

Ezekiel's Vision

Ezekiel 1

Ezekiel 1: *"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. ² On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.*

⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵ Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. ⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. ⁸ The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. ⁹ Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. ¹² And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. ¹⁴ And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

¹⁵ Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. ¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. ¹⁷ When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. ¹⁸ As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them. ¹⁹ When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. ²⁰ Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. ²¹ When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

²² The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads. ²³ And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body. ²⁴ When they went, I

heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings. ²⁵ A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.

²⁶ And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. ²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.”

Background Notes

What a vision! It's important to notice that this was *not* a dream. It was a *vision* that was given by God to Ezekiel. It reminds us of the vision of our Lord that was given to the apostle John in Revelation 4. Both John and Ezekiel experienced the same reaction: they fell on their faces in awe and worship!

I challenge anyone to draw a good diagram of this vision. Exactly what did Ezekiel see? There are many details, but if you try to draw a diagram of exactly what he saw you'll find that it's not easy, even though a very detailed description is given. One thing is certain: Ezekiel did **not** see a flying saucer!

Ezekiel saw a “*theophany*.” A theophany is a visible manifestation of God. Ezekiel specifically saw a visible manifestation of the glory of God. “*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*” (v28). All the symbolic details of this theophany contributed to the glory of God in some way. In fact, the overall theme of the prophecy of Israel is “**The glory of God.**” The Lord's glory is mentioned sixteen times in the book of Ezekiel.

Even though there is a lot of material in Ezekiel about the coming judgment of God upon the disobedient kingdom of Judah, the overriding theme of the book is the glory of God. A brief outline of the book of Ezekiel would be:

Chapters 1-24 – the departure of God's glory

Chapters 24-32 – the scope of God's glory

Chapters 33-38 – the return of God's glory.

The first three verses of chapter 1 revealed that Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon when God gave him this vision. Along with other captives, he was living in a kind of “refugee town” by the River Chebar, a river that flowed into the Euphrates River. Ezekiel was taken into captivity in 597BC, at the same time as King Jehoiachin was taken captive (v2). Five years had passed, and Ezekiel had just turned thirty years of age. This was very significant, because Ezekiel was a priest, and according to the Law he would have entered the priesthood at age 30, had he remained in Jerusalem. The Temple was still standing in Jerusalem - it was not destroyed until 586BC.

Most of the book of Ezekiel contains prophecies that were given before the final fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. It's important to know this, to fully understand the meaning of the vision of the glory of God.

Doctrinal Points

1. God must judge His wayward people.

What did the Lord communicate to Ezekiel in this vision of the great glory of God? The fact that God must judge His wayward people is certainly the main message. This is confirmed in Ezekiel 43, where Ezekiel had a vision of the return of the glory of the Lord, and compared it with the vision of Ezekiel 1. Ezekiel 43:3: *"It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw—like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar, and I fell on my face."*

In chapter 43 Ezekiel said that his vision of chapter 1 was a vision of God in His glory coming to destroy the city of Jerusalem. The nation of Judah had forsaken the Lord and disobeyed His Word. They had broken God's covenant with them, so God would allow His wayward people to be conquered by the Babylonians. This was the judgment of God.

Several features of this vision emphasize the judgment of God. Ezekiel saw the *throne chariot of God* coming in a *storm wind from the north*. The enemies of Judah always swept in and attacked Jerusalem from the north, and the Babylonians would come from that direction to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. Verse 24 said that the sound was like the *noise of an army*. The four living creatures with their four faces and four wings, along with their fast-moving wheels with rims *full of eyes*, emphasized the omniscience of God. God sees all and knows all as the perfect Judge. The *burning coals and fire and lightning* all speak of God's judgment. God must judge His wayward people.

As God had to judge His wayward people Israel, so God must judge His wayward people today. It is impossible for God to "sweep sin under the rug" - and He doesn't look the other way when people sin. As believers, our sins are eternally forgiven, but when we walk away from the Lord to do our own thing, the Lord must discipline us. As a good heavenly Father, He will always seek to bring us back to Himself – sometimes by judgment. God must judge His wayward people.

2. God will not forsake His wayward people.

Imagine how the captives must have felt in Babylon. They probably thought God had forsaken them. They realized that they were captives in Babylon because God's Law said (in no uncertain terms) that if His people turned away from Him, He would uproot them from their own land and cast them into a foreign land (Deuteronomy 28-29).

But there was a note of hope! The fact that Ezekiel received this vision of the glory of God in Babylon showed that *God was still willing to communicate with His people*. God had not cast His people off forever. And the captives knew that there were prophecies about God restoring His people. So even though the main message of this vision of God's glory was that God must judge His people, there was some encouragement to Ezekiel and the captives.

The appearance of the rainbow above the Lord and His throne chariot emphasized the never-ending faithfulness of God to His people. The rainbow was the sign of the covenant God made after the global Flood. It symbolized God's promise of faithful preservation.

God will not forsake His wayward people - and that includes you, if you're a true believer in the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior. In Hebrews 13:5, when the Lord said that He will never leave us nor forsake us, there were *no strings attached!* God will not forsake His wayward people. Aren't you glad about that?

Practical Application

When you see the Lord, what will your reaction be?

A Christian once told me that when he sees the Lord he's going to run up and give Jesus a big hug! I think my reaction will be more like Ezekiel's reaction. When Ezekiel saw the amazing glory of the Lord, he fell on his face in awe (v28). In a coming day, when we see the Lord in all His wonderful glory, falling on our faces in worship will certainly be the most appropriate reaction.

According to Philippians 2:10, every knee will bow to the Lord in the future. Unbelievers will be forced to bow the knee in judgment. Believers will be privileged to bow the knee in worship! When you see the Lord, what will your reaction be?