

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL PART V – OUR RESPONSE TO EZEKIEL'S MESSAGE

We have explored the gospel which was revealed to Ezekiel and presented by him to his people. First he met the Lord in glory to whom the cherubim pointed as the gospels do for us. Then he was shown the human problem which begins with rebellion against God, leading to idolatry as something else takes God's place. Idolatry is promoted by false teaching which tries to justify our rebellion. Such an attitude is compared to harlotry which is not only unfaithfulness to God but lures others into the same behaviour. The nature of the resulting behaviour is described which is particularly characterised by our oppression and neglect of the poor, and our private immoral behaviour. Such sins are only the end result of our rebellion not the problem itself.

God initially responds with kindness and patience to our rebellion but He must eventually act in judgement. This will only take place after death. God decides when to take away life. Adverse circumstances now are not God's judgement. They are the work of the Devil, the other people in the world in which we live, and sometimes the consequences of our own behaviour. Repeatedly Ezekiel warned his people that they would die as the result of their rebellion,(3:20; 5:2; 6:7; 7:15; 9:1) as God had warned Adam and Eve that rebellion would result in death.(Gen.2:17)

How could they deal with their problem of rebellion and escape its consequences? The first step was to listen to God speaking through His prophets.(3:10,27; 12:2) Then we are to remember God and how we have hurt Him.(6:9) This should cause us to sigh and groan over the ugliness of sin.(9:4) Next we are to repent, turn away and no longer stray, but instead be His people.(14:6,7,11) We should remember our covenant with Him, be ashamed, and want to know Him.(16:60-63) The result will be forgiveness and a new heart and a new spirit.(18:21-32) This in turn enables us to walk or live in a new way,(11:19,20; 18:5-9) to cast off the old way and so be righteous.(20:7, 11, 21, 25; Gal.3:23) We will want to tell others we know Him.(12:16)

For all this to happen someone will have to bear our sin,(4:4) gather and restore us,(11:15-17) and deliver us from false teaching to know Him instead.(13:23) Then we can be comforted and be a comfort to one another in Christian fellowship.(14:22,23; II Cor.1:3-7) We cannot deliver ourselves from sin by being righteous, and no mere man however righteous can deliver us.(14:14) Sacrifice must be offered for us to be accepted by God.(20:39-44; Heb.9:11-28; Rom.12:1,2)

Before revealing just how sacrifice for sin would be effective, Ezekiel is shown how not only would the neighbours of Judah be used by God to show them the consequences of their rebellion but how those same neighbours would also in due time face the judgement of God. Ezekiel's message was not only for the Jews but for the world. In turn he deals with Babylon and Ammon,(21) the priests, prophets and princes of Judah,(22) Samaria,(23) Jerusalem,(24) Ammon, Moab and Edom,(25) Tyre,(26, 27, 28) Egypt, Ethiopia, and Assyria(29,30,31,32).

The prime responsibility in every country is on leaders who could lead their people to death or to life. He compares a spiritual leader to a watchman who was to patrol a city wall all night in all weather to warn the people of approaching enemies.(33:1-9) The word 'bishop' or 'overseer' in the New Testament is taken from the illustration of the watchman of Ezekiel.(I Tim.3:1,2; Tit.1:7) The overseer needs to see the big picture, recognise false teaching, and loudly and clearly proclaim the truth to answer it. Chapter 34 is addressed to the spiritual shepherds, the pastors who had neglected and exploited the flock for their own benefit and therefore exposed them to danger rather than feeding them. The Lord was to become their shepherd, leading and feeding them so that they would learn to rest in Him. He would separate the sheep who followed Him from the goats who did their own thing.(Matt.25:32,33) He would be like David, both a shepherd and a King. Twenty-eight times in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as Son of David.

In chapters 35 and 36 Ezekiel continues talking to the neighbours of Judah, this time to Edom so often their arrogant enemies who considered themselves safe up in the mountains from the invaders who bullied the Jews. We have already considered Ezekiel's third vision of the valley of dry bones which described the two parts to God's creation of His army. First teaching brought the bones and flesh together in the way God planned the human body as the word of God shows us how our lives and relationships to Him and each other are meant to be. Second the Holy Spirit entering those bodies gave them life as the army of God. Jesus said "I am the way (into a relationship with God), the truth (about how the Christian life is meant to be) and the life (of God in us which makes the plan work.)"(Jn.14:6) Chapters 38 and 39 address more neighbours, this time those more remote to the north and to the south.

From chapters 40-47 we are shown Ezekiel's most detailed final vision, of the temple which had by now been destroyed and would be rebuilt some 40 years later. The only temple at Ezekiel's time in existence was the one in heaven.(Heb.8 and 9) More than 500 years later that temple would again come to earth, first as the body of Jesus,(Jn.2:21) and then when He returned to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to live in us, His temple.(I Cor.3:16, 6:19) The central activity of the temple was sacrifice in which the Shepherd-King would allow Himself to be the once and for all sacrifice for our sin.(Heb.7:27)

From under the door of the temple a trickle of water flowed out which as Ezekiel followed it downstream became a larger and larger river.(47) When on the basis of the cross, Jesus moves into us, His temple, life flows out to those around us.(Jn.4:10,14; 7:37-39) We become a means of life to those around us as fruit trees sprang up on either side of the river bearing fruit all year round. God's plan is that those who really know Him will be like the vine branches grafted into Him,(Jn.15:1-11) showing the fruit in our character of His presence,(Gal.5:22,23) and able to be the same under all circumstances.(II Tim.4:2) In the rest of chapter 47 and chapter 48, the exiled Jews were reassured that as they responded to this message there would be a special place of each of them and their descendants back in the land God had given them. Jesus told His disciples that He would go to prepare a place for them in His Father's house.(Jn.14:2,3) Let us heed Ezekiel's message, cease our rebellion, accept His sacrifice and welcome Him in!