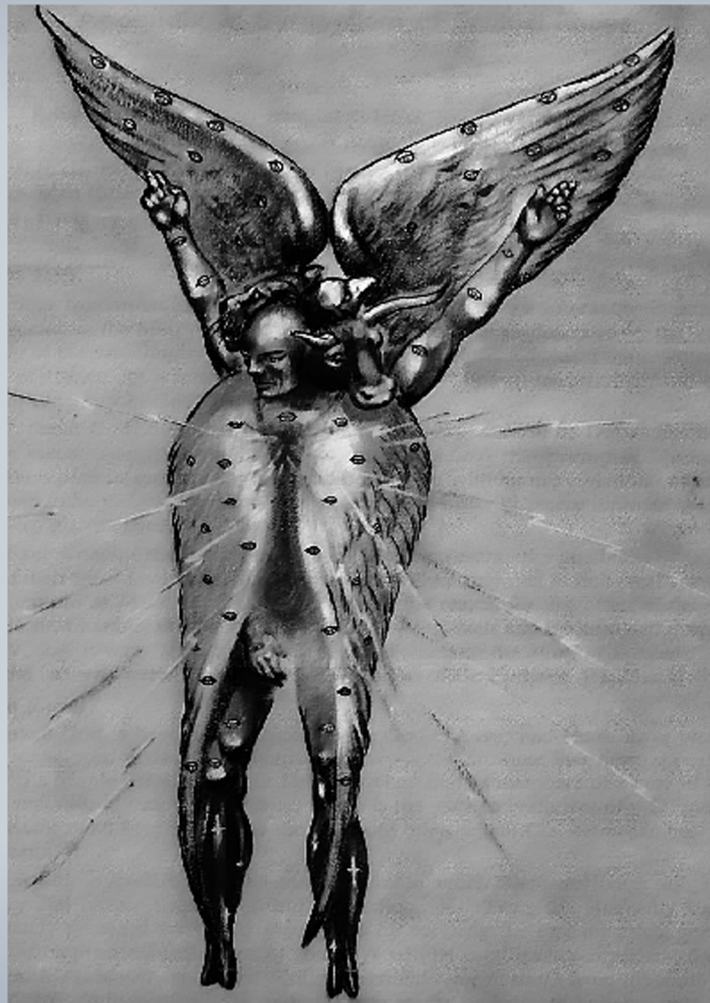


Ezekiel's Vision



**“This [vision] was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.”
(Ezekiel 1:28)**

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF GOD

"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

"On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of the LORD came 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.

"As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze.

"And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

"Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze." (Ezek. 1:1-7, Revised Standard Version)

The Prophet Ezekiel, in looking to the north, saw a vision of a great cloud approaching. The cloud, which appeared ominous, especially with the gleaming bronze of a burning fire in its midst and lightning flashing forth, was symbolic of a judgment coming upon the nation of Israel.

From the midst of the cloud came four “living creatures,” more properly translated “living *beings*.” Not creatures, insects, or lower animals, as one might suppose, the living beings or cherubim each had a human-like body but four different faces and two pairs of wings.

“Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went.

“As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back.

“Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies.

“And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went.” (Ezek. 1:8-12, RSV)

This vision in Ezekiel chapter 1 is complex—it is surrealistic art, as it were. If it were not for the fact that certain other details are supplied, we would have difficulty making sense out of the vision and might quickly pass over this particular account. At the end of the first chapter, however, is a startling statement that immediately attracts our attention and interest. “This [vision] was the appearance of the likeness of the *glory of the LORD*” (Ezek. 1:28). Therefore, in spite of the complexity of the detail, we are constrained to want God to give us understanding on the significance of the symbolisms.

Before explaining verses 8-12, we will read further.

“Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads.

“And under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each creature had two wings covering its body.

“And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the

thunder of the Almighty [God], a sound of tumult like the sound of a host; when they stood still, they let down their wings.

“And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they stood still, they let down their wings.

**“And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form.”
(Ezek. 1:22-26, RSV)**

The likeness of a firmament shining like crystal was above the heads of the living beings. Some translations record the firmament as “terrible [awesome] crystal.” The firmament formed a bar of separation between the cherubim and the great throne above. In other words, in looking at this vision, Ezekiel saw a throne standing on a pure, transparent, icelike foundation or pavilion and four living beings supporting the foundation. Seated on the throne was the presence of “the Almighty [God].” These details, plus the others, add up to a symbolic vision of the glory of God. Of course the Heavenly Father, who is “from everlasting to everlasting,” is not dependent upon any other sentient being, physical or spiritual, for support (Psa. 90:2). Therefore, the four

living beings or cherubim, which supported the throne of God, are *symbolisms*. In other words, they do not represent actual personalities.

A sound of a voice came forth from the midst of the throne that was over the heads of the cherubim. The voice sounded like “the thunder of the Almighty.” The power of the voice of God can be somewhat understood by imagining the thunderous sound of the great Niagara Falls. The sound was very awesome in the vision. In its antitypical significance, the sound represents the diversity of God’s voice in the earth through the Bible as translated into the various tongues and dialects. His voice or Word can be heard in *all* the languages of earth. The voice from above the throne is identified with the personality of the Great Jehovah Himself, described as the likeness of a human form.

The four living beings symbolize the four cardinal attributes that are the substructure of God’s throne. Psalm 89:14 tells us that justice is the foundation of His throne, but here we are given an insight into the *four* cardinal attributes of God that support His throne: love, justice, wisdom, and power. The four attributes can be identified by the faces of the cherubim.

We use symbolism in everyday life, albeit unwittingly in some instances, and yet that symbolism is fraught with meaning. For instance, on top of the dome of City Hall in New York City is the statue of a blindfolded woman with a scale of justice in her right hand. This symbolism signifies that ideologically the building is the center of *impartial* justice. The woman herself represents justice as a virtue, and the blindfold means there is to be no partiality in the distribution of justice on behalf of her subjects. The four likenesses of human beings in the Book of Ezekiel have a somewhat similar inference.

Each living being had one head on its body, but unlike a normal human being, each head had four faces. The fact that four cherubim supported the square throne, each facing a different cardinal point of the compass, does not mean, however, that each cherub represented a different attribute. Rather, the four living beings represent that God's activity in *all points of the compass* is always in harmony with all four attributes.

When considered separately, the four faces of each living being are seen to portray God's four attributes. In front was the face of a man, which is symbolic of *love* for several reasons. Man

was created in the image of God, which is the image of compassion. One day man will have a “heart of flesh,” that is, a heart of *compassion* (Ezek. 11:19). Accordingly, the face of a man, which is identified with a human likeness, is primarily one of compassion and love.

On the right side of the head of each living being was the face of a lion, a representation of God’s *justice*. It is true that the Scriptures sometimes use the lion to portray power and that Jesus is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” the Strong One who prevailed, and it is also true that Samson used the lion in his riddle as “the strong,” yet the lion is also used in several places in the Bible as a symbol of justice (Rev. 5:5; Judges 14:14). In some instances, the thrones of Israel’s kings had lions as a symbol of God’s justice or judgment, signifying that the king was God’s active minister of justice and that swift retributive justice would be meted out to any who infringed the laws of the nation (1 Kings 10:19,20). Prophecies indicated that Israel was to be visited with judgments from the north by an alien power, namely, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who was likened to a lion whom the Lord would call out of a thicket from the north (Jer. 4:7). The word “lion” is embedded in the significance of the altar in the sacrifices of

Ezekiel's Temple; that is, the altar is called the "Ariel" or "Lion of God" (Ezek. 43:15).

The face of an eagle was at the back of the head stock of each living being. Of the four symbolisms, the eagle is easily associated with vision and hence *wisdom*. In the bird kingdom, the eagle is known for its far-ranging vision and voracious appetite. The constant hunger of the eagle is aided by its ability to see prey at great distances. As someone who can see or observe with exceptional keenness is said to have an "eagle eye," so the eagle represents insight into and wisdom and knowledge of God's divine plan and actions.

The fourth symbol, that of an ox on the left side of the head, pictures *power*. We often use such symbolism today; for instance, a person may have "the strength of a bull" or "oxlike strength." Thus in Ezekiel's symbolic vision of the glory of God, the four cardinal attributes of love, justice, wisdom, and power can be identified as the foundation features of His throne.

In addition to the four faces, each living being had two pairs of wings, and underneath each of the four wings was a human hand. The wings represent the method God employs in revealing

or making known His character. The four attributes operate in harmony with the Word of God, and the two wings (each pair) are symbolic of that Word, the Old and New Testaments. In the Book of Revelation, the Church is pictured as a woman fleeing into the wilderness, supported on the wings of an eagle, that is, the Old and New Testaments (Rev. 12:14). The lesson is that God possesses many characteristics, yet in His dealings with mankind and in His movements, He *always* operates in harmony with His Word.

Each of the two pairs of wings served a different function. With two wings (the first pair), the living beings did fly, and with two wings (the second pair), the living beings covered their bodies. In other words, God's actions—what He is doing now—can be perceived only in investigating the Scriptures and the counsel of His Word. On the one hand, His character is *hidden* in His Word, and on the other hand, it is *discerned* in His Word. The world cannot understand God's character because, not using His Word, they lack information on the details of His plan.

The hands under the wings show that information about God's Word comes through *human* agencies (Eph. 4:11,12). In the

Old Testament, not only did God speak by the mouth of His holy prophets, but also the Hebrew literal rendering is that He spoke “by the *hand* of His prophets.” God uses human agencies to instruct His people so that they can see in part—they see “through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). In Old Testament times, God raised up prophets like Moses, Daniel, and Isaiah. In New Testament times, the Gospel Age, He sent seven successive messengers through Jesus to enlighten His people (Rev. 1:16,20). For example, the first messenger was “the angel of the church of Ephesus,” one of the “seven stars” that Jesus held in his right hand (Rev. 2:1).

“Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.

“As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of a chrysolite; and the four had the same likeness, their construction being as it were a [smaller] wheel within a [larger] wheel.

“When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went.

“The four wheels had rims and they had spokes; and their rims were full of eyes round about.

“And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose.

“Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

**“When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.”
(Ezek. 1:15-21, RSV)**

A tremendous wheel was by the side of each living being so that when the cherubim were active, wheels accompanied them. Whatever the living being did—whether he went forward or backward, or upward or downward—a huge wheel accompanied him. The life that was in the cherubim also seemed to exist in the wheels. With the least movement of the cherubim, there was a corresponding reaction of the wheels—so much so, in fact, that it seemed as if the same personality, life, movement, or spirit that was in the living beings was possessed to a similar degree by the wheels.

Moreover, in whatever direction the wheels went, they operated “without turning as they went.” The thought is not that

the wheels did not revolve because the account expressly states there was movement of the wheels. The point is that the wheels *did not deviate from their fixed course* once they went into operation. The wheels did not deviate either to the right or to the left but were swift on errands of mercy or judgment according to God's purpose or command.

The wheels that accompanied the living beings represent progress or development. The lesson is that God's movements or actions are according to a *predetermined* plan. Nothing He does is haphazard. Every action has been planned with considerable forethought. Hence the wheels represent divine progression down through the ages. The large outer wheel, which stood upon the earth at the side of each living being, was so high that it struck reverential fear in Ezekiel when he first saw its awesome height. And so we find that God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. His movements span great ages. He does things in such a slow, majestic manner, spanning ages of time, that we cannot discern or appreciate what He is doing except through the knowledge of His Word. The majesty of His stately steppings down through the ages can be discerned only through the Bible.

The smaller wheel within the larger wheel represents God's movements or activities in the earth that are easier to see because they are more localized; that is, they are dispensational truths and prophecies that are being fulfilled today. An example is the development of the nation of Israel and the regathering of Jews back to their homeland. In addition to being easier to discern, the smaller wheel revolved much faster than the larger wheel. From Ezekiel's perspective, he saw it as a *whirring* wheel within the larger wheel.

The chrysolite rim of each wheel represents wisdom from two standpoints. Chrysolite is the stone of wisdom, and the rim was full of eyes, showing the depth of the knowledge and wisdom of God in His plan. The spokes, which connected the center hub to the rim, symbolize the outworkings of God's purposes in connection with His plan. Everything is moving according to His purposes and in harmony with His fixed plan and His attributes.

“In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

“And the living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.” (Ezek. 1:13,14, RSV)

The living creatures went forth as “lightning,” meaning they operated (“darted to and fro”) with great speed. Not only did the wheels not deviate from their course, but also they lost no time in performing their mission. If need be, God has the ability to answer our prayers very quickly, even while we are yet speaking. Of course sometimes the answers to prayers are delayed for our development in character, patience, and faith, but God’s ability to function with the speed of lightning shows that *nothing* can retard or retrogress divine purposes in any mission He may have toward man.

“And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him.

“Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about.” (Ezek. 1:27,28, RSV)

It is significant that God’s face was not described in the vision. The appearance of the lower loins and legs merely tells us

that a personage was seated on the throne. Thus there was no violation of the commandment not to “make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above” (Exod. 20:4).

The sapphire (blue color) of God’s throne represents His faithfulness in connection with His promises (Ezek. 1:26). And the rainbow encircling the throne signifies that in spite of the awesomeness of this vision, God’s purposes are for the benefit of the human race, not for its destruction. The bow associated with the throne scene is meant to be an encouragement. As God had promised Noah after the Flood, the rainbow portrayed a covenant of *mercy*.

“And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

“And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

“And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.” (Gen. 9:15-17)

Thus was similar assurance of mercy and encouragement granted to the Prophet Ezekiel when he beheld “the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek. 1:28).

Frank Shallieu

For more information, see the appendices on “Ezekiel Faces” and “Ezekiel Wheels” in the book *The Keys of Revelation*, pages 619-631.