

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL PART III - HIS TEACHING METHODS

Ezekiel was the master of the use of visual aids as a teacher. The Lord had already used the most dramatic and vivid visual aid to teach Ezekiel about Himself in his vision of the 4 living creatures and the throne of God above. Then he was instructed to eat the scroll which was held out to him as we are to feed on the Word if we are to have anything to say.(2:8-3:3) God described his role among his people as being like a watchman,(3:17) whose job it was to patrol the walls of the city day and night, in all weather, to warn the inhabitants of attack from any direction. The 'watchman' is the 'overseer' in the New Testament, sometimes translated 'bishop'.(I Tim.3:1) The Bible teacher or prophet is responsible to recognise wrong teaching, warn about it and answer it effectively before the people are over-run by the consequences of a false message. Sometimes Ezekiel's tongue would stick to his mouth when God knew the people would not listen. At other times God would remove his muteness by giving him something urgent to say.(3:26,27) We have nothing to pass on unless God gives it to us.

At the beginning of chapter 4, Ezekiel was to build a model of Jerusalem under siege from the enemy using a brick surrounded by walls, ramps and battering rams to let the Jews know what would happen in 586 BC when they rebelled against the Babylonians for the last time.(4:1-3) Next he was told to lie on his left side for 390 days, over a year! Each day represented a year and would take them back to the time of Solomon and the building of the temple. Another 40 days on his right side was a further reminder to Judah in particular. To make his ordeal even harder he was tied with ropes to stop him changing sides.(4:4-8) Next he was given a diet of bread baked over dung, and water, the barest rations for his time of adversity.(4:9-17) Ezekiel's aids for communicating his message required him to suffer with his people. His lesson was for him as well as the audience as we should be the first to be convicted by our preaching.

In chapter 5, the image changed to a haircut in which his beard and hair were removed and divided into three portions to illustrate the three different ways the people of Jerusalem would be punished - by famine, disease and their homes being burned, by their families being slaughtered and by being taken away to strange places as exiles. Just a few would survive to return.(5:1-4) Ezekiel was not the kind of preacher who just stood there and talked. He was commanded to clap his hand and stamp his foot to gain the attention of his congregation.(6:11) In chapter 7:23 he was to make a chain as a warning of suffering to come.

After his second vision in chapters 8-11, Ezekiel is told to role play the coming exile of those left in Jerusalem by packing his bags and carrying them through a hole in the wall like a refugee.(12:1-7) Later he is instructed to tremble while he eats and drinks to represent the fear the people should be feeling as they anticipate losing everything.(12:18) He rebukes the false prophets whose misleading message of peace is like whitewashing a plaster wall before the rain comes,(13:10-16; Matt.23:27,28) and the women who wear magic bands supposedly to protect themselves.(13:17-23) He explains that vine wood is useful only for firewood,(15:1-8) when it should have been branches

drawing life from Christ and bearing fruit.(Isa.5:1-7; Jn.15:1-11) He compares the Jews to a baby abandoned at birth but taken into the family and raised by a passer-by as God had done for them,(16:1-14) only to go out and behave as a harlot with other gods.(16:15-63; Rev.17:1-7) In chapter 17 he compares the king who transplanted Judah to Babylon to a great eagle. Next he pictures the kings of Judah whose kings had been captured as lion cubs taken from their mother.(19:1-9) and then he returns to the image of the vine.(19:10-14) In chapter 21 a great sword will be God's means of judgement as His word will cut through our excuses.(Heb.4:12; Eph.6:17) The next illustration is of dross, the rubbish which separates when metals are refined.(22:17-22; I Cor.3:12-15) Then he returns to lions and wolves,(22:23-31) and to harlots.(23) In chapter 24 the rebellious city of Jerusalem is headed for a cooking pot.

Among the stern warnings to neighbouring countries, Egypt is threatened with a sea monster,(29) and yokes(30). Assyria is compared to a great cedar which was chopped down.(31) Lions and sea monsters return to picture Egypt in chapter 32 and their defeat by Babylon is like their river Nile turning to oil. In chapter 33 Ezekiel is compared to the watchman again who must be faithful in passing on God's warning but in chapter 34 the spiritual leaders are pictured as shepherds who have only served themselves. God's cleansing of our sin is compared to washing in clean water.(36:25,26; Jn.13:1-7) The spiritually dead are the dry bones of chapter 37. The northern neighbours of Israel will be hooked and led like animals.(38:1-6) Finally there is the temple,(40-47; I Cor.3:16; 6:19) setting out in detail God's plan to save His people and cause a river of life,(Jn.7:37-39) to flow out from them to all nations.(Matt.28:19)

Q.1. What different aids to making his message clear and effective does Ezekiel use with the Jews? How does God do the same in our lives? How does Jesus use similar methods in the New Testament? In what ways can we use these same methods in witnessing, counselling, preaching or teaching today?

Q.2. Where else in the Old Testament is the vine,(Ezekiel 15-19) used to teach about our relationship with God? How does each of these help to explain John 15?

Q.3. What connection can you see between Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim and his parables in chap.17 & 19? How does his vision help to explain these stories? How does Peter use his vision of Christ in his message in II Pet.1? How does John apply his vision in Rev. 1 to his message in Rev. 2-3? How will our teaching be affected if we are not seeing Jesus Christ for ourselves daily?

Q.4. In chap.20, Ezekiel reminds the Jews of their history. He compares their position in Babylon with their former position in Egypt. How would this sermon from history help them now? What can we learn from this about how to use Bible stories today?

Q.5. In chap. 25-32 Ezekiel speaks of the sins of the neighbours. How would this help the Jews? How did Amos do the same in Amos 1, 2? How can we teach people to learn from the mistakes of others in the Bible or in life without judging them?