

## Message #3

## Ezekiel 1:4-28

The philosophy of many so-called churches today is that they want to create an atmosphere that is non-threatening so seekers may come in and share in something delightful. They want a service that is entertaining, non-threatening and emotionally uplifting. They don't want to hear any warnings, any threats or any negative things that are intimidating. All they want to hear is about a God who will just love them the way they are and a God they can never make angry.

Unfortunately that is not the truth about God. When you come to the book of Ezekiel, you never find that philosophy anywhere. In fact, in Ezekiel, **God makes it clear that not only does He threaten His people, He actually sends judgments against His people.** When God's people do things to make Him angry, He will sovereignly send His heavenly agents to move in mighty ways of punishment and judgment. These judgments are coming straight out of heaven and never is that point more evident than when we come to this vision that starts off the book of Ezekiel.

Now keep our context in mind. God had not spoken to these Hebrew slaves in Babylon for at least five years. You would expect that the first message God would give them will be I just want you to know things are going to work out for you just fine. But that is not how God starts this. What God does is start off by saying I am in sovereign charge of everything and all of the negative things that are happening to My people, I am authorizing and controlling with my angelic forces right out of heaven.

As we come to this series of verses, we come to what A. C. Gaebelien said was "one of the greatest visions of the Bible" (*The Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 19).

It is one of the most amazing texts in Scripture and to explain every bit of this vision is what Gaebelien said was "beyond any expositor" (*Ibid.*, p. 19). In fact, H. A. Ironside said that artists have tried to picture this, but no human mind can even begin to visualize all of the intricate details given here (*Ezekiel*, p. 5). It would be hard to draw or paint this.

**What we know from verse 4 is that Ezekiel looked and actually saw this and what we know from verse 28 is that when he saw it he fell down on his face.** Ezekiel himself knew this was a very unique vision of God. This was not what you typically saw on your average day.

**EZEKIEL SEES A VISION THAT DISPLAYS GOD'S MAJESTY, SOVEREIGNTY AND GLORY IN CONTROLLING ALL THINGS ON EARTH AND HE FELL DOWN ON HIS FACE BEFORE GOD.**

It has been a long time since we did an exposition of the book of Isaiah, but we may recall that Isaiah saw a vision of God in which the LORD was sovereignly sitting on His throne in heaven (Is. 6:1). **Ezekiel is going to see a vision of God in which the LORD is sovereignly operating on earth.**

Now we want to do our best to carefully work through this vision by making eight observations:

**OBSERVATION #1** – Ezekiel saw a storm wind coming from the north. **1:4a**

As this began, Ezekiel looked toward the north and he saw a stormy wind, like a whirlwind approaching. It must have initially looked like some odd electrical storm, because there was something like lightning flashes in the storm.

**The northern direction of this storm is critical because nearly all of Israel's enemies who brought evil upon Israel came out of the north.** Even today many of Israel's enemies are to her north. To the north of Israel are countries like Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and if you go far north there is Russia. So many enemies of Israel came from the north.

**What this text says is that these enemy powers are all controlled by God and when they move against Israel, it is even sovereignly authorized by God (i.e. Jer. 1:14-15).** He controls the storm.

What this teaches Israel and us is that Israel's enemies are sovereignly controlled by God and so are ours. **What this warns is that a judgment of God is coming from the north against Israel and His glorious, living being agents will see to it that it is precisely carried out.**

**OBSERVATION #2** – Ezekiel saw a great cloud. **1:4b**

As Ezekiel kept looking at this ominous cloud, there was something very unusual about it. Now a cloud often displayed the glory of God for Israel and apparently that is what Ezekiel saw.

It was perhaps a dark mysterious cloud that was rolling in and it featured an amazing light show. The cloud was flashing forth light continually.

The cloud had a bright light around it.

The cloud had glowing metal like fire in the midst of it.

We know from Revelation that the flashing of lightning is something that continually exists at the Throne of God (Rev. 4:5). **So we may conclude that everything happening here is being authorized right from the throne of God.** One of the things that dominate Ezekiel is God's movement. God's glorious work is in motion and these living creatures will carry it out.

**OBSERVATION #3** – Ezekiel saw four living beings within the cloud. **1:5-12**

**In the middle of this electrical storm and cloud were four living beings.** The word "living beings" means that these were real living beings. They are not symbolic figures. They are obviously very distinct from the other angels, but they are very real and very alive. Ezekiel goes to great lengths to describe the living beings. Later in this book Ezekiel will classify these living beings as being Cherubim angels (10:5, 20). They display the glory of God (9:3). So these are high-ranking, living beings sent right from the throne of God.

There are at least eleven descriptions we get concerning these living beings:

**Description #1** - The beings had a human form. **1:5**

Ezekiel was impressed with the fact that they had a likeness of humans. These were real living beings.

**Description #2** - Each of the beings had four faces and four wings. **1:6**

**In Revelation there are four beings but they only have one face, not four, and six wings, not four (Rev. 4:6-8).** I believe this is very significant. Because by the time one gets to Revelation, there is one more judgment to come and it will come with rapid speed, thus the one face and the additional wings.

**Description #3** - Each of the beings had straight legs. **1:7a**

This probably means that it did not have a jointed knee. They had legs that were straight and tall in a complete vertical line. They could swiftly move straight forward without any effort. Apparently this is the point. They move in a straight direction in accordance with the Word of God. There is no variation. They carry out His commands.

**Description #4** - Each of the beings had feet like a calf's hoof. **1:7b**

The foot was roundish. One of the things that this kind of hoof enables an animal to do is to scale mountains like they are nothing. We suspect that one of the things this indicates is that when God sends His judgment, there is no place that people can go to escape it.

**Description #5** - Each of the beings gleamed like burnished bronze. **1:7c**

Each of the legs gleamed like burnished bronze. This imagery of burnished bronze is one that means there is a radiant glow that is as hot metal coming out of a fire. Daniel saw a vision of a man with the same thing (Dan. 10:6) and the Apostle John saw this in connection to the feet of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:15). In all instances it reflects the glory of God and it portrays the idea that God can and will stamp out and crush that which is evil as a direct judgment from Him.

**Description #6** - Each being had human hands under each wing. **1:8a**

Now one wing seems to be on each side of this being and under each wing were human hands. These beings are able to carry out judgments against humans that come from the hand of God.

**Description #7** - Each being had wings that touched one another. **1:8b-9a**

These beings were connected to each other. Just as in the Tabernacles, the wings touched each other, so the real cherubim did in carrying out their assignments. They function as a unit.

**Description #8** - Each being had faces that looked straight ahead. **1:9b**

These beings are focused on one objective and that is to carry out the will of God.

**Description #9** - Each being had four faces. **1:10-11a**

Each being had the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of a bull and the face of an eagle. Now the face of the man was the dominant face because it was located on the front of the being. The face of the lion was on the right side, the face of the ox was on the left side and the face of the eagle was on the back side.

The image indicates that these judgments will be real judgments against Israel. The judgment will be a ferocious judgment like that of a lion. It will be a powerful judgment like that of an ox. It will be a swift judgment that is as fast as an eagle.

The reason why there are four faces versus one face in Revelation is because at the time Ezekiel is writing, God was going to authorize four ferocious judgments to come against Israel–Babylon, Medo Persia, Greece and Rome. When you get to Revelation there is one left. It is the revived Roman Empire dominated by the Antichrist, who will unleash the most ferocious judgment against Israel that she has ever seen.

**Description #10** - Each being had four wings. **1:11b**

The wings were spread out above them. Two touched each other and two covered their bodies. Four wings speak of four swift judgments that God would authorize.

**Description #11** - Each being went straight in the direction of the spirit. **1:12**

They would not turn to the right or left. They did exactly what God’s Spirit led them to do. Do not miss this key point. They went exactly where God’s spirit directed them to go. These beings are moving under the control and in Harmony with direction of the Holy Spirit.

**OBSERVATION #4** – Ezekiel saw the activity in the midst of the living beings. **1:13-21**

Notice from **verse 15** again, just as we saw in **verse 4**, we learn Ezekiel “looked.” He actually saw these things.

**Verse 13** says in the middle of these beings was something that looked like burning coals, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. It was like lightning flashes bright and darting back and forth among the living creatures. This certainly has to do with judgment that all stem from the justice and holiness of God.

**Verse 14** says that the living creatures ran to and fro as fast as bolts of lightning. There was obviously tremendous activity and quick activity. When God authorizes judgment, there is no dilly-dallying.

**Verse 15** says that there was one wheel on the earth for each of the four. This will be a swift judgment that will roll through the earth sanctioned right out of heaven.

**Verse 16** says that the wheel was beautiful craftsmanship and one wheel was within the other wheel. Each wheel sparkled like beryl or chrysolite. This was one of the stones on Aaron's priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:20). This judgment these beings bring is priestly. Wheels were intersecting wheels. When these wheels are moving, there is symmetry and harmony with a wheel within a wheel. Everything was being beautifully orchestrated by God. Now keep in mind that this is judgment about to hit and when it hits it is carrying out the beautiful plan of God.

They could move in any of four directions without turning (**v. 17**). They were "omnidirectional." The rims of the wheels were lofty and awesome and the rims of the wheels were full of eyes and could see everything (**v. 18**). They can move in any direction and carry out any assignment, anywhere.

From **verse 19** we learn that whenever the living beings moved, the wheels did too. The wheels were involved in movement of these beings so the purpose of the beings became the purpose of the wheels. Judgment was authorized from heaven to roll through the earth.

**Verses 20-21** make it clear that the living beings followed the leading of the Spirit of God on earth (**v. 12**). The beings would move in accordance to the work of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the living beings and the purpose of the wheels were to carry out the will of the Spirit of God on earth.

See, people do not like this about God. They want a God whose Spirit will just tolerate anything. **That is not how God reveals it to be.**

**OBSERVATION #5** – Ezekiel saw what was over the heads of the living beings. **1:22**

He saw an awesome gleam of crystal spread out over their heads. This is a pure judgment coming right out of heaven that specifically is given to these beings.

**OBSERVATION #6** – Ezekiel saw what was under the wings of the living beings. **1:23**

The wings were stretched out straight. Two wings covered its body and two wings touched the other wings on each side.

**OBSERVATION #7** – Ezekiel describes what he heard concerning the living beings. **1:24-25**

There are four sounds that Ezekiel mentions that give us some great data about their work.

**Sound #1** - Ezekiel heard what sounded like abundant water when they moved. **1:24a**

When the wings fluttered there was a thunderous sound like rushing water. There was tremendous power on those beings. It was like the roar of an ocean.

**Sound #2** - Ezekiel heard a voice like the sound of the Almighty. **1:24b**

When these beings moved they were obviously moving for God. Their movement and voice was His movement and voice. They are carrying out the sovereign judgment of a sovereign God.

**Sound #3** - Ezekiel heard the sound of an army camp. **1:24c**

This immediately causes us to realize that God moves among military forces to accomplish His sovereign will. These beings are involved in stirring up military forces to accomplish God's purposes. They can stand still and let them carry out the will of God.

**Sound #4** - Ezekiel heard a voice coming from the expanse above. **1:24d-25**

They apparently would stop moving when the voice told them to. They would lower their wings and stop moving. What this means is when God would authorize some military to come up against His people, these beings would oversee it. They monitored the action and lowered their wings and let the army do the work.

Now from this description we conclude that these beings have thunderous, unstoppable power. They get direct orders from Almighty God and they carry out those orders, apparently using military army camps to accomplish their purposes. When they are told to stop, they do. When they are told to move, they do.

**OBSERVATION #8** – Ezekiel describes what was over the heads of these living beings.  
**1:26-28**

It is very clear that these amazing, heavenly beings are under the control of someone who sits on the beautiful Throne of God. This Divine Person has the appearance of a man (**v. 26**). He has the appearance of a judge who has fire all around Him and the glory of God above Him.

This one is none other than Jesus Christ and when Ezekiel saw Him, **verse 28** says he fell on his face.

Now carefully observe what is said in **verse 28**: all of this movement of these beings was for the glory of God.

As the book of Ezekiel begins, Ezekiel sees a glorious display of the glory of God in which God specifically and sovereignly authorizes horrible judgments to come against His own people. Why? The reason for all of this is because of Israel's rebellion (2:3). The reason why Israel was in Babylon was because of her rebellion. The reason why God sanctions bad things against His own people is because of their rebellion. God's first message to His own people in Ezekiel is the wages of sin is death. God is a sovereign God. God is Almighty God. He will not let Israel and He will not let us get away with sin. We are to judge ourselves or He will judge us.