

# Ezekiel 1 • God's Glory

## Introduction

Thomas was told by Christ upon providing a sign Thomas could touch – the scars from His death on the cross – that, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:29) Christ was not only speaking about faith, but how it's far more important to understand the spiritual meaning signs teach, even more than witnessing the signs themselves. For instance, it's really of no use to have witnessed the veil to the holy of holies being supernaturally torn apart at the moment of Christ's death if you don't understand the greater meaning that through Christ, man has direct access to God. It's really the same thing when it comes to the great prophetic symbols and signs given through the likes of Daniel, John, and Ezekiel: it's what they teach that is far more important to us. These things actually have a practical application for our spiritual walk.

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. <sup>2</sup>(On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, <sup>3</sup>the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him.)

### [Read v.1-3]

**Q: What might be significant about the fact that these events did not occur until Ezekiel was 30 years old?**

A: As stated in v.3, Ezekiel is a priest. According to the Law (Nu. 4:3), a priest could not begin their service before God until the age of 30.

**Q: What might be significant about the reference to “the fifth of the month in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile”?**

A: First, it indicates that Ezekiel was taken into captivity in an earlier invasion by Nebuchadnezzar (there were 3 major deportations), a time when Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple were all yet to experience final judgment. Second, it probably relates to the fact that a year earlier, God directed Jeremiah to send a letter to the group of captives of which Ezekiel would have been a part (Jeremiah 29) warning against the false prophets yet predicting Babylon's defeat and the captives' return. Ezekiel's ministry in many ways is an extension of what began with the Word of God through Jeremiah. While Jeremiah speaks to those still to go into captivity, Ezekiel speaks in parallel to those already there.

**Q: What might be significant about Ezekiel's being exiled to the river Chebar?**

A: Whereas Daniel and company, when taken into captivity, went to the king's court, Ezekiel and others were sent to Chebar, the very place to where those from the northern kingdom of Israel were deported by Assyria. Assyria was conquered by Babylon and so the Israelites already in captivity inherited a new master. Ezekiel wasn't just living among Jews newly deported from the southern kingdom of Judah, but also among Jews who had been deported under Assyria much, much earlier.

**Q: What might be significant about the specific phrase, “the heavens were opened and I saw”? How might this verify the authenticity of Ezekiel's visions?**

A: It's a very specific phrase that is used elsewhere in Scripture as a powerful verification of someone on earth having a genuine, heavenly experience. In Ezekiel's case, it's verification of the Word of God given through these visions that they're not man-made, but God-breathed.

1. John the Baptist, at Jesus' baptism: “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, **the heavens were opened**, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him,” (Mt. 3:16)
2. Stephen, as he testified at his trial: “and he said, “Behold, I see **the heavens opened up** and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:6)

3. Peter, when God revealed to him the Gospel was to also be given to the Gentiles: “and he saw **the sky opened up**, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,” (Acts 10:11)
4. The apostle John in God’s vision given of the return of Christ: “And I saw **heaven opened**, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.” (Rev. 19:11)

**Point:** In studying Ezekiel within the correct context, we need to clearly understand the facts of his ministry, particularly that he was not just a prophet, but a priest who although could not literally serve in the temple in Jerusalem, was nonetheless allowed to serve before the true and heavenly glory of God. What God communicates through Ezekiel has a lot to do with Ezekiel’s being a priest teaching an exiled and backslidden people the true nature of worship, service, and working of the One True God. The symbols and signs employed through Ezekiel are meant to teach something much greater about God’s working and character, and something much greater than either the temple or the city of Jerusalem, things the people had come to trust in more than God Himself.

**[Read v.4-14]**

**Q: How do we know for sure that what is being presented to us is God’s glory and not something else?**

A: Because at the end of this description in v.28 it categorically states, “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.” The meaning is clearly and inarguably explained within Scripture itself.

**Q: Do each of the things mentioned in v.4 have specific meanings? What do they represent?**

A: Assuredly there are layers of meaning to these things. One can’t help but remember how God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38:1) or notice that the same terms for fire used here are the same as the plague in Egypt of the hailstones mixed with fire. (Ex. 9:24) There are many elements here that speak of God’s authority, presence, power, and judgment. Many think that because it comes from the north that it’s alluding to God’s judgment of Israel coming from nations to its north. That being said, let’s keep in mind the most basic explanation, that Ezekiel is using the best human terms possible to describe the approaching glory of God, something which in the end is probably far too great for the human mind to truly and wholly perceive, much less articulate. It’s very difficult to use our limited, human vocabulary to describe the indescribable.

**Q: How do we know for sure that these four living beings are actually cherubim?**

A: Ezekiel specifically states so when he encounters them again later on as recorded in chapter 10.

*These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim.  
Ezekiel 10:29*

**Q: What is the greater spiritual meaning of the four cherubim and their associated characteristics?**

A: There are probably a great many. Some scholars believe they are the heavenly contrast to the four beast of the kingdoms of the earth in Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome; some believe they represent the four

<sup>4</sup>As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. <sup>5</sup>Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form.

<sup>6</sup>Each of them had four faces and four wings.

<sup>7</sup>Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf’s hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze.

<sup>8</sup>Under their wings on their four sides were human hands.

As for the faces and wings of the four of them, <sup>9</sup>their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward.

<sup>10</sup>As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. <sup>11</sup>Such were their faces.

Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies.

<sup>12</sup>And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went. <sup>13</sup>In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire

was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. <sup>14</sup>And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.

Gospels; some have noticed these same symbols were used by Israel as they camped on the four sides of the tabernacle; some equate them to intelligence/wisdom (man), strength and boldness (lion), faithfulness and service (ox), and heavenliness (eagle); and the list goes on and on and on and on.

***Point:*** *The reason that ALL of these (and more) may be right is because of the greater issue that what exists in heaven is reflected in many different ways at many different times in earth below. For instance, we know that the earthly temple and its furnishings were a copy of the heavenly one. Much of what we see in Ezekiel is replayed again in Revelation. Although some of this symbolism has value, the greater principle to keep in mind is that the things of God are very, very difficult to describe because of our limited understanding and vocabulary. Therefore God has used them in many, many examples, each one teaching a little bit more about the whole. We're not supposed to obsess about one, individual meaning, but to strive to understand the greater, combined message to which they're all pointing.*

**Q: So what may be the greater teaching to which this is all pointing?**

A: Remember that since Israel left Egypt, God's glory was always associated first with the tabernacle and then the temple. We have a very vivid reminder that He is not confined to one place and is present and working throughout the whole earth. This would be a very powerful message to Jews living in captivity and cut off from the temple, that they don't need the temple to experience God. Just as we need to see the greater message behind Ezekiel's visions, **THEY** needed to live the greater principles behind the Law given concerning the temple and the things of God.

**Q: What is the greater meaning of the descriptions contained in v.12-14?**

- A big principle we should be learning is to be obedient to the Spirit's leading, unhesitatingly moving to fulfill God's will.
- Those serving before God never cease ministering to Him or carrying out His work.
- Another is that God's righteousness and holiness are constantly at work.
- Others?

***Point:*** *The overall message of this vision is that God is at work, in control, and accomplishing His will in spite of how things look from a human point of view. Ezekiel, living in the worst conditions and lowest point of Israel's history, was shown the reality of God at work once his eyes were opened to God's working in the spiritual realm. Just as the things of heaven are cast in many different variants to teach an aspect of their greater, spiritual meaning, so earthly events – regardless of how they appear from an earthly perspective – are actually the direct result of heavenly workings.*

<sup>15</sup>Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them. <sup>16</sup>The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another. <sup>17</sup>Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved.

<sup>18</sup>As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. <sup>19</sup>Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also.

<sup>20</sup>Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. <sup>21</sup>Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.

<sup>22</sup>Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads. <sup>23</sup>Under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering its body on the one side and on the other. <sup>24</sup>I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. <sup>25</sup>And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.

### **[Read v.15-21]**

**Q: So in keeping with the intention we've established so far to seek the greater teaching behind the symbols, how would you interpret the meaning of the wheels and their associated description?**

A: It's a teaching of the omniscience of God ("omniscient" means "having total knowledge; knowing everything") who is not just aware of everything occurring throughout the whole earth, but is actually present and active throughout the whole earth.

**Point:** *What has happened to get us to this very point in life, what is happening to us at this present hour, and how it all fits together for our future, is not something God is observing from afar, but in which He's actually and actively involved.*

### **[Read v.22-25]**

**Q: What is the greater lesson being taught here?**

A: When God speaks, even heavenly beings shut up and listen. They recognize and respond to His Word. They trust in the direction that He gives. So should we.

**Point:** *One of the common characteristics of all the great role models provided throughout the Bible is that they never cease listening to and obeying God's Word regardless of the circumstances. They completely put aside their own desires in favor of responding exclusively to His.*

<sup>26</sup>Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. <sup>27</sup>Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. <sup>28</sup>As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

## **[Read v.26-28]**

**Q: So who is at the very center of God's glory? How is God's glory ultimately and visibly expressed so as to be understood by humans?**

A: Christ Jesus. He is the expression of God's glory that serves as the ultimate example to explain precisely what that glory is and how we should respond to it.

*Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.*

*Revelation 4:2-3*

## **Application**

*Go through as many of the following verses as possible and make application of what God's glory means, how it relates to Christ, and ultimately how it relates to you personally. How well do you see the heavenly patterns behind the earthly events of your life? And how well do you recognize that God is in complete control not just of the past, but the present and future?*

*"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds."*

*Matthew 16:27*

*"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

*Mark 8:38*

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*John 1:14*

*"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

*John 17:22-23*

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

*Romans 8:18*

*And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.*

*Romans 9:23-24*

## **Ezekiel 1 • God's Glory, Page 5 of 6**

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

*2 Corinthians 3:18*

*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

*Colossians 3:3-4*

*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

*Hebrews 1:3*

*If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

*1 Peter 4:14*

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

*2 Peter 1:16-18*

*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.*

*Revelation 21:10-11*

*I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

*Revelation 21:22-23*