

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

As Jesus' brothers and sisters we are being called to the family meal table, to 'partake' of a feast. Just as He partook of our humanity,(2:14) we are urged to share in the benefit of brotherhood with the Son of God,(chapter 1) and the Son of Man.(chapter 2) He is the Apostle, the special messenger from heaven, and the High Priest, the chosen representative from earth. We need to enjoy both to the full. How do we do it?

There was one simple secret to the life of Jesus, faithfulness to His Father. In this respect Moses pictured Jesus as both of them worked to build God's house on earth, which is our lives.(I Cor.3:16; 6:19) Both constantly sought instructions and strength from God. There was however a difference; Moses was a servant in the house while Jesus is the owner. The servant was preparing the house for the owner. In elevating Moses, the Jews had missed the point of his role. We too are to be faithful by holding on tight for ever to all we have been given in Jesus.(3:1-6)

Faithfulness is the secret of partaking of Christ. The writer first explains faithfulness in the rest of the chapter by defining and illustrating unfaithfulness from the Exodus journey of the Israelites. He quotes selectively from Ps.95:7-11 which contrasts people celebrating the goodness of their Saviour and Creator with the hardheartedness and grumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness. Unbelief begins with deafness to God, an inner hardness against His plan,(v.7) which leads to provoking God by grumbling and complaining against Him and our leaders, a longing for the old days before we knew Christ, testing and trying God by demanding our own way.(v.8,9) We make God angry by going astray and choosing to be ignorant of His word.(v.10) All this leads to a failure to enter 'God's rest'.(v.11) This theme of rest will occupy the next chapter and is the writer's core illustration for explaining faithfulness. The model described was the attitude of the Israelites when they finally stopped grumbling and doubting in the wilderness and entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.(3:7-11)

Evil is equated with unbelief, because unbelief is the beginning of sin.(Jn.16:9; Rom.14:23) The most evil crime against humanity begins with unbelief towards Christ. 'Falling away from God' is the opposite of 'standing with God'. It is not about our salvation but our walk along the path of life with Jesus and the battle of life against Satan. It describes a deserter. It results from being deceived by the enemy's propaganda which has always begun with the idea that we can walk and fight in our own strength.(Gen.3:1-5) To be faithful to God is simply to stay in the relationship which resulted in our initial salvation.(Col.2:6,7) We can either keep listening to Him or harden and challenge Him as the Israelites did who left Egypt with Moses. They had gone through the experience of the Passover, and the Red Sea, and of being fed and watered, and given victory over the enemy by God, all of which were based on faith but when He commanded them to enter Canaan by faith they saw only the obstacles and disobeyed Him.(3:12-19)

It would be useful to review the Exodus journey and the hardening process which began when they came to Marah and grumbled about the bitter water.(Exod.15:24) God made it

sweet by showing Moses a branch he could throw into the water. They grumbled again when the food ran out.(Exod.16:2) God gave them manna daily and quails sometimes. They quarreled with Moses when the water was exhausted.(Exod.17:2) God told Moses to hit a rock and water gushed out. They made a golden calf to worship when Moses was away too long.(Exod.32:1) The Lord punished them for idolatry.

Later they complained of adversity.(Num.11:1) God sent fire on the camp. Almost immediately they were demanding meat.(Num.11:4) God gave them more meat than they knew what to do with. Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses' choice of a wife and claimed that God spoke through them as much as Moses.(Num.12:1-2) Miriam became a leper for a while until Moses prayed for her healing. Twelve spies entered Canaan and reported back to the Israelites what a great place it was; ten said that the occupants were too big and it would not work, so they proposed going back to Egypt; only two believed God could give victory because He was bigger and urged the people to enter the land.(Num.13 and 14) God decided that all the adults except the two who believed Him would die in the wilderness. Korah and three others challenged Moses' leadership and divided the people.(Num.16) God caused an earthquake which swallowed them up and later a plague on those who supported Korah. Again the people contended with Moses because there was no water.(Num.20:2,3) Moses was commanded to speak to the rock this time but he finally lost his temper and struck it twice. Not even he would enter the Promised Land. Once more the people spoke against God because they became impatient with the long journey.(Num.21:4) This time they were overrun by poisonous snakes until Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a staff. Next the men got involved with the Moabite women and their idolatry.(Num.25:1-3) The leaders responsible were executed. Finally it seemed that generation had learned their lesson and were ready for Canaan.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What were the two roles Jesus played when He came to earth? What does it mean to 'partake of a heavenly calling' in relation to each of these roles?
2. What were the similarities and differences between Moses and Jesus? Which one should we trust and why?
3. Review the occasions when the Israelites grumbled during the Exodus journey. What can we learn for today from each one? How each time was there a picture of some aspect of the gospel? How do these stories illustrate the problem of unbelief? How on the other hand did Moses usually illustrate 'resting' in Christ?
4. If we have 'wandered in the wilderness' during our Christian lives what are the reasons and what is God's solution?