

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS – PART NINE

The old covenant was based around an old teaching aid, the earthly tabernacle built by Moses. It had three main parts to it, the outer court in which blood sacrifices were offered daily for the sin of the people, and where there was a laver for the priest to wash in before entering the Holy Place, which in turn contained the showbread, the candlestick and the altar of incense. Beyond the curtain was the Holy of Holies containing the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant, above which was the presence of God.

The New Testament identifies the tabernacle as a whole as first the body of Jesus,(Jn.2:21) and then the bodies of all believers.(I Cor.3:16; 6:19; II Cor.5:1). Like the tabernacle we have three parts,(I Thess:5:23) spirit, soul and body. Our spirit is the place in which the Holy Spirit wants to turn on the light of His presence.(Prov.20:27) The soul is where each unique individual has the opportunity to magnify God in his character.(Luke 1:46) The body is where the evidence of this is seen in our behaviour in the world.(Jn.14:7-9)

When we become Christians, Jesus re-enters the human spirit as His Holy Spirit, made possible by His sacrifice on the cross. He will then speak to us inwardly, based on His word which He will never contradict. The Bible is taught to us in two ways, through teachers, represented by Aaron's rod which budded,(Num.17:8) and by the manna,(Exod.16) which reminds us of God's plan to feed each of us by teaching us Himself every day. In our souls, represented by the Holy Place, we have the daily privilege of being able to speak with God about the most intimate things of our lives, pictured by the altar of incense.(Rev.8:3,4) We become the 'light of the world',(Matt.5:14) illustrated by the candlestick,(Rev.1:12-20) and begin through Bible study to prepare spiritual food we can teach to the world.(Jn.6:34,35)

In the Old Testament on only one special day in the year, the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of a bull for his own sin and the sin of the people. For the rest of the people there was still no way into the presence of God. They had to wait for a better way.(9:1-10)

The better way was Jesus Christ, the better High Priest, who entered the better tabernacle in heaven with a far better sacrifice, His own blood shed to cleanse our sin, not just on the outside and for the moment, but where the problem starts, in our hearts, and once and for all. By this means He offers us a better covenant which provides for the removal of all the problems made evident by the old covenant. If we accept we receive a better inheritance, not just the land of Canaan for a lifetime, but heaven for eternity.(9:11-16)

The new covenant like the old one is similar to a last will and testament. It became effective on death. Nothing it provided could begin until blood had been shed. In the Old Testament when the tabernacle was set up everything and everyone had to be sprinkled with the blood of animals offered in sacrifice. The promises of the New Testament could only begin with the death of Jesus whose blood for us obtained lasting

forgiveness. God cannot truly bless us until He has first forgiven us. In the same way every fulfilling human relationship, whether in the family, in marriage or in friendship, must be based upon forgiveness. Only God working through us can enable us to forgive. The Lord reminded us in His special prayer,(Matt.6:11,12) that the request 'give us this day our daily bread.' needed immediately to be accompanied by 'forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.'(9:17-22)

Just as the tabernacle built in the wilderness needed to be sprinkled in every part with the blood of animal sacrifices, so the heavenly original needed to be bathed in forgiveness by the blood of Christ. As a better High Priest He offered Himself, as a sacrifice which would have effect in heaven and would allow our relationship with God to begin. But again, even better, whereas the earthly sacrifices were made over and over again, His sacrifice was so much better, because it was once and for all, never needing to be repeated. We will die physically just once and will face judgement, not in this life, but after death. Jesus died once to give us full and lasting forgiveness which will never be withdrawn. Chapter 10 tells us the exciting news of how a better High Priest gives us a better hope and a better judgement beyond death when He returns.(9:23-28)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Draw a simple diagram of the tabernacle showing its three parts and what was in each part. What clues can we find in the Bible as to the symbolic meaning of each item in the tabernacle? Compare this diagram with a plan of the three parts of man, spirit, soul and body. When you have more time for study, go back to Exodus 25-28 and 36-39 where the tabernacle plan was given and carried out to see how it fills out your understanding with more detail. How does all this help us to grasp the better covenant of the Christian gospel?(verses 1-5)
2. What did the Old Testament priests and the high priest do, and why? How was what Jesus did so much better? How does this greatly improve our situation as New Testament priests? Why should we not want to go back to the old system? What damage do we do to those we seek to lead if we try to go back?(verses 6-14)
3. How is a covenant with God similar to a will of someone who has died? Why then is the death of Jesus Christ absolutely vital to the whole Christian message? What was done with the blood of the sacrifices in the Old Testament? How does this idea apply to our relationship with God today? How does it also affect our relationship with those around us on earth?(verses 15-23)
4. When are men judged? How does this help to explain adversity on earth? If we have faith in Christ how will this affect future judgement for us?(Jn.5:24) What can we be confident about in relation to Christ's return? What in the light of this can we say to people who fear their sin has caused them to lose their salvation?(verses 24-28)