

The Living Creatures

Ezekiel 1: 1-12; 24; 28

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Our brother has just been speaking to us from Acts 7, concerning the progress of the truth of Christianity in regard to Christ in glory. We have heard the record of Stephen that the heavens were opened and through those heavens he saw the Son of Man in the glory of God. I have in mind to continue with the thought of the opened heavens from these verses we have read together in the beginning of this remarkable prophecy. Our brother has occupied us with those opened heavens in regard to that which is established in **heaven**, and I would like to add a corresponding word in regard to the ways of God on **earth**. In the book of the Acts from which our brother has been speaking, we see every thought of God established in the Man Christ Jesus Who is glorified at God's right hand. He is the One, as we have heard, Who will bring in the world-to-come and fill it with the glory of God. In this vision granted to Ezekiel, we see the resources of God vested in the angelic host and operating on earth. We are given a description of these powers which are in the hand of God and are at His disposal to carry into effect every detail of that eternal purpose which was planned before time began. Of this we can be sure, with Christ already in the glory, and these unlimited powers in the hand of the Spirit of God on earth, as well as in heaven, every detail of that purpose will be accomplished. The end will be reached in the world-to-come when, in a blaze of glory, Christ will fill both the heaven and the earth with the glory of God. This will be the climax of the ways of God to which both Ezekiel and Acts 7 point.

At the time of this vision, Ezekiel was in a very trying position. The children of Israel were in captivity and it appeared that all hope was gone for these prisoners of war. A more hopeless condition could hardly be found, yet it was just there, in those very circumstances that this vision was given to him. Need we wonder that his name means — "God strengthens"? In all our lives there are times when we, like Ezekiel, need a fresh impression of the greatness and glory of God. We are all inclined at times to come under the power of external conditions and to be depressed as a consequence. What we need is a vision like this to restore our confidence in God.

The first thing which Ezekiel tells us he saw was, "**the heavens were opened**", v. 1. Hemmed in by man on earth, with no way out, the prophet was assured that he was not hemmed in by heaven. Whatever restrictions man may put upon him, he is to learn that heaven is always open to one who is prepared to move on earth subject to direction from heaven.

Secondly, he tells us that through those opened heavens he saw "**visions of God**", v. 1. He may not have been of much account on earth at that moment, but he is assured that he was an object of interest to heaven and was graciously given this vision. What a difference it makes whether we look **around** or look **up**! Are we not apt to pick up a newspaper in the morning and read about all the troubles in man's world and as a consequence go forth with the feeling that everything is going to pieces? The result is, a cloud of depression settles upon us as we move about. If, however, we picked up our Bibles instead and, like Ezekiel, obtained fresh "visions of God," should we not rather go along with a sense of victory in our souls instead of depression? Conditions in this world are serious; if it were not so, the Scriptures would not be true; but why should these conditions affect us? We are here in the interests of heaven, and keeping in mind what we have heard in our Bible readings, let us walk in the confidence of these things, knowing that all is right in the hands of our God. Through His Word He

reveals to us His majesty and His glory, and if our souls are filled with these things not anything in this world will depress us.

The third thing Ezekiel tells us is, "The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest," v. 3. How often do **you** read your Bible? No doubt this word came to him orally, whereas we have the written Word of God and much more than he could receive in his day. Note what he says about that word, it came **expressly** to him. Ere he passed on these communications to others, they first came home to his own heart. Beloved, it is only as we are subject to and formed by the Word that we shall be capable of helping others in the precious truths of God.

The fourth thing he tells us in this opening section is, "the hand of the LORD was there upon him," v. 3. That hand of omnipotence rests upon each one of us and will not be lifted from us till we are safe home in the glory. Perhaps he had often been conscious of that hand resting upon him as he performed his priestly function in the temple, but now God is saying as it were, I am as much with you here by the river of Chebar as when with you in the temple. What an encouragement this must have been to him!

In these opening verses we see Ezekiel being prepared as a vessel to receive the following vision of the living creatures; and what a preparation it was! The "opened heavens" would secure his **attention** to the movements of God. The "visions of God" would strengthen his **faith** in spite of the conditions obtaining around him. "The word of the LORD" would instruct his **mind** with a view to communicating these instructions to others. "The hand of the LORD" being consciously upon him would encourage his **heart** in view of much conscious weakness within and strong opposition without. So with his attention directed to heaven; his faith strengthened in God; his mind instructed through the Word of the LORD and his heart encouraged, he is prepared for the vision of the living creatures where we shall see a wonderful display of the resources of God to effect every detail of His will in the universe.

In coming to the vision of the living creatures, I am not going to attempt an explanation of all that is here, but there are a few of the more manifest marks about which I do wish to say something. First, what was that whirlwind out of the north? It was the invasion of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel had suffered severely through that wind, hence his present conditions, but he has yet to see that God was also in the whirlwind. In the cloud he sees a fire **infolding** itself, not **unfolding** itself. This infolding would speak of the hidden ways of God with us, for there are as yet many things hidden from our eyes. The day of unfolding will surely come and then we shall see all clearly in the light. When we do so, we shall praise our God for all, whether good or bad as we may estimate it today. As on has said, "The day is coming when God will explain Himself."

The prophet is given to see coming out of the cloud the four living creatures which are used to portray the powers at the disposal of God to accomplish His will in heaven and on earth. If a comparison is made between this chapter and Revelation 4, it will be seen that these powers described by the living creatures are vested in the angels, those beings who minister to the heirs of salvation. Coming out of this cloud they would assure us that while many clouds cross our pathway, God is behind them all and is using them to perfect His work in each one of us. That cloud had meant bloodshed, fire, captivity; yet the prophet has to learn that God was accomplishing His will by that very disaster. The fact that there were four living creatures would suggest that these powers are universal; for there is not a spot in the whole universe beyond the control of God. Their having four faces would suggest that they are intelligent concerning every movement in the universe. Their four wings speak of their universal activity, for they reach to every point in the created sphere. Their feet being straight and

like a calf's speaks of the evenness of their course and the endurance with which they press on towards their objective. The wings would speak of their heavenly activity and the feet of their earthly movements. The hands under the wings would assure us that they are capable of serving God both in the heavens and on the earth. Their wings being joined together would indicate that they moved with a concerted action, for only one mind governs them. Then, we are told, they went straight forward, not being turned aside by anything. Beloved, what an encouragement this ought to be to us! Here are powers which are never turned aside and we are in the care of these powers as surely as Ezekiel was. In war, we read of men having secondary plans should the first objective fail; but God has no secondary plan, for His first great plan will never fail. His plan is to fill the heavens and the earth with His glory, and here are the powers He uses till that end is reached. If the prophet has yet to see the glory departing from the temple (Ezek. 10), he will also see it return to the temple again (Ezek. 43). We understand the glory entering by the east gate to be the fulfilment of Ps. 24, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" (v. 7). That gate will be closed after the LORD has entered in; no one is allowed to use it for entrance, but David the prince will eat bread in the porch of it before the LORD.

We are then told of the likeness of the four faces of the living creatures; a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. The face of a man would convey supremacy of intelligence; the face of a lion, supremacy of power; the face of an ox, supremacy of endurance; the face of an eagle, supremacy of movement. In every sphere in the whole creation these beings are supreme, for man is supreme in intelligence, the lion supreme among wild beasts; the ox is regarded as the greatest burden bearer and the eagle the swiftest and highest flyer. The characters given to these living creatures are to assure us that in every sphere they are supreme. Satan and rebellious men have great intelligence which they use in opposition to God, but here are beings who excel in intelligence; and whatever be the power, or endurance, or the rapidity with which the enemies move to reach their objectives, these living creatures will wear them down. They will out-think, out-last, out-wear and out-distance every adverse power, and will never fail to accomplish every detail of the will of God in the universe. Going straight forward in their might, they will sweep aside all opposition till all is subdued and the glory of God comes into display in the glorified Man, Christ Jesus.

An interesting link with this chapter is found in Ezek. 41: 18, 19. We read there that the cherubim in the temple have only **two** faces, that of a man and that of a lion. The face of an ox and the face of the eagle are not used. In this chapter we have a description of the temple which will be built on earth for the display of the glory to Israel. In that display the features of endurance and rapidity because of opposition will not be seen, for God will have reached the end to which He is working. What does abide is the witness of His **wisdom** and **power**. The face of a man is seen looking towards a palm tree and the face of a lion looking towards a palm tree, the tree which is emblematic of victory. It will be clearly seen in that day of display that God in His wisdom and power has gained the victory over every force of opposition. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory," 1 Cor. 15: 57.

One more point is worthy of notice. In v. 12 we read "whither the spirit was to go, they went." Again, in v. 24 we read, "as the voice of the Almighty." Further, in v. 26 we read of, "the appearance of a man." Whether it be the Spirit in His subjective work in the whole creation, or the voice of the Almighty commanding all, or the Man upon the throne administering all, we are given to see in this vision that all the Persons of the Godhead are working together to accomplish every detail of Their eternal purpose. The vision would assure us that God has in hand irresistible powers which must result in complete triumph for Him, and this will yet be seen in that coming day of display. In the light of Christianity today, we know that the Spirit, and the Father, and the Son are all working together

towards that day of manifestation. With Christ already in the glory, and the Spirit active on earth, the heavenly company is being formed and fitted now in view of the heavenly sphere of administration. Then, we are assured by this vision that the earthly company will just as surely be brought into being to fill their appointed sphere in the world-to-come, and all will redound to the glory and praise of God. If we keep in mind that the complete purpose of God is to "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. 1: 10), we shall see by this vision, alongside the outline we have heard from Acts 7, that all combine to assure us that both heaven and earth will yet be filled with the glory of God through the One Who filleth all things.

May we keep moving on with the sense of victory in our souls, being assured that all that God has planned, whether for heaven or for earth, will be carried into effect, ending in that coming day of glory.