

Understanding The Four Beasts Of Ezekiel and Revelation

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The Vision Of The Chariot Of God¹

"And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof as it were glowing metal, out of the midst of the fire. And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures, And this was their appearance: They had the likeness of a man; and every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings were separate above; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches: the fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning"—Ezekiel 1:4-14.

Artists have attempted to picture this majestic vision of the Eternal One riding through the universe on His chariot of glory, but no human mind can visualize the description in its intricate details. As we read the words of the prophet we are reminded anew that as the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's thoughts beyond our thoughts and His ways above our ways. But even though the vision may be, as a whole, beyond our comprehension, there is much in it that becomes clear as we study it attentively.

As Ezekiel looked heavenward he beheld a stormy wind, evidently a whirlwind, coming from the north, which to an Israelite was the place of mystery, of darkness and of distress. The biting north wind brought with it blight and desolation. Babylon's legions entered the land from the north, spreading desolation wherever they went. Though false prophets cried, "Peace, peace," endeavoring to quiet the fears of the people, there would be no peace but rather destruction, because of the waywardness and disobedience of the leaders and people alike. A storm was coming. It was God Himself who had decreed it in His righteous government.

As the prophet gazed upon the enfolding cloud, he discerned the form of a great chariot with wheels of enormous height, the attendants of the divine majesty surrounding it, and one in the form of a man riding in triumph through the heavens.

The living creatures are identical with those of The Revelation, and yet the description is somewhat different. There each individual cherub has but one face, though there are four, as here; and they bear respectively the faces of a man, signifying intelligence; a lion, speaking of majesty and power; an ox, telling of patient service; and an eagle, the symbol of swiftness in execution of judgment and acute discernment from afar. Here each cherub has the four faces. These are the heads of the four orders of creation, the human, the wild beasts, the cattle of the farm, and the bird kingdom. There were two cherubim over the ark, attached to the mercy-seat, speaking of judgment (discernment), and justice (righteousness), the habitation of God's throne. The four here in Ezekiel and in The Revelation tell of these powers in connection with the government of the world. Four is the number of the world powers, as in Daniel 2 and 7 and elsewhere.

¹**Ezekiel The Prophet.** By H.A. Ironside, Chapter 1; Litt.D.; Loizeaux Bros., Inc. Bible Truth Depot, Neptune, NJ.; © 1949

The cherubim here are seen in connection with divine activity in the affairs of the nations. They are the expression of the divine attributes. Whether they are actually created beings, like or akin to angels, or whether they are symbolic representations of these attributes, is a moot question. At any rate, we see in them the manifestation of the divine nature acting in righteous government over the nations.

From the days of the Early Church fathers these cherubim have been linked with the manner in which Christ is presented in the four Gospels, and sometimes very fancifully, and apparently with no real grasp of their significance. For instance, "the lion of St. Mark" is well known and implies that Mark presents Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. But this is surely incorrect. It was Matthew to whom it was given so to portray Him; whereas Mark's record is symbolized better by the patient ox, the servant of God and man. Luke gives us pre-eminently the face of a Man—the Humanity of our Lord in all its perfection. John completes the story by setting Him forth as the heavenly One—the Eternal Son become flesh, aptly pictured by the eagle. In Christ all fulness dwells. He is the complete manifestation of all the divine attributes.

There are details that one who is more spiritually-minded might understand better, but which forbid more careful attempt at exposition as far as the present writer is concerned. The wings connect the cherubim with the heavens, and by these they are covered in the presence of the Throne Occupant. Under their wings are hands as of a man—hands ready to succor and help when needed, or to strike in judgment, if necessary. Nothing here is arbitrary; all is under the control of Him whose heart is concerned about all His creatures.

"They went every one straight forward." Nothing can turn aside the undeviating principles of the divine government. No schemes of men, no flaunting of God's Word, no studied attempts to thwart His righteous rule, can avail. Steadily the chariot of the Lord rolls on, accomplishing the ends He has in view.

Every one of the cherubs had the face of a man. This seems to be the predominant face. The others, archetypal heads of creation, occupy a secondary place. The face of a man tells us that heaven truly understands and enters into our problems. The Lord is mindful of His own, and His heart goes out to every creature He has made. These cherubim are the executors of His judgments as the seraphim are the agents of His grace (Isa. 6). But judgment is His strange work and is executed only when grace has been ignored or rejected.

The wings of the living creatures are used for worship and for service. Like the seraphim, with twain they cover their faces as they bow in adoration before the Majesty of the heavens. The other two are used to speed them on His errands. We may learn a lesson from this for ourselves: worship comes first, then service.

"They went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went." There is no vain Repetition in God's Word. The fact that this statement is repeated only helps to impress upon us the immutability of God's counsels. No power, human or diabolic, can turn them aside. All are directed by the Spirit who is the expression of the divine activity; ever working throughout the universe.

The appearance of the living creatures was ethereal, like flaming torches, even as we read, He "maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104 :4 ; Heb.1:7). The angels are the ministers of God's providence through whom He rules the present creation.

"But unto the angels hath He not put into subjection the age to come' (Heb. 2:5). That age will be ruled through His redeemed ones, associated with Christ on His throne, according as it is written, "The time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7 :22) .

The fire that went up and down among the living creatures is the Shekinah glory, the manifest presence of the God of Israel, the uncreated light that once abode over the mercy-seat and between the cherubim, in the Holiest of all, of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple built by Solomon. This glory Ezekiel saw leaving the temple and returning to heaven. Some day it will come back to earth again and hover above the holy city, and the glory shall be a defence over all (Isa, 4:5). During all the long period of the times of the nations, while the Jews are scattered and the temple-site is occupied by a mosque of the false prophet of Islam, the glory is departed from the earth. "Ichabod" is written over all this scene. So one has to look up to see it by faith in that place where Christ sits exalted at God's right hand.

The living creatures come and go—swift messengers bent on the King's business—as the appearance of lightning. Limitations of time are not theirs. Instantly they dart from one end of the universe to another as they carry out the bidding of their Imperial Lord. Even so shall His coming be when He returns to earth the second time, for "as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in His day" (Luke 17:24).

We turn to consider next the wheels with their terrible rotations as the chariot of the Almighty moves on in majesty.

"Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold, one wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces thereof. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto a beryl: and they four had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in their four directions: they turned not when they went. As for their rims, they were high and dreadful; and they four had their rims full of eyes round about. And 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. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went; thither was the spirit to go: and the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels"—**verses 15-21**.

These wheels connect the chariot with the earth. There are wings above and wheels below, and both are in perfect harmony, for the Lord hath His way in the sanctuary and in the sea (Ps. 77 :13, 19). He is both the God of heaven and the Lord of the whole earth. All things serve His might. There is no one who can say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" or hope to resist His power. He makes the very wrath of man to praise Him, and that which would not contribute to His glory He restrains (Ps. 76:10).

Wheels, with their ever-recurring revolutions as they move on through the ages, suggest the great changes to which men and nations are subject. Nothing is at a standstill; everything is in constant motion. This is as true in nature, the material universe, as in the moral and spiritual realms. Solomon marvelled as he watched the great wheel of the world go round. He exclaimed, "One generation goeth, and another generation cometh ; but the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again" (Eccl. 1:4-7). We say that history repeats itself. This is but another way of saying that the wheels are continually revolving.

And there are wheels within wheels, so arranged that we cannot follow their intricacies. But we see them everywhere, different principles working at one and the same time, in the world, in politics, in the church, in all phases of human society. So true is this that the mind becomes bewildered trying to keep all the different movements in mind, until we are tempted to think that all is utter confusion, and there is neither order nor sanity in the universe. But the spirit of the living creature is in the wheels and all are controlled by a higher power than the merely human, or blind chance, or what men call *fate*.

Moreover, there are eyes in the wheels, and these speak of intelligence and careful discernment and discrimination. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov.15 :3); and, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron. 16 :9). Those eyes are ever over the righteous, and His ear is open to their cry (Ps. 34:15). And so as the wheels move on, though so high that we are unable to comprehend fully what God is doing, we may rest in this precious truth, that nothing moves but at His command or by His permission. In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God's long toleration of evils—His apparent indifference to the cruelties practiced against His people and the wicked behavior of those who seemed to triumph for a time while the righteous suffered in silence—will all be made clear, and we shall see that though the wheels were high and the mysteries of the divine government beyond our present ability to comprehend, yet all were under His control who was working according to plan in a way that puny man little realized. The wheels have never been separated from the living creatures. Nothing is left to chance. All movements among men are under divine control, and even Satan can act only as God gives permission, as we see in the account of His dealings with the patriarch Job.

"And over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of a firmament, like the terrible crystal to look upon, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two which covered on this side, and every one had two which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of a host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice above the firmament that was over their heads: when they stood, they let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above. And I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it round about, from the appearance of his loins and upward; and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake"—**verses 22-28**.

The firmament, the heavenly dome, is over the living creatures, for it is under the heavens that the divine government is exercised. Nor is there ever any conflict between the various divine agencies or the divine counsels. What seems to man's finite mind to be intricate and confused is clear to the spiritual one, who sees God behind all His works and ways. So the cherubim act in perfect harmony, and are thus joined to one another. All act in obedience to the voice above their heads, the voice of Him who sits unmoved upon His throne, undisturbed by all the storms of earth that rage below.

As Ezekiel looked up he saw the likeness of a Man upon that throne. This is a clear intimation that the Man of God's counsels, the Lord Jesus Christ, is ever to occupy that place of power and majesty. It was the pre-incarnate Christ that the prophet beheld, "the likeness of a Man." Now, since redemption is accomplished, the Man Christ Jesus sits in His glorified human body on that throne of the Eternal. Consider the description of the Son of Man walking amid the lampstands in The Revelation, and note how intimately that links with this.

The rainbow about the throne, also seen again in the Apocalypse, speaks of the unchanging covenant God made with Noah, and gives assurance that no matter what catastrophes prevail for the moment, God's watchful eye is ever upon this earth, and while it remains, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest shall not cease. The storm may rage and the very sun may seem to be blotted out of the heavens, but the Word of our God shall stand forever. His covenant He will not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of His lips. Faith can rest now and be quiet and peaceful in the day of trouble.

Eating The Roll²

(Ezekiel 3:12-15)

"Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of Jehovah from his place. And I heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing. So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away; and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river Chebar, and to where they dwelt; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days"—verses 12-15.

This was a fresh revelation of the power of God as Governor among the nations, given to encourage the prophet as he was about to begin his ministry. He had to learn that there was no might in himself; he could not carry on in what was merely human energy. The Spirit of God proceeding from the throne, took him up and placed him under divine control. This was ever true of our blessed Lord in the years of His humiliation. He ever chose to act, not in His inherent omnipotence as God the Son become flesh, but He put Himself under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who "drove Him into the wilderness," and it was by the Spirit of God that He cast out demons and accomplished all His mighty works.

His servants, too, are to be under the same authority as they go forth to witness. The "noise of a great rushing" that stirred Ezekiel's soul, reminds us of the sound as of a rushing, mighty wind at Pentecost, when the promised Comforter descended upon the one hundred and twenty disciples, baptizing them into one Body (1 Cor. 12 :12, 13) and empowering them for service. The book of the Acts is far more truly designated as the Acts of the Holy Spirit than the Acts of the Apostles. It was the Spirit who empowered Peter and John and the rest for witness-bearing. The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip when his work with the Ethiopian treasurer was done. The same Spirit opened and closed doors for Paul and his companions; and by the Spirit all testimony for Christ has been maintained throughout the centuries since.

It is evident that Ezekiel did not seek the position of being the mouthpiece of God. As a result of the book of "lamentations and mourning" which he had eaten, his own spirit was filled with bitterness. He was keenly conscious of the sadness of the burden of the Lord which he must proclaim. Borne along by the Spirit, however, he found himself among the captives at Tel-abib by the River Chebar. To them he was to give forth what God had given him. But so great was his inward exercise that for a full week he sat looking on, dumb with grief, as he considered their present condition and realized the hardness of their hearts and their unwillingness to heed what he was sent to declare unto them. At the end of the seven days God spoke again.

The Man With The Inkhorn³

Ezekiel 9

IT IS a mark of grace working in the soul when one is characterized by a holy horror of surrounding sin and uncleanness. By this is not meant a "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou," attitude, but a recognition of the fact that one is himself part of an iniquitous and gainsaying people ; one who, like Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra, bears the sins of his people upon his own heart and takes his place with them in confession before God.

As the Lord looked upon the people of Judah in Ezekiel's day He saw very little evidence of this spirit of self-judgment. He who of old would have spared the cities of the plain had ten righteous men been

² **Ibid.** Ezekiel 3: 12-15

³ **Ibid.** Ezekiel 9

found in Sodom, had looked in vain for any appreciable group in Judea who mourned before Him because of the abounding evil. He would separate any such from the apostate nation, associating them with Himself in judgment upon the rest. In a remarkable vision this was made clear to the prophet.

"Then he cried in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause ye them that have charge over the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lieth toward the north, every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man in the midst of them clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon it was, to the threshold of the house: and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn by his side. And Jehovah said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof"—verses 1-4.

One can see in this the inspiration of John Bunyan's graphic picture of the call to devotion to the Lord's battles as beheld by the pilgrim in the Interpreter's house. Bunyan's whole being was saturated with the Scriptures, which colored all his thinking and writing.

A voice is heard calling from the sanctuary for those who are in authority in Jerusalem to draw near with the swords of judgment in their hands.

To this call six men responded in the vision, each one armed to deal with offenders against the law of God. Among these was a secretary, or recorder, robed in linen, the symbol of righteousness, and having a writer's inkhorn by his side according to the custom of those days. All these men took their positions before the brazen altar, which speaks of the cross work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the light of which the whole world of the impenitent is to be judged.

The prophet sees the glory of the God of Israel which had gone up from its accustomed place between the cherubim over the mercy-seat, now hovering over the threshold of the house. The throne of God is no longer a throne of grace but of judgment, for grace has been spurned and God's holiness defied.

The voice is heard again, and is identified as that of Jehovah Himself. He commands the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn, to go through the midst of the city of Jerusalem, and to set a mark upon the foreheads of those who manifested exercise of soul by sighing and crying because of the manifold abominations being practiced on every hand. One is reminded of the 144,000 out of all the tribes of Israel who are to be sealed in their foreheads just before the great tribulation bursts upon the world in all its terrible fury. And we think today of those who, having turned to God in repentance and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, are sealed by the Holy Spirit and thus marked off from those who are to be Anathema Maranatha—devoted to judgment at the coming of the Lord.

The nature of the mark on the foreheads of those sealed in this vision is not indicated, but it certainly was a sign that they had judged themselves before God and now sided with Him in His attitude toward the iniquities of Judah.

"And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye through the city after him, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; slay utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark: and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the old men that were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and smote in the city"—verses 5-7.

As we read these words we cannot fail to connect them with the solemn message of 1 Peter 4 : 17, 18 : *"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God : and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear ?"*

The armed executors of justice were commanded to go through Jerusalem and smite down all who did not have the seal on their foreheads, and the word was, "Begin at My sanctuary." Thus the judgment commenced with the priest of the Lord who had profaned His name. Even so, God will deal in stern retribution with all who profess His name today but who have only a form of godliness while denying its power. The Lord will not spare the professing church if its members spurn His Word and trample on His grace, turning that grace into lasciviousness.

Because the people of Judah had profaned the temple by their idolatries, God would give it up to further defilement by the dead bodies of those who had rebelled against Him.

"And it came to pass, while they were smiting, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord Jehovah! wilt Thou destroy all the residue of Israel in Thy pouring out of Thy wrath upon Jerusalem? Then said He unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of wresting of judgment: for they say, Jehovah hath forsaken the land, and Jehovah seeth not. And as for Me also, Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed in linen, who had the inhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as Thou hast commanded me" —verses 8-11.

Stirred to the depths of his being by this vision of the slaughter of priests and people (so soon to be accomplished by the Chaldean armies), Ezekiel fell down on his face before God and pleaded that He would not destroy all the remnant of Israel when He poured out His wrath upon Jerusalem. God answered by declaring that conditions were such that judgment could no longer be delayed, and inasmuch as the whole people had departed from Him, and had refused all entreaty to repent and seek His face, judgment without mercy should be meted out to them.

But this did not mean that He had forgotten the few in the land who sighed and cried because of conditions which they could not remedy. He had commanded the destroyers already, saying, "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark." This indicated clearly His care for the faithful remnant.

As the first part of the vision came to an end the man with the inhorn reported, saying, "I have done as Thou hast commanded me." This was to reassure the prophet concerning those who had humbled themselves before God and mourned because of the sin of Judah.

The Divine Chariot Reappears⁴

Ezekiel 10

THIS tenth chapter gives a continuation of the vision, the first part of which is recorded in chapter 9. The man clothed with linen who had the inhorn by his side is still before us and acts as the direct representative of God in judgment. Ezekiel's attention was turned away from the earthly sanctuary to the heavens above. He says :

"Then I looked, and behold, in the firmament that was over the head of the cherubim there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed in linen, and said, Go in between the whirling wheels, even under the cherub, and fill both thy hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of Jehovah mounted up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Jehovah's glory. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaketh. And it came to pass, when he commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went in, and stood beside a wheel. And the cherub stretched forth his hand from

⁴ Ibid. Ezekiel 10

between the cherubim unto the fire that was between the cherubim, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed in linen, who took it and went out. And there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings" —verses 1-8.

So marvelous and sublime is this vision that it is almost beyond human power to fully understand and appreciate it. We see here, as in chapter 1, the divine chariot in which Jehovah rides majestically through the universe, ordering everything according to the counsel of His own will. The prophet looked up and saw in the firmament that was over the head of the cherubim, a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. It is the throne of the moral Governor of the universe. No matter how confused and confusing conditions may be on earth,

"God sits exalted on His throne, And ruleth, all things well."

At His command the man clothed with linen was seen entering in between the whirling wheels under the cherubim. There his hands were filled with coals of fire from between these glorious beings—fire which was to be scattered over the city, indicating that the hour of its judgment had come.

We have something very similar in the book of the Revelation, in the eighth chapter, where the angel-priest is seen standing at the golden altar, offering up before God the smoke of the incense with prayers of His suffering saints on the earth. In response to these prayers the angel takes the censer and fills it with the fire of the altar and casts it upon the earth, thus indicating that the judgments of God are to be poured out upon this guilty world. And so here in Ezekiel 10, God's patience having been exhausted, the people of Judah having sinned until there was no hope of repentance, the hour of their doom had struck. They could not see what was going on in the heavens ; they did not realize that coals of fire from between the cherubim were being scattered over the city; but they were soon to know the meaning of all this in all its terror and its horror.

As the prophet beheld, the cherubim stood on the right side of the house when the man went in, and the cloud, we are told, filled the inner court. Then he saw the glory of Jehovah mounting up from the cherubim and standing suspended over the threshold of the house which was filled with the cloud, and the court, too, was resplendent with the brightness of Jehovah's glory.

Though the ears of the sinners of Judah were deaf to it all, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaketh. He commanded the man clothed in linen, bidding him take the fire from between the whirling wheels from between the cherubim—a command that was obeyed immediately. Hands that had been hidden formerly beneath the wings of these executors of the divine government, reached out and took the fire and put it into the hands of this man who received it and went out. It was the form of a man's hand that was seen under the wings, suggesting that God was reaching down to clasp the hand of His creatures and would have poured out upon them His rich grace had they been prepared to receive it, but now He must deal in judgment.

"And I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like unto a beryl stone. And as for their appearance, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been within a wheel. When they went, they went in their four directions: they turned not as they went, but to the Place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels. And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle"—verses 9-14.

The wheels of government, as we saw in chapter 1, are intimately connected with the cherubim. There are wheels within wheels, because the counsels of God are being carried out even though man cannot

comprehend them. At the very time that the Lord had to visit in judgment the city where He had placed His name, He was so overruling in connection with His faithful remnant that even the haughty Gentile oppressor would find it in his heart to show them mercy.

Nothing can turn aside these wheels of government to the place whither the head looked; that is, the head of the chariot. They followed it and turned not as they went. Puny man attempts to defy God, but it will result only in his being crushed beneath these mighty wheels. None who have ever hardened themselves against Him have prospered ; and yet those wheels do not represent mere arbitrary fate, but the wheels themselves were full of eyes—eyes roundabout ; eyes that speak of intelligence ; the eyes of the Lord, in every place beholding the evil and the good. For the judgment of God is according to truth. There is nothing capricious about His government He will not render unto man more than his right.

We have noticed already in our comments on the first chapter the significance of the four faces of the cherubim and so need not dwell upon that here.

"And the cherubim mounted up: this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar. And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them: for the spirit of the living creature was in them"—verses 15-17.

Very definitely Ezekiel identifies this vision of the living creature with that which he saw previously by the River Chebar, but again he emphasizes the fact that the wheels were under the direct control of the cherubim. When they lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth the wheels also turned not from beside them; when the cherubim stood, the wheels were still ; and when they soared up into the heavens the wheels were lifted up with them, for the spirit of the one was in the other.

"And the glory of Jehovah went forth from over the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them: and they stood at the door of the east gate of Jehovah's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above"—verses 18, 19.

As Ezekiel continued to gaze upon this wondrous scene he beheld the Shekinah glory issue forth from over the threshold of the house and rise up into the heavens until it stood over the cherubim; and then, as though riding majestically through the universe in the divine chariot, it crossed to the door of the east gate of Jehovah's house, and for a time seemed to be suspended above that entrance. It was as though Jehovah was loth to forsake His sanctuary. He lingered still in the place where He had set His name, but there was no evidence whatever of repentance on the part of the people, and so in a short time the glory was to ascend to heaven never to be seen again until the Lord Jesus Christ appeared on this earth.

"This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim. Every one had four faces, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves; they went every one straight forward"—verses 20-22.

Again the prophet identifies the vision with the living creature which he had seen by the River Chebar. Observe that the living creature is under the God of Israel. God Himself is invisible. His attributes are manifested in the cherubim. "Justice and judgment," the Psalmist tells us, "are the habitation of Thy throne" (Psalm 89:14), and these attributes are exemplified in the angelic figures.

How solemn the repetition of the words "They went every one straight forward." Oh, the folly of supposing that it is possible for human power to thwart the will of God!

The End Of The Vision⁵

Ezekiel 11: 22-25

"Then did the cherubim lift up their wings, and the wheels were beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of Jehovah went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city. And the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that Jehovah had showed me"—verses 22-25.

As the vision came to an end and Ezekiel beheld the cherubim lift up their wings with the wheels of government beside them, he saw the glory of the God of Israel over them above. It was evident that God still lingered in mercy, even though that mercy was despised, for the glory of Jehovah went up from the midst, then stood upon the mountain, which is on the east side of the city. This is the Shekinah glory which had dwelt between the cherubim in the Holiest of all. It now stood over upon the Mount of Olives, the very place where the Lord Jesus Himself was to stand before He ascended to heaven. The last the prophet saw of the glory in this vision it still waited there upon the mountain top, as though God was reluctant to forsake His people, in spite of the fact that they had proven so disobedient and hardhearted.

As the vision passed Ezekiel opened his eyes to find himself in the land of Chaldea on the banks of the Chebar with a group of the captives gathered about him, to whom he revealed all that he had seen and heard.

The Return of the Glory⁶

Ezekiel 43

We have seen how the Shekinah Glory, the *uncreated light* that rested above the mercy-seat, moved slowly from the temple of Solomon, rising from its place between the cherubim, passing on to the door of the temple, then on to the gate in the east and thence to the Mount of Olives, from which the prophet saw it ascending to heaven; all of which is distinctly typical of our blessed Lord's giving up of Israel when they knew not the time of their visitation. But that glory which departed is yet to return when Israel shall be restored to the Lord, and it is this the present chapter treats.

In vision the prophet sees the divine chariot, the glory which he had beheld by the river Chebar, now returning to take its place in the magnificent structure which he saw spread before him as he looked down from the top of the mountain.

"Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh out toward the east. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shined with His glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; And the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of Jehovah came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. And behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house"—verses 1-5

Ezekiel was brought by the man with the measuring rod to the east gate, and there as he looked up he beheld the glory of the God of Israel coming from the way of the sunrising, and he heard a voice like the sound of many waters. So marvelous was the sight that the earth shone with the brilliance of the Shekinah. The prophet recognized it at once as the same glory which he had seen departing when God announced that the destruction of the city was near at hand. Reverently Ezekiel fell upon his face as a

⁵ **Ibid.** Ezekiel 11: 22-25

⁶ **Ibid.** Ezekiel 43

worshiper as he beheld the glory enter by way of the east gate, and then as he looked up he saw that it filled the entire house.

"And I heard one speaking unto me out of the house; and a Man stood by me. And He said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile My holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places; in their setting of their threshold by My threshold, and their door-post beside My door-post, and there was but the wall between Me and them; and they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in Mine anger. Now let them put away their whoredom, and the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever"—verses 6-9.

A voice came from out of the house, and a Man hitherto unseen stood by Ezekiel. The voice announced, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever." When the glory returns it will not be a question of whether the people themselves are deserving of blessing, but it will be a manifestation of the grace of God as set forth in the new covenant. The Lord Himself will see to it that the house of Israel shall never again defile His holy name nor bring dishonor upon His sanctuary by departing from Him and taking up with unclean and unholy practices. In that day His law will be written upon the hearts of His people so that they will delight to do His will. Idolatry will never again rear its hateful head in all the land of Palestine. No more will the priests of Baal and kindred systems set their thresholds by that of Jehovah as in the past when His house was often rendered unclean by the setting up of their images in or near to its courts. All this will be forever past, and God Himself will dwell in the midst of His people.

"Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the egresses thereof, and the entrances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the house: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house"—verses 10-12.

The tenth verse gives the real key to the entire vision, the reason for which God gave it. He said to Ezekiel, "Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern." As they thus dwelt upon the glory they might be moved for the time being, and they would loathe themselves as they realized that their iniquities had separated between them and their God. If conscience were inactive, of course, all this would have no effect upon them. But Jehovah said that if they were ashamed of all they had done, then the prophet was to make known the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, the exits and the entrances, and everything connected with the service and its laws, in order that they might yield glad-hearted obedience to all that God asked of them.

It is noticeable that the law of the house was really the way of holiness, for we are told in ver. 12, "This is the law of the house: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house." God makes Himself known to those who walk before Him in holiness and righteousness. We do not learn truth simply through the intellect; we learn it through the conscience. When the conscience is tender and responsive to the Word of God, then His truth is opened up to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we are enabled to understand His mind and find our delight in doing His will. So will it be with Israel when the many prophecies concerning their future regeneration shall have been fulfilled.

The measures of the altar are given in the verses that follow: "And these are the measures of the altar by cubits (the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth): the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border

thereof by the edge thereof round about a span; and this shall be the base of the altar. And from the bottom upon the ground to the lower ledge shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser ledge to the greater ledge shall be four cubits, and the breadth a cubit. And the upper altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth and upward there shall be four horns. And the altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides thereof. And the ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad in the four sides thereof; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and the bottom thereof shall be a cubit round about; and the steps thereof shall look toward the east"—verses 13-17.

It is noticeable here that the altar is measured not by ordinary cubits but by a cubit and a span. The ordinary cubit was approximately the measure from a man's elbow to the tip of his fingers, about eighteen inches; the span added to it would make it about twenty-one or twenty-two inches. It is by this longer cubit that the altar is measured, as though to remind us that the work of the cross is not to be measured by man's standards but by those that God Himself appoints. The altar here is, of course, the altar of sacrifice; and it speaks of the work of the cross.

It might seem as we read on in the chapter that sacrifices and offerings are to be presented to the Lord on this altar in millennial days, and, as we have mentioned previously, there have been many who have believed this in the past, and there are still numbers of very godly teachers who consider that the sacrifices will be reinstated, but as memorials not as actually having any atoning value. It seems clear, however, that prior to the work of the cross there could be no other way of presenting that work prophetically than by directing attention to such offerings as the people understood, but when Christ fulfilled all the types on the cross and exclaimed, "It is finished," these sacrifices were done away forever, so that the ordinances of the altar which are spoken of in the closing verses of the chapter, all picture, I have no doubt, the way in which the people will enter into and appreciate the work of our Lord Jesus Christ when at last He is revealed to them.

"And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. Thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that are of the seed of Zadok, who are near unto Me, to minister unto Me, saith the Lord Jehovah, a young bullock for a sin-offering. And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse it and make atonement for it. Thou shalt also take the bullock of the sin-offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary. And on the second day thou shalt offer a he-goat without blemish for a sin-offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they did cleanse it with the bullock. When thou hast made an end of cleansing it, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. And thou shalt bring them near before Jehovah, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt-offering unto Jehovah. Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin-offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. And when they have accomplished the days, it shall be that upon the eighth day, and forward, the priests shall make your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and your peace-offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord Jehovah"—verses 18-27.

Everything here speaks of Christ as the burnt offering, who offered Himself without spot unto God, a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor. He is the true sin offering, who, though He was sinless, was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Israel has never yet entered into the reality of this, but in that coming day they will see how Christ is the fulfilment of all these types, and so they will reach the place where, in holy fellowship with the Lord, they will enjoy Christ as the peace offering', who has brought God and man together, and made them as He has made those of us, both Jew and Gentile, who believe, to be accepted in the Beloved.

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