

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

PART TWO – EZEKIEL'S VISIONS

After thirty years of preparation, Ezekiel's ministry as a priest finally began. He had been 25 years in Judah watching the spiritual decline of his people, most of it under godless leadership, followed by 5 difficult years of exile as slaves in Babylon wondering what the future held and whether they would ever be able to return to Jerusalem and their beloved temple. But what does a priest do without a temple? Then God spoke!

Ezekiel's first vision was dramatic and full of symbolism and set the scene for the rest of his ministry. His immediate attention was caught by 4 living beings, in a later vision identified as cherubim,(10:1) familiar from the description of the entrance to the Garden of Eden,(Gen.3:24) and the golden figures in the Holy of Holies which overshadowed the mercy seat.(Exod.25:18) Each living being had four faces, the man, the lion, the bull and the eagle. They could well remind us of the four ways Jesus is presented to us in the 4 gospels. Very similar creatures appear in Rev.4:6 and repeatedly throughout Revelation. Our understanding of Jesus begins in the many facets of Him in the gospels.

They were distinct yet linked to each other. They had mobility to go everywhere and the ability to see in every direction at once, as God's Spirit can be everywhere and nothing about our lives escapes Him. Between them was a fire to purify and above them the throne of God on which sat a figure familiar to us from Daniel 7:9; 10:5,6 and Revelation 1:13-15, whom John identifies as Jesus, the Son of God.

Ezekiel was given a commission and then the power of God's Spirit in him to carry it out.(2:1-4) So that he would have something to say in his ministry he was ordered to eat a scroll which tasted like honey, as we have first to take the Word into us before we have anything worthwhile to offer to others.(2:8-3:3) John would have a similar experience in Rev.10:8-10)

A year later Ezekiel had his second vision.(8-11) The same heavenly Person picked him up and gave him first a glimpse of Jerusalem and the loathsomeness of the supposedly hidden sin of the leadership of God's people. He was then shown the judgement they deservedly faced. Finally the cherubim reappeared and became the source of cleansing of the temple which would allow God to work again in His people as the gospel of Jesus in all its dimensions is the only way back to God. His ministry began with dramatic immediate consequences for one false teacher.(11:13)

Ezekiel's third vision is well known in the words of a Negro spiritual.(37) He is shown a valley of dry bones which reassemble themselves into bodies when the Word is preached to them and come alive when the Spirit is breathed into them, as the spiritually dead are brought back into God's plan for them and then brought alive when they receive His Holy Spirit. Once alive in Christ we are to be His army for conquering the hearts of men.

The final vision (40-47) was 20 years after the first one and was of the temple in Jerusalem long after its destruction in 586 BC. It not only described the temple as it would be rebuilt in the time of Haggai but foresees it having the function of bringing life not only to the Jews but to all nations. This will be the end result of one man seeing Jesus, letting Him equip him with His word and His Spirit, and sending him out into the world.

QUESTIONS ON EZEKIEL PART II

Q.1. Ezekiel had 4 visions. In which chapters are they? What is the special theme of each one? How do these 4 ideas connect together?

Q.2. Who is the man who appeared to Ezekiel? How do you know this? Where else in the Bible is a man with a similar appearance seen? What clues to his identity are there on those occasions? How can we see the same man?

Q.3. Who or what is 'the glory of the God of Israel'? Where in the Bible has this been mentioned before? And with what explanation? How can we see the glory of God? And how can we glorify God?

Q.4. Where have cherubim (plural of cherub) been described before in the Bible? What is their special task? Each has four faces. What might each face mean? Where else in the Bible does God use four different ways to teach about Himself? Can you see any connection between these and Ezekiel's cherubim?

Q.5. What do the cherubim's means of transport teach us about Christ? How does this fit into the New Testament presentation of Christ? How can we be in the world but not of the world?

Q.6. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel's visions? Compare this with His work in Acts 2, 8 and 19. What do the visions teach us about the Trinity, what it is and how the three Persons relate to each other? How will the Holy Spirit do the same in our lives?

Q.7. Why is Ezekiel given a scroll to eat? What effect did it have upon him? How are we to do the same?

Q.8. How did Ezekiel's visions of the glory of the Lord in chap. 8-11 equip him to understand and speak about the sin and the need of the people of His day? How can the same happen for us?

Q.9. How does being a Christian give us a different view of the needs of others and what to do for them? (chap. 37)

Q.10. Why was Ezekiel to remind the people of his day of the design and function of the temple? (chaps.40-47) What does this teach us about counselling?