

EZEKIEL

AN EXTRAORDINARY VISION

THE PROPHETS SPEAK OF JESUS



My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. ^{33.31-32}

THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

- ▶ Occurred simultaneously with Jeremiah's prophecy; however, while Jeremiah was in Jerusalem experiencing the Babylonian sieges and persecution by his own people, Ezekiel was already in exile in Babylon, having been deported in the first group of captives.
- ▶ Is uniquely "Spirit-ual" – eleven times Ezekiel recorded that "*the Spirit (came into me; came upon me; lifted me up; carried me, etc)*". The only other prophet who made such a reference (once) was Micah (3.8).
- ▶ Contains the most definitive Old testament portrait of Lucifer in his position, pride, and fall (represented as the prince of Tyre, chapter 28).

VISIONS OF HEAVEN

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. JOHN 1.1

- ▶ To initiate his divine calling to prophetic ministry, Ezekiel is given access to the "transcendent realm":

the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 1.1

While other prophets had extraordinary experiences, this was such an unparalleled vision that we only find one that is comparable elsewhere in Scripture. This "vision of God" was in fact a vision of the Son of God in his pre-incarnate glory!

▶ Two definitions are necessary for us to grasp the significance of this revelation that we are seeing in Scripture today:

▶ *glory*¹: *weight; the sum and substance of God's infinite perfections*

▶ *incarnate*: *invested with human nature and form; made manifest*

¹ Hebrew: *kawbode*; Greek: *doxa*

▶ After setting forth the truth that the *Word was in the beginning with God and was God*, the Apostle John wrote:

The Word became flesh (incarnate; invested with human form and nature) and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory (made manifest), the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John [the Baptizer] testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") JOHN 1.14-15

► In the hours before his death, Jesus prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.” JOHN 17.1-5

- We know that Ezekiel was seeing the Son of God in his pre-incarnate glory because of the identifying details within the vision. The Apostle John is given access to heaven and to see the Son of God in his *post-incarnate* glory, with the same associated identifying details. Ezekiel saw the Son of God in the glory he shared with the Father before the world began; John saw the Son of God in heaven with that glory restored.

The Apokalypsis of Jesus Christos

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants-- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, and among the lamp stands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

REVELATION 1.10-17

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. . . . In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “ ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.”

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

REVELATION 5.1-6

The Prophecy of Ezekiel

On July 31 of my thirtieth year, while I was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. This happened during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. (The LORD gave this message to Ezekiel son of Buzi, a priest, beside the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians, and he felt the hand of the LORD take hold of him.)

As I looked, I saw a great storm coming from the north, driving before it a huge cloud that flashed with lightning and shone with brilliant light. There was fire inside the cloud, and in the middle of the fire glowed something like gleaming amber. From the center of the cloud came four living beings that looked human, except that each had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight, and their feet had hooves like those of a calf and shone like burnished bronze. Under each of their four wings I could see human hands. So each of the four beings had four faces and four wings. ^{1.1-8}

Each had a human face in the front, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back. Each had two pairs of outstretched wings—one pair stretched out to touch the wings of the living beings on either side of it, and the other pair covered its body. They went in whatever direction the spirit chose, and they moved straight forward in any direction without turning around. The living beings looked like bright coals of fire or brilliant torches, and lightning seemed to flash back and forth among them. And the living beings darted to and fro like flashes of lightning. As I looked at these beings, I saw four wheels touching the ground beside them, one wheel belonging to each. The wheels sparkled as if made of beryl. All four wheels looked alike and were made the same; each wheel had a second wheel turning crosswise within it. The beings could move in any of the four directions they faced, without turning as they moved. 1.10-17

The rims of the four wheels were tall and frightening, and they were covered with eyes all around. When the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. When they flew upward, the wheels went up, too. The spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. So wherever the spirit went, the wheels and the living beings also went. When the beings moved, the wheels moved. When the beings stopped, the wheels stopped. When the beings flew upward, the wheels rose up, for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. Spread out above them was a surface like the sky, glittering like crystal. Beneath this surface the wings of each living being stretched out to touch the others' wings, and each had two wings covering its body. As they flew, their wings sounded to me like waves crashing against the shore or like the voice of the Almighty or like the shouting of a mighty army. When they stopped, they let down their wings. 1.18-24

As they stood with wings lowered, a voice spoke from beyond the crystal surface above them. Above this surface was something that looked like a throne made of blue lapis lazuli. And on this throne high above was a figure whose appearance resembled a man. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like gleaming amber, flickering like a fire. And from his waist down, he looked like a burning flame, shining with splendor. All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the LORD looked like to me. When I saw it, I fell face down on the ground, and I heard someone's voice speaking to me. ^{1.25-28}

EZEKIEL & REVELATION

- ▶ There are over eighty parallels between the prophecy of Ezekiel given to him in sixth century B.C. and the revelation of the Apostle John at the end of the first century A.D. For example, both saw the jewel-like rainbow (a sign of covenant); both saw the blazing purity of God's presence (to Ezekiel, it was *like* a dazzling brightness above; to John, it was *like* a sea of glass); both had a vision of lamps representing God's Spirit; both saw four living creatures with extraordinary features; and both were given a scroll to eat, and instructed to go and prophesy.

- ▶ Of all the parallels, the most significant are:
 - Both had a revelation of “one *like* a son of man” who was overwhelming in his appearance;
 - Both detailed the wrath of God and His irrevocable judgment against the sinfulness of people and nations;
 - Both saw four “living creatures” and described them with the same detail: faces of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle. Wings and many eyes were also prominent features.
 - Both of their prophecies conclude with a new work of God in a setting of abiding presence, righteousness, healing, and life.

IN BETWEEN PRE AND POST

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1.14

- ▶ In his Gospel, the Apostle John presents the *Incarnate-God-Word*, who took on human form and came with all of his infinite glory (weight, merit), the fullness of which extended grace (unmerited favor) to sinful humanity.
- ▶ In The Revelation, the apostle saw four creatures; what is extraordinary is that Ezekiel also saw these creatures, but in a most unique way.

The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. . . . Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. ^{1.5-6, 10-11}

- ▶ What do we make of such an unusual creature? Is there a way to decipher what Ezekiel was seeing of this glory in heaven: four creatures whose form was human, who had four faces, and were capable of supernatural activity?
- ▶ The answer is found in the Gospels where the faces of Ezekiel's vision find fulfillment in the *God-Word-Incarnate*.

THE INCARNATE GLORY

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

HEBREWS 2.9

- ▶ The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the descendant of David and the King of the Jews. The elder said to John in heaven:

“Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” REVELATION 5.5

- ▶ The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as a hardworking, obedient servant—

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” MARK 10.45

- ▶ The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man, a title that Jesus used exclusively and attributed to himself.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” LUKE 19.10

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” 21.36

- ▶ The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Son of God– the *God-Word-Incarnate* who came to bring salvation through the grace of his infinite merit (*cf. Exodus 19.11, salvation on eagle’s wings*)

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. JOHN 20.30-31

- ▶ Ezekiel's vision presented Jesus in His eternal glory while revealing him as the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world"—the *God-Incarnate-Savior*. How do you see Jesus? It is a most critical question. *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*