

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have,


I. The common circumstances of the prophecy now to be delivered, the time when it was delivered (v. 1), the place where (v. 2), and the person by whom (v. 3).

II. The uncommon introduction to it by a vision of the glory of God,

- 1.** In his attendance and retinue in the upper world, where his throne is surrounded with angels, here called “living creatures,” (v. 4-14).
- 2.** In his providences concerning the lower world, represented by the wheels and their motions (v. 15-25).
- 3.** In the face of Jesus Christ sitting upon the throne (v. 26-28). And the more we are acquainted, and the more intimately we converse, with the glory of God in these three branches of it, the more commanding influence will divine revelation have upon us and the more ready shall we be to submit to it, which is the thing aimed at in prefacing the prophecies of this book with these visions. When such a God of glory speaks, it concerns us to hear with attention and reverence; it is at our peril if we do not.

EZEKIEL 1:1-3

EZEKIEL'S VISIONS

The circumstances of the vision which Ezekiel saw, and in which he received his commission and instructions, are here very particularly set down, that the narrative may appear to be authentic and not romantic. It may be of use to keep an account when and where God has been pleased to manifest himself to our souls in a peculiar manner, that the *return of the day*, and our return to *the place of the altar* ( Genesis 13:4), may revive the pleasing grateful remembrance of God's favour to us. “Remember, O my soul! and never forget what communications of divine love thou didst receive at such a time, at such a place; tell others what God did for thee.”

I. The time when Ezekiel had this vision is here recorded. It was *in the thirtieth year*, v. 1. Some make it the thirtieth year of the prophet's age; being a priest, he was at that age to enter upon the full execution of the priestly office, but being debarred from that by the iniquity and calamity of the times, now that they had neither temple nor altar, God at that age called him to the dignity of a prophet. Others make it to be the thirtieth year from the beginning of the reign of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, from which the Chaldeans began a new computation of time, as they had done from Nabonassar 123 years before. Nabopolassar reigned nineteen years, and this was the eleventh of his son, which makes the thirty. And it was proper enough for Ezekiel, when he was in Babylon, to use the computation they there used, as we in foreign countries date by the new style; and he afterwards uses the melancholy computation of his own country, observing (v. 2) that it was the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. But the Chaldee paraphrase fixes upon another era, and says that this was the thirtieth year after *Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law in the house of the sanctuary, at midnight, after the setting of the moon, in the days of Josiah the king*. And it is true that this was just thirty years from that time; and that was an event so remarkable (as it put the Jewish state upon a new trial) that it was proper enough to date from it; and perhaps therefore the prophet speaks indefinitely of thirty years, as having an eye both to that event and to the Chaldean computation, which were coincident. It was in the *fourth month*, answering to our June, and in the *fifth day of the month*, that Ezekiel had this vision, v. 2. It is probably that it was on the sabbath day, because we read (³⁸⁶Ezekiel 3:16) that *at the end of seven days*, which we may well suppose to be the next sabbath, the word of the Lord came to him again. Thus *John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day*, when he *saw the visions of the Almighty*, ⁴¹⁰Revelation 1:10. God would hereby put an honour upon his sabbaths, when *the enemies mocked at them*, ²⁰⁰Lamentations 1:7. And he would thus encourage his people to keep up their attendance on the ministry of his prophets every sabbath day, by the extraordinary manifestations of himself on some sabbath days.

II. The melancholy circumstances he was in when God honoured him, and thereby favoured his people, with this vision. he was *in the land of the Chaldeans, among the captives, by the river of Chebar, and it was in the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity*. Observe,

1. The people of God were now, some of them, *captives in the land of the Chaldeans*. The body of the Jewish nation yet remained in their own land, but these were the first-fruits of the captivity, and they were some of the best; for in Jeremiah's vision these were the *good figs*, whom God had *sent into the land of the Chaldeans for their good* (^{<2445>}Jeremiah 24:5); and, that it might be for their good, God raised up a prophet among them, to *teach them out of the law*, then when he chastened them, ^{<3912>}Psalm 94:12. Note, It is a great mercy to have the word of God brought to us, and a great duty to attend to it diligently, when we are in affliction. The word of instruction and the rod of correction may be of great service to us, in concert and concurrence with each other, the word to explain the rod and the rod to enforce the word: both together give wisdom. It is happy for a man, when he is sick and in pain, to have a messenger with him, an interpreter, *one among a thousand*, if he have but his *ear open to discipline*, ^{<8212>}Job 23:23. One of the quarrels God had with the Jews, when he sent them into captivity, we for *mocking his messengers* and *misusing his prophets*; and yet, when they were suffering for this sin, he favoured them with this forfeited mercy. It were ill with us if God did not sometimes graciously thrust upon us those means of grace and salvation which we have foolishly thrust from us. In their captivity they were destitute of ordinary helps for their souls, and therefore God raised them up these extraordinary ones; for God's children, if they be hindered in their education one way, shall have it made up another way. But observe, *It was in the fifth year of the captivity* that Ezekiel was raised up amongst them, and not before. So long God left them without any prophet, till they began to *lament after the Lord* and to complain that they *saw not their signs* and there was none to *tell them how long* (^{<3749>}Psalm 74:9), and then they would know how to value a prophet, and God's discoveries of himself to them by him would be the more acceptable and comfortable. The Jews that remained in their own land had Jeremiah with them, those that had gone into captivity had Ezekiel with them; for wherever the children of God are scattered abroad he will find out tutors for them.

2. The prophet was himself among the captives, those of them that were posted by *the river Chebar*; for it was *by the rivers of Babylon* that they *sat down*, and on the willow-trees by the river's side that they *hanged their harps*, ^{<3103>}Psalm 137:1, 2. The planters in America keep along by the sides of the rivers, and perhaps those captives were employed by their masters in improving some parts of the country by the rivers' sides that were

uncultivated, the natives being generally employed in war; or they employed them in manufactures, and therefore chose to fix them by the sides of rivers, that the good they made might the more easily be conveyed by water-carriage. Interpreters agree not what river this of Chebar was, but *among the captives* by that river Ezekiel was, and himself a captive. Observe here,

(1.) The best men, and those that are dearest to God, often share, not only in the common calamities of this life, but in the public and national judgments that are inflicted for sin; those feel the smart who contributed nothing to the guilt, by which it appears that the difference between good and bad arises not from the events that befall them, but from the temper and disposition of their spirits under them. And since not only righteous men, but prophets, share with the worst in present punishments, we may infer thence, with the greatest assurance, that there are rewards reserved for them in the future state.

(2.) Words of conviction, counsel, and comfort, come best to those who are in affliction from their fellow sufferers. The captives will be best instructed by one who is a captive among them and experimentally knows their sorrows.

(3.) The spirit of prophecy was not confined to the land of Israel, but some of the brightest of divine revelations were revealed *in the land of the Chaldeans*, which was a happy presage of the carrying of the church, with that divine revelation upon which it is built, into the Gentile world; and, as now, so afterwards, when the gospel kingdom was to be set up, the dispersion of the Jews contributed to the spreading of the knowledge of God.

(4.) Wherever we are we may keep up our communion with God. *Undique ad coelos tantundem est viae — From the remotest corners of the earth we may find a way open heavenward.*

(5.) When God's ministers are bound *the word of the Lord is not bound*, ² Timothy 2:9. When St. Paul was a prisoner the gospel had a free course. When St. John was banished into the Isle of Patmos Christ visited him there. Nay, God's suffering servants have generally been treated as favourites, and their consolations have much more abounded when affliction has abounded, ² Corinthians 1:5.

III. The discovery which God was pleased to make of himself to the prophet when he was in these circumstances, to be by him communicated to his people. He here tells us what he saw, what he heard, and what he felt.

1. He *saw visions of God*, v. 1. No man can *see God and live*; but many have seen visions of God, such displays of the divine glory as have both instructed and affected them; and commonly, when God first revealed himself to any prophet, he did it by an extraordinary vision, as to Isaiah (Isaiah 6), to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1), to Abraham (~~ACTS~~ Acts 7:2), to settle a correspondence and a satisfactory way of intercourse, so that there needed not afterwards a vision upon ever revelation. Ezekiel was employed in turning the hearts of the people to the Lord their God, and therefore he must himself see the visions of God. Note, It concerns those to be well acquainted with God themselves, and much affected with what they know of him, whose business it is to bring others to the knowledge and love of him. That he might see the *visions of God the heavens were opened*; the darkness and distance which hindered his visions were conquered, and he was let into the light of the glories of the upper world, as near and clear as if heaven had been opened to him.

2. He heard the voice of God (v. 3): *The word of the Lord came expressly* to him, and what he saw was designed to prepare him for what he was to hear. The expression is emphatic. *Essendo fuit verbum Dei — The word of the Lord was a really it was to him*. There was no mistake in it; it came to him in the fulness of its light and power, in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit; it came close to him, nay, it came into him, took possession of him and dwelt in him richly. It *came expressly*, or accurately, to him; he did himself clearly understand what he said and was abundantly satisfied of the truth of it. *The essential Word* (so we may take it), *the Word who is, who is what he is, came to Ezekiel*, to send him on his errand.

3. He felt the power of God opening his eyes to see the visions, opening his ear to hear the voice, and opening his heart to receive both: *The hand of the Lord was there upon him*. Note, *The hand of the Lord* goes along with *the word of the Lord*, and so it becomes effectual; those only understand and *believe the report to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed*. *The hand of God was upon him*, as upon Moses, to cover him, that he should not be overcome by the dazzling light and lustre of the visions he

saw, ^{<2352>}Exodus 33:22. It *was upon him* (as upon St. John, ^{<6617>}Revelation 1:17), to revive and support him, that he might bear up, and not faint, under these discoveries, that he might neither be lifted up nor cast down with the abundance of the revelations. God's *grace is sufficient for him*, and, in token of that, his *hand is upon him*.

^{<2004>}EZEKIEL 1:4-14

VISION OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

The visions of God which Ezekiel here saw were very glorious, and had more particulars than those which other prophets saw. It is the scope and intention of these vision,

1. To possess the prophet's mind with very great, and high, and honourable thoughts of that God by whom he was commissioned and for whom he was employed. It is *the likeness of the glory of the Lord* that he sees (v. 28), and hence he may infer that it is his honour to serve him, for he is one whom angels serve. He may serve him with safety, for he has power sufficient to bear him out in his work. It is at his peril to draw back from his service, for he has power to pursue him, as he did Jonah. So great a God as this must be served *with reverence and godly fear*; and with assurance may Ezekiel foretel what this God will do, for he is able to make his words good.

2. To strike a terror upon the sinners who remained in Zion, and those who had already come to Babylon, who were secure, and bade defiance to the threatenings of Jerusalem's ruin, as we have found in Jeremiah's prophecy, and shall find in this, many did. "Let those who said, *We shall have peace though we go on*, know that *our God is a consuming fire*, whom they cannot stand before." That this vision had a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem seems plain from ^{<2448>}Ezekiel 43:3, where he says that it was *the vision which he saw when he came to destroy the city*, that is, to prophesy the destruction of it.

3. To speak comfort to those that feared God, and trembled at his word, and humbled themselves under his mighty hand. "Let them know that, though they are captives in Babylon, yet they have God nigh unto them; though they have not *the place of the sanctuary* to be their glorious high

throne, they have the God of the sanctuary.” Dr. Lightfoot observes, “Now that the church is to be planted for a long time in another country, the Lord shows a glory in the midst of them, as he had done at their first constituting into a church in the wilderness; and out of *a cloud and fire*, as he had done there, he showed himself; and from between *living creatures*, as from between the cherubim, he gives his oracles.” This put an honour upon them, by which they might value themselves when the Chaldeans insulted over them, and this might encourage their hopes of deliverance in due time.

Now, to answer these ends, we have in these verses the first part of the vision, which represents God as attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, who are all his messengers, his ministers, *doing his commandments* and *hearkening to the voice of his word*. This denotes his grandeur, as it magnifies an earthly prince to have a splendid retinue and numerous armies at his command, which engages his allies to trust him and his enemies to fear him.

I. The introduction to this vision of the angels is very magnificent and awakening, v. 4. The prophet, observing the heavens to open, *looked*, looked up (as it was time), to see what discoveries God would make to him. Note, When the heavens are opened it concerns us to have our eyes open. To clear the way, *behold, a whirlwind came out of the north*, which would drive away the interposing mists of this lower region. Fair weather *comes out of the north*, and thence *the wind* comes that *drives away rain*. God can by a whirlwind clear the sky and air, and produce that serenity of mind which is necessary to our communion with Heaven. Yet this whirlwind was attended with *a great cloud*. When we think that the clouds which arise from this earth are dispelled and we can see beyond them, yet still there is a cloud which heavenly things are wrapped in, a cloud from above, so that *we cannot order our speech* concerning them *by reason of darkness*. Christ here descended, as he ascended, *in a cloud*. Some by this *whirlwind and cloud* understand the Chaldean army coming *out of the north* against the land of Judah, bearing down all before them as a tempest; and so it agrees with that which was signified by one of the first of Jeremiah's visions (^{<2014>}Jeremiah 1:14, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth*); but I take it here as an introduction rather to the vision than to the sermons. This whirlwind came to Ezekiel (as that to Elijah, ^{<1191>}1 Kings 19:11), to *prepare the way of the Lord*, and to demand attention. *He that has eyes, that has ears*, let him see, *let him hear*.

II. The vision itself. A *great cloud* was the vehicle of this vision, in which it was conveyed to the prophet; for God's pavilion in which he rests, his chariot in which he rides, is *darkness and thick clouds*, ^{<1246>}Psalm 18:11; 104:3. Thus he *holds back the face of his throne*, lest its dazzling light and lustre should overpower us, by *spreading a cloud upon it*. Now,

1. The cloud is accompanied with a *fire*, as upon Mount Sinai, where God resided in a *thick cloud*; but *the sight of his glory was like a devouring fire* (^{<1246>}Exodus 24:16, 17), and his first appearance to Moses was *in a flame of fire in the bush*; for *our God is a consuming fire*. This was a *fire enfolding itself*, a globe, or orb, or wheel of fire. God being his own cause, his own rule, and his own end, if he be as a *fire*, he is as a *fire enfolding itself*, or (as some read it) *kindled by itself*. The fire of God's glory shines forth, but it quickly enfolds itself; for he lets us know but part of his ways; the fire of God's wrath breaks forth, but it also quickly enfolds itself, for the divine patience suffers not all his wrath to be stirred up. If it were not a fire thus enfolding itself, *O Lord! who shall stand?*

2. The fire is surrounded with a *glory*: *A brightness was about it*, in which it enfolded itself, yet it made some discovery of itself. Though we cannot see into the fire, cannot by searching find out God to perfection, yet we see the brightness that is round about it, the reflection of this fire from the thick cloud. Moses might see God's back parts, but not his face. We have some light concerning the nature of God, from the brightness which encompasses it, though we have not an insight into it, by reason of the cloud spread upon it. Nothing is more easy than to determine that God is, nothing more difficult than to describe what he is. When God displays his wrath as fire, yet there is a brightness about it; for his holiness and justice appear very illustrious in the punishment of sin and sinners: even about the devouring fire there is a brightness, which glorified saints will for ever admire.

3. Out of this fire there shines *the colour of amber*. We are not told who or what it was that had this colour of amber, and therefore I take it to be the whole frame of the following vision, which came into Ezekiel's view *out of the midst of the fire and brightness*; and the first thing he took notice of before he viewed the particulars was that it was *of the colour of amber*, or *the eye of amber*; that is, it looked as amber does to the eye, of a bright flaming fiery colour, the colour of a *burning coal*; so some think it should be read. The *living creatures* which he saw coming *out of the midst of the*

fire were seraphim — burners; for he maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire.

4. That which comes out of the fire, of a fiery amber colour, when it comes to be distinctly viewed, is *the likeness of four living creatures*; not the *living creatures* themselves (angels are spirits, and cannot be seen), but *the likeness* of them, such a hieroglyphic, or representation, as God saw fit to make use of for the leading of the prophet, and us with him, into some acquaintance with the world of angels (a matter purely of divine revelation), so far as is requisite to possess us with an awful sense of the greatness of that God who has angels for his attendants, and the goodness of that God who has appointed them to be attendants on his people. *The likeness of these living creatures came out of the midst of the fire*; for angels derive their being and power from God; they are in themselves, and to us, what he is pleased to make them; their glory is a ray of his. The prophet himself explains this vision (³¹¹Ezekiel 10:20): *I knew that the living creatures were the cherubim*, which is one of the names by which the angels are known in scripture. To Daniel was made known their number, *ten thousand times ten thousand*, ²¹⁰Daniel 7:10. But, though they are many, yet they are one, and that is made known to Ezekiel here; they are one in nature and operation, as an army, consisting of thousands, is yet called a body of men. We have here an account of,

(1.) Their nature. They are living creatures; they are the creatures of God, the work of his hands; their being is derived; they have not life in and of themselves, but receive it from him who is *the fountain of life*. As much as the living creatures of this lower world excel the vegetables that are the ornaments of earth, so much do the angels, the living creatures of the upper world, excel the sun, moon, and stars, the ornaments of the heavens. The sun (say some) is a flame of *fire enfolding itself*, but it is not a living creature, as angels, those flames of fire, are. Angels are living creatures, living beings, emphatically so. Men on earth are dying creatures, dying daily (*in the midst of life we are in death*), but angels in heaven are living creatures; they live indeed, live to good purpose; and, when saints come to be *equal unto the angels*, they shall not *die any more*, ²¹⁶Luke 20:36.

(2.) Their number. They are four; so they appear here, though they are innumerable; not as if these were four particular angels set up above the rest, as some have fondly imagined, Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel, but for the sake of the four faces they put on, and to intimate their

being sent forth towards *the four winds of heaven*, ^{<1263>}Matthew 24:31. Zechariah saw them as four chariots going forth east, west, north, and south, ^{<3061>}Zechariah 6:1. God has messengers to send every way; for his kingdom is universal, and reaches to all parts of the world.

(3.) Their qualifications, by which they are fitted for the service of their Maker and Master. These are set forth figuratively and by similitude, as is proper in visions, which are parables to the eye. Their description here is such, and so expressed, that I think it is not possible by it to form an exact idea of them in our fancies, or with the pencil, for that would be a temptation to worship them; but the several instances of their fitness for the work they are employed in are intended in the several parts of this description. Note, It is the greatest honour of God's creatures to be in a capacity of answering the end of their creation; and the more ready we are to every good work the nearer we approach to the dignity of angels. These living creatures are described here,

[1.] By their general appearance: *They had the likeness of a man*; they appeared, for the main, in a human shape, *First*, To signify that these living creatures are reasonable creatures, intelligent beings, who have the *spirit of a man* which is the *candle of the Lord*. *Secondly*, To put an honour upon the nature of man, who is made lower, yet but *a little lower, than the angels*, in the very next rank of beings below them. When the invisible intelligences of the upper world would make themselves visible, it is in *the likeness of man*. *Thirdly*, To intimate that their *delights are with the sons of men*, as their Master's are (^{<2081>}Proverbs 8:31), that they do service to men, and men may have spiritual communion with them by faith, hope, and holy love. *Fourthly*, The angels of God appear in *the likeness of man* because in *the fulness of time* the Son of God was not only to appear in that likeness, but to assume that nature; they therefore show this love to it.

[2.] By their faces: *Every one had four faces*, looking four several ways. In St. John's vision, which has a near affinity with this, each of the four living creatures has one of these faces here mentioned (^{<6047>}Revelation 4:7); here each of them has all four, to intimate that they have all the same qualifications for service; though, perhaps, among the angels of heaven, as among the angels of the churches, some excel in one gift and others in another, but all for the common service. Let us contemplate their faces till we be in some measure changed into the same image, that we may do the

will of God as the angels do it in heaven. They *all four had the face of a man* (for in that likeness they appeared, v. 5), but, besides that, they had *the face of a lion, an ox, and an eagle*, each masterly in its kind, *the lion* among *wild* beasts, *the ox* among *tame* ones, and *the eagle* among fowls, v. 10. Does God make use of them for the executing of judgments upon his enemies? They are fierce and strong as the lion and the eagle in tearing their prey. Does he make use of them for the good of his people? They are as *oxen strong for labour* and inclined to serve. And in both they have *the understanding of a man*. The scattered perfections of the living creatures on earth meet in the angels of heaven. They have *the likeness of man*; but, because there are some things in which man is excelled even by the inferior creatures, they are therefore compared to some of them. They have *the understanding of a man*, and such as far exceeds it; they also resemble man in tenderness and humanity. But, *First, A lion* excels man in strength and boldness, and is much more formidable; therefore the angels, who in this resemble them, put on the *face of a lion*. *Secondly, An ox* excels man in diligence, and patience, and painstaking, and an unwearied discharge of the work he has to do; therefore the angels, who are constantly employed in the service of God and the church, put on *the face of an ox*. *Thirdly, An eagle* excels man in quickness and piercingness of sight, and in soaring high; and therefore the angels, who seek things above, and see far into divine mysteries, put on *the face of a flying eagle*.

[3.] By their wings: *Every one had four wings*, v. 6. In the vision Isaiah had of them they appeared with six, now with four; for they appeared above the throne, and had occasion for two to cover their faces with. The angels are fitted with wings to fly swiftly on God's errands; whatever business God sends them upon they lose no time. Faith and hope are the soul's wings, upon which it soars upward; pious and devout affections are its wings on which it is carried forward with vigour and alacrity. The prophet observes here, concerning their wings, *First, That they were joined one to another*, v. 9 and again v. 11. They did not make use of their wings for fighting, as some birds do; there is no contest among the angels. God makes *peace*, perfect peace, *in his high places*. But their wings were joined, in token of their perfect unity and unanimity and the universal agreement there is among them. *Secondly, That they were stretched upward*, extended, and ready for use, not folded up, or flagging. Let an angel receive the least intimation of the divine will, and he has nothing to seek, but is upon the wings immediately; while our poor dull souls are like

the ostrich, that with much difficulty lifts up herself on high. *Thirdly*, That two of their wings were made use of in covering their bodies, the spiritual bodies they assumed. The clothes that cover us are our hindrance in work; angels need no other covering than their own wings, which are their furtherance. They cover their bodies from us, so forbidding us needless enquiries concerning them. Ask not after them, for they are wonderful, ^{<1718>}Judges 13:18. They cover them before God, so directing us, when we approach to God, to see to it that we be so clothed with Christ's righteousness *that the shame of our nakedness may not appear*.

[4.] By their feet, including their legs and thighs: They were *straight feet* (v. 7); they stood straight, and firm, and steady; no burden of service could make their legs to bend under them. The spouse makes this part of the description of her beloved, that *his legs were as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold* (^{<2155>}Song of Solomon 5:15); such are the angels' legs. *The sole of their feet was like that of a calf's foot*, which divides the hoof and is therefore clean: *as it were the sole of a round foot* (as the Chaldee words it); they were ready for motion any way. *Their feet were winged* (so the Septuagint); they went so swiftly that it was as if they flew. And their very feet *sparkled like the colour of burnished brass*; not only the faces, but the very feet, of those are beautiful whom God sends on his errands (^{<2317>}Isaiah 52:7); every step the angels take is glorious. In the vision John had of Christ it is said, *His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace*, ^{<4115>}Revelation 1:15.

[5.] By their hands (v. 8): *They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides*, an arm and a hand under every wing. They had not only wings for motion, but hands for action. Many are quick who are not active; they hurry about a great deal, but do nothing to purpose, bring nothing to pass; they have wings, but no hands: whereas God's servants, the angels, not only go when he sends them and come when he calls them, but do what he bids them. They are *the hands of a man*, which are wonderfully made and fitted for service, which are guided by reason and understanding; for what angles do they do intelligently and with judgment. They have calves' feet; this denotes the swiftness of their motion (the cedars of Lebanon are said to *skip like a calf*, ^{<4396>}Psalms 29:6); but they have a man's hand, which denotes the niceness and exactness of their performances, as the heavens are said to be the work of God's fingers. Their hands were *under their wings*, which concealed them, as they did the rest of their bodies. Note, The agency of angels is a secret thing and their

work is carried on in an invisible way. In working for God, though we must not, with *the sluggard, hide our hand in our bosom*, yet we must, with the humble, *not let our left hand know what our right hand doeth*. We may observe that where these wings were their hands were *under their wings*; wherever their wings carried them they carried hands along with them, to be still doing something suitable something that the duty of the place requires.

(4.) Their motions. The living creatures are moving. Angels are active beings; it is not their happiness to sit still and do nothing, but to be always well employed; and we must reckon ourselves then best when we are doing good, doing it as the angels do it, or whom it is here observed,

[1.] That whatever service they went about *they went every one straight forward* (v. 9, 12), which intimates, *First*, That they sincerely aimed at the glory of God, and had a single eye to that, in all they did. Their going *straight forward* supposes that they looked straight forward, and never had any sinister intentions in what they did. And, if thus *our eye be single*, our *whole body will be full of light*. The singleness of the eye is the sincerity of the heart. *Secondly*, That they were intent upon the service they were employed in, and did it with a close application of mind. They went forward with their work; for what their hand found to do they did *with all their might* and did not loiter in it. *Thirdly*, That they were unanimous in it: *They went straight forward*, every one about his own work; they did not thwart or jostle one another, did not stand in one another's light, in one another's way. *Fourthly*, That they perfectly understood their business, and were thoroughly apprised of it, so that they needed not to stand still, to pause or hesitate, but pursue their work with readiness, as those that knew what they had to do and how to do it. *Fifthly*, They were steady and constant in their work. They did not fluctuate, did not tire, did not vary, but were of a piece with themselves. They moved in a direct line, and so went the nearest way to work in all they did and lost no time. When we go straight we go forward; when we serve God with one heart we rid ground, we rid work.

[2.] *They turned not when they went*, v. 9, 12. *First*, They made no blunders or mistakes, which would give them occasion to turn back to rectify them; their work needed no correction, and therefore needed not to be gone over again. *Secondly*, They minded no diversions; as they turned

not back, so they turned not aside, to trifle with any thing that was foreign to their business.

[3.] *They went whither the Spirit was to go* (v. 12), either, *First, Whither* their own *spirit* was disposed to go; thither *they went*, having no bodies, as we have, to clog or hinder them. It is our infelicity and daily burden that, when *the spirit if willing*, yet *the flesh is weak* and cannot keep pace with it, so that *the good which we would do we do it not*; but angels and glorified saints labour under no such impotency; whatever they incline or intend to do they do it, and never come short of it. Or, rather, *Secondly, Whithersoever the Spirit* of God would have them go, thither *they went*. Though they had so much wisdom of their own, yet in all their motions and actions they subjected themselves to the guidance and government of the divine will. Whithersoever the divine Providence *was to go they went*, to serve its purposes and to execute its orders. The Spirit of God (says Mr. Greenhill) is the great agent that sets angels to work, and it is their honour that they are led, they are easily *led, by the Spirit*. See how tractable and obsequious these noble creatures are. Whithersoever *the Spirit is to go* they go immediately, with all possible alacrity. Note, Those that *walk after the Spirit* do the will of God as the angels do it.

[4.] *They ran and returned like a flash of lightning*, v. 14. This intimates, *First*, That they made haste; they were quick in their motions, as quick as lightning. Whatever business they went about they despatched it immediately, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Happy they that have no bodies to retard their motion in holy exercises. And happy shall we be when we come to have spiritual bodies for spiritual work. Satan *falls like lightning* into his own ruin, ~~☞~~ Luke 10:18. Angels fly *like lightning* in their Master's work. The angel Gabriel flew swiftly. *Secondly*, That they made haste back: *They ran and returned*; ran to do their work and execute their orders, and then returned to give an account of what they had done and receive new instructions, that they might be always doing. They *ran* into the lower world, to do what was to be done there; but, when they had done it, they *returned like flash of lightning* to the upper world again, to the beatific vision of their God, which they could not with any patience be longer from than their service did require. Thus we should be in the affairs of this world as out of our element. Though we run into them, we must not repose in them, but our souls must quickly return like lightning to God their rest and centre.

5. We have an account of the light by which the prophet saw these living creatures, or the looking-glass in which he saw them, v. 13.

(1.) He saw them by their own light, for *their appearance was like burning coals of fire*; they are *seraphim* — *burners*, denoting the ardour of their love to God, their fervent zeal in his service, their splendour and brightness, and their terror against God's enemies. When God employs them to fight his battles they are as *coals of fire* (~~3082~~ Psalm 18:12) to *devour the adversaries*, as lightnings shot out to discomfit them.

(2.) He saw them by the light of some *lamps*, which *went up and down among* them, the shining whereof *was very bright*. Satan's works are works of darkness; he is *the ruler of the darkness of this world*. But the angels of light are in the light, and, though they conceal their working, they show their work, for it will bear the light. But we see them and their works only by candle-light, but the dim light of *lamps* that go *up and down among* them; when *the day breaks, and the shadows flee away*, we shall see them clearly. Some make the *appearance* of these *burning coals*, and of the *lightning* that issues *out of the fire*, to signify the wrath of God, and his judgments, that were now to be executed upon Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, in which angels were to be employed; and accordingly we find afterwards *coals of fire scattered upon the city* to consume it, which were *fetched from between the cherubim*, ~~3102~~ Ezekiel 10:2. But by *the appearance of the lamps* then we may understand the light of comfort which shone forth to the people of God in the darkness of this present trouble. If the ministry of the angels is as a consuming fire to God's enemies, it is as a rejoicing light to his own children. To the one this *fire* is *bright*, it is very reviving and refreshing; to the other, *out of the fire* comes fresh *lightning* to destroy them. Note, Good angels are our friends, or enemies, according as God is.

~~3115~~ EZEKIEL 1:15-25

THE VISION OF THE WHEELS

The prophet is very exact in making and recording his observations concerning this vision. And here we have,

I. The notice he took of the *wheels*, v. 15-21. The glory of God appears not only in the splendour of his retinue in the upper world, but in the steadiness of his government here in this lower world. Having seen how God does according to his will in the armies of heaven, let us now see how he does according to it among the inhabitants of the earth; for there, *on the earth*, the prophet saw the *wheels*, v. 15. *As he beheld the living creatures*, and was contemplating the glory of that vision and receiving instruction from it, this other vision presented itself to his view. Note, Those who make a good use of the discoveries God has favoured them with may expect further discoveries; for *to him that hath shall be given*. We are sometimes tempted to think there is nothing glorious but what is in the upper world, whereas, could we with an eye of faith discern the beauty of Providence and the wisdom, power, and goodness, which shine in the administration of that kingdom, we should see, and say, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth* and acts like himself. There are many things in this vision which give us some light concerning the divine Providence.

1. The dispensations of Providence are compared to *wheels*, either the wheels of a chariot, in which the conqueror rides in triumph, or rather the wheels of a clock or watch, which all contribute to the regular motion of the machine. We read of *the course or wheel of nature* (³⁰⁶James 3:6), which is here set before us as under the direction of the God of nature. *Wheels*, though they move not of themselves, as *the living creatures* do, are yet made movable and are almost continually kept in action. Providence, represented by these *wheels*, produces changes; sometimes one spoke of the wheel is uppermost and sometimes another; but the motion of the wheel on its own axletree, like that of the orbs above, is very regular and steady. The motion of the wheels is circular; by the revolutions of Providence things are brought to the same posture and pass which they were in formerly; for *the thing that is is that which has been, and there is no new thing under the sun*, ²⁰⁹Ecclesiastes 1:9, 10.

2. The wheel is said to be *by the living creatures*, who attended it to direct its motion; for the angels are employed as the ministers of God's providence, and have a greater hand in directing the motions of second causes to serve the divine purpose than we think they have. Such a close connexion is there between *the living creatures* and the *wheels* that they moved and rested together. Were angels busily employed? Men were busily employed as instruments in their hand, whether of mercy or judgment, though they themselves were not aware of it. Or, Are men

active to compass their designs? Angels at the same time are acting to control and overrule them. This is much insisted on here (v. 19): *When the living creatures went, to bring about any business, the wheels went by them*; when God has work to do by the ministry of angels second causes are all found, or made, ready to concur in it; and (v. 21) *when those stood these stood*; when the angels had done their work the second causes had done theirs. If *the living creatures were lifted up from the earth*, were elevated to any service above the common course of nature and out of the ordinary road (as suppose in the working of miracles, the dividing of the water, the standing still of the sun), *the wheels*, contrary to their own natural tendency, which is towards the earth, move in concert with them, and *are lifted up over against them*; this is thrice mentioned, v. 19-21. Note, All inferior creatures are, and move, and act, as the Creator, by the ministration of angels, directs and influences them. Visible effects are managed and governed by invisible causes. The reason given of this is because *the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels*; the same wisdom, power, and holiness of God, the same will and counsel of his, that guides and governs the angels and all their performances, does, by them, order and dispose of all the motions of the creatures in this lower world and the events and issues of them. God is the soul of the world, and animates the whole, both that above and that beneath, so that they move in perfect harmony, as the upper and lower parts of the natural body do, so that *whithersoever the Spirit is to go* (whatever God wills and purposes to be done and brought to pass) *thither their spirit is to go*; that is, the angels, knowingly and designedly, set themselves to bring it about. And *their spirit is in the wheels*, which are therefore *lifted up over against them*; that is, both the powers of nature and the wills of men are all made to serve the intention, which they infallibly and irresistibly effect, though perhaps *they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so*, ^{<301>}Isaiah 10:7; ^{<301>}Micah 4:11, 12. Thus, though the will of God's precept be not *done on earth as it is done in heaven*, yet the will of his purpose and counsel is, and shall be.

3. The wheel is said to have four *faces*, looking four several ways (v. 15), denoting that the providence of God exerts itself in all parts of the world, east, west, north, and south, and extends itself to the remotest corners of it. Look which way you will upon the wheel of Providence, and it has a face towards you, a beautiful one, which you may admire the features and complexion of; it looks upon you as ready to speak to you, if you be but ready to hear the voice of it; like a well-drawn picture, it has an eye upon

all that have an eye upon it. The wheel had so four *faces* that it had in it four *wheels*, which *went upon their four sides*, v. 17. At first Ezekiel saw it as *one wheel* (v. 15), one sphere; but afterwards he saw it was four, but *they four had one likeness* (v. 16); not only they were like one another, but they were as if they had been one. This intimates,

(1.) That one event of providence is like another; what happens to us is *that which is common to men* and what we are not to think strange.

(2.) That various events have a tendency to the same issue and concur to answer the same intention.

4. *Their appearance and their work* are said to be *like the colour of a beryl* (v. 16), *the colour of Tarshish* (so the word is), that is, of the sea; the beryl is of that colour, sea-green; *blue Neptune* we call it. The nature of things in this world is like that of the sea, which is in a continual flux and yet there is a constant coherence and succession of its parts. There is a chain of events which is always drawing one way or other. The sea ebbs and flows, so does Providence in its disposals, but always in the stated appointed times and measures. The sea looks blue, as the air does, because of the shortness and feebleness of our sight, which can see but a little way of either; to that colour therefore are *the appearance and work* of Providence fitly compared, because we cannot find out that which God does *from the beginning to the end*, ^{<2011>}Ecclesiastes 3:11. We see but *parts of his ways* (^{<2014>}Job 26:14), and all beyond looks blue, which gives us to understand no more concerning it but that in truth we know it not; it is *far above out of our sight*.

5. *Their appearance and their work* are likewise said to be *as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel*. Observe here again, *Their appearance* to the prophet is designed to set forth what *their work* really is. Men's appearance and their work often differ, but the appearance of God's providence and its work agree; if they seem to differ, it is through our ignorance and mistake. Now both *were as a wheel in a wheel*, a less wheel moved by a greater. We pretend not to give a mathematical description of it. The meaning is that the disposals of Providence seem to us intricate, perplexed, and unaccountable, and yet that they will appear in the issue to have been all wisely ordered for the best; so that though *what God does we know not now*, yet *we shall know hereafter*, ^{<2017>}John 13:7.

6. The motion of these wheels, like that of the living creatures, was steady, regular, and constant: *They returned not when they went* (v. 17), because they never went amiss, nor otherwise than they should do. God, in his providence, takes his work before him, and he will have it forward; and it is going on even when it seems to us to be going backward. *They went* as the Spirit directed them, and therefore *returned not*. We should not have occasion to return back as we have, and to undo that by repentance which we have done amiss, and to do it over again, if we were but *led by the Spirit* and followed his direction. *The Spirit of life* (so some read it) *was in the wheels*, which carried them on with ease and evenness, and then *they returned not when they went*.

7. The *rings*, or rims, *of the wheels were so high that they were dreadful*, v. 18. They were of a vast circumference, so that when they were reared, and put in motion, the prophet was even afraid to look upon them. Note, The vast compass of God's thought, and the vast reach of his design, are really astonishing; when we go about to describe the circle of Providence we are struck with amazement and are even swallowed up. O the height and depth of God's councils! The consideration of them should strike an awe upon us.

8. They were *full of eyes round about*. This circumstance of the vision is most surprising of all, and yet most significant, plainly denoting that the motions of Providence are all directed by infinite wisdom. The issues of things are not determined by a blind fortune, but by those *eyes of the Lord* which *run to and fro through the earth*, and *are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*. Note, It is a great satisfaction to us, and ought to be so, that, though we cannot account for the springs and tendencies of events, yet they are all under the cognizance and direction of an all-wise all-seeing God.

II. The notice he took of *the firmament* above *over the heads of the living creatures*. When he saw *the living creatures* moving, and *the wheels* by them, he looked up, as it is proper for us to do when we observe the various motions of providence in this lower world; looking up, he saw *the firmament stretched forth over the heads of the living creatures*, v. 22. What is done on earth is done under the heaven (as the scripture often speaks), under its inspection and influence. Observe,

1. What he saw: *The firmament was as the colour of the terrible crystal,* truly glorious, but terribly so; the vastness and brightness of it put the prophet into an amazement and struck him with an awful reverence. *The terrible ice, or frost* (so it may be read), the colour of snow congealed, or as mountains of ice in the northern seas, which are very frightful. Daring sinners ask, *Can God judge through the dark cloud?* ^{<821>}Job 22:13. But that which we take to be a dark cloud is to him transparent as crystal, through which, *from the place of his habitation, he looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth,* ^{<834>}Psalms 33:14. *Under the firmament he saw the wings of the living creatures* erect, v. 23. When they pleased they used them either for flight or for covering. God is on high, *above the firmament*; the angels are *under the firmament*, which denotes their subjection to God's dominion and their readiness to fly on his errands *in the open firmament of heaven*, and to serve him unanimously.

2. What he heard.

(1.) He heard the *noise of the angels' wings*, v. 24. Bees and other insects make a great noise with the vibration of their wings; here the angels do so, to awaken the attention of the prophet to that which God was about to say to him from *the firmament*, v. 25. Angels, by the providences they are employed in, sound God's alarms to the children of men and stir them up to *hear his voice*; for that is it that *cries in the city* and is heard and understood by *the men of wisdom*. *The noise of their wings* was loud and terrible, *as the noise of great waters* (like the rout or roaring of the sea), and *as the noise of a host*, the noise of war; but it was articulate and intelligible, and did not *give an uncertain sound*; for it was *the voice of speech*; nay, it was *as the voice of the Almighty*, for God, by his providences, *speaks once, yea, twice*, if we could by *perceive it*, ^{<834>}Job 33:14. *The Lord's voice cries*, ^{<319>}Micah 6:9.

(2.) He heard a *voice from the firmament*, from him that sits upon the throne there, v. 25. When the angels moved they *made a noise with their wings*; but, when with that they had roused a careless world, they stood still, and *let down their wings*, that there might be a profound silence, and so God's voice might be the better heard. The voice of Providence is designed to open men's ears to the voice of the word, to do the office of the crier, who with a loud voice charges silence while the judge passes sentence. *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*. Note, Noises on earth

should awaken our attention to the *voice from the firmament*; for *how shall we escape if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven!*

~~3025~~ EZEKIEL 1:26-28

THE VISION OF THE DIVINE THRONE

All the other parts of this vision were but a preface and introduction to this. God in them had made himself known as Lord of angels and supreme director of all the affairs of this lower world, whence it is easy to infer that whatever God by his prophets either promises or threatens to do he is able to effect it. Angels are his servants; men are his tools. But now that a divine revelation is to be given to a prophet, and by him to the church, we must look higher than the living creatures or the wheels, and must expect that from the eternal Word, of whom we have an account in these verses. Ezekiel, hearing a voice from the firmament, looked up, as John did, to *see the voice that spoke with him*, and he *saw one like unto the Son of man*, ~~6012~~ Revelation 1:12, 13. The second person sometimes tried the *fashion of a man* occasionally before he clothed himself with it for good and all; and the Spirit of prophecy is called the *Spirit of Christ* (~~6011~~ 1 Peter 1:11) and the *testimony of Jesus*, ~~660~~ Revelation 19:10.

1. This glory of Christ that the prophet saw *was above the firmament* that was *over the heads* of the living creatures, v. 26. Note, The heads of angels themselves are under the feet of the Lord Jesus; for the firmament that is over their heads is under his feet. *Angels, principalities, and powers are made subject to him*, ~~6012~~ 1 Peter 3:22. This dignity and dominion of the Redeemer before his incarnation magnify his condescension in his incarnation, when he was *made a little lower than the angels*, ~~3829~~ Hebrews 2:9.

2. The first thing he observed was a *throne*; for divine revelation comes backed and supported with a royal authority. We must have an eye of faith to God and Christ as upon a throne. The first thing that John discovered in his visions was *a throne set in heaven* (~~6602~~ Revelation 4:2), which commands reverence and subjection. It is a throne of glory, a throne of grace, a throne of triumph, a throne of government, a throne of judgment. *The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens*, has prepared it for his Son, whom he has set *King on his holy hill of Zion*.

3. On the throne he saw *the appearance of a man*. This is good news to the children of men, that the throne above the firmament is filled with one that is not ashamed to appear, even there, in the likeness of man. Daniel, in vision, saw the kingdom and dominion given to one *like the Son of man*, who *therefore* has *authority given him to execute judgment because he is the Son of man* (^{<4357>}John 5:27), so appearing in these visions.

4. He saw him as a prince and judge upon this throne. Though he appeared *in fashion as a man*, yet he appeared in more than human glory, v. 27.

(1.) Is God a *shining light*? So is he: when the prophet saw him he saw *as the colour of amber*, that is, a *brightness round about*; for God dwells in light, and *covers himself with light as with a garment*. How low did the Redeemer stoop for us when, to bring about our salvation, he suffered his glory to be eclipsed by the veil of his humanity!

(2.) Is God a *consuming fire*? So is he: from his loins, both upward and downward, there was the *appearance of fire*. The fire above the loins was *round about within the amber*; it was inward and involved. That below the loins was more outward and open, and yet that also had *brightness round about*. Some make the former to signify Christ's divine nature, the glory and virtue of which are hidden within the *colour of amber*; it is what no man has seen nor can see. The latter they suppose to be his human nature, the glory of which there were those who saw; the glory as of *the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*, ^{<4314>}John 1:14. He had *rays coming out of his hand, and yet there was the hiding of his power*, ^{<3504>}Habakkuk 3:4. The fire in which the Son of man appeared here might be intended to signify the judgments that were ready to be executed upon Judah and Jerusalem, coming from that *fiery indignation* of the Almighty which *devours the adversaries*. Nothing is more dreadful to the most daring sinners than *the wrath of him that sits upon the throne, and of the Lamb*, ^{<4166>}Revelation 6:16. The day is coming when *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire*, ^{<3012>}2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8. It concerns us therefore *to kiss the Son lest he be angry*.

5. The throne is surrounded with a rainbow, v. 28. It is so in St. John's vision, ^{<4163>}Revelation 4:3. The brightness about it was of divers colours, *as the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain*, which, as it is a display of majesty, and looks very great, so it is a pledge of mercy, and looks very kind; for it is a confirmation of that gracious promise God has made that he will not drown the world again, and he has said, *I will look upon the*

bow and remember the covenant, ^{<106>}Genesis 9:16. This intimates that he who sits upon the throne is the Mediator of the covenant, that his dominion is for our protection, not our destruction, that he interposes between us and the judgments our sins have deserved, and that *all the promises of God are in him yea and amen*. Now that the fire of God's wrath was breaking out against Jerusalem bounds should be set to it, and he would not make an utter destruction of it, for he would *look upon the bow and remember the covenant*, as he promised in such a case, ^{<102>}Leviticus 26:42.

Lastly, We have the conclusion of this vision. Observe,

1. What notion the prophet himself had of it: *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*. Here, as all along, he is careful to guard against all gross corporeal thoughts of God, which might derogate from the transcendent purity of his nature. he does not say, *This was the Lord* (for he is invisible), but, *This was the glory of the Lord*, in which he was pleased to manifest himself a glorious being; yet it is not *the glory of the Lord*, but *the likeness of that glory*, some faint resemblance of it; nor is it any adequate likeness of that glory, but only *the appearance of that likeness*, a shadow of it, and not the very *image of the thing*, ^{<301>}Hebrews 10:1.

2. What impressions it made upon him: *When I saw it, I fell upon my face*.

(1.) He was overpowered by it; the dazzling lustre of it conquered him and threw him upon his face; for *who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* Or, rather,

(2.) He prostrated himself in a humble sense of his own unworthiness of the honour now done him, and of the infinite distance which he now, more than ever, perceived to be between him and God; he fell upon his face in token of that holy awe and reverence of God with which his mind was possessed and filled. Note, The more God is pleased to make known of himself to us the more low we should be before him. He *fell upon his face* to adore the majesty of God, to implore his mercy and to deprecate the wrath he saw ready to break out against the children of his people.

3. What instructions he had from it. All he saw was only to prepare him for that which he was to hear; for *faith comes by hearing*. He therefore *heard a voice of one that spoke*; for we are taught by words, not merely by

hieroglyphics. When *he fell on his face*, ready to received the word, then he *heard the voice of one that spoke*; for God delights to teach the humble.