

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

In Jesus we have a far better High Priest than was possible in Aaron and his descendants because, being sinless, He could enter the presence of God to represent us for ever. The tabernacle He entered in heaven was so much better than the earthly one constructed in the time of Moses. The tabernacle in the wilderness, built by man, was merely a copy of the heavenly original, shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai, which had been constructed by God Himself. Why settle for a man-made imitation when we can have the masterpiece? And why have earthly priests who have to keep repeating their sacrifices because the effect was not lasting? The model made by the Israelites was only intended to be a temporary provision until the real thing was available to all of us. The problem for the Jews of that time was that the earthly model had become a permanent fixture and an object of worship instead of simply a teaching aid. The purpose of the writer of this book was to move them back to God's first purpose and on to the tabernacle's greater fulfillment in Jesus.

At the same time, God's instruction, given in Exod.25:40 and repeated here in verse 5, gives us confidence to explore the symbolism of the tabernacle as a way of learning more about Jesus. That will be the fascinating topic of chapter 9. While we savour the prospect of dissecting the message of the tabernacle, just keep in mind the importance of letting the Bible explain itself. Interpreting spiritual symbols must be based on clear Biblical explanation not wild imagination which can bring the whole valuable exercise into disrepute. Reputations have been built in the past on dogmatic interpretations of obscure nuts and bolts of the tabernacle.(8:1-5)

A better High Priest in a better tabernacle made possible a better covenant based on a better law and better promises. The Jews at the time this book was written were clinging fiercely to their covenant with God which they believed gave them a privileged position as His chosen people. Why would they give up on a deal which gave them an advantage over the rest of the world? In the process of jealously guarding their covenant with God they had forgotten that the purpose of their special relationship was that they should be 'a light for the Gentiles'.(Acts 13:47)

Even in the Old Testament however it had been spelt out by God that a better deal was coming based upon superb promises. The writer of Hebrews takes a large section from Jeremiah 31 which explains the better, future covenant. His first point is that the old covenant needed to be replaced because it had been invalidated by the Israelites. God had kept His promise to bring them out of slavery in Egypt to the land of Canaan but the responsibility of the Israelites was to continue to trust and serve God only. They had failed to do this over and over again. Therefore God no longer had an obligation to look after them.

Secondly the new covenant would involve God writing His law on the hearts and minds of His people. The weakness of the old law was that it dealt with the outside of man only. The new law would deal with the heart in the expectation that a changed heart would result in changed behaviour. This was Jesus' message in the Sermon on the Mount

when He explained that He had come to fulfill the law of Moses not to abolish it.(Matt.5:17-20) When He did this He greatly raised the standard with regard, for example, to murder which now included hate, and to adultery which now meant lust as well. The great difference was that under the new covenant although the standard was much higher, it was Jesus in us who would meet it as He lived through us.(Gal.2:20)

The third provision of the new covenant was to be a personal relationship with God which would mean that every believer would have a sense of belonging to the Lord not just as part of a chosen nation. The Holy Spirit, who in the Old Testament had only equipped a select group of leaders, would indwell every child of God to equip us to live the Christian life.(Acts 2:17,18)

The fourth new promise was equally spectacular. No longer would we have to look for a prophet or priest to tell us what the Bible meant. We were promised that God Himself would be our Teacher.(I Jn.2:20,27)

The final feature of the new contract with God was that His mercy would cause our sin to be forgotten. In the Old Testament the best that those who repented and offered sacrifice could expect was that their sin was 'atoned for'. Atone meant 'cover' and was obviously a temporary measure. If we spill coffee on the carpet we may decide to cover the stain with a rug or to have the carpet properly cleaned. Jesus did not atone for our sin He did so much more when He cleansed it.(I Jn.1:7,9)

When we realise the promises of the new covenant being offered in Jesus, why would we want to remain bound to the old one whose terms we so plainly failed to meet?(8:6-13)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is Jesus a better High Priest than Aaron? What has He done which Aaron could never do? Where is He now? What benefit is that to us in daily life?(verses 1-3)
2. Where is the true tabernacle? In what way is it better than the Old Testament one? How does the earthly tabernacle help us to understand God's plan of salvation in Jesus?(verses 4,5)
3. What is the new covenant which God offers us in Jesus? Why is it better than the old one?(verses 6,7)
4. Why according to Jeremiah did the old covenant have to be replaced? In what five ways did he say the new one would be better? How does each of these improvements work out in our lives today?(verses 8-12)
5. What in the light of this new and better covenant should be done about the old one? How do we cling to the old covenant and with what effect in our lives?(verse 13)