

The Glory of God

October 21, 2007

Ron Smith

Introduction

Halloween is a time for goblins and ghouls. All kinds of scary creatures will come to your door demanding candy. There are a plethora of scary movies being shown on almost every channel. But to be frank, Halloween has nothing on Ezekiel 1. There we find a vision of God that is terrifying, perplexing, majestic, and inviting all at the same time. In Ezekiel 1 we come face to face with the glory of God.

A Devotional Reading of Ezekiel 1

Ezekiel was part of King Nebuchadnezzar's second wave of deportation. He is living in exile in Babylon along the Kebar canal.

1-3: this vision will be referred to throughout the book as Ezekiel sees new visions of God

4: not uncommon to other times when God revealed himself. Exodus 19, 40; 2 Chronicles 7 (thunder, lightning, cloud)

5-14: Living Creatures also seen in Rev 4. Simply astounding in creatures.

15-21: Wheels that moved with the creatures. Not recorded in Revelation. Perhaps some kind of divine chariot is in view here.

22: Expanse = platform something solid

23-28: Climax of the vision. Throughout doesn't know exactly what he is seeing. But describes it the best he can. What he is seeing is in color. It is bright. It is awesome. It is none other than the Glory of the Lord.

Defining "The Glory of the Lord"

It seems like once a week my kids will ask me to define a word or expression that is common. Personally, I find it a difficult task. Last week Josiah asked me to define "in a row." Vanessa had observed that there were three cars that were black next to us, to which Winsor quickly pointed out there was a blue one too. Being the smart daddy that I am, I was able to note that what Vanessa meant was that there were three black cars in a row. Everyone was happy. But Josiah asked the question, what does 'in a row' mean daddy? I suddenly didn't feel so smart. I guess what makes it hard is to describe a simple concept using even more simple words.

When coming to define "The Glory of the Lord", I find it difficult. It is an expression used throughout the Bible, but for the most part it is assumed that people knew what it meant. Perhaps this is because there really is no definition needed. After constructing the tabernacle the glory of God filled it. There is no explanation as to what the glory is exactly, but everyone knew what it was. I can imagine God saying to Moses, "After you construct the tabernacle, I will fill it with my glory." To which Moses asks, "What is that?" And God responded, "Don't worry, you'll know."

Because I have had all week to think about and ponder what the "Glory of the Lord" is, I am ready to give a definition.¹ The Hebrew word behind our English word "glory" is *kabod*.

¹ Throughout the OT God's glory...
o Appears (Lev. 9:6,23)
o Is Bright (Ezekiel 10:4)

It means weightiness, abundance, riches. When applied to God, it speaks of the weight of God's majesty. It is weighty because God is infinite in being and perfect in his character. Glory can be attributed to a human king. However, that glory is fleeting. It will pass away. And if that king's character is not noble, it is diminished in the eyes of his subjects.

So I would define the glory of the Lord as **the manifestation of the infinite being and perfect character of God**. Easton's Bible Dictionary says it is the "infinite perfections of God." W. E. Vine says, "His Glory is the manifestation of His nature, attributes and power."²

Two verses are particularly helpful in coming up with this definition. One is Isaiah 42:8, *I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols*. God is saying I do not give my essential character or nature to anyone else. A second verse is **Romans 3:23**, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. We do not measure up to the glory of God, because it represents the perfection of who he is. When you consider man's glory, it is always subservient to God. It can vanish in a moment. God speaks against the nations through Isaiah telling them that their glory will come to an end (cf. Isaiah 8:7; 13:19; 16:14). We cannot measure up to the glory of God. It is manifestation of infinite being and perfect character of God.

What is the effect of the glory of God? (In particular as it relates to Ezekiel 1)

1. God's Glory Distinguishes Him from His Creation

The passage starts off by describing the four living creatures. That is followed by a description of wheels that have eyes all around. Then we come to verse 22 where we are told that there is an expanse, or platform above the heads of the four creatures. There is something solid that creates a boundary they cannot pass. It is not until verse 26 that we are told what is above this platform. First there is something that looked like a throne. Second, there is one who is seated above the throne. There is an emphasis on the fact that God is high above all of creation. Psalm 113:4-6 echoes this, ⁴ *The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!* ⁵ *Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,* ⁶ *who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?* ⁷

Ezekiel recognizes that he is beholding the glory of the Lord, and falls on his face. What he is seeing simply overtakes him. Others have responded to the glory of the Lord in the same way. In Revelation 1 after John sees the vision of Jesus, he fell at his feet as though dead.

When the tabernacle is constructed the glory of the Lord fills it. The glory of the Lord was so powerful that Moses was not able to enter it. Similarly when the temple was constructed the glory of the Lord filled it so that the priests were not able to enter.

God is distinct from his creation. We must never confuse the distinction. When we do, we make ourselves to be god. We operate in a way that says the world revolves around us. We become the authority, not God.

-
- o Is Tangible (Exodus 33:18,22)
 - o Declared by the heavens Psalm 19:1
 - o Fills the earth (Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 97:6)
 - o Will fill the earth (Habakkuk 2:14, ultimate fulfillment in Revelation 21:23)

² Vine's Expository Commentary on Isaiah, 1997, page 95.

The people of Israel had done just this. They had become idolaters and began to do what seemed right to them. In response God had sent them into exile and as we read in chapter 10, removes his glory from the temple. This ensures Jerusalem's defeat.

God is to be feared, obeyed, worshiped, and adored. He has created all things, and therefore none of creation can compare to him.

2. God's Glory Draws us to Himself

God's glory sets him apart from creation and causes us to fall to our faces, but it also invites us to draw near to him. While this vision that Ezekiel has is remarkable in the way that it describes the heavenly scene, it is also remarkable in that it communicates that God is with his people. Despite being in exile and away from the temple, this vision declares that God's glory knows no boundaries. He is with this people no matter where they are.

More specifically, he is with Ezekiel. After Ezekiel falls to the ground, he hears the voice God speaking to him. Read Chapter 2.

God reveals his glory to Ezekiel and calls him to be his prophet. He invites him to be apart of his mission of preparing a people for himself to bring himself glory and honor.

At the end of the book, Ezekiel has another vision of the glory of the Lord. This time the glory returns. It is a promise of restoration that gives Israel hope. God would dwell with them. He would be their God and they would be his people forever.

What better way do we see God's glory drawing us to himself, but in his son Jesus. John 1:14 says, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth." It is because of what he has done for us in dying in our place, taking our sins upon himself, so that we are able to come boldly into the very throne room of God. His blood cleanses us of all sin and wickedness that causes us to be separated from the presence of God. Now we are being transformed into his image from glory to glory.

How do we respond?

1. Guard against pride:
 - a. The pride of self-promotion: Pride that exalts itself above God. He is God and you are not. Be careful that you don't try to make yourself out to be greater than you really. Be careful of seeking the attention. In doing so you are causing others to look to you rather than God. Usually more subtle, very few people are flat out arrogant and boastful. Self-defense. Wanting to impress the right people. It happens in the inward motivations of your heart – I want to prepare a sermon that helps people to learn about God, but that can quickly and easily turn into, "I want people to think I did a good job."
 - b. The pride of self-protection: pride that seeks to be someone you are not. Or in other words don't try to wear a mask around others so that they can't see your struggles and sin. "I hope they don't find such and such out." When we allow people to see us for who we are, God is glorified. God is in the business of changing lives. This can cause us to miss how God's draws us to himself and makes us new creations.
2. Join in declaring his glory to the nations.