

The Appearance of the Likeness of the Glory of God

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- [0 : 00] I'm going to sing to God's praise from Psalm 104. Psalm 104, singing from verse 30 to the end of the psalm.
- Thy quickening spirit thou sendest forth, then thy created be, and then the earth's decayed face renewed is by thee.
- The glory of the mighty Lord continue shall forever. The Lord Jehovah shall rejoice in all his works together.
- Earth has afflicted, trendless all, if he on it but look, and if the mountains he but touch, they presently do smoke.
- I will sing to the Lord Most High, so long as I shall live, and while I be him, I shall to my God praise his give.
- [1 : 02] Of him my meditation shall sweet thoughts to me afford, and as for me I will rejoice in God my only Lord.
- From earth let sinners be consumed, let ill men no more be. O thou my soul, bless thou the Lord, praise to the Lord, give ye.
- Then sing these verses, Psalm 104, from verse 30 to the end, Thy quickening spirit thou sendest forth, then thy created be.
- Thy quickening spirit thou sendest forth, then thy created be.
- And then the earth's decayed face renewed is by thee.
- [2 : 13] The glory of the mighty Lord continue shall forever.
- The Lord Jehovah shall rejoice in all his works together.
- The Lord Jehovah shall be.
- They presently do smoke. I will sing to the Lord most high, so long as I shall live.
- And while I be in all my salvation, To my God-blessed care.
- [4 : 02] Of whom my meditation shall sweet thoughts to me afford.
- And as for me, I will rejoice in God my only Lord.
- From earth let sinners be consumed, let ill men no more be.
- O thou my soul, bless thou the Lord. Praise to the Lord, praise to the Lord, give ye.
- May I. May I. May I. We can return for a short while to Ezekiel chapter 1.
- [5 : 26] and we can read from verse 26. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone.

And upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward.

I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that speak.

We're continuing our consideration of some passages of Scripture, of portions of Scripture that speak to us about the glory of God, in some of its aspects.

[7 : 15] And sometimes we may refer to passages that have a curiosity content.

there's a strangeness about the events that are presented or the sights that are brought before us.

some people and that itself attracts some people to them. Some others would confess that they are too strange and that they are too difficult to comprehend.

And therefore, they would turn away from them. And I suppose the book of the prophet Ezekiel is a bit like that.

There is much in it that is not easily understood. And because it's not easily understood, it's therefore hard to apply in a meaningful way.

[8 : 20] I think we have to remind ourselves always of the need that we have if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are Christians, that we are required to have an exalted view of God.

And such portions of Scripture encourage such a view the late Dr. Stuart Briscoe made the following comments about this book as a whole.

He says the book the main thrust of the book is to show who God really is. But then he added this remark after that statement.

He says people do not really know the Lord today because in many of our churches we talk about ourselves and our problems more than the Lord and his requirements.

That's something that you can think about. God's I think we have to have a balance in the way in which we study God's word.

[9 : 49] There has to be a relevance to our lives. There has to be a teaching in it that would encourage our faith and build upon our faith and allow us to get a greater and a more deep knowledge of our Lord and Saviour from a practical perspective.

We have to understand that the word of God is meant to inform us and it informs us in order to instruct us and it instructs us so as to help us to know how to conduct ourselves before God and before our fellow man.

And there is that clear requirement but it is never that in isolation it's always with an understanding that we do this we learn these things we apply these things because God is our God and God is like no other and God is holy and God requires of us that we be holy and that is something we cannot apply ourselves to if we don't know what the holiness of God is like.

Well it's something for us to think about. This book of Ezekiel as I said is not an easy read there are many things in it that I can't explain and I find it difficult to apply them and this opening chapter is one such example but we believe that there is benefit from studying such passages Ezekiel whose name is on this prophecy was somebody who lived 600 years approximately before Christ was born onto the earth and without going into the historical context there was much that went before the appearance of

Ezekiel but it is a book about God's displeasure with his own people and Ezekiel is God's servant and he is with God's people he is in exile and just because he is a servant of God did not mean that he avoided the exile but he is in exile with God's people in Babylon and God has given him a ministry to speak of God in exile and also to bring God's judgment and God's condemnation before them reading the first chapter you find that Ezekiel is described as a priest and all that means probably is that he was of the priestly caste reading some of the commentators they don't they don't believe that there's any emphasis placed upon him fulfilling that official role prior to

[14 : 07] God calling him to the role of prophet and in the first chapter we read of God's calling coming to Ezekiel and it's replicated again in the second chapter it describes the kind of prophetic ministry that he has to carry out amongst the people of God who are in exile he said unto me son of man stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee and the spirit entered into me when he spoke unto me and he said to me and he said unto me son of man send thee to the children of Israel to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me they and their fathers have transgressed against me even unto this very day for they are impudent children and stiff hearted

I do send thee unto them and thou shalt say unto them thus saith the Lord God and they whether they will hear or whether they will forbear for they are a rebellious house yet they shall know that there hath been a prophet among them and thou son of man be not afraid of them neither be afraid of their words though briars and thorns be with thee and thou dwell among scorpions be not afraid of their words nor be dismayed at their looks though they be a rebellious house and thou shalt speak my words unto them whether they will hear or whether they will forbear for they are most rebellious so clearly there you have a description of a calling coming to this man of God a priest probably of the priestly caste but now called most clearly to fulfill a prophetic ministry amongst

God's people now as I said while the historical context is a bit complicated because God was dealing with the rebellious nation of Israel and also the apostate nation of Judah which had separated and the condemnation of God was upon both until they would both be obliterated virtually but what we have in chapter one is a vision that is given to the prophet of Jehovah prior to his call but also I think probably alongside his call because the call of God is described to us in the first chapter also and he is given a vision of

God the God who is the God of Judah and the God who has given him this access to the glory of God in the call that he gives to him and it speaks in the beginning of visions and in that sense you see the different aspects to what we come face to face with as if they are separate visions as if the encounter with the creature with the four faces and the head and the hands and the wings is one separate vision and then the wheels within wheels another vision and finally the vision of the throne of

God now some people would treat it as if it was three separate visions all occurring at the same time but on the other hand you would think that it's more likely that it was the one vision that was given to him I think what's important for us to understand this what the prophets saw was God in his glory and yet it has to be emphasized that what he sees is not God physically because there is no physical representation of God the God Jehovah has no body he has no physical entity that is descriptive of who he is and yet at the same time what you have to say is that this person encountered

[19 : 55] God very clearly the prophet saw God and yet the God that he saw is not to be considered as the image of God so that if you were to describe God on the basis of what the prophet saw then you would be wrong but the experience of the encounter as an encounter with God is exactly that and I know that's difficult to understand he met God and it was the glory of God that met with him and yet what he saw physically with his own eyes is not God if you remember if we put it like this you go back to the

New Testament and the words of the apostle John and he is preparing preparing the gospel to be preached and directing attention to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and he insists upon the deity of Jesus Christ and he says of the Lord no man has ever seen God at any time that's the truth no man has seen God at any time but then he adds to that the only begotten son which is in the bosom of the father he has declared to him and that's the balancing act that you have here you've got a vision of God and God in his glory and what is seen speaks of

God and every bit you can say that God is speaking to the prophet through the vision and yet God is spirit and that's what we have to remember Don Carson speaking about the prophecy of Isaiah on the passage there I think we referred to it last week where you see the prophet coming face to face something similar to the vision that the prophet Ezekiel has here he says the vision of the Lord that Isaiah saw was as vivid and terrifying as close to the real thing even though it was but the hem of the Lord's garment that filled the temple causing him to cry out woe me that's not easy to understand close to the real thing and yet it was but the hem of his garment that the glory of the

Lord filled the temple so the encounter that the prophet has with God here that is preparatory and that is the means by which his ministry is to be confident and encouraged in the face of all the enmity that is in the world and even amongst God's people against the Lord so the first thing that we see and I'm I have to apologize because trying to explain what is seen and some of it is very detailed and you read there that the I looked and behold a whirlwind came out of the north a great cloud and a fire infolding itself and a brightness was about it and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber out of the midst of the fire and the detail that is in that description is very suggestive it tells you a lot without telling you exactly what it was that the prophet saw he saw something that was otherworldly he saw something that was extremely difficult to comprehend because of the glory that was in it and if you notice all in your reading of this chapter there's two words that appear and they're repeated throughout the chapter that is the word for likeness and the word for appearance and I think that is quite deliberate it is in the likeness of for example verse 10 there as for the likeness of their faces they had therefore had the face of a man and the face of a lion and on the right side and therefore had the face of an ox on the left side therefore also the face of an eagle thus were their faces their wings were stretched upward and two wings of everyone were joined together and so on so you're having a repetition of these words which carefully says these images that were presented to him were physical images but they were representative whatever they represented they were meant to be understood as that one purpose that is suggested and you could you can see why it is suggested because where the vision came to him is very clearly set out for us the word of the

Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest the son of who see the land of the Chaldeans by the river Keper and the hand of the Lord was there upon him he is in a specific location and the Lord makes himself known to him now it might not appear to us the significance of that location but it is in Babylon where the people of God are found and it may be that very often when the Lord's people were exiled the place of worship that they chose was beside the rivers or beside running water there might have been a reason for that to do with the artificial system but Psalm 137 by the rivers of

[27 : 44] Babylon there we sat down and they wanted us to sing a song even though they were exiled from their people now maybe their significance attached to that but what he saw when he was there that is the foundation if you like for this vision of God it was in a location where I believe the worship of God was probably I'm not going to I can't say that I read this but I think that that is more than likely what was true that it was a place associated with the worship of God and that was where he was found and that was where God made himself known to him that shouldn't surprise us even if I'm wrong it shouldn't surprise you that God makes himself known in the place where God's people gather to worship worship and he reminds the prophet that they are there because they are being judged they are exiled because of

God's judgment and the picture that we are given of the fire and the whirlwind and the flashing burning image that we have there is a reminder to them of God's holiness they are there because God is holy no other reason they rebelled against God and God has judged them and because God has judged them he has taken them to Babylon and though he has taken them to Babylon he has not taken them exile for no reason to condemn them out and out and to leave them in the group of their enemies no his justice meant is in order for them to be recovered and even though the progress that they are making is none null and void there is no sense that at this moment that they are making any progress that this is what

God has in view for them it is a justice meant with a view to their recovery so the image that you have of the fire and again if you look at that the fire is not to free to burn as it pleases I think well if I understand it the infolding in verse 4 what does that mean as if the fire is revolving around this whirlwind it is not allowed to go and burn at will it is controlled and it speaks of the presence of God who is an all consuming fire and yet the fire is not allowed to consume them although it well could and I think we are given sight at this point of the holy otherness of God the mystery of his holiness is before us that our

God is a consuming fire but for his own people what he does he does for a reason in this passage it is possible that the word that is there for glory you find elsewhere to be translated majesty if you remember for example the saint job when he was going through the experiences that were so vexatious to him he was aware through God's encounter with him of the majesty of God the holiness of God and the majesty of God in Job 37 and it's a word that occurs frequently in the book of Job fair weather cometh out of the north with

God his terrible majesty touching the almighty we cannot find him out he is excellent in power and in judgment and in plenty of justice he will not afflict now I do know that some of the commentators say that when this whirlwind came from the north it is frequently thought of as identifying the Babylonian oppressor because that is where they were geographically in relation to Judah and Israel now it is hard for us to imagine the figures that he saw winged creatures that looked like a man four of them with four faces and four wings face of a lion face of an ox and the face of an eagle and

[33 : 44] I'm not going to say that I understand the imagery there or the purpose of what was presented to his senses but it seems that he understood something from what he encountered there similarly with the wheels within wheels you've got collectively I think what we have is lessons concerning the omniscience the omnipresence and the sovereignty of God in all that God is doing to his people they may think that God is not aware of what's happening they may think that God does not care they may think that God is insensitive to what is occurring but the prophet is being reminded that nothing could be further from the truth but I think most importantly what you have if you look at these visions if they are separate the key one the most important one is the one we see at the end of the chapter because this is the one that brings to the attention of the prophet the reality of who is before him you would think perhaps that you know these awesome creatures that were presented to the senses would drive him to his knees but they don't you would think that the images of the wheels however and you see how closely described it is but I couldn't get my head around you know trying to figure out how these things actually worked in practice

Professor Ari Finlison has got a statement on the folded wings but he doesn't do much explaining as to what the actual imagery does what he says about the folded wings is that there's a lesson there about the believers that there comes a time when they become inactive and when their activity must come to an end but he doesn't explain to us the fullness of what is brought to our attention there but what we do find is that that I saw as the colour of amber as the appearance of fire round about within it from the appearance of his lines even upward from the appearance of his lines even downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire the brightness round about it as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the

Lord and when I saw it I fell upon my face I fell upon my face then you would think that that would have taken place before now it certainly would have filled every one of us with fear and dread but what causes him to fall on his face is the remember it is the spirit that is teaching him here it is the spirit that is instructing him that is said at the very outset the hand of the Lord was upon him and the spirit of the Lord was bringing home to him what he was to hear and see but what he saw was more more than just something that was unique he saw the glory of

God and that drove him to his knees I'm sure there's a debate amongst the theologians most well some at least of the reformed theologians are convinced that what we have is a theophany and there's a debate among themselves was this a christophany or a theophany and part of the reason for their debate is because that when you see what the prophet saw above the film that was above the head was the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man upon it now some of the theologians say that that is a form of anachronism that they shouldn't be seeing the throne with a man sitting on it because it had not yet taken place but that's

I don't think if you're dealing with prophecy and if you're dealing with revelation to argue like that is to argue against what God is able to reveal he saw sitting on the throne one with the likeness of a man the likeness as the appearance of a man again the double emphasis there so that's why there's questions about whether this really is not just a theophany but a christophany a revelation of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ given to the the prophet so here we have yet another encounter with the glory of God that is given to this person in order for him to fulfill the role that he has as God's servant ministering in a hostile environment ministering to a people who are under judgment bringing home God's truth to them because it's right towards the end of the prophecy before there is any sense of optimism coming through in the prophecy up until maybe the 30th chapter it's all judgment all gloom and doom and rightly so because they are they are resisting the grace of God denying it and the

[40 : 56] God of heaven sees foot to reveal his glory to his servant to encourage him and to equip him so as he can deal with that well may God encourage your own thinking on some of the things that we come face to face with here that God has been pleased to reveal to us let us pray Lord oh God you are indeed a God who is high and lifted up and you sit upon the throne and there is one at your right hand who is enthroned and there is the difference that we can go to that is brought before us in your word that that is how it is that Christ has fulfilled all righteousness and that he has ascended up on high and that he sits at your right hand we give thanks for the glory that that brings before us we bring to your attention the needs of our congregation here and all connected with it especially those of our number who are unable to be with us and especially amongst them any who are unwell forgive our sins and pardon every transgression in Jesus name amen we're going to sing some verses in from psalm 108 psalm 108 and verse 5 two verses these two verses this eat

The Book of lemans Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[45 : 13] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.