

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

After a powerful opening statement as to who Jesus is, the Son of God, not just a high ranking angel, the writer demands a response from those who will read his letter. What a terrible crime and a heartbreaking tragedy it would be to waste the opportunity God has given us to know His Son. Let us take the good news seriously! The consequences of not doing so will be devastating now on earth and one day in heaven.

The writer uses two images to picture how easily we can throw away the privilege God gave us of knowing the truth. First he talks of drifting away, like a ship with no anchor, an illustration he uses again in 6:19 when he refers to the ‘anchor of the soul’. With no certainty to which we are committed we can quickly slide on to the rocks. Our modern world which denies absolutes and regards every idea or behaviour as relative leaves people drifting towards disaster. How can we be certain of our Christian faith in an uncertain world? God proves the accuracy of His word to us by the inner witness of the Spirit that it is the Lord who speaks to us, supported by many testimonies to its truthfulness, and by the miracles Jesus did in the New Testament and still does in transforming lives.

The second image is of neglecting our salvation, of apathy and indifference towards our relation with God through Jesus. The writer could again have had a ship in mind because so many wrecks have been the result of neglect of equipment, maintenance, crew training, and sound information. A modern illustration could be that of an airline pilot who, if he does his job properly, checks and rechecks before taking off. Most air crashes are due either to systems not being in place or being ignored. Every day we need to check out again our relationship with our Heavenly Father, (I Cor.11:28; II Cor.11:3-5) by reading His word and talking with Him. (2:1-4)

The writer now picks up his theme again from chapter one of the Son of God who was above the angels but came down to earth for a time, after which He would return to His position of power and honour in heaven. This time He has a new title, Son of Man. The Son of God became a man for a while. Psalm 8 is a short psalm which predicts the Creator taking on human form. The New Testament miracle of the incarnation, God in a human body, was clearly stated centuries before in the Old Testament. The Jewish message was the Christian message long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Just what did the humanity of Jesus mean in practice? The writer makes four statements.

First He suffered as we do. His suffering was extreme in torture and crucifixion and led to His death. But there was a reason for his suffering; it was for us, a topic on which much more will be said later. Many have seen Jesus’ acceptance of brutality against Him as weakness. Why did He not fight back? As His enemies said, (Matt.27:39-43) and He confirmed, (Matt.26:53) He could have called on an army of angels to rescue Him. He chose to share our weakness as a man. In doing so He demonstrated true strength, in enduring suffering, depending on the Holy Spirit, for the sake of others. By growing in stature through pain, He showed us just a glimpse of the meaning of suffering. (2:9,10)

Second, as a man He calls us His brothers. We all have the same Father in heaven and so are one family. Sometimes the idea of a heavenly Father seems too big and remote to bring into our daily struggles. For many of us having a big brother who looked after us with the bullies at school or in the neighbourhood was a huge comfort. He knows because He has already been here and endured what we endure. The biggest, meanest bully is Satan whom our big brother, Jesus, has dealt with once and for all. We therefore have nothing to fear from him or his agents. Even better than an earthly brother however, He lives in us. This is plain, down to earth help for those who trust God as Abraham did.(2:11-16)

Third, He became the high priest. This was the role of a man appointed by God to make a relationship with God possible through sacrifice. Again much more will be said about Jesus' position as our high priest later in the book, and about how He cleansed our sin by being the sacrifice Himself.(2:17)

Fourth, as a man He had to face temptation. As the Creator of the universe He could have set the rules denying the Devil the right to tempt the Son of Man, but He did not. In the wilderness He faced in principle all the temptations we face and dealt with them, as we also can, by refuting the Devil's lies from scripture.(Matt.4:1-11; Lk.4:1-13) The Devil left Him alone for a while but tried again in various guises at opportune times.(Matt.16:23) Knowing this can be life changing for us as we struggle with failure.(2:18)

Jesus' humanity made all this help available. In the next two chapters the writer will discuss just how we can benefit from who He is and what He offers.

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What two images does the writer use to warn us how we could miss out on God's best for us? What would be the consequence of ignoring these warnings? How can we be certain the gospel is true? Do we need to see God do miracles to have confidence in the Bible?(2:1-4)
2. How does Psalm 8 explain the mystery of the incarnation, God becoming a man for a while, to accomplish His purpose before returning to His previous position in heaven? How would this Psalm have helped Jesus to make sense of what He was suffering on the cross? What confidence would it have given Him about the end result of His time on earth? How does it help us in difficult times?(2:5-9)
3. What four features of Jesus being a man does the writer identify? How does he explain each one? What was Jesus' secret in each of these aspects of His life among us? How does each strengthen us in daily life? How too does each idea make it easier to understand the struggles of others and have something to offer them? How could we be 'priests' to the needy around us?(2:10-18)