

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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### *"Rider on the Storm"*

1:22-28

God had an address in the Old Testament. It was,

*The Glory of God  
c/o the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount,  
Jerusalem, Israel.*

God desired to dwell on earth in the midst of His people Israel. We call this manifestation of God to His people His "glory." Let's take a quick look at how God has manifested His glory.

In the process of cutting a covenant with Abraham, animals were cut in two and the presence of God passed between the animal parts. God's glory was described as a "smoking oven and a flaming torch" (Genesis 15.17).

Later God's glory appeared to Moses in the "burning bush" (Exodus 3.2).

As Israel departed Egypt, God's glory led them in the form of a "pillar of cloud" by day and a "pillar of fire" by night (Exodus 13.21-22).

An even more awesome manifestation of the "glory of God" appeared to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Moses gave this account:

Exodus 19:16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Exodus 19:17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Exodus 19:18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.

After the covenant between God and Israel had been completed, God revealed for the first time that He wanted to dwell in the midst of Israel. He commanded Israel to build a "holy house" for Him.

Exodus 25:8 And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Later, He revealed that He had brought Israel out of Egypt just for this purpose.

Exodus 29:46 And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.

Finally, when the tabernacle had been completed, God's glory filled it and God dwelled in the midst of Israel.

Exodus 40:34 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Eventually God revealed the permanent place that He had chosen for His dwelling place. This was Mount Moriah. David constructed an altar on this site and, later, Solomon built the First Temple there. When the Temple was being dedicated, God's glory filled it as He had the tabernacle in the wilderness (Second Chronicles 7.1-3).

God's glory dwelled in the midst of Israel throughout the First Temple era. After Solomon's death the kingdom was divided - Israel to the north and Judah to the south. As the Jews fell into sin God warned them of His discipline. It finally came to the northern kingdom of Israel as the Assyrian army took them away captive. Would Judah, to the south, learn the lesson and repent?

No. The major reason was they had the Temple and therefore they had the glory of God in their midst. Nevertheless God sent Babylon to discipline

His wayward people. Babylon came three times. In the third siege the Temple was destroyed and the glory of God departed from Israel.

The opening half of Ezekiel takes place between the second and third sieges of Jerusalem. He was given a vision to prepare the people for the departing from Jerusalem of the glory of God.

We need all this as background in order to put the remaining verses of chapter one into perspective. Ezekiel sees the heavens open and a storm approaching. In the storm he sees four living creatures who he will later identify as cherubim. They are special beings, probably angels, that are associated with the presence of God and His throne. There is a sort of supernatural chariot. As the vision progresses Ezekiel sees a “firmament” above the cherubim and chariot.

Ezekiel 1:22 The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.

Ezekiel 1:23 And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body.

Ezekiel 1:24 When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings.

The word for “firmament” is the same word translated *expanse* in Genesis chapter one when the Bible describes the atmosphere that separated the waters below from the sky above. This firmament in Ezekiel’s vision serves as a sort of platform for the throne of God.

We saw that the glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies. Specifically it dwelt above the Mercy Seat that served to cover the Ark of the Covenant.

1 Samuel 4:4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim...

2 Samuel 6:2 And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the Lord of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim.

The Mercy Seat was distinguished by having cherubim carved on top of it with wings touching. It was a physical representation of the reality that God was enthroned on the firmament in the heavens.

Ezekiel 1:25 A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.

Ezekiel 1:26 And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.

A Jew would immediately associate these details with the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat, and the glory of God that dwelt in the Holy of Holies. After the storm passed passed they would not see the glory of God as they had previously.

Indeed it is interesting that it is about this time in history that the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat disappear. What happened to them?

There are at least four answers to this.

1. One is that it is in Heaven. It's a theory based on the fact you have mention of the Ark of the Covenant being in Heaven in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.
2. Another answer is that it is buried somewhere under the old Temple.
3. A third is that it was hidden somewhere by Jeremiah - probably in the Judean countryside - around the time of the Babylonian conquests.
4. Fourth, some believe the Ark is kept in a sanctuary in Ethiopia where it is currently being tended by a secluded line of Levitical priests.

What we know for sure is that the Ark and Mercy Seat was never seen again after the Babylonian captivity. In its place was a large stone slab onto which the High Priest sprinkled the blood on the Day of Atonement. When Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63BC he looked into the Holy of Holies and was amazed to find it was empty.

There is no mention of the glory of the Lord being present in the Temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel was seeing the glory of God departing from the Temple. The Jews did not believe anything like that could happen. But it was happening.

The glory of God did not return when Herod rebuilt the Jewish Temple. That glory will not return when the Jews are allowed by the Antichrist to rebuild their Temple.

*But it will return!* It returns when Jesus returns to the earth in His Second Coming. The second half of Ezekiel's book looks forward to the return of the glory of the Lord.

Which is why I believe (along with most evangelical commentators) that the "man" Ezekiel sees in this vision is none other than Jesus Christ in His Millennial glory.

Ezekiel 1:27 Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around.

Ezekiel 1:28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

It was "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." There are similarities and differences when you compare what Ezekiel saw to what John saw on Patmos, but both men saw the Lord in His glory.

One author calls this "the prelude to a mystery." He's referring to First Timothy 3:16 where we read,

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead, would be "manifested in the flesh." Ezekiel saw a "likeness" of that future manifestation, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another interesting thought along the lines of this being Jesus would be Second Thessalonians 1:7-8, which reads,

2 Thessalonians 1:7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

2 Thessalonians 1:8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glory of God was departing. It is still departed. *But it will return!*

Ezekiel's vision encompasses all of this prophetic truth. It preps the Jews for a long exile but gives them an even longer hope for the future.

Ezekiel's reaction was to "fall on [his] face." After the vision, in chapter two, Ezekiel will receive a call and commission and an endowment with power for the office to which God has called him.

This vision is for and about Israel. *We're not in it.* But I think there are some important lessons to be learned. You see, God **is** in the vision and we can understand some things about how He deals with His people.

I'd start by pointing out that God desires to be among His people. He had face-to-face fellowship with Adam and Eve. From the moment fellowship was lost in the Garden of Eden God has been at work to restore it. Human history can be understood as the plan of God to redeem the human race and restore what our original parents forfeited. In the Revelation you see things finally, fully restored. There is no more Temple because the dwelling place of God is where it ought to be - among those who are saved.

If the ultimate goal, to use such a word, is the redemption of man and the restoration of fellowship, then we ought to concern ourselves with those things now.

- If a person is not saved, there is nothing more important than the issue of where they will spend eternity. We who are saved ought to so live to represent Jesus to them. We are, after all, His Temple on the earth. We ought to be revealing how glorious is our Lord.
- Once saved the primary thing is your relationship with the Lord. You should pursue anything and everything that helps your relationship with

the Lord. You should avoid anything and everything that hinders your relationship with the Lord.

A second lesson is something we've pointed out repeatedly in going through chapter one. God is both in the storm and over the storm. For the Jews the storm was Babylon and exile. What is your storm? Whatever it is, God will be in it with you and He is over it. He is using it to mold you, to shape you, to make you into a man or woman of God.

You must believe He is present in the storm.

Then there is this whole issue of glory. It's interesting that the Temple that existed in the time of Jesus, called Herod's Temple, did not have the Ark or the Mercy Seat and therefore did not have the glory of God. Mostly because the glory of God was on the earth in the Person of Jesus Christ!

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

The same glory seen in the Temple is described by Peter of the transfiguration when Jesus is transformed. Mark reports He was transfigured before them, his clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Luke says the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. Matthew states "and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him."(Matthew 17:2-3).

Jesus being transfigured in the Greek is the word is *metamorphoo*, meaning a change of appearance. This is not an inward change but an outward one. What was once veiled is now revealed to those around him. They were able to see the inner glory that was veiled by His flesh.

Now here is something truly amazing: **You and I can reflect the glory of God.** In fact, we ought to reflect His glory.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The phrase “beholding as in a mirror,” literally means, *reflecting, as a mirror does...* Paul declares that you see God face-to-face in the Person of your Savior, Jesus Christ. You “all” see Him – every Christian. As you do, over the course of your lifetime, you are “being transformed” by the indwelling Spirit “into the same image” you see in Jesus. **You are becoming more like Jesus!**

Have you ever seen a married couple who, after many years of living together, begin to look and act alike?

If you will spend time with Jesus, over your lifetime you will “look” and act more like Him.

Along the way other people will see His glory.

One final thought. There is still a sense in which God’s glory can depart from us. When addressing the church at Ephesus Jesus told them if they did not return to their first love for Him then He would remove their “lampstand.”

The lampstand represents the church on earth. “Remove your lampstand” means Jesus will no longer be present in the midst of your church.

We really don’t want to be a loveless, lifeless, lightless church. Let’s get alone with the Lord. Let’s fall on our faces in His presence. Let’s see His glory then reflect it to others.



