

# A VISION OF GOD'S THRONE

Pastor Paul Penno

January 9, 2008

The commission of Ezekiel to his prophetic office opens with a vision of God's throne. There he views Christ as man—the true Adam reflecting the light and image of the revered Father. This is God's purpose in the everlasting covenant to exalt fallen humanity to the status sitting with Christ in His throne and being light-bearers to the universe shining forth the character of God.

“And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the color of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.” Ezekiel 1:22.

Above their heads is a firmament. This means a stretched out place. And this firmament connected with the throne in verse 20, has the “appearance of a sapphire stone” (vs. 26).

Now we first encounter this firmament like a sapphire stone in a description of the throne of God found in connection with the time when the seventy elders together with Moses, went up into Mount Sinai, for a distant encounter with Yahweh. They saw through the mist of that vision this stretched out place above the throne, the color of sapphire. The foundation of the throne is sapphire. This led to the traditional view of the Jews that the original ten commandments were written on sapphire stones. The law of God is the foundation of His throne. The two tables of stone on sapphire would remind them of this as did the ribbon of blue that was to bind their wrists and ankles wherever they moved. So their hands and their feet always were active within the circle of the law of God.

“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 the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” Ezekiel 1:26.

Like other Old Testament theophanies in which the Lord or his Angel (the preincarnate Christ) appears as a man (e. g. Gen. 18; 32:24-30; Josh. 5:13-15), this points toward the incarnation of Jesus Christ as true man, fully human and yet fully God. The term here is אָדָם *aw-dawm*, Adam, a man, a human. The use of ‘adam here, may recall that God created ‘adam (Adam; the man; the first man and woman; humanity) in his own image.

“And I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.” Ezekiel 1:27.

This divine man is composed of various brilliances of what looked like fire and electrum from his waist and above, and of fire below.

“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.” Ezekiel 1:28.

Christ has a rainbow-like nimbus entirely surrounding him. The rainbow is the sign of God’s everlasting covenant.

“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. 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.” Genesis 9:13, 16. The rainbow encircles God’s throne and is ever a reminder to Him of His promise in the everlasting covenant to administer mercy toward sinners. It is through the man on the throne that God mediates His promise of life to sinners. Christ is the gift which God gives to humanity because of His promise in the covenant. This brings to us just what we need—forgiveness of sins, and power to overcome temptation to sin. The plan of salvation has ever been the same before the cross as well as after the cross. It has ever involved God becoming a man. 1 Peter 1:19, 20.

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.” Ezekiel 1:28.

Despite Ezekiel’s caution and awe, he gives a fuller eyewitness description of Yahweh than one can find anywhere else in the Old Testament, except in Dan. 7:9-14. Even Isaiah had seen only Yahweh’s “train” (Is. 6:1).

Ezekiel realizes that what he is gazing upon is “the appearance of the Glory of Yahweh.” Here God reveals His glory from the heavenly sanctuary to Ezekiel. It is still God’s purpose to reveal His glory not just to a prophet in the end-time, but to the whole earth (Rev. 18:1).

And so in this vision of Ezekiel chapter one we have the most inspiring picture of God upon His throne seen through Jesus Christ; surrounded by the bow of unchanging promise; support by the law of unchanging providence; controlling the wheels of interplay of human events full of eyes. Nothing is hidden from His sight; guiding the destiny of cooperative men so that they might become impressed

with the fullness of Christ's likeness. This was the vision by the Chebar. This was the purpose of the incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

And as Ezekiel looks at this vision, as chapter one ends, he falls upon his face, full of awe. But he hears a voice speak to him saying, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me" (ch. 2:1, 2). Having seen the vision (vs. 3), Ezekiel is commissioned, "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel" (vs. 3). Once a man catches a vision of Jesus on His throne with the purposes of salvation he must bear the good tidings to those who will listen. And so Ezekiel is sent as a messenger.

But he is warned that the children of Israel is a rebellious nation. They have transgressed. They are impudent children—stiff-hearted. It is not an easy task to carry the message of God. It is not an easy task to preach the gospel. Those who listen are not there with their mouths open for the bread of life. Many times they are rebellious, stiff-hearted, impudent. But what is Ezekiel to do? What is every speaker for God to do?

"I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD" (2:4). The message that Ezekiel is to bring, therefore, is a message that is to be filled with the word of God. It is not his own ideas. It is not his own opinion. It's not sociology. It's not anthropology. It's not psychology. It's not behavioral science. It's the word of the Lord. "Thus saith the Lord GOD." And he is to continue to preach this "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear for they are a rebellious house, yet shall know that there hath been a

---

<sup>1</sup> "This vision was given to Ezekiel at a time when his mind was filled with gloomy forebodings. He saw the land of his fathers lying desolate. The city that was once full of people was no longer inhabited. The voice of mirth and the song of praise were no more heard within her walls. The prophet himself was a stranger in a strange land, where boundless ambition and savage cruelty reigned supreme. That which he saw and heard of human tyranny and wrong distressed his soul, and he mourned bitterly day and night. But the wonderful symbols presented before him beside the river Chebar revealed an overruling power mightier than that of earthly rulers. Above the proud and cruel monarchs of Assyria and Babylon the God of mercy and truth was enthroned.

"The wheellike complications that appeared to the prophet to be involved in such confusion were under the guidance of an infinite hand. The Spirit of God, revealed to him as moving and directing these wheels, brought harmony out of confusion; so the whole world was under His control. Myriads of glorified beings were ready at His word to overrule the power and policy of evil men, and bring good to His faithful ones." 5T 752.1.

prophet among them.” (2:5). So he may expect them not to listen to him.

Seeing the look of consternation on Ezekiel’s face the Lord continues, “Son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions” (2:6). A scorpion doesn’t make a frontal attack. He sneaks up from behind. When he gets you in an unsuspected moment, then he buries his tail in you. Ezekiel is to expect such treatment from those to whom he speaks.

But, nevertheless, vs. 7, “thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.” He is to go as a messenger. He is to speak God’s word. He is to speak God’s word whether he has an attentive, appreciative audience or not.

Well, how is he to learn God’s message. Vs. 8: “Hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.” This concept of eating the word of God is found in many parts of the Bible. Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16). In Rev. 10 John the Revelator is told to take the scroll and eat it. And here Ezekiel is told to take the book and eat it.

“But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.” Ezekiel 3:7. This dismal forecast of Ezekiel’s failure is obviously intended as comfort to Ezekiel. The present, continuing refusal of Israel to listen to God guarantees their future refusal to listen to God’s prophet. “Convince a man against his will, he’s of the same opinion still” applies with double force to repentance and conversion, which can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word. No merely human devices or persuasive techniques will work. “No one is so deaf as someone who does not want to hear.”

There had never been a time in Israel’s existence when it had not been refractory and confrontational. The people’s behavior is both an old family tradition and also one that they almost spontaneously reaffirm themselves.

Their rejection is not of Ezekiel personally, but of the one who sent him. Jesus expressed the Christ-centered principle of representation according to which the emissaries bear in themselves the person of

Christ. “The one who listens to you listens to me, and the one who rejects you rejects me. But the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

“And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.” Ezekiel 3:11. Ezekiel’s commission is to work among the exile captives of the “sons of Israel.” He is told that this evangelistic work will largely be unsuccessful. For that he needs a strong sense of calling by God for the work. Success is not coming to be measured by large numbers of accessions to the faith. Faithfulness to the task which God has called the prophet will be the measure of success in God’s eyes. So far as God is concerned, He has granted freedom to choose to everyone. God remains ever the same. God is love. He draws them to choose life in Him by the power of His love. He does not use compulsion or force. The door of opportunity stands open to a stiff-hearted people.

“Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place.” Ezekiel 3:12. In 1:28 and 10:4, 18, the “Glory of Yahweh” refers specifically to the man-like form of God on the throne (1:26; cf. 8:2). When the angels sang at the birth of Christ their doxology was: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of his good will” (Luke 2:14). God’s glory was revealed on earth through the incarnation of God in sinful flesh. Heaven and earth are very closely linked together by virtue of the incarnate Word—the glory of Yahweh.

“Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.” Ezekiel 3:3. So Ezekiel eats the word of God in the scroll and it is sweet, but it soon turns to bitterness in his stomach. “So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness.” Ezekiel 3:14. This forms the backdrop for John the Revelator’s experience of taking the little book and eating it. “Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.” Revelation 10:9, 10. Here the little book was the sealed prophecies of the book of Daniel. Understanding the prophecies and then going through the bitter disappointment of the non-appearance of Jesus in 1844, corresponds to the bitterness in the belly.

Now we might ask ourselves, How could lamentations, mourning and woe be honey for sweetness? This is the interesting part of the

holy Scriptures. To the unregenerate mind, the message of mourning, lamentation and woe is a put down. The unregenerate mind says, the preacher or prophet is all the time cutting me down. He's all the time criticizing me. He's all the time hitting me over the head. To the regenerate mind, however, these are pointers towards righteousness. He is delighted to have weaknesses pointed out so that he can avoid them in the future. He does not wish to live in a fool's paradise. He is delighted to see areas of improvement. He rejoices to know that whom the Lord loves He rebukes and chastens. And so as Ezekiel ate this inspired record, this roll handed to him by the Holy Spirit in his mouth it was honey for sweetness.

The prophet was carried by the power of the Spirit to Tel-abib. This was not a visional thing, but real; for being lifted up, he was taken away from the place where he saw the vision; he was not set down, and so left to go to Tel-abib, but he was carried in the arms of the Spirit (Eze. 3:15).

Here is infirmity of the prophet appears. He has found favor in the eyes of Christ. The Spirit has entered into him to comfort and bestow prophetic gifts. He has received his message. He is strengthened for the task. Now he finds an unwillingness to obey Christ's call. This bitterness and opposition to his will is a great infirmity. If I go and preach of the glory departing from the temple, I shall stir up the people against me, they will stone me; if not, I shall offend God. He thought about the God's departure out of the temple, the ruin of the city, the stubbornness and impudence of the house of Israel. Now the weightiness of the work enjoined him by Christ seized upon him. Like Jonah, he thought to decline the service. His spirit was bitter.

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." Ezekiel 3:17. Ezekiel's office is a watchman. A watchman observes accurately from a high place. He observes what danger is approaching in order to inform the city or army in a timely fashion. If there is fire, robbery or invasion, the watchman is the first line of defense. Isa. 21:8.

God has set his watchmen in the church which include: extraordinary; prophets, apostles, evangelists; and ordinary; pastors and teachers. Christ is the Master Watchman as Head of the church. Christ forewarns his sentinels in their line of duty to bring to the flock His present truth in order to keep them from falling and prepare them for His coming.

Now Ezekiel was God's watchman set for the task of warning Israel of God's judgment hour in session. This is an example of God's investigative judgment which begins with the house of Israel. Case number one is where the watchman fails to warn the wicked. "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." Ezekiel 3:18. In earlier verses it had often sounded as though the "rebellious house" (3:1-7, 17) was so hardened and incorrigible in their rebellion that any hope for repentance was futile (2:3-7). Here we see that there was a certain hyperbole in such earlier statements. The people are not predestined by God to certain and collective doom, but stand at the crossroads between life and death.

Case number two is identical to case number one, except that here the watchman has done his duty, and when the warning is rejected and the wicked man dies as a result of his iniquity, the watchman has saved his own life. "Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." Ezekiel 3:18, 19.

The obvious purpose of God's investigative judgment and warnings through the watchman is to turn the hearts of the wicked to repentance. It goes without saying that God gives salvation to the wicked. Whether they receive the good word or reject it, is their choice. This means that in the hour of His judgment, God justifies the wicked. He will abundantly pardon and forgive sins. Justification is free to all the wicked, but it is not forced upon those who choose not to repent.

And so in Israel's history a miniature investigative judgment is in progress at this time of exile—a window of mercy is still open for repentance. This limited time is available so long as God is calling them to turn. The love of God is infinite for them, but soon the patience of God will wear out with a recalcitrant people.

God has turned the judgment over to Christ—the adam. Ezekiel, the prophet, alerts God's people as to the storm cloud of judgment that is coming on the horizon. If the watchman saw afar off a desert storm cloud approaching the city and failed to warn the citizens, he would become responsible for the loss of life. Having sounded his early warning system he has cleared his responsibility for any loss of life.

Case three contemplates the sad case, all too familiar in the church, a “righteous man,” by all human measures a faithful member of the community, who apostatizes—who abandons or even renounces the faith and life he once professed. To compound the tragedy, the watchman also, fails to give timely warnings and so is held accountable by God for the apostate’s death. “When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” Ezekiel 3:20. God will not finally judge using some scales of justice, in which the good must be heavier than the bad, as is so popular in conventional religion or spirituality. We hear people say, when I die, I have that my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds. It is the righteousness of God alone that justifies the ungodly sinner. This gift is given to every man, woman, and child. God has elected, chosen, called, and justified every man to be saved. However, God’s election does not trump human choice. So that if one chooses to hinder the gift of God, he may lose his salvation. There is no once saved, always saved.

In case four the man living a righteous life needs the warning of the judgment hour message. “Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.” Ezekiel 3:20, 21. This warning is all the more needed in that he may be tempted to apostatize by sinning, thinking that his righteousness will carry him through. However, upon sober reflection of the prophet’s warning, it may take effect so that he may choose not to sin and thus his life be saved. There is to be no self-confidence in the flesh. One rejoices in the comfort that the Holy Spirit does convict of our weaknesses in order that we may turn to the Lord our Righteousness. This case is a positive motivation for the prophet to undertake his calling. Not all of Israel is incorrigibly wicked and doomed to die.

Earlier the glory of the Lord had been revealed in the heavenly temple of God by the River Chebar. That same glory is revealed to Ezekiel as he stands upon the plain. The mobility of God and His omnipresence are portrayed. This is no place where we can flee from His presence. Heaven is in close proximity to the earth. The glory of God in His sanctuary is omnipresent to the individual soul. “Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the



LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face.” Ezekiel 3:23.

The user-friendly church and worship services that are so popular today that fit God into the needs of people and conform his character and nature to the popular culture around us is so far from the truth as to be ludicrous. This is not to say that God doesn’t meet our needs, but He meets them at their most deepest level, whereas we desire a God who touches us only superficially. Wherever Ezekiel meets the glory of the Lord, whether it be by the river Chebar or on the plain the effect is to fall upon his face in reverence as though awestruck. All this talk about a relationship with God and becoming chummy with Him is leading the people far afield.

“Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house.” Ezekiel 3:24. There was some seclusion time for Ezekiel. He needed some time to process in his own mind all that the Lord had revealed to him. The message and the mission were, humanly speaking, overwhelming.

However, the godly before Christ had the same Holy Spirit that we have since His coming. The Apostle John said, “The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). Not given at all is not the meaning, but was not given so plentifully, so visibly, till Christ was glorified. When kings enter their kingdoms first, or ride in triumph after great victories, then they scatter gold and silver plentifully, and give the greatest honors and gifts unto men; so Christ reserved the pouring out of His Spirit in such plenty and visible signs, till His glorifying. Nevertheless, those godly before Christ had the same Holy Spirit, albeit not in the manner and so largely as after His ascension to heaven.

Ezekiel was imprisoned with his own fears, beat down under a sense of his own worthlessness, but the Spirit of Christ set him at liberty, and lifts him up again, and works graciously in him. The Spirit bring to him comfort, grace, and freedom.

“But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them” (Eze. 3:25). In general the people are enemies to their own good, and active to their own ruin. The house of Israel are against the prophet. They fetter and chain him up, and think they have done well, to make him secure from coming amongst them. What they have done is to thrust away the physician that should cure them. They have shut out

mercy by shutting up a prophet. They have put out the light. That are droves and multitudes of people that would think it a happiness to get all the prophets silenced, imprisoned, banished. They would like to live in darkness. They threw Jeremiah into a miry pit. Peter was chained and put in prison. Paul was flogged and imprisoned.

“And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house.” Ezekiel 3:26. Speech, words, communication are a gift from God. Anyone who has been commissioned of God to give His message to an unreceptive audience knows the difficulty of putting into words and standing boldly before such a group. It is quite intimidating. So without the Lord’s blessing of speech nothing will happen. If the messenger will depend upon the Lord He will open or close the mouth as the situation requires. No human agent can be put into the position of reproving others. Only the Holy Spirit of God can convict of sin.

“But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house.” Ezekiel 3:27.

All times are not times for the prophets to speak. Now the mouth is shut for it is not a seasonable time to prophesy, but hereafter when I shall speak with thee, I will open your mouth. Prophets must wait upon God for their warrant to speak. There are times when God, in judgment to a people, would not have them speak. “There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7). Both these the Lord will show His servants.