

## UNIT 2: THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Ezekiel 1:1–3:27

### **The Place of the Passage**

After a brief biographical and historical note, Ezekiel begins with one of the most amazing depictions of the glory of God in the entire Bible. Full of strange and potentially confusing symbols, Ezekiel's first vision forms the foundation for his call and commission in chapters 2–3 as the Lord's prophet to the exiles in Babylon. But while the vision assures Ezekiel that God is still on his throne despite the exile, it also raises the question, "What is God doing in Babylon?" Answering that question is what the first section of the book (chs. 1–11) is all about.

### **The Big Picture**

Although God's people are in exile, God still reigns and still speaks to them through his prophet, if they have ears to hear.

### **Reflection and Discussion**

**Read through the complete passage for this study, Ezekiel 1–3. Then review the questions below concerning the opening section of Ezekiel and write your notes on them.**

#### **1. The Throne of the Lord Approaches (1:1–28)**

As the book begins, Ezekiel is 30 years old, the age at which he would have been installed as a priest in the temple at Jerusalem (Num. 4:3). Instead, something even more significant occurs: he sees "visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1). Describe in your own words what he sees. Is this something an artist could draw? Why do you think Ezekiel repeatedly uses the terms "likeness," "appearance," and "as it were" to describe his vision?

In Ezekiel's vision, the four creatures not only fly but also are each stationed next to "a wheel within a wheel" (v. 16). Above their wings, they carry an "expanse" on which sits a throne. This is a vision of God's mobile chariot-throne that can go "straight forward" in any direction "without turning," directed by God's Spirit (v. 12). Why would an exile in Babylon need to know that God reigns from a mobile throne? How does such knowledge encourage Christians, who are "elect exiles" (1 Pet. 1:1)?

## *Easing into Ezekiel*

Ezekiel realizes that he has seen a vision of God, and yet he calls it “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek. 1:28). In other words, words fail him in his attempt to describe God. What aspects of God’s glory do you see in this passage? Ezekiel lies prostrate on the ground in humility before the awesome holiness and majesty of God. Does your view of God produce the same response? What would need to change about your understanding of God to produce this kind of worship?

### **2. The Prophet Commissioned (2:1–3:15)**

The last thing Ezekiel says in chapter 1 is that he “heard the voice of one speaking” (1:28). The culmination of the vision is not visual but aural. God’s voice calls Ezekiel to prophetic ministry to a “rebellious house” (2:5). What, then, is the significance of Ezekiel’s being commanded to eat a scroll with writing on both sides (2:8–3:3)?

The Lord draws a contrast between foreigners with difficult speech and the Israelites. The former would have listened to Ezekiel, but God knows that Israel will not listen (3:4–7). Why would God send a prophet to people he knows will not listen? What does this suggest about the purpose of Ezekiel’s ministry?

It takes seven days of silence for Ezekiel to recover from this first vision. What accounts for the “bitterness in the heat of my spirit” that he experiences (3:14)?

### **3. The Duty of a Watchman (3:16–27)**

The responsibilities of a watchman are common to several prophets (see Isa. 21:6–9; Hos. 9:8; Hab. 2:1). Watchmen were stationed on a city wall to warn of impending danger. What is the particular emphasis of Ezekiel’s duty as watchman? How does that duty affect his life?

The initial vision is reprised in Ezekiel 3:22–27. How does God ensure that Ezekiel will be a faithful watchman, speaking only the words God gives him? What does this tell us about the importance of these words?

**Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.**

## **Gospel Glimpses**

**HE WHO WILL HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.** Ezekiel is told to preach “whether they hear or refuse to hear” (2:7). Jesus will echo the final verse of chapter 3 by concluding many of his parables, “He who has ears, let him hear” (3:27; compare Matt. 13:9). Spiritual life comes by hearing God’s Word.

## *Easing into Ezekiel*

The message of life does not depend on us or our efforts. Nor does it come only to the worthy and the righteous. God speaks to sinners. His words of warning lead to repentance and life. The fact that he speaks, rather than leaving us alone in our sin, is grace. And if we will hear, we will “surely live” (Ezek. 3:21).

**SON OF MAN.** Ezekiel is called “son of man” (or “son of Adam”) 93 times by God, marking him out as a creature in the face of the Creator. He is filled with the Spirit (2:2), who enables him to hear, obey, and speak God’s Word. It is not surprising, then, that this title will be one of Jesus’ favorite self-designations. As the last Adam, Jesus fully identifies with us in our humanity; but he is without sin, and so is qualified to be our substitute. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus not only *speaks* God’s Word to us, he *is* God’s Word, displaying God’s glory and bringing life to all who receive him.

### **Whole-Bible Connections**

**THEOPHANY.** God is a spirit, and thus is invisible. When he appears in visible form, in what is called a *theophany*, we know that a major turning point in the history of redemption has come. Each of the redemptive covenants in the Old Testament is accompanied by a theophany (e.g., Genesis 15; Exodus 19; perhaps 2 Samuel 7), and in Ezekiel 1, the enactment of the covenant curses is accompanied by a theophany as well. God speaks to many, but he appears only to a few—that is, until Jesus, who is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). With the establishment of the new covenant, God appears not in visions and symbols but in human flesh.

**CHERUBIM.** We often think of cherubim as small, pudgy boys with stubby wings. But the Bible portrays these angels as terrifying. They first appear in Genesis 3, wielding a flaming sword and guarding the entrance back to Eden. Their next appearance is in Exodus 25, guarding the ark of the covenant, the footstool of God’s throne, in the Most Holy Place. Their appearance here in Ezekiel is meant to remind us of both of their functions, as throne-bearers and as guardians of God’s holiness. Their presence portends judgment. It is only with the coming of Jesus that we finally see angels put down their swords and take up singing!

### **Theological Soundings**

**GLORY.** The Hebrew word for “glory” is *kabod*, meaning heavy or weighty. When referring to God’s physical manifestation, the term is usually associated with brightness and light. But God’s glory, his significance, is manifested through more than light. It is the sum total of his perfections and attributes, his transcendence, his sovereign majesty, his holiness, and his merciful love. And yet, God’s glory is not an abstract idea. Paul tells us that we have been given “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS.** Throughout Scripture, what sets God apart from the idols is that he speaks. While idols attract the eye, they impart a false confidence to the worshiper. They are mute and can neither explain the past nor tell the future (see Isa. 41:21–29). Not only does the God of Scripture create and govern all things by his word (Gen. 1:3ff.; Ps. 33:6; Heb. 1:3; 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5); his Word is the only means of salvation (Rom. 10:8–17) and the final standard of judgment (Rom.

## *Easing into Ezekiel*

3:19). God's Word brings clarity to our confusion and light to our darkness. Life and death hang in the balance of hearing and receiving God's Word.

### **Personal Implications**

**Take time to reflect on the implications of Ezekiel 1–3 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust more deeply in his gracious promises. Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.**

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

**3. Theological Soundings**

**4. Ezekiel 1–3**

### **As You Finish This Unit ...**

**Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ezekiel. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.**