

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

When we want to persuade someone who already has a strong foundation of knowledge of something new, it always makes sense to begin by reaffirming his foundation and then building on elements in it of the new idea we want to introduce. This has been the approach of the writer of this letter. To show in chapters 5-7 that Jesus would be a new High Priest like Melchizedek, he started in Ps.110 where this was promised. To gain support in chapter 8 for adoption of his new covenant, he began in Jer.31 where the key points were set out beautifully. To explain the new meaning of the tabernacle in chapter 9, he reminded his readers from Exod.25 of how Moses was only copying a heavenly original, far more glorious than the earthly tent. Now the writer takes us to Ps.40 to demonstrate fully how this new tabernacle needed a new sacrifice to fulfill its intended purpose.

The old law provided only a shadowy outline of the new and better law which was to come. The substance, Paul taught, belonged to Christ.(Col.2:17) Powerful examples of this shadow are in the sacrifices of bulls, goats and sheep which had to be offered over and over again because all they could do was to atone for, or cover, the sins of the offerer as a temporary solution until the substance filled out the shadow. A guilty conscience drove the sinner to repeat the sacrifices endlessly. Psalm 40:6-8 pointed to a remarkable new idea. Instead of sacrificing more and more animals, God would provide a body for the One He would send from heaven to do His will by sacrificing Himself. God was not satisfied with the blood of animals so He provided a better sacrifice which would finally cleanse our sin. The reference to ‘the roll of the book’ reminded the readers of an expression used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe the written word,(Ezra 6:2; Jer.36:2; Ezek.2:9; 3:1) the key theme of which was the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. The new and better sacrifice replaced the old, ineffective one.(10:1-9)

The new sacrifice of the body of Jesus was once and for all, never to be repeated. Instead of the priest having to go back to the altar day after day, our High Priest was able to enter heaven for eternity. The Son of God returned to that position of honour and power which was His before He came to earth.(Phil.2:6-11) This had been anticipated as the end result of the work of the High Priest who would come and be like Melchizedek, in Ps.110. His restored position in heaven guarantees victory over our enemies, the world, the flesh and the Devil who caused our problem of sin in the first place.(10:10-13)

The promised new covenant would include the law which was no longer just in a book but in our hearts. Our Teacher within would constantly assure us of our cleansing and that consequently God no longer has any memory of our sin. If He has forgotten, we do not have to remember our failure either. The urge to search for a another sacrifice would be gone forever!(10:14-18)

The wonderful message of the new covenant, the new High Priest and the new sacrifice demands a response from us. God wants us to begin by drawing near ‘with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith’. We can confidently approach Him as no Old Testament

sinner could do, wholeheartedly accepting His gift of forgiveness and cleansing. By doing so we are 'entering into His rest',(4:1) relaxing in the certainty of who He is and what He has done. Next He wants us to 'hold fast' without 'drifting away',(2:1) firmly 'anchored' in Christ.(6:19) Now we can encourage each other to know Him better, love Him more and serve him enthusiastically. While our salvation is absolutely individual and personal, the Lord wants us to support each other.(10:19-25)

If we choose to refuse the new covenant which we have been offered, we will remain responsible for our own sin. No animal sacrifices will fix the problem. There is only one alternative to the new covenant. We will face the terrible certainty and finality of the old judgement. The old law provided severe punishment for those who rejected it. How much worse will be the situation of those who reject the sacrifice of the Son of God Himself. A Holy God must eventually deal with those who continue to insult Him.(10:26-31)

The writer reminded his readers of how their journey began before the spiritual hearing of some of them deteriorated and they went back to baby food.(5:11-14) They had seen the light of truth and suffered for it. They had supported others who suffered. They had been robbed of their earthly possessions, knowing how rich they would remain in Christ. He urged them not to waver now. He reminded them of Hab.2:3,4 which summed up the new covenant message, 'the righteous shall live by faith', that had been the key to the book of Romans.(Rom.1:17) He pleaded with them simply to continue by faith as they had begun.(10:32-39)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How were the Old Testament sacrifices shadows of the New Testament message? What other 'shadows' of Christ are there in the Old Testament? How can seeing a shadow before we meet the real thing make us more aware of the substance when it appears? What were the limitations of animal sacrifices in the tabernacle?(verses 1-4)
2. How had Psalm 40 been intended to prepare the Jews for the death of Jesus on the cross? How did the reference to the 'roll of the book' encourage Christians to search the Old Testament to help them understand the coming of Jesus better?(verses 5-9)
3. What was the outcome of Jesus' sacrifice of Himself? How does knowing this help us to overcome temptation now? Why is New Testament experience so much better than was possible in the Old Testament?(verses 10-18)
4. What three steps are we to take to show our acceptance of God's invitation to enter heaven through Jesus' sacrifice? What will be the consequence of each step?(verses 19-25)
5. What is the only alternative to accepting God's plan? Why does God have no choice but to judge those who refuse?(verses 26-31)
6. Why do some Christians struggle badly after first trusting Christ? How can we encourage them? Of what message should we remind them?(verses 32-39)