

CHAPTER 10

The prophet had observed to us (8:4) that when he was in vision at Jerusalem he saw the same appearance of the glory of God there that he had seen by the river Chebar; now, in this chapter, he gives us some account of the appearance there, as far as was requisite for the clearing up of two further indications of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, which God here gave the prophet: —

- I. The scattering of the coals of fire upon the city, which were taken from between the cherubim (v. 1-7).
- II. The removal of the glory of God from the temple, and its being upon the wing to be gone (v. 8-22). When God goes out from a people all judgments break in upon them.

EZEKIEL 10:1-7

THE VISION OF THE CHERUBIM

To inspire us with a holy awe and dread of God, and to fill us with his fear, we may observe, in this part of the vision which the prophet had,

I. The glorious appearance of his majesty. Something of the invisible world is here in the visible, some faint representations of its brightness and beauty, some shadows, but such as are no more to be compared with the truth and substance than a picture with the life; yet here is enough to oblige us all to the utmost reverence in our thoughts of God and approaches to him, if we will but admit the impressions this discovery of him will make.

1. He is here *in the firmament above the head of the cherubim*, v. 1. He manifests his glory in the upper world, where purity and brightness are both in perfection; and the vast expanse of the firmament aims to speak the God that dwells there infinite. It is *the firmament of his power* and of his prospect too; for thence *he beholds all the children of men*. The divine nature infinitely transcends the angelic nature, and God is *above the head of the cherubim*, in respect not only of his dignity above them, but of his

dominion over them. Cherubim have great power, and wisdom, and influence, but they are all subject to God and Christ.

2. He is here upon the throne, or that which had *the appearance of the likeness of a throne* (for God's glory and government infinitely transcend all the brightest ideas our minds can either form or receive concerning them); and it was *as it were a sapphire-stone*, pure and sparkling; such a throne has God *prepared in the heavens*, far exceeding the thrones of any earthly potentates.

3. He is here attended with a glorious train of holy angels. When God came into his temple *the cherubim stood on the right side of the house* (v. 3), as the prince's life-guard, attending the gate of his palace. Christ has angels at command. The orders given to all the angels of God are, to *worship him*. Some observe that they *stood on the right side of the house*, that is, the south side, because on the north side the image of jealousy was, and other instances of idolatry, from which they would place themselves at as great a distance as might be.

4. The appearance of his glory is veiled with a cloud, and yet out of that cloud darts forth a dazzling lustre; in *the house and inner court* there was *a cloud* and darkness, which filled them, and yet either the outer court, or the same court after some time, *was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory*, v. 3, 4. There was a darting forth of light and brightness; but if any over curious eye pried into it, it would find itself lost in a cloud. His righteousness is conspicuous *as the great mountains*, and the brightness of it *fills the court*; but *his judgements are a great deep*, which we cannot fathom, *a cloud* which we cannot see through. *The brightness* discovers enough to awe and direct our consciences, but the *cloud* forbids us to expect the gratifying of our curiosity; for *we cannot order our speech by reasons of darkness*. Thus (³³⁰⁰Habakkuk 3:4) *he had rays coming out of his hand, and yet there was the hiding of his power*. Nothing is more clear than that God *is*, nothing more dark than *what* he is. God *covers himself with light*, and yet, as to us, *makes darkness his pavilion*. God took possession of the tabernacle and the temple in a cloud, which was always the symbol of his presence. In the temple above there will be no cloud, but we shall see *face to face*.

5. The cherubim, made a dreadful sound with their wings, v. 5. The vibration of them, as of the strings of musical instruments, made a curious melody; bees, and other winged insects, make a noise with their wings.

Probably this intimated their preparing to remove, by stretching forth and lifting up their wings, which made this noise as it were to give warning of it. This noise is said to be *as the voice of the almighty God when he speaks*, as the thunder, which is called *the voice of the Lord* (¹⁹⁰⁸Psalm 29:3), or *as the voice of the Lord* when he spoke to Israel on Mount Sinai; and *therefore* he then gave the law with abundance of terror, to signify with what terror he would reckon for the violation of it, which he was now about to do. This noise of their wings *was heard even to the outer court*, the court of the people; for the Lord's voice, in his judgements, *cries in the city*, which those may hear that do not, as Ezekiel, see the visions of them.

II. The terrible directions of his wrath. This vision has a further tendency than merely to set forth the divine grandeur; further orders are to be given for the destruction of Jerusalem. The greatest devastations are made by fire and sword. For a general slaughter of the inhabitants of Jerusalem orders were given in the foregoing chapter; now here we have a command to lay the city in ashes, by *scattering coals of fire* upon it, which in the vision were fetched *from between the cherubim*.

1. For the issuing out of orders to do this *the glory of the Lord* was lifted *up from the cherub* (as in the chapter before for the giving of orders there, v. 3) *and stood upon the threshold of the house*, in imitation of the courts of judgement, which they kept in the gates of their cities. The people would not hear the oracles which God had delivered to them from his holy temple, and therefore they shall thence be made to hear their doom.

2. *The man clothed in linen* who had marked those that were to be preserved is to be employed in this service; for *the same Jesus* that is the protector and Saviour of those that believe, having *all judgement committed to him*, that of condemnation as well as that of absolution, will *come in a flaming fire to take vengeance on those that obey not his gospel*. He that sits on the throne calls *to the man clothed in linen to go in between the wheels, and fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city*. This intimates,

(1.) That the burning of the city and temple by the Chaldeans was a consumption determined, and that therein they executed God's counsel, did what he designed before should be done.

(2.) That the fire of divine wrath, which kindles judgement upon a people, is just and holy, for it is fire fetched *from between the cherubim*. The fire

on God's altar, where atonement was made, had been slighted, to avenge which fire is here fetched from heaven, like that by which Nadab and Abihu were killed for offering strange fire. If a city, or town, or house, be burnt, whether by design or accident, if we trace it in its original, we shall find that the *coals* which kindled the *fire* came from *between the wheels*; for there is not any evil of that kind in the city, but the Lord has done it.

(3.) That Jesus Christ acts by commission from the Father, for from him he *receives authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of man*. Christ came to *send fire on the earth* (⁽²²⁴⁾Luke 12:49) and in the great day will speak this world into ashes. By fire from his hand, the earth, and all the works that are therein, will be burnt up.

3. This *man clothed with linen* readily attended to this service; though, being *clothed with linen*, he was very unfit to go among the burning *coals*, yet, being called, he said, *Lo, I come*; this commandment he had received of his Father, and he complied with it; the prophet saw him go in, v. 2. *He went in, and stood beside the wheels*, expecting to be furnished there with the coals he was to scatter; for what Christ was to give he first received, whether for mercy or judgement. He was directed to take fire, but he staid till he had it given him, to show how slow he is to execute judgement, and how long-suffering to us-ward.

4. One of the cherubim reached him a handful of fire from the midst of the living creatures. The prophet, when he first saw this vision, observed that there were *burning coals of fire, and lamps, that went up and down among the living creatures* (⁽²¹¹³⁾Ezekiel 1:13); thence this fire was taken, v. 7. The *spirit of burning, the refiner's fire*, by which Christ purifies his church, is of a divine original. It is by a celestial fire, *fire from between the cherubim*, that wonders are wrought. *The cherubim put it into his hand*; for the angels are ready to be employed by the Lord Jesus and to serve all his purposes.

5. When he had taken the fire he *went out*, no doubt to *scatter* it up and down upon *the city*, as he was directed. And *who can abide the day of his coming?* Who can stand before him when he goes out in his anger?

~~3108~~ EZEKIEL 10:8-22

THE VISION OF THE DIVINE GLORY

We have here a further account of the vision of God's glory which Ezekiel saw, here intended to introduce that direful omen of the departure of that glory from them, which would open the door for ruin to break in.

I. Ezekiel sees the glory of God shining in the sanctuary, as he had seen it *by the river of Chebar*, and gives an account of it, that those who had by their wickedness provoked God to depart from them might know what they had lost and might lament after the Lord, groaning out their Ichabod, *Where is the glory?* Ezekiel here sees the operations of divine Providence in the government of the lower world, and the affairs of it, represented by the *four wheels*; and the perfections of the holy angels, the inhabitants of the upper world, and their ministrations, represented by the *four living creatures*, every one of which had *four faces*. The agency of the angels in directing the affairs of this world is represented by the close communication that was between the *living creatures* and the *wheels*, the wheels being guided by them in all their motions, as the chariot is by him that drives it. But the same Spirit being both in the *living creatures* and in the *wheels* denoted the infinite wisdom which serves its own purposes by the ministration of angels and all the occurrences of this lower world. So that this vision gives out faith a view of that throne which the Lord has *prepared in the heavens*, and that kingdom of which *rules over all*,

~~1439~~ Psalm 103:19. The prophet observes that this was *the same vision* with that he saw by the river of Chebar (v. 15, 22), and yet in one thing there seems to be a material difference, that that which was there *was the face of an ox*, and was *on the left side* (~~3110~~ Ezekiel 1:10), is here the *face of a cherub*, and is the *first face* (v. 14), whence some have concluded that the peculiar face of a cherub was that of an ox, which the Israelites had an eye to when they made the golden calf. I rather think that in this latter vision the first face was the proper appearance or figure of a cherub, which Ezekiel knew very well, being a priest, by what he had seen in the temple of the Lord (~~1169~~ 1 Kings 6:29), but which we now have no certainty of at all; and by this Ezekiel knew assuredly, whereas before he only conjectured it, that they were all cherubim, though putting on different faces, v. 20. And this first appearing in the proper figure of a cherub, and yet it being proper to retain the number of four, that of the ox is left out

and dropped, because the face of the cherub had been most abused by the worship of an ox. As sometimes when God appeared to deliver his people, so now when he appeared to depart from them, *he rode on a cherub, and did fly*. Now observe here,

1. That this world is subject to turns, and changes, and various revolutions. The course of affairs in it is represented by *wheels* (v. 9); sometimes one spoke is uppermost and sometimes another; they are still ebbing and flowing like the sea, waxing and waning like the moon, ~~OR~~ 1 Samuel 2:4, etc. Nay, their appearance is as if there were a *wheel in the midst of a wheel* (v. 10), which intimates the mutual references of providence to each other, their dependences on each other, and the joint tendency of all to one common end, while their motions as to us are intricate, and perplexed, and seemingly contrary.

2. That there is an admirable harmony and uniformity in the various occurrences of providence (v. 13): *As for the wheels*, though they moved several ways, yet *it was cried to them, O wheel!* they were all as one, being guided by one Spirit to one end; for God works all according to the counsel of his own will, which is one, for his own glory, which is one. And this makes the disposal of Providence truly admirable, and to be looked upon with wonder. As the works of his creation, considered separately, were *good*, but all together *very good*, so the wheels of Providence, considered by themselves, are wonderful, but put them together and they are very wonderful. *O wheel!*

3. That the motions of Providence are steady and regular, and whatever the Lord pleases that he does and is never put upon new counsels. *The wheels turned not as they went* (v. 11), and the *living creatures went every one straight forward*, v. 22. Whatever difficulties lay in their way, they were sure to get over them, and were never obliged to stand still, turn aside, or go back. So perfectly known to God are all his works that he never put upon to new counsels.

4. That God make more use of the ministration of angels in the government of this lower world than we are aware of: *The four wheels were by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by another cherub*, v. 9. What has been imagined by some concerning the spheres above, that every orb has its intelligence to guide it, is here intimated concerning the wheels below, that every wheel has its cherub to guide it. We think it a satisfaction to us if under the wise God there are

wise men employed in managing the affairs of the kingdoms and churches; whether there be so or no, it appears by this that there are wise angels employed, *a cherub to every wheel*.

5. That all the motions of Providence and all the ministrations of angels are under the government of the great God. They are all *full of eyes*, those eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the earth and which the angels have always an eye to, v. 12. The *living creatures* and *the wheels* concur in their motions and rests (v. 17); for *the Spirit of life*, as it may be read, or *the Spirit of the living creatures, is in the wheels*. The Spirit of God directs all the creatures, both upper and lower, so as to make them serve the divine purpose. Events are not determined by the *wheel of fortune*, which is blind, but by the *wheels of Providence*, which are full of eyes.

II. Ezekiel sees the glory of God removing out of the sanctuary, the place where God's honour had long dwelt, and this sight is as sad as the other was grateful. It was pleasant to see that God had not *forsaken the earth* (as the idolaters suggested, ~~200~~ Ezekiel 9:9), but sad to see that he was forsaking his sanctuary. The *glory of the Lord stood over the threshold*, having thence given the necessary orders for the destruction of the city, and it *stood over the cherubim*, not those in the most holy place, but those that Ezekiel now saw in vision, v. 18. It ascended that stately chariot, as the judge, when he comes off the bench, goes into his coach and is gone. And immediately *the cherubim lifted up their wings* (v. 19), as they were directed, and they *mounted up from the earth*, as birds upon the wing; and, *when they went out*, the wheels of this chariot were not drawn, but went by instinct, *beside them*, by which it appeared that *the Spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels*. Thus, when God is leaving a people in displeasure, angels above, and all events here below, shall concur to further his departure. But observe here, In the courts of the temple where the people of Israel had dishonoured their God, had cast off his yoke and withdrawn the shoulder from it, blessed angels appear very ready to serve him, to draw in his chariot, and to *mount upwards* with it. God has shown the prophet how the will of God was disobeyed by men on earth (Ezekiel 8); here he shows him how readily it is obeyed by angels and inferior creatures; and it is a comfort to us, when we grieve for the wickedness of the wicked, to think how his angels do his commandments, *hearkening to the voice of his word*, ~~200~~ Psalm 103:20. Let us now,

1. Take a view of this chariot in which *the glory of the God of Israel rides triumphantly*. He that is the God of Israel is the God of heaven and earth, and has the command of all the powers of both. Let the faithful Israelites comfort themselves with this, that he who is their God is above the cherubim; their Redeemer is so (~~GEN~~ 1 Peter 3:22) and has the sole and sovereign disposal of all events; *the living creatures and the wheels* agree to serve him, so that he is *head over all things to the church*. The rabbins call this vision that Ezekiel had *Mercabah* — *the vision of the chariot*; and thence they call the more abstruse part of divinity, which treats concerning God and spirits, *Opus currus* — *The work of the chariot*, as they do the other part, that is more plain and familiar, *Opus bereshith* — *The work of the creation*. —

2. Let us attend the motions of this chariot: The *cherubim, and the glory of God above them, stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house*, v. 19. But observe with how many stops and pauses God departs, as loth to go, as if to see if there be any that will intercede with him to return. None of the priests in the inner court, between the temple and the altar, would court his stay; therefore he leaves their court, and stands at the *east gate*, which led into the *court of the people*, to see if any of them would yet at length stand in the gap. Note, God removes by degrees from a provoking people; and, when he is ready to depart in displeasure, would return to them in mercy if they were but a repenting praying people.