), and Tabernacles (Ingathering). The Lord said to his people (13), *‘In all that I have said to you, be circumspect (watchful).’* This instruction is given in the context of not mentioning the names of other gods. This does not mean that we should not speak of them to warn against the false religions associated with them. We must be on our guard never to give the impression that we are speaking favourably or giving credence to false deities. Do we take God’s Word to heart and are we on our guard so that we do not fall into disobedience?

Little by little

God promised to send his Angel ahead of his people to protect them and to lead them to the promised land (20,23). ‘*The Angel of the LORD*’ is frequently identified with God (cp. 3:2,4; Judges 6:22) and may well refer to the Lord Jesus Christ appearing to men before he came to earth at Bethlehem. God gave his people wonderful promises, but they were conditional; they were for those who obeyed him and served him (22,25). The idolatrous people of Canaan sought to appease their gods by sacrifices and other ritual in order to obtain fertility for their women and for prosperity. God promised far more than this to his people so long as they shunned false gods and served him alone (24–26). The expression ‘*I will fulfil the number of your days*’ is a promise that God will give a fulfilled and contented life.

Many people accuse God of injustice because he drove the heathen out of Canaan to make way for his people (23–24, 28–30). These nations were under God’s judgment because of their vile practices (Leviticus 18:25; Deuteronomy 9:4–5). Israel was the instrument of divine judgment. We must never presume to dispute with God about his actions (Romans 9:18–21). He is far, far wiser than the wisest human and he is not accountable to anyone.

The Lord promised to drive out the heathen *little by little* (29–30). He was sensitive to the Israelites’ limited capacity to take full advantage of a quick and complete victory. There is a lesson for us here. We are often impatient for greater success in our work for the Lord, but would we be able to cope with a huge influx of new Christians coming into our churches? God knows our limitations. **Steady, unspectacular growth is far better than the quick burst which is often very shallow and fails to last. The same principle applies in the Christian life. We come to spiritual maturity through growth in grace rather than by sensational experiences (2 Peter 3:18).** Can you trace any spiritual growth in your own life in recent months, even though it be *little by little*?

The Book of the covenant ... The blood of the covenant

The Lord called Moses to worship him on Mount Sinai together with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons, Leviticus 10:1–2), and seventy of Israel's elders (1). We are told that *they saw the God of Israel* (9–10). No mortal man can see God and live (33:20; cp. 1 Timothy 6:16). They had a glimpse of the glory and the beauty of God. They saw under his feet a beautiful sapphire-paved footstool, awesome in its beauty (cp. Ezekiel 1:26; Revelation 4:6).

God made a covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more people, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. The covenant brought great responsibilities as well as great privileges to the people of God. The Ten Commandments and the laws recorded in chapters 21 to 23 were written in *the Book of the Covenant* (4,7). The solemn promises made by the people that they would obey God's words (3,7) were soon to be broken (cp. 32:1–6).

The blood of the covenant (8) was vital to the people of the covenant. It was through blood sacrifice that atonement was made for sin (Leviticus 17:11). *Without shedding of blood there is no remission* (or 'forgiveness of sin' – Hebrews 9:22). The covenant which God made with Israel is known as the old covenant. The Lord Jesus came to give us the new covenant which is a better covenant. **The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:6–15).**

What are the marks of true religion?

- The teaching that only the blood of Christ can atone for sin. He alone is the way to God the Father (John 14:6). When he instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus took the cup of wine as a symbol of his blood shed to save sinners. He said, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you'* (Luke 22:20).
- Covenant people are also people of the Book (the Bible). We must know the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15–16; 1 Peter 2:2) and obey them (John 14:15).

The sight of the glory of the LORD

We saw yesterday that a religion which denies the necessity of the blood of Christ for the pardon of sin, or which denies the supreme authority of Scripture and the need to submit to God's Word is false.

The Lord called Moses to go up the mountain, saying, *'I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them'* (12). When Moses ascended the mountain he was accompanied by Joshua (13). Aaron and Hur were delegated to judge the people in his absence (14).

Moses went up into Sinai which was covered by the glory of the Lord. On the seventh day God called to Moses out of the cloud. *The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel* (17). Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights (18; 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9,11,18; 10:10).

The sight of the glory of the LORD is awesome, majestic and beautiful. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God (Isaiah 6:1–5; cp. John 12:41; Hebrews 1:3,8) and he was overwhelmed by the majesty and dazzling splendour of the exalted God. When the Lord Jesus comes again in power and majesty, we will admire him and adore him (2 Thessalonians 1:10). We will see his face in heaven (Revelation 22:4). We will see the scars of the crown of thorns that tore his lovely brow. We will be reminded of his wondrous love and grace and the cost of our salvation. We will worship and adore him who loved us and gave himself for us. **Will you be there?**

*How wonderful, how beautiful,
The sight of thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power
And awesome purity!*

(F.W. Faber)