

The Calls of the Prophets Part:3

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[0 : 01] Good morning. I turn you this morning to Ezekiel chapter 1 and we'll read the whole thing. It's a long chapter but we want to see what's being said here. Now before we read the chapter what I'm going to be doing this morning is first of all giving you a description of what he sees because if we can understand what he sees then we can understand the Bible a bit better.

And then I'll talk about the meaning and I'll sum up with the application. So in Ezekiel chapter 1 we read there from verse 1. In the 30th year and the 4th month, on the 5th day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

On the 5th day of the month, it was the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Kebar, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire that were gleaming bronze.

In the midst of this came the likeness of four living creatures, and this was their appearance. They had the form of a man, for each had four faces, each of them had four wings.

[1 : 50] Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings and on their four sides there were human hands, and the four had their faces and their wings thus.

Their wings touched one another, they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went. And as to the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in the front, the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back.

Such were their faces, and their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wings of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward.

Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures.

And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning, and the lightning darted to and fro like a flash of lightning.

[3 : 10] As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.

And as for the appearance of the wheel, and their construction was like the gleaming of a chrysolite. And the four had the same likeness, their construction being, as it were, a wheel within a wheel.

When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning. The four wheels had rims, and they had spokes, and their rims were full of eyes round about.

When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them. When the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheel rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

When these went, these went, and when they stood still, they stood still. And when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them. The spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels.

[4 : 18] Over the heads of the living creatures, there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like crystal, spread above their heads. And under the firmament, their wings touched towards straight, one toward another.

And each creature had two wings covering its body. When they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of a tumult, like the sound of a host.

When they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. And when they stood still, they let down their wings.

And above the expanse over their heads, there was the likeness of a throne, an appearance like sapphire. And seated above the likeness of a throne was the likeness of a human form.

And upward from what had the appearance of his loins, I saw, as it were, a gleaming bronze, like the appearance of the fire enclosed round about.

[5 : 27] And downward from what he had the appearance of his loins, I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire. And there was brightness round about him, like the appearance of a bow that is in the cloud on a day of rain.

So was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Amen. May the Lord bless us that reading may be to his praise and to his glory. Believe it or not, all these details have a meaning. But what do we know about Ezekiel?

In verses 2 and 3, we read that on the fifth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzahai in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river Kebar, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

So where we are in this terms of history is somewhere about BC 593. The first part of the exile had taken place in BC 597.

[6 : 42] But in BC 593, Ezekiel was 30 years of age. Now that is significant for our understanding of what's going on here, because 30 years of age was the normal age for priests to enter into their duties at the temple.

So, from these facts, it seems that God has called Ezekiel from what he thought would be his ministry to a different ministry.

And he's called him to be a prophet, it's given him to be a compensation, because he's not able to be fulfilling his cause as a priest in the temple. Now, as I said, I want to describe this first.

The description is actually split into four chunks in that chapter. Verses 4 to 14 contains a description of four living creatures who may be understood to be arranged in a square.

Verses 15 to 21 contains a description of the wheels which are best understood as being like a gyroscope. 22 to 25 is the description of the expanse which is over the living creatures like a platform or a ledge.

[8 : 10] And verses 26 to 28 contain the description of an apparent human figure which is understood to be an appearance of the glory of the Lord.

So, we begin with the first bit which is the four living creatures. verse 4. As I look, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north and a great cloud with brightness round about it and fire flashing forth continually and in the midst of the fire as it were gleaming bronze.

Now, at the beginning of this description it said that the storm has come out of the north. Now, that is a very significant thing to note simply because in the thinking of the Old Testament the dwelling place of God was said to be in the north beyond the land of Israel.

And if we take the book of Job to be the oldest book in the Bible in chapter 37 we read that the glorious splendor came out of the north.

You get it reflected also in the book of Psalms in Psalm 48 Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God.

[9 : 31] His holy mountain beautiful in elevation is the joy of all the earth. Mount Zion in the far north is the city of the great king.

vision. So this is where it's come from. It's come from the dwelling place of God. This is where the vision comes from.

And it uses a great number of bright precious stones to indicate the color of all this. Later on we'll see he talks about it being like a crystallite.

Now a crystallite is a gemstone something like a topaz. It's yellowish green in color and that's what Ezekiel saw.

Now we read about their faces. As for the likeness of their faces each had the face of a man in front the face of a lion the face of an ox and the face of an eagle at the back.

[10 : 37] They're only linked by their wingtips and their wingtips are extended for this purpose to form the square upon which the expanse stood.

We move on and look at verses 15 to 21 which gives us the description of the wheels. They're best understood as being like a gyroscope.

As I looked at the living creatures I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures and the appearance of the wheels and their construction was it where a wheel was in a wheel.

Now this is it is they that are described as being like a crystallite this precious gemstone which are yellowish green in color.

And what's happening is that you've got one wheel bisected with another wheel at right angles to each other and these rims these four wheels had rims and spokes and they had eyes all round about.

[11 : 49] So that's what that's about. 22 to 25 they have the description of the firmament or expanse which is over the living creatures like a platform or a ledge over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament shining like crystal spread out over their heads.

This was a dreadful sight and at this platform move there was a strange stirring sound as the four pairs of wings vibrated and there came a voice the voice of God.

Now the voice the appearance of the vision of God appears in verses 26 to 28 above the firmament or over their heads there was the likeness of a throne in appearance like sapphire and seated above the likeness of the throne was the likeness as it were of human form.

Now you find that Ezekiel describes the living creatures in detail but when it comes to God all he can say is that he had a human form.

So what's being pictured here in the description of this vision is something like a chariot four living creatures four sets of wheels an expanse above and someone sitting on a throne on top of that expanse.

[13 : 30] Now I want to move on now to discuss the meaning of the vision and believe it or not it does have a meaning. The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

So what does this mean? Well in chapter 43 verses 3 to 5 he says this the vision which I saw was like the vision when he came to destroy the city and like the vision I had seen by the river Kebar and I fell upon my face and the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east and behold the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

Now it's interesting to note that in present day Jerusalem the east entrance based on this quotation is bricked up.

You can't go through it because it's been held sacred from the time of Ezekiel that one day the Messiah will come through the eastern entrance.

But what he's seen is a vision of the glory of God. Now how can we understand what this glory of God is? I think the answer to the question is that it's a vision of the manifestation or the revelation of God in his holiness.

[15 : 05] Now let's go to Solomon's temple where we read about it in 1 Kings 8. When the priests came out of the holy place a cloud filled the house of the Lord so the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

They couldn't minister because of this visitation of God in his awesome holy presence. The glory of the Lord.

What do we say that this means? Let me say very simply that this whole vision is a vision about the ongoing purposes of God for Ezekiel and for the people of Israel.

Going back to what I said earlier about Ezekiel being forbidden by circumstance to exercise his calling in the temple. Thus it means for him a vision that the purpose of his God and his calling will carry on regardless of circumstances.

And when you look at the remainder of this book from chapter 36 on, you find that the purposes of God for Israel are indeed carrying on irrespective of sin, irrespective of the nation's failure, irrespective of its apostasy to the faith, God is saying, I'm going on.

[16 : 54] Now let's consider how we can see this. As for their appearance of the wheels and their construction, their appearance was like the gleaming of a chrysolite, and the four had the same likeness, their construction being, as it were, a wheel within a wheel.

Now if you look at the wheels, indeed any wheel, it can be seen that the wheel has no perceptible beginning or no end.

So the wheels in Ezekiel's vision have no perceptible beginning or end, and as such, they represent the purposes of God.

Because the purpose of God, purposes of God, are eternal. And as far as we can determine from the New Testament, they have no beginning.

beginning, because the beginning was in eternity past, and they stretch forward without an end to eternity future. So the vision is about the ongoing purpose of God.

[18 : 09] Now what are the living creatures? In the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures, and this was their appearance. They had the form of a man, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

These human forms may be said to be the medium, or the means of communicating that the purposes of God are eternal and are going to be made known.

They had four faces, the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and that of an eagle. Now all of these species point to the high point of God in the creation of the world.

Man, or rather humanity, may be judged to be the king of the creative acts of God. The lion is the king of all beasts, the ox the king of all cattle, the eagle the king of all birds.

God is the king of all and the king of all the people. And four in the bible is the number of humanity.

[19 : 29] God is communicating his purpose. Now in the old testament, this fourfold witness, fourfold medium, was the king, the prophet, the priest, and the Levites.

But we've moved on from that. So it's no longer the king, the prophet, the priest, and the Levites. Indeed, it's the four gospels.

Because in these four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the purposes of God in Christ are revealed to you and to me.

And above all this is the vision of God himself who is supreme in the created world and revealing his purposes being the message of the eternal gospel.

So the vision is all about the ongoing purposes of God. So finally, we come to the application.

[20 : 36] In the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

The river Kebar still exists. It's a canal. It's near a place called Nippur in modern-day Iraq, which takes in where Babylonia was.

We find that Ezekiel has been exiled to Babylon in the year 597. So the basis of the exile is stated, as I said last week, in Jeremiah 25, verse 11.

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. Now, historians tell us that this servitude of 70 years began in B.C.

606, and ended under the reign of Cyrus the Persian in B.C. 536. Now, the reason for this servitude was to cure the Israelites of their one failing sin, which was to worship more than one God.

[21 : 55] So in the exile, they learned this lesson. they only worship now, one God. But in the early reign of Jehoiachin, the first part of the exile took place.

So at the time that Ezekiel gave some of his prophecies, the whole land was carried away for the same reason. And that assessment of facts means that the whole land lay desolate, the temple of the Lord in ruins, the king's house and all the great houses of Jerusalem were in ruins.

In short, everything which Ezekiel and his companions held dear was little more than a memory. But that's not the end of the story because God is saying, I'm going on and I want you to go on with me.

I've said already that you find how this works out in the second half of the book from 36 on. And so we read in Ezekiel 36 24, I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

the promise is backed up by the vision of the dry bones coming back to life in Ezekiel chapter 37. When Israel was reconstituted as a nation in 1947, the chapter Ezekiel 37 was read out at the official ceremony making Israel a nation once more.

[23 : 44] chapter 40 to 48 we read of a restored temple and a restored priesthood which causes the land to flourish and blossom as a rose.

In Ezekiel 36 we read they will say the land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden and the waste and the desolate ruined cities are now inhabited and fortified.

So the nation of Israel is going to continue and flourish. What does it mean? It means that the purpose of God in Christ for you and me is going on.

Yes, we live in a difficult world. We live with lots of opposition to the Christian gospel. irrespective of all that God is going on.

Listen to what how Peter spoke to Jesus. You are the Christ the son of the living God and Jesus answered him blessed are you Simon bar Jonah from flesh and blood is not revealed it to you but my father who is in heaven and I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

[25 : 17] The rock is the confession that Peter had made. So what is being said here is that the church has a future in the purposes of God provided it remains faithful to the truth of the gospel.

The teaching of Jesus we see that the purposes of the church will not falter until the end of the age. So that what we see in the book of Ezekiel is identical for the church for you and me all of that is secure in the hands of God.

In Ezekiel 47 we read the result of a restored temple. He brought me back to the door of the temple and behold water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east for the temple faced east and water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple south of the altar.

So here we have this vision of this renewed temple which has a profound effect on the healing of the land. But wherever this water flows it brings life to all it comes in contact with.

And this is not just the vision of a restored temple but a vision of a renewed church from which the waters of the healing powers of the gospel flow out and give life to all who come in contact with.

[27 : 10] Now in chapter 43 he says this he said to me son of man this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.

Now in the prophecy what's being talked about is Jerusalem that is the place but speaking of it spiritually it refers to this place this is the place of my throne where I will place the soles of my feet and I will dwell here forever.

So what is the throne? The throne is this platform or pulpit or whatever you want to call it because it's a throne for the word of God and from this throne there flow out waters that will heal the land.

Now I said it right at the beginning that these three are in fact one. They're all new. I didn't write that. They're not stuff I've used before but if we go back two weeks ago to Isaiah and his circumstances of a collapsed world and how everything that he thought was good was crumbling and he heard the voice of the Lord whom shall I send?

So if we take that as applying to us what God is saying is get out there and heal my broken world.

[29 : 13] Moving to step two in Jeremiah we spoke about his predestinated ministry and his opposition which he overcame by the promises of God.

You are with me. But the greatest promise he got was the promise of a future. I know the plans I have for you says the Lord.

Plans for prosperity and not for evil to give you a future and a hope. God is saying we have a future.

We have a hope. And the third bit is tied in with Ezekiel who is assuring us that God's purpose in calling us here is going to carry on.

I commit this to you. Let in God's name let us help make it a reality. Amen. Shall we sing now?

[30 : 26] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.