

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

Early in this book the writer, after presenting Jesus Christ as both Son of God,(chapter one) and Son of Man,(chapter two) had urged his readers to ‘partake’ of all He promises us by faithfulness.(3:2; 4:2) He emphasized how faith to be effective must be a response to the good news, the word of God. From chapter 5 to 10, He has been looking afresh at the good news to see just how good it is. It is so much better than the Old Testament message to which the Jews clung so tightly. The Old Testament itself promised a better High Priest, a better covenant, a better Law, a better tabernacle and a better sacrifice, all of which Jesus fulfilled. At the end of chapter 10 he had reminded them of how Habakkuk 2:4 had promised a better message, that the righteous should live by faith. Faith in all that Christ did on the cross is the secret of being saved from the penalty of sin, past, present and future. Faith in all that He is as by His Spirit He lives His resurrection life in us is the secret of being saved daily from the power of sin.(Rom.5:1-10)

Chapter eleven is a cascade of examples of men and women who demonstrated faith in Christ, long before the better message had been fully spelled out. Well before there was a visible high priest, offering visible sacrifices in a visible tabernacle, men were taking God at His word about what they could not see. First they believed that God was the Creator of the universe even though they had not seen Him do it. They believed that the visible world was the evidence of the creation and of the nature and power of God.(Rom.1:19,20) It still is, though some choose to suppress the truth and believe it evolved by accident over billions of years.(11:1-3)

By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice,(Gen.4:4) the blood sacrifice God first taught to Adam and Eve at the entrance of the Garden of Eden, which foreshadowed Jesus, the Lamb of God, whom he could not see. Cain as a religious man offered his best efforts as a crop farmer. True faith depends on a blood sacrifice. By faith Enoch walked daily in a relationship with God which pleased the Lord.(Gen.5:21-24) He was taken to a better life he could not see, even without dying first, as we can, by faith, share eternal life through Jesus Christ right now.(I Jn.5:11-12) By faith Noah built the ark because God warned him of coming judgement on the world, and promised him a better life beyond the flood, neither of which he could yet see.(Gen.6:13-22) He was righteous only by faith.(11:4-7)

By faith Abraham responded to God’s promise of a better place than the comfort and security of his father’s family which he could see. By faith he lived in a tent anticipating being father of a whole new nation even before he could see the promised son through whom it would all happen. By faith Sarah received a baby within her despite being able to see that she was well past the age for children. In time the Lord blessed Abraham and Sarah not just with the promised son but with a multitude of descendants though they never lived to see them.(11:8-12)

Like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah we are urged to believe that if we trust Him, God will bless us with His Son whom we cannot see now, but will meet in eternity.

God's blessing in Christ does not mean a guarantee of material prosperity but everything we need inwardly to face life today as well as heaven one day.(11:13-16)

When Abraham was willing to offer his son as a sacrifice on Mt Moriah, he could by faith see them walking down the mountain together afterwards, because God who had promised him many descendants could raise Isaac from the dead if necessary, as He would one day raise Jesus. When Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau even though Jacob had deceived him, he was rightly anticipating the unseen promises of God regarding the two boys. Joseph when dying knew by faith that somehow God would get His people out of Egypt, even when Joseph was not around. The survival of Moses looked impossible when he was born because Pharaoh was killing baby boys, but his parents, by faith, foresaw God's purpose for their baby son and risked their own lives to hide him. When Moses was 40 he saw by faith the huge privilege it would be to be a Hebrew on the run, rather than a pampered Egyptian prince. When God warned of the death of the Egyptian firstborn and provided the Passover sacrifice as the way of escape, Moses, by faith, accepted God's better way. The Red Sea looked an impassable barrier to their escape from Egypt but Moses, by faith, saw the path through and beyond. The walls of Jericho appeared another insuperable barrier to enjoying the land of Canaan but Joshua, by faith, believed God's instructions and marched round and round the city till the walls fell down. Rahab, by faith, identified with the people of God among whom she would be accepted despite her past.(11:17-31)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What is faith according to this section? So what is faith not? How does this opening statement build on the quote from Habakkuk at the end of the previous chapter? What should we therefore look for as we study this chapter? How does this relate to our understanding of creation?(verses 1-3)
2. In what did Abel, Enoch and Noah put their faith? How did faith lead into them enjoying something better?(verses 4-7)
3. What were the three examples of faith in Abraham's life and the one which he shared with Sarah? What was the 'better' consequence for them? How do these examples represent four important discoveries in our lives? What are the consequences of us failing to make any of these discoveries?(verses 8-19)
4. What did Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Rahab all have in common as they exercised faith? How were they too all anticipating something better? How are we to believe like they did?(verses 20-31)
5. Look back on the stories of those mentioned in verse 32 for examples of faith – and failure. Why does this chapter not mention their failures? What does this teach us about the nature of faith? What examples of the successes and suffering of this passage can you recall? How again do those stories demonstrate faith leading to something better?(verses 32-40)