

Touchstones of God's Economy

Ezekiel (1)

The prophecy of Ezekiel was given in the land of the Chaldeans, close to Babylon, over a period of twenty-two years, beginning from 595 B.C., the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. Ezekiel testifies, "While I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1). God's visions, being His revelations, enable His people to see divine, spiritual, and heavenly things. Ezekiel saw spiritual, heavenly visions under an open heaven and presented these visions to God's people so that they might be recovered from their captivity for the building up of God's dwelling place. It was mainly through Ezekiel's prophesying to the people of Israel in captivity that they eventually detested the idols, turned their hearts to God, and returned to their homeland after seventy years (3:10-11; 2 Chron. 36:21-23).¹

Ezekiel saw four major visions: the first is the vision of the appearance of the glory of Jehovah (Ezek. 1:4-28); the second is the vision of Jehovah's glory departing from the temple and the city (8:1—11:25); the third is the visions of the dry bones and the two sticks, showing the regenerating and renewing of God's people (37:1-28); and the fourth is the vision of the holy building of God (40:1—44:31). With these four visions, the book of Ezekiel may be considered a miniature of the entire Bible, which reveals that God's eternal intention is to dispense Himself into His chosen people, making them the same as He is in His life, His nature, and His image, but not in His Godhead, so that they might be mingled with Him as one entity and built together in Him to be His eternal habitation. This article will cover the first of these visions.

In order to interpret this vision, it is important to note two things. First, although the contents of the visions in Ezekiel are of visible, physical things, they all signify spiritual things. Throughout the Bible physical things are used to signify spiritual things. For example, in John 15 the Lord said that He is the vine and we are the branches, signifying the spiritual union between Christ and His believers (vv. 1, 5). In Revelation 5:6 John saw a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, signifying Christ as our Redeemer. The principle of the types and figures of the Old Testament is that the physical items in the old covenant portray the spiritual items in the new covenant and therefore also need to be interpreted spiritually (Heb. 9:9;

10:1). In Ezekiel 1 the physical items include the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum; the four living creatures with their faces, wings, feet, and hands; and the wheels, torches, eyes, beryl, sapphire stone, and rainbow. These all need to be interpreted for their spiritual significance; otherwise, the vision has no practical meaning for God's people. Second, the vision of the four living creatures is not the same as that of the four living creatures in Revelation 4:6-9. There are many differences between these two visions, the most significant of which is that the four living creatures seen by John in Revelation were in heaven, whereas the four living creatures seen by Ezekiel were on earth (Rev. 4:6; Ezek. 1:15, 19, 22). It is contrary to the principle of His creation, in which everything is according to its kind, that God would create certain physical creatures to roam the earth like the ones Ezekiel saw in his vision (Gen. 1:12, 21, 24-25). Rather, God showed Ezekiel a composition of recognizable physical things in order to convey deep things in our spiritual experience and living that cannot be conveyed by words alone. In fact, Ezekiel 1 may be considered the deepest chapter in the Bible concerning the spiritual experience of the believers in Christ.

The Vision of the Appearance of the Glory of Jehovah

The vision in chapter 1 is a vision of the appearance of the glory of Jehovah. At the end of the chapter, referring to the vision he had just seen, Ezekiel says, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and I heard the voice of someone speaking" (v. 28). God's intention in His economy is that His glory would appear, that is, be expressed, not only in the heavens but also on the earth through His chosen people. According to this vision, the glory of Jehovah appears first through His manifestation in the four living creatures, then through His move in the wheels, and finally through His administration, which requires an open heaven (expanse), the throne, and the man on the throne. However, first there is the need of certain basic experiences, as signified by the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum.

The Wind, the Cloud, the Fire, and the Electrum

The wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum were the

first things that Ezekiel saw in his vision: “I looked, and there came a storm wind from the north, a great cloud and a fire flashing incessantly; and there was a brightness around it, and from the midst of it there was something like the sight of electrum, from the midst of the fire” (v. 4).

The storm wind is a figure of the powerful Spirit of God (Acts 2:2, 4). In the Scriptures wind has both a negative and a positive significance. Negatively, it is a symbol, or sign, of God’s judgment upon man (Jer. 49:36; Rev. 7:1). In its positive significance, as used here, the storm wind symbolizes the blowing of the Holy Spirit upon man or the descending of the Holy Spirit upon man to cause him to have God’s life (Ezek. 37:9-10; John 3:6-8; Acts 2:2-21). It is “from the north,” which means that it is from God (Psa. 75:6-7; Isa. 14:13). Whenever God visits us and revives us, His Spirit blows upon us like a mighty wind to bring a spiritual storm into our life, into our work, and into the church, causing us to be dissatisfied and concerned about our spiritual progress and to have a turn in our spiritual life.

Following the storm wind, there is the cloud. This is a figure of God as the Spirit abiding with His people and covering them in order to care for them and to show favor to them (Exo. 13:21; 40:34-35; Prov. 16:15; 1 Cor. 10:1-2). God comes to us as the wind, but He stays with us as the cloud. Together, these are an indication that an important transaction is about to take place between God and man.

Next, Ezekiel saw the fire, which signifies God’s burning and sanctifying power (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). Whenever God visits us, His holy fire comes to consume everything in us that does not match His holy nature and disposition. It also causes us to be enlightened concerning our spiritual condition before God. The more the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in us, the more we are purified and enlightened (Isa. 6:5-7).

From the midst of the fire there appeared the glowing electrum. Electrum, composed of the elements of gold and silver, signifies the Lamb-God, the redeeming God (Rev. 22:1). Gold in the Bible signifies the divine nature of God the Father, and silver signifies the redeeming Christ (1 Cor. 3:12). The glowing of the electrum within the fire signifies the radiant expression of the redeeming God. Whereas the fire burns and enlightens, the electrum glows, in a way that is lovely, precious, and pleasant. As the electrum, the Lord Jesus is the One who has redeemed us and who is everything to us. If we consider our experience, we will realize that the One who dwells within us today is the Lamb-God, the One signified by the electrum. The issue of the spiritual transactions involving the blowing wind, the covering cloud, and

the purifying fire is the glowing electrum—the radiant expression of the redeeming God.

The Four Living Creatures

Out of the fire also came four living creatures: “From the midst of it there came the likeness of four living creatures” (Ezek. 1:5). This indicates that the more we experience God as the blowing wind, the overshadowing cloud, the burning fire, and the glowing electrum, the more we are enlivened with the divine life to become the four living creatures.

The number four is related to God’s creation and signifies man as God’s creature (Isa. 11:12; Jer. 49:36; Rev. 7:1). Indeed, the four living creatures have one appearance, that of a man: “This was their appearance: They had the likeness of a man” (Ezek. 1:5). According to verse 26, God on the throne also bears the appearance of a man. Therefore, the living creatures, who are reckoned not as individuals but as a group, that is, as one entity, are the corporate expression of the man on the throne. The fact that they bear the likeness of a man and that God on the throne also bears the appearance of a man indicates that God’s central thought and arrangement are related to man (Gen. 1:26; Psa. 8:4-8). According to the vision in Ezekiel 1, man is the means for God to manifest His glory, man is the means for God to move on the earth, and man is the means for God to administrate on the throne. Therefore, God uses the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum to enliven us in order to gain man as the means of His manifestation, move, and administration.

Each living creature had four faces (vv. 6, 10). The first was the face of a man, which indicates that the living creatures live in a proper humanity, the humanity of Jesus (John 19:5). The second face was that of a lion, which indicates that in relation to sin, the world, and Satan they are bold, strong, victorious, and reigning (Rev. 5:5; Rom. 5:17). The third face was that of an ox, which indicates that they are willing to bear the burden, to labor, and even to sacrifice themselves (1 Cor. 15:10, 58; Acts 20:24; Phil. 2:30). The fourth face was the face of an eagle, which indicates that the living creatures are transcendent, buoyant, and powerful in the life of God (4:12-13).

The four faces of the living creatures portray the life of Christ as depicted in the four Gospels: Matthew shows Christ as a lion, the King in God’s kingdom; Mark portrays Him as an ox, the Servant of God; Luke depicts Him as a man, the Man-Savior; and John shows Him as an eagle, the very God. Thus, the four living creatures are a corporate expression of Christ, living out the life of Christ in a corporate way. They are the corporate Christ, as the corporate expression of God among human beings (1 Cor. 12:12).

Ezekiel 1:6-8 describes the wings, the feet, and the hands of the living creatures:

Every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet, and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the sight of burnished bronze. And the hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides.

The wings must be the wings of an eagle, because only the eagle among the four faces is a creature with wings. In the Scriptures the wings of an eagle signify the grace, strength, and power of God applied to us (Exo. 19:4; Isa. 40:31; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:7; 12:9). Their feet signify their walk. A calf's foot signifies a walk that is not crooked in human cleverness but is straight, frank, faithful, and honest in the divine grace (1:12; 4:2). A calf's foot is cloven, that is, divided, signifying that in their walk the living creatures can discern what is right and what is wrong and what is clean and what is unclean in the eyes of God (Phil. 1:9-10; Lev. 11:3). Their feet sparkled like the sight of burnished bronze, signifying that their walk has been tested and examined by the Lord and that it shines, giving light to others and being a test to their walk (Rev. 1:15). The hands of the living creatures being the hands of a man indicate that a proper, normal Christian should always do things exactly as a man (Acts 20:34). Although we conduct ourselves and labor in the grace and power of God, we should be very human in our living, cooperating with God in a human way and fulfilling our human duty. This is to be balanced. The human hands are under the eagle's wings, which indicates that in doing everything we should be under God's grace and under His covering, depending on the Lord and expressing Him.

Ezekiel 1:11-14 conveys a clear picture of the coordination of the living creatures:

Their wings were spread out upward; two wings of each were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward; wherever the Spirit was to go, they went; they did not turn as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches; the fire went to and fro among the living creatures, and the fire was bright; and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran to and fro like the appearance of a lightning bolt.

The coordination of the living creatures is a portrait of the proper church life. The joining of the two wings is for a

corporate move in coordination. The fact that the four living creatures are coordinated and move as one by their wings, which are eagle's wings, signifies that their coordination is not in themselves but in God and by the divine power, the divine strength, and the divine grace (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:7). The other two wings covered their bodies, indicating that the wings are not only for moving but also for protection. This signifies that we are also under the overshadowing, the covering, of the Lord's grace and the Lord's power (Psa. 17:8; 57:1; 63:7; 91:4; 2 Cor. 12:9).

The living creatures "went straight forward," literally, "in the direction of their faces." The move of the living creatures is not individual but corporate. They move as one entity in coordination. Each of the living creatures faces one direction. As they face these four directions, two of their wings spread out and touch the adjacent creatures' wings, forming a square. When the living creatures move, they do not need to turn; one moves straight forward while the opposite creature moves backward and the other two move sideways (Ezek. 1:9). This is a beautiful picture of the coordination in the church as the Body of Christ, in which each member has his particular position and function, or ministry (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:14-30; Eph. 4:7-16). When one member functions, he moves "straight forward" to fulfill his function, and the other members accommodate him by moving in the same direction, some moving "backward" and some moving "sideways."

The living creatures follow the Spirit: "Wherever the Spirit was to go, they went." This indicates that in order to have the genuine coordination, we need to deny ourselves and walk by the Spirit and according to the spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4).

The issue of the coordination of the living creatures is that they become like burning coals: "Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches." The holy God as a consuming fire burns among them and within them (Heb. 12:29; Exo. 3:2). Furthermore, they become burning torches for shining and enlightening (Rev. 4:5). The burning of the coals and the enlightening of the torches signify that the sanctifying fire becomes the sanctifying light. Both the Lord on the throne in Ezekiel 1:26 and the living creatures in verse 13 have the appearance of fire. This further indicates that the living creatures are the expression of the Lord on the throne.

This fire is not static but always moving: "The fire went

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to and fro among the living creatures.” This indicates that in their fellowship the living creatures allow God, signified by the fire, to move freely among them. “The fire was bright,” indicating that in their coordination the living creatures manifested a glorious and majestic condition. “Out of the fire went forth lightning.” This signifies a special flashing of the divine light in the church during times of storm and darkness.

The living creatures “ran to and fro” like “a lightning bolt.” Having a proper coordination with the aforementioned items, the living creatures run, because they have the power and the impact.

According to the vision of the four living creatures, the coordination of the believers as members of the Body of Christ results in the corporate expression of God in Christ (vv. 5-14, 26), in the move of God on the earth (vv. 15-21), and in the administration of God on the throne (vv. 22-28). Thus, this coordination affords God a way to manifest His glory and accomplish His eternal purpose and plan. In order to participate in such a coordination, we need to have the spiritual experiences and practical living symbolized by all these details.

The High and Awesome Wheels

Next to the living creatures, Ezekiel saw wheels: “As I watched the living creatures, I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, for each of their four faces” (v. 15). A wheel indicates a move, implying an extraordinary move with a purpose, a move not by our own strength. The appearance of the wheels here indicates that God’s move on the earth follows the coordination of the living creatures. The wheels being for the four faces of the living creatures indicates that if we would have the Lord’s move, we must first live out the Lord, expressing Him.

Since the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, presents a full picture of the economy of God and of God’s move on earth to carry out His economy, it is necessary to interpret the visions in Ezekiel according to God’s economy (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4). In this book God’s economy and God’s move in His economy are signified by a wheel. The hub of this wheel signifies Christ as the center of God’s economy, and the rim signifies Christ’s counterpart, the church, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. The spokes of the wheel spreading from the hub to the rim signify the many believers as the members of Christ.

Ezekiel 1:16-21 describes the wheels and their movements. “The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship were like the sight of beryl” (v. 16). Beryl signifies the appearance of the Lord when He is moving

(Dan. 10:6). This indicates that within the move of the wheels is the appearance of the Lord. “The four of them had one likeness” (Ezek. 1:16). This indicates that the move of the Lord has the same likeness and appearance in every local church (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1; 1 Thes. 2:14; Rev. 1:20; 2:7). “Their appearance and their workmanship were as it were a wheel within a wheel” (Ezek. 1:16). This indicates that in the move of the living creatures there is the move of the Lord; that is, the Lord moves in their moving. The inner wheel, the Lord as the hub, is the source of power for the moving of the outer wheel, the church as the rim. Whenever the wheels went, “they went in their four directions; they did not turn as they went” (v. 17). Like the move of the living creatures themselves, the wheels going in four directions, not turning as they went, indicates a move in coordination, without any turns. “As for their rims, they were high and they were awesome” (v. 18). Although we need to be small, the wheel beside us should be high and awesome. This means that the move of God’s economy with us should be a great thing. “The rims of the four of them were full of eyes all around” (v. 18). Eyes indicate insight, foresight, and other kinds of sight. The more we have the move of the Lord, the more we are enlightened and the more we will be able to see.

Verses 19 through 21 concern the leading of the wheels: “Whenever the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and whenever the living creatures were lifted up above the earth, the wheels were lifted up also” (v. 19). In this verse the wheels follow the living creatures, which indicates that if we move in faith, the Lord will follow our move. “Wherever the Spirit was to go, they [the living creatures] went—wherever the Spirit was to go. And the wheels were lifted alongside them, for the Spirit of the living creature was in the wheels” (v. 20). Here, the living creatures follow the Spirit, but the Spirit is in the wheels, and the wheels follow the creatures (vv. 19, 21). This indicates that we are one with the Lord, and He is one with us. The Lord follows us, we follow the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the wheels.

The Expanse like the Sight of Awesome Crystal

Based on the experiences in verses 4 through 21, the spiritual sky over the heads of the living creatures is crystal clear: “Over the heads of the living creature there was the likeness of an expanse, like the sight of awesome crystal” (v. 22). The sky is stable, unchanging, as crystal, yet still it is expanding, for it “stretched forth over their heads above” (v. 22). In such a situation, there is nothing between the living creatures and God, and there is nothing between them and one another. They have thorough fellowship with the Lord and with one another. This requires maintaining a pure conscience without any offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16).

Ezekiel 1:23 again speaks concerning the wings of the living creatures: "Under the expanse one pair of their wings went straight out, one toward the other." This signifies that under a clear and expanding sky we can have the adequate and proper coordination, a coordination that is altogether straight, with nothing crooked. Moreover, they each had another pair of wings "covering their bodies on this side and on that side." This indicates that in the coordination we should not display ourselves but should, instead, hide ourselves under the Lord's grace.

In verse 24 a voice came out of the wings of the four living creatures: "I heard the sound of their wings, like the sound of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, as they went; it was the sound of a tumult, like the sound of an army." The voice coming out of the wings that were joined to one another is the testimony of the living creatures. This indicates that the voice of the testimony of any local church must be the voice of a corporate, coordinated body, a voice that comes out of the proper coordination (Acts 2:14). Such a testimony will be strong, like the sound of great waters; moreover, it will be the voice of God Himself and the voice of an army fighting the battle for God's testimony. The living creatures could also halt their movements and stop themselves: "Whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. And there was a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads" (Ezek. 1:24-25). The voice here is God's voice. The living creatures standing still and dropping their wings indicates that they know not only how to speak and sound forth their voice but also how to listen to God's voice (Exo. 21:5-6; Isa. 50:4-5; Luke 10:38-42).

The Man on the Throne

The four living creatures are for the manifestation of the Lord and for the move of the Lord. The final part of the vision in Ezekiel 1 shows that they are also for the Lord's administration, His government. This is indicated in verse 26 by the throne: "Above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne." The Lord is among the living creatures and above them not only for His manifestation and move but also for His government. In such a situation God is not only the God of heaven but also the God of the earth (Matt. 11:25; 6:10). Through the living creatures the heavens are open to the earth and are joined to the earth (Gen. 28:11-12; John 1:51).

The Lord's presence is always with His throne. The Lord's throne is both in the third heaven and in our spirit (Rev.

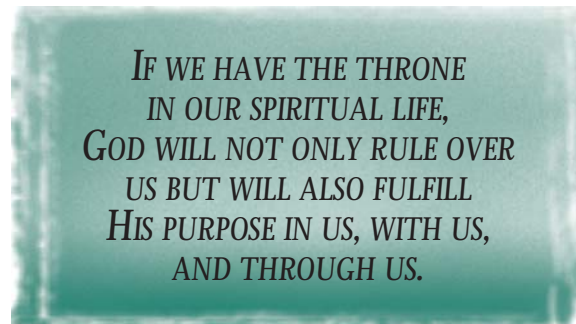
4:2-3; Heb. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:22). The throne above the crystal clear expanse in this vision indicates that whenever we have a "clear sky" in our Christian life and in our church life, we will be under the ruling of the throne. To reach this point means that in everything we allow God to have the preeminence and are completely submissive to God's authority and administration. The throne is not only for God to reign over us but also for God to accomplish His eternal purpose. If we have the throne in our spiritual life, God will not only rule over us but will also fulfill His purpose in us, with us, and through us.

The throne had "the appearance of a sapphire stone" (Ezek. 1:26). The sapphire stone, blue in color, signifies a heavenly condition that exists when God is present in a particular situation (Exo. 24:10). The throne being in the likeness of a sapphire stone shows the presence of God in a heavenly situation.

Ezekiel then sees One who is on the throne: "Upon the likeness of the throne was One in appearance like a man, above it" (Ezek. 1:26). The One who is on the throne looks like a man, yet with Him there is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah" (v. 28). This indicates that the One sitting on the throne is both God and man, the God-man, the mingling of God and man. He is the complete God incarnated to be a man (John 1:1, 14). Having the nature of man, He lived, died, resurrected, and ascended as a man, and now as the One on the throne, He is still the Son of Man (6:62; Acts 7:56). Since the ascension of the Lord Jesus, there has been a man on the throne. In the millennium and in the new heaven and new earth for eternity, there will still be a man on the throne (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 22:1, 3).

Man was created in the image of God to express God and to rule for God (Gen. 1:26-28). The four living creatures on earth are the expression of the One on the throne, that is, the manifestation of God in humanity (1 Tim. 3:15-16). God in heaven desires to gain man on earth for His expression by working Himself into man. Furthermore, God's intention is to work on man in order that man will be on the throne (Rev. 3:21; 22:5). As the Pioneer, the Forerunner, the Lord Jesus cut the way to enter into glory and to sit on the throne. We, His many brothers, are now following Him (Heb. 2:6-12; 6:20).

Ezekiel 1:27 describes the appearance of the One on the throne: "I saw something like the sight of electrum, like the appearance of fire encased all around, from the



appearance of His loins and upward; and from the appearance of His loins and downward, I saw something like the appearance of fire.” This appearance has two aspects: from His loins upward, He has the appearance of electrum, and from His loins downward, the appearance of fire. The upper part of a man, from his loins to his head, is the part of feeling, of sensation, signifying his nature and disposition. According to His nature and disposition, the Lord Jesus on the throne has the appearance of electrum, signifying the redeeming God. The lower part of a man’s body is for moving. The appearance of fire from the loins downward signifies the Lord’s appearance in His move with God’s burning and sanctifying power. When the Lord comes to us, He comes as fire to enlighten, search, and burn. Then through the fire He becomes electrum to us. After all the negative things have been burned out of us by the Lord as the consuming fire, what will remain in us is the electrum, the redeeming God.

Finally, around the One on the throne there was a rainbow: “There was brightness all around Him. Like the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell on my face” (vv. 27-28). The rainbow signifies the splendor and glory around the Lord on the throne. The vision in chapter 1 therefore consummates in a rainbow, indicating that the Christian life and the church life, as portrayed in this vision, will consummate in such a rainbow, at which point God’s eternal plan will have been accomplished.

At Noah’s time the rainbow in the cloud was a sign of God’s faithfulness in keeping His covenant with man and every living creature that He would never again destroy mankind with a flood (Gen. 9:13, 15). The colors of the rainbow, the primary ones of which are red, yellow, and blue, indicate God’s righteousness, holiness, and glory. These three attributes of God keep sinners away from God (3:24; Rom. 3:10-18, 23). However, Christ came and died on the cross to satisfy the requirements of God’s righteousness, holiness, and glory. He was also resurrected,

and He is now our righteousness, holiness, and glory (1 Cor. 1:30). Because we, the believers, are now in Christ, in the sight of God we bear the appearance of Christ as righteousness, holiness, and glory. This is the appearance of a rainbow as a testimony of God’s faithfulness in sparing us and saving us, the fallen ones, from His judgment on sinners. In the New Jerusalem, a city whose foundations have the appearance of a rainbow, we, the aggregate of the saved ones, will be a rainbow reflecting God’s righteousness, holiness, and glory and testifying forever that our God is righteous and faithful (Rev. 21:19-20).

In the vision of the appearance of the glory of Jehovah in Ezekiel 1, the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum signify the experiences needed for the believers to become the corporate expression of God on earth for the manifestation of God’s glory, which manifestation is signified by the living creatures. Moreover, their experiences of God’s grace and power, their living and walk by the Spirit, and their conducting themselves in Jesus’ proper humanity allow them to have a wonderful coordination that ushers in God’s move on the earth for the carrying out of His economy. Ultimately, the coordination of the living creatures brings in God’s administration with His government being fully realized on the earth. When such a situation prevails, the heavens are open to the earth, and earth is joined to heaven in the uniting, mingling, and incorporation of God and man. This is the appearance of the glory of Jehovah—the corporate expression of God in man in the church life today—that will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth.

by Jim Batten

Note

¹See note 4, by Witness Lee, on Ezekiel 1:1 in the Recovery Version. This article draws extensively from the notes in the Recovery Version of the Bible, and for a full interpretation of this chapter, including many practical examples in Christian experience, see Witness Lee’s *Life-study of Ezekiel*, messages 1-12.

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“Now in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, on the fifth of the month, while I was among the captives by the **river** Chebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1).

river: A river in Babylon that flows east of the Euphrates and eventually empties into it. *Chebar* means *strong, powerful*. The river Chebar symbolizes the power of Babylon to damage God’s people (cf. Isa. 8:7-8). It signifies the tide of the present age, which carries people away from God to Babylon. There are two rivers in the book of Ezekiel: the river Chebar in ch. 1 and the river flowing out of the temple in ch. 47. The former carries the people of God away from God and destroys the building of God; the latter brings people into God’s life and builds up God’s dwelling place.