

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

The secret of enjoying all that Jesus Christ came to be in our lives as the Son of God and the Son of Man is faithfulness. Jesus was faithful to His Father as the Son. Moses had been faithful as a servant. The Israelites, after the marvellous experience of being redeemed out of Egypt, were unfaithful during the long fruitless years of wandering in the wilderness, grumbling, rebelling, doubting and doing their own thing. They had been saved from slavery but they were not enjoying all that God had promised them in the land of Canaan. They were not 'partaking', sharing the benefits of being God's children and Jesus' brothers and sisters. We too can be saved but struggling in our own strength. What then do we have to do to get out of the wilderness?

Chapter three describes unfaithfulness but hints at the alternative which the writer calls 'entering His rest'. Chapter four now goes on to explain this exciting prospect more fully. It is not necessary to 'wander in the wilderness' of an unfulfilling Christian life. The answer is not faith as some people might suppose but faith united with the word of God. We can believe wrong information and be disappointed. We can believe with no information and be disillusioned. 'Rest' is hearing the good news throughout the Bible and relaxing, with a huge sigh or relief, in its truth. The Israelites heard from God through Moses of the wonderful land to which He was taking them but they did not rest in that truth. Instead they looked at their problems, looked back on their past and looked only to themselves. In Numbers 13 when the twelve spies returned from their reconnaissance of Canaan with not only a description of a fertile, fruitful land but solid evidence of what they had seen, they also gave two opposing messages. Ten spies said the enemy were too big and it would not work. Two only said God was bigger so they could enter confidently if only they trusted Him. Sadly they believed the ten. Apart from the two faithful spies, the rest of that generation did not get out of the wilderness and into Canaan.(4:1-3)

The first example of 'rest' in the Bible is in the second chapter of Genesis when on the seventh day, after six busy days of creation, God rested. He did not take a day off because the universe depends on His power to hold it together,(Col.1:17) but He saw and enjoyed His perfect creation as a whole. He wanted man to do the same, to see His perfect, complete work as a whole and relax.(Exod.20:11) If God could do such a good job of creating the universe surely He can handle my problems! Everything God said at creation He did. Everything He did was for us to enjoy. Everything He made was of the highest quality. Nothing has changed.(4:4)

Resting in Christ's perfect work is the opposite of hardening our hearts against Him. Joshua and Caleb, alone of the adult generation who came out of Egypt, entered the land of Canaan and so rested. Some people have supposed that crossing the river Jordan and entering Canaan pictures death and going to heaven, but the book of Joshua contradicts that. There were huge problems to be overcome like the River Jordan,(Josh.3) and the walls of Jericho.(Josh.6) They fought battle after battle against one enemy after another.(Josh.8-11) They were not sitting back in ease and doing nothing. Life in

Canaan was tough and constantly challenging. They were far busier than in the wilderness because they had crops to plant and homes to build and look after, but throughout it all they were resting in God's amazing promises and mighty power. They made mistakes at times and had to seek forgiveness and begin again.(Josh.7,9) This was not heaven. The seventh day was a day of rest to teach them a principle, but Joshua did not just fight battles on Saturdays! Resting in Canaan was for every day of the week. The Sabbath for us is not confined to one day a week, but is an attitude for every day, which is presumably why the New Testament does not specify one special day of rest.(4:5-11)

Remember that faith does not stand alone but is a response to the word of God, compared here to a sharp sword.(Eph.6:17) Unlike the words of men in rebuke which can just bounce off us if we do not want to listen, God's word cuts right into our innermost being and shows us how completely God knows our deepest thoughts and hidden motives. It shows the difference between soul, the personality which even animals have, and spirit, unique to man as the place where God can live.(Prov.20:27) People only truly change inside when God's word gets into them and they 'rest'.(4:12,13)

In the last few verses of this chapter the writer returns to the theme of Jesus as the High Priest, a topic on which he will have much more to say right through to chapter 10. Who He is and what He has done is the basis of our 'rest', our faith. The word gets right through to our hearts as Jesus, our High Priest, got right through to the Father in heaven. As we were told in 2:18, as a man He was tempted, but alone in history He did not sin, so He can represent us in heaven and access the grace of God for us. Let's relax – and get busy!(4:14-16)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness instead of entering the Promised Land illustrate the idea of 'coming short' of God's rest? What would this mean in ordinary life today?(verse 1)
2. What two things do we have to do to enter God's rest? What happens if only one is present in our lives?(verse 2)
3. What did God do on the seventh day of creation? How in practical terms are we to follow His example? What in this section is the opposite of resting in Christ? What are the consequences of not resting?(verses 3-6)
4. How does the story of Joshua leading the Israelites into possession of the land of Canaan picture Jesus leading us into enjoying His best? How in each case did the idea of 'God's rest' operate? Why would having only one day a week to rest in Christ limit our Christian experience?(verses 7-11)
5. To what is the word of God compared? Why is the illustration so effective? Where else in the Bible is the same picture used? How does the word of God help us to 'rest in Christ'?(verses 12,13)
6. How was Jesus different from every previous high priest? How does knowing what He has done give us confidence about His grace and mercy?(verses 14-16)