

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL PART IV - EZEKIEL'S MESSAGE

We have already seen in the first part of this study how God's preparation of Ezekiel as His prophet began not with the problem but with the answer. In chapter one Ezekiel met Jesus as revealed by the four faces of the four living creatures, as the four gospels introduce us to Him. In chapters 8-11 the vision of the cherubim was repeated but now put into context as he was given a glimpse of the spiritual reality of those left behind in Jerusalem. The gospel, the good news, starts with Jesus Christ. Then we are ready to hear the bad news, our sin.

Ezekiel is told first that his audience are rebels against God, who have therefore transgressed; they have broken God's law.(2:3) The theme of rebellion runs right through the book. In chapter 3 rebellion led to a refusal to listen to God.(3:7-9) The problem goes back to Genesis where Adam and Eve told God they knew better how to live their lives than He did.(Gen.3:1-7) Later in this same chapter rebellion is described as producing iniquity, the twisted nature we have all inherited from Adam which can only do wickedness.(3:18,19) The label of the 'rebellious house' is picked up again in chapter 12 to explain why the Jews had eyes which did not see and ears which did not hear God. Ezekiel was taught to use visual aids which would remain in the mind of his audience until the moment when the Holy Spirit caught their attention.(12:1-20) Jesus used parables for the same reason.(Matt.13:10-17)

In chapter 6, Ezekiel is given a new way of understanding sin. Idolatry is both the cause of our rebellion and the fruit of it. When Adam and Eve rebelled they put 'self' in place of God in their lives.(Gen.3:10) Sometimes we give self the name of another god, often in the present day we simply justify self-centredness. Advertisements often read, "Buy so-and-so, you deserve it!" Ezekiel warns his people of the devastating consequences of idolatry on the lives of our families and societies. He describes idolatry as 'harlotry', unfaithfulness to God, our 'husband'. In his vision in chapter 8 he is shown how idolatry was the hidden problem of the leaders of Judah and how God cannot allow this rebellion against Him to continue for ever. In chapter 14 he is shown how idolatry works to bring rebellion. What destroys us is idolatry in the heart. This separates us from God and makes us deserving of His judgement. The only answer is repentance by which we turn away from idols and self, and back to Him. We need deliverance which not even good men like Noah, Daniel and Job could accomplish for us. We need Jesus.

Rebellion leads to idolatry and idolatry opens the door for false teachers according to chapter 13. Those false prophets will please their followers by proclaiming 'peace when there is no peace',(13:10) that all is well between us and God when it is not.(II Tim.4:3,4) False prophets are compared to harlots who have not only been unfaithful to God who should have been their 'husband' and gone after other gods but they have committed themselves to luring others into the same unfaithfulness.(16) The next chapter describes the arrogance of the false teacher whom God will bring down. Chapter 18 explores some of the every day behaviour which results from rebellion and idolatry fed by false teaching. Much of it has to do with our neglect or oppression of the poor, and our grubby immorality.

The city-state of Tyre, a seemingly impregnable fortress on an off-shore island, out from what is now Lebanon, had a long history of independence and defiance of great empires. Ezekiel uses Tyre as a symbol of arrogant independence of God, first demonstrated by Satan and later followed by Adam and the whole human race.(28) The Devil was the mastermind of man's rebellion. This chapter gives insight into the origin of Satan in heaven, once wise and beautiful until made evil and

ugly by his rebellion which we are in danger of copying. The Devil has always made sin appear attractive not repulsive. We are easily fooled.(II Cor.11:12-15)

Just as rebellion against government brings a response as sovereignty is restored and independence crushed, so the King of the Universe must eventually act in judgement. The difference between an earthly ruler and the Lord is in His longing to see rebellion end in repentance, and His use of kindness and patience to bring this about.(Rom.2:4,5) We may bring consequences of our rebellion on ourselves now, but judgement is after death.(Heb.9:27) Ezekiel warns Judah that their rebellion would end with death.(3:18; 6:12; 9:1) The wages of sin is death.(Rom.6:23) We have so often concentrated on the disasters which cause us to suffer - sickness, earthquake, tornado, war, which are the work of the Devil according to Job 1 and 2. They should catch our attention and make us think, (Lk.13:1-5) but are not sent by God. Ultimately however it will be His decision to withdraw life after which the unbeliever must face Him in judgement.

In the very first chapter Ezekiel saw Christ enthroned, to whom the living creatures pointed. All through the book, God is the sovereign creator seeking surrender from those who have rebelled. In chapter 34 He offers a completely different view, one very familiar from the New Testament. He is the good shepherd who will, at the same time, be their Prince.(John 10:11; I Pet.5:4; Ps.23:1) David was the shepherd boy who became king. More than 20 times in the gospels Jesus is described as the son of David. To the people of Ezekiel's day there could be no sharper contrast than between the humble shepherd and the all-powerful king. Sadly however the teachers who should have been their shepherds behaved like they were kings. We still make the same mistake today when as pastors we tell people how they should behave and then exploit them.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Q.1. How does Ezekiel describes sin in the following sections,
(a) chaps. 2, 3, 12 (b) chaps. 6, 8, 14 (c) chap.13 (d) chaps.16, 17 (e) chap.18?
Put each view of sin into modern terms. Why is it necessary to have many different ways of thinking about sin?

Q.2. Ezekiel 28:1-19 is addressed to the king of Tyre. Who is it really describing? Compare this passage to Isa.14. How are they similar? How do both stories help us to understand what happened in the garden of Eden? And the problem of sin in our lives?

Q.3. How would God judge the people of Ezekiel's time? In what ways does the New Testament express the same ideas? What are we to tell people about God's judgement in their lives? Are sickness, accidents and personal loss in our lives the judgement of God on our sin?

Q.4. We have already seen how Christ appeared to Ezekiel in some of his visions. How does Ezekiel present the person of Christ in his sermons? Who are the shepherd and the prince in chap.34? What warning does this chapter give about those in Christian leadership?

Q.5. What does Ezekiel say about the following parts of the gospel?

- (a) God's plan for our lives.
- (b) His promise to us.
- (c) How to come to Christ.
- (d) How to receive the Holy Spirit.
- (e) How to live the Christian life.

Q.6. Make an outline of a message you might give on witnessing of Christ to others, based on the idea of the watchman in the book of Ezekiel.