

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

and five feet in diameter, of the Corinthian order. It had a table for an inscription on its north side, but the letters are now perfectly erased." As it was in 1696 so it is in 1846, a perfectly isolated column, with not another trace of a building for many miles in any direction. It is called el-Magazel—the spindle—by the natives. Ba'albek is some eight miles east of this Magazel. As I have been there repeatedly, I did not turn out of my course to visit it, but rode on to Zahley and there slept.

11th. Started early, and was at the foot of the mountains before the sun rose. A short distance off the road at the base of Jebel Knisch, is the small village Judeithab, where once stood a temple worth examination. There are other ruined temples on the salient spurs of the mountains which inclose the Bukâh, or in the side valleys which lead to their summits. Some of these have inscriptions, others have not, but I have neither space nor time to notice them at present. I reached Abeih at 12 o'clock, devoutly thankful to find all well and in peace. My own health has been perfect throughout this long ride over the burning plains of Syria, in her hottest and most unhealthy season. Besides accomplishing the particular object of my mission, I have seen much of this interesting land, and have passed over routes very little frequented by modern tourists.

---

## ARTICLE VI.

### COMMENTARY ON THE VISION OF EZEKIEL INTRODUCTORY TO HIS PROPHECY.

By the late Professor Hävernîck. Translated from the German by Edward Kohls, Assistant Instructor in Hebrew, Theol. Seminary, Andover.

[In the last Number of the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, we inserted Prof. Hävernîck's Introductory Observations to his Commentary on Ezekiel. We now give a specimen of the Commentary itself, embracing the first two chapters and a part of the third chapter. This passage, describing the solemn inauguration of the prophet to his work, is one of the most important and interesting in the whole compass of the prophetic writings. In order to derive satisfaction and profit from the explanation of this extraordinary vision, it is not necessary to accede to all the critical remarks and conclusions of the lamented author.—E.]

THE glory of Jehovah is revealed to the prophet as coming from the North, in wonderful appearance upon the cherubim, chap. i. The prophet thereby becomes sure of his calling and qualification to go forth among his people as God's instrument, 2: 1—7. To this end, with the call which is given him, he receives at the same time a complete view of the work before him; its chief purport is the cry of woe against Jerusalem, the announcement of the punitive judgment of God.

In order properly to appreciate this purport, it is necessary first of all to glance at the historical occasion of the same. The time is the fourth month of the fifth year of the reign of Zedekiah, 1: 1 sq. Under the sad reign of this fickle and hypocritical ruler, the misery which had already broken out upon Judah was hastening with rapid steps to its completion. Only a few in Jerusalem in those days of wretchedness had kept their vision pure and unclouded, and full of humility, were enabled to look deeper into the counsels of God which were becoming manifest to his people. The majority were seized with a wretched infatuation with regard to the destiny of the theocracy; a presumptuous arrogance, as if ruin were not to be thought of, had pervaded the royal court. To stand against all this, Jeremiah was called as a witness to the truth in Jerusalem, ch. xxviii. Already, because of the dependency of Zedekiah upon Babylon, there existed an active commerce between the exiles and their brethren at home, Ez. 33: 21. Accordingly, with the embassy of Zedekiah at the beginning of his reign to Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah sent a letter which is very characteristic for the condition of the Babylonian Jews at that time. These were in a state of no less grievous self-deception than those who were left at home. By an appeal to earlier prophecies, Jeremiah strikes down their proud expectations of a speedy deliverance, zealously kindled by the word of false prophets, 29: 1—23. This letter embittered the spirit of the exiles against the prophet to a passionate degree; they even sent to the high priest in Jerusalem a demand for his punishment, 29: 24 sq. But the ground on which those hopes were based was by no means an altogether vain one or arbitrarily invented. Splendid prophecies, especially those of Isaiah with regard to the destruction of Babylon as a punishment for her haughtiness and violence towards the theocracy, were in the hands of all. Without such a possession, which in those days infatuation and despair knew how to appropriate and misinterpret, the remarkable and peculiar phenomenon is not to be explained, that, after the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes, and after the severest strokes from the rod of Divine wrath which the Jews themselves had experienced, they still

with invincible strength preserved such hopes of the future. So much the more important, therefore, was it for Jeremiah, in order to remove every suspicion that either through fear of man, or because he was bribed by the enemy, he was endeavoring to promote the voluntary submission of the people to the Chaldean yoke, to express clearly and definitely his relation to those earlier prophecies, and to justify himself with regard to his own calling. He took advantage of a journey of Zedekiah to Babylon to send to the exiles his own prophecies respecting Babylonia, and which presuppose the earlier ones, especially those of Isaiah. This took place through the mediation of Seraiah—as it seems a brother of Baruch, and therefore friend of the prophet—in the fourth year of Zedekiah, 51: 59, precisely in that period in which we find the prophetic activity of Ezekiel to have commenced. According to the instruction of the prophet, Seraiah, as soon as he had made an end of reading the book, was to bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, for a sign that thus Babylon should sink and never rise again. This event cannot possibly have been without reference to the entrance of Ezekiel upon his prophetic office. The feeling which after this event again spread among the people and won increased power, was that former sense of security in the hope of a speedy deliverance from Babylon. Moreover the embassy, at whose head was the king himself, and which expressed to the Babylonian court only the disposition of submission; was it not a new surety for the quiet continuance of the Jewish relations, which indeed oppressed for the moment, yet according to the sanguine and carnal hopes of the majority, were to take a prosperous and joyous turn by the destruction of the oppressor? Then it was high time that the people in Babylonia should know what it meant, that a true prophet (אֱלֹהִים) was among them, 2: 5, who, unconcerned about those expressions of the sinful popular consciousness, punished the same, and pointed to the way of God. So Ezekiel appeared upon the bank of the Chebar as the successor of Jeremiah. His soul, scorning the spirit of the age, is full only with the thought of God's judgments upon Jerusalem. In the pressure of circumstances, there is for him the inner necessity for his public appearance as a prophet; an uncontrollable power of divine inspiration seizes him; he feels himself strong in the same, and able to accomplish his difficult work, to live for his new and unusual calling; beholding the glory of the Lord, he knows with immovable certainty how this will be manifested and hallowed in Israel; he goes forth to fulfil his commission.

Thus the manner in which the prophet receives his call involves also his instructions and the purport of what he was to announce.

He wishes for nothing else, he knows no other part to perform in life than that with which Jeremiah appeared upon the stage. The words of Jeremiah, 1: 14, "Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land," are also the fundamental theme of the inauguration of Ezekiel, 1: 4. 2: 10. But the manner in which the prophet has apprehended this thought, and become inwardly assured of it, is peculiar, and we have to inquire, how he arrived at that mode of representing the theophany and the inauguration connected with it?

Ezekiel's mode of representation, as was to be expected from a man who had become great in sacerdotal service, rests upon the Pentateuch. The scenery described in our chapter, had its origin in those magnificent theophanies with which in the earlier time the lawgiver was favored, and which were the ideal of all the later revelations of God to his prophets. Ex. 25: 22. Num. 7: 89. Moses heard the voice of Jehovah from the mercy-seat out of the midst of the cherubim; cf. 1: 26 sq. with Ex. 24: 10. The place of atonement for the whole people is the special dwelling place of the Deity, where he makes himself known as the Holy One of Israel, and reveals himself in his glory as the actually present God. Here the *idea* of Deity appears as *reality*; what he is in his essence appears in his relation to and for his covenant people. The relation of God to man appears in full and clear light as that of the Creator preserving his love to his creatures, in order to sanctify and save them. Around the ark of the covenant are seen forms in the posture of reverential adoration, holy symbols of the creation represented in their noblest ideal appearance. To them is imparted the power of life which flows from God, and has in God its constant source, and thus the cherubim are the symbolical bearers of that Divine fulness of life which is manifested in creation.<sup>1</sup>

The place of God's sanctifying influence, is thus at the same time the true place of life, and as such, the place where God reveals himself. There the pious Jew with an eye of faith beheld the mediation between God and the world; God as the one holy and living God, not in a formless abstraction, but manifesting himself in the most real living symbol. Thence are primarily derived those poetic views, according to which Jehovah, when he is thought of as imparting of his fulness of life, and as actively present among his creatures, is regarded as sitting enthroned upon cherubs; cf. especially Ps. 99: 1, where "The LORD reigneth" corresponds to "he sitteth upon the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the excellent development of the meaning of the cherubim in the Mosaic sanctuary by *Bahr*, *Symbolik* I. s. 311 ff. 340 ff.

cherubim." The consequence of God thus revealing himself towards his creatures, is expressed in the words, "The nations tremble, the earth quakes." All the manifestations of sinful life must sink back into their weakness and nothingness before such a manifestation of the living God. Therefore the God of life is also the God of help, of salvation for the pious, the God of ruin and destruction to the ungodly. Therefore Jehovah is invoked as seated upon the cherubim, Pa. 80: 1. 2 Kings 19: 15; as such he makes himself known to his people in the experience of life; in their distress Jehovah appears upon a cherub, destroys their foes and rescues whom he loves, Pa. 18: 10.

Without doubt, the vision of Isaiah, ch. vi, which is kindred to that of Ezekiel, is derived from those holy symbols of the temple. This prophet, in his vision, finds himself in the temple, where the glory of Jehovah is revealed, and this fact should long since have shown that the prophet borrowed his representation from the symbols of the *res sacras* themselves, instead of transferring to the temple what was foreign to it. The name of the seraphim is purposely chosen instead of the usual one of cherubim, since the latter has a meaning altogether general and even insignificant, for the purpose of the prophet. The question however arises, why the prophet preferred this change of name, or in what relation it stands to the idea of his vision. שֵׁרָפִים according to the Hebrew etymology, is certainly nothing else than *comburentes*, fiery forms, forms full of consuming fire. Every other derivation of the word has weighty objections to it, and does not agree with the fundamental idea of the vision. The prophet sets forth therein a two-fold thought; first, his own subjective calling, the way and means by which he came and was induced to assume it, and what qualified and strengthened him for so difficult an office; secondly, the purport of his announcements, the nature of his work, which Isaiah embraces in one grand, clear and complete scene. The vision is accordingly divided into two parts, vs. 1—8 and vs. 9—13, and the theophany relates to each in its peculiar character. Jehovah appears surrounded by fiery forms, by the seraphim, not so called because of their shining light,<sup>1</sup> but because of the consuming, annihilating power of fire. The seraphim, as well as the cherubim, represent also the life-giving power of Jehovah in creation—only however in one particular aspect of the Divine efficiency. *Fire*, as that which burns and destroys, is the symbol of purification, the means of extinguishing

<sup>1</sup> As many, e. g. Rosenmüller, *Hendewerk* find expressed in the word שֵׁרָפִים. The verb שָׂרַף means in Hebrew only, *were, comburere*.

the sin and guilt of men,<sup>1</sup> therefore, the seraph takes away the sin of the prophet with the glowing stone, and thus imparts to him divine qualification for his office; for only a man thus purified and sanctified by God can be his servant, an executor of his will. As the designation of the seraphim in v. 6 is thus significant for the first part of his vision, so it is no less so for the second. The prophet is to announce to the hardened people their punishment; the judgment of God towards which they are irrepressibly hastening. Thus God glorifies his holiness upon his rebellious people; appears, therefore, as a consuming, annihilating fire.<sup>2</sup> The same destination of the people is expressed, v. 13, in יִהְיֶה לְבָרָרָה; they are destined to be burned (cf. Num. 24: 22), wherein is evidently a reference to the theophany. In relation to the apostasy of the people from God, the truth expressed in Heb. 12: 29, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος κατακλιθεῖσθαι appears no less in the manner of God's manifestation than in the labors of the prophet while actually fulfilling his office.

If the vision of Isaiah be understood in this way, there is evidently a very intimate connection between it and that of Ezekiel. In the latter the appearance of Jehovah upon the cherubim has also a twofold meaning, being designed in part for the prophet and his equipment for his office, and in part relating to the purport of his announcements, the nature of his work; God represents both what he intends to do for the prophet, and what he intends to do to the people.

Jehovah appears to the prophet in venerable human form; in boundless condescension, but at the same time in the fulness of his glory. Below him, in immediate nearness, stand the cherubim and the wheels connected with them, 1: 15. The outflow of his nature, the power of his holy sway is active in these attendant beings, whose appearance testifies of the highest powers of motion and of life. The Spirit of Jehovah dwells in both, a divine breath of life which moves them as his servants that do him honor, vs. 12, 20, 21. The prophet receives so mighty an impression of the vision, that the spirit comes into him, and since at first terrified he had fallen to the ground, raises him up again. Thus filled and moved by the Spirit of God he is henceforth a prophet of God, 2: 5. The course of thought thus lies clearly before us. God is the living God, embracing in himself all life, and without whom is no life; as such revealing himself in symbols; as such he makes himself known to the soul of Ezekiel; proves

<sup>1</sup> So in Scripture, cf. *Hengstenberg*, *Christol.* III. s. 410. So also in antiquity generally, cf. *Böttiger*, *Ideen zur Kunst-Mythologie* I. s. 122. *Bahr*, *Symbolik*. II. s. 475.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e. g. *Matth.* 3: 12; τὸ δὲ ἄγρον κατακλιθεῖσθαι ὑπὲρ ἀπέθου.

himself to be a God who imparts unto him his Spirit, and by this act of power and of love consecrates him as his prophet. More mightily than ever, cf. Ezek. 3: 14, 24. 8: 1 sq. 37: 1 sq., did the prophet feel the movements of the Divine Spirit, when his outward path and condition showed to him the necessity of his office. The greater the number of objections which natural consciousness opposed to such a step, the more important the moment of decision in such hours of inward and outward conflict, so much the more affecting, especially in a character so energetic and magnanimous as that of Ezekiel, is the hour, when the spirit of God overcoming all other voices of the soul, manifests itself as an irresistibly victorious power, and the entire life is concentrated in this inner unity, and all the powers of the soul inspired and consecrated to one glorious end. Life is broken in two divisions; the best, the fairest part is found and—chosen.

But the mission of the prophet is addressed to a perverse and stubborn people. However ready and willing on the one side the Spirit of God makes him to assume and fulfil his high calling, yet on the other side the fulfilment of it is proportionably difficult. With willing spirit, with holy courage is Ezekiel to utter many lamentations and woes over the unhappy people, 2: 8—10. Not in vain, therefore, does God reveal himself to the prophet as a *living* God; for as such is he a holy judge of his people. The labor of Ezekiel is only a further unfolding of the theme; *παρεδόν τὸ ἐμπροσθε εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζώοντος*, Heb. 10: 31. Out of the north, 1: 4, the entire theophany appears to the seer while in the spirit tarrying in Jerusalem; it is Jehovah in all his majesty, who will show unto his people that not in vain does he have in himself and shed abroad a fulness of life; who does not let himself be disregarded and rebelled against with impunity; who will execute judgment upon the theocracy, cf. Dan. 7: 9 sq. The description of Ezekiel's call, therefore, was designed to show to the prophet his true position in the midst of his faithless age, and at the same time to obtain also for those who were around him, a deep impression of the character and living power of Jehovah—the representation of which was already a sufficiently sharp rebuke of their perverse disposition and aims—and further, to show that the realization of the Divine counsels was near at hand, the destruction of his enemies, the suppression of whatever power in the people opposed itself to God.

The idea of the prophet is accordingly essentially Jewish, and in this respect harmonizes with the earlier prophetic writings; it is an idea, as was to be expected from the sacerdotal education and disposition of the man, rooted in the Mosaic ritual, and grown up and be-



come great under the constant influence of the holy symbols of the sanctuary. But as already his predecessors, and especially Isaiah, had employed the same fundamental idea with independent freedom, so Ezekiel makes use of it according to his special need and particular design. He goes much further than Isaiah in drawing minute details; with the hand of a genuine artist he brings before our view, in an exceedingly picturesque and graphic manner, grand, wonderful and significant phenomena. For this there was a special demand in the circumstances of the prophet. He was in Babylon, and the monuments there discovered<sup>1</sup> testify of the taste which the ancient inhabitants of that country had for fantastic, grotesque and significant combinations of the human with other animal forms. Their partial affinity with the imagery employed by the prophet is remarkable, and has been long recognized. "In the poetry of Ezekiel," says Schlosser, "a Chaldaean and Babylonian tone so evidently prevails, that it expresses exceedingly well the character of his times. The symbolic style, the chariot of lightning-cloud, the dreadful steeds that draw it, the noise of whose wings is as the noise of great waters, the throne of sapphire, the canopy above the throne bright with the colors of the rainbow, belong to the Babylonian temple, to the Babylonian court, and the symbolic representations by Ezekiel are so much the more intensive than those by Isaiah, as his poetry, in other respects, is weaker." No well-informed person will maintain that Ezekiel exactly borrowed this imagery, or with Spencer that he designed to contrast the Jewish with the pagan mode of view. The fundamental idea of the prophet did not originate in the country which had become his second home, but was elsewhere derived, and unconsciously to him was united with the mighty impressions produced by the objects around him. We may well suppose that on a character like that of Ezekiel those Babylonian temples would have produced a remarkable effect; that so genuine an oriental spirit, one that so naturally reached forth after the immeasurable, and was so glowingly sensitive to the indescribable, must have felt himself wonderfully enchained by those exalted and gigantic symbols,<sup>2</sup> and taken colors from them in order to give to his own bold flight of thought a somewhat corresponding form. But in all this variety of outward colors the soul of the seer turns upon but one thought, and that is truly his own, and the dazzling brightness without becomes mellowed in the pure undisturbed mirror of his spirit, in which are united the consciousness of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Münter*, Religion der Babylonier, s. 89 sq. *Schlosser*, Universalhist. Uebersicht I. s. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Meinen Comment. z. Daniel*, s. 362 ff.

the nearness of God, the fulness of the Divine presence, and the clear vision of the glory of God.

This prophecy, and especially this theophany, was held in high regard by the Jews in every age. This is seen in the eulogy of Ezekiel by the son of Sirach, 49: 9. Under the title *עֲצוּת וְהַרְבֵּבָה*, opus currus, it formed the foundation and point of union for the later mystic theology in its endless gnostic speculations upon the Divine nature and the world of spirits.<sup>1</sup> No section has experienced among Christian interpreters so variously differing explanations, most of which however degenerate into altogether idle and senseless allegorical trifling.<sup>2</sup>

CHAP. I. vs. 1—3. We first examine the chronological data of the section. Ezekiel has the custom in common with the prophets of a later age, of stating minutely the time in which the prophecies were communicated. Some have supposed the occasion of this to be the residence of the seers in Chaldaea, the seat of mathematical science.<sup>3</sup> But it is to be considered that the later historical books also, as those of the Kings, are distinguished by a similar chronological minuteness,<sup>4</sup> and that the later prophets give a much more careful attention to the literary character of their prophecies, to the manner in which they represent them in writing than the earlier prophets do, whose written word is rather the simple imitation of their spoken discourse. In the present instance this particularity with regard to time is seen in the fact, that two dates are set down, the latter of which alone is at first clear. It is the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity—an event so memorable in the view of the prophet that he dates his prophecy according to it, without any regard to Zedekiah, the successor of the king at Jerusalem. With that captivity the fate of Judah was in fact decided; the last hope of deliverance vanished. By this definite date the prophet explains the preceding more indefinite one: *in the thirtieth year*. We can consistently pass over unnoticed the irrelevant interpretations of this date, as e. g. whether the 30th year of the age of Ezekiel or of the exile be meant. The question can only be, whether a Babylonish or Jewish mode of reckoning is employed. In the first case, the 30th year of the era of Nabopolassar is meant. But this

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Maimonides, moreh Nebochim III. p. 332 sq. Zunz, die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden. s. 162 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Vid. Pradus, p. 42 sq. Pfeiffer, dubia vex. p. 763 sq. Starck, Comment. p. 20 sq.

<sup>3</sup> Hengstenberg, Beiträge, I. s. 356.

<sup>4</sup> Vid. mein Handbuch der Einleitung II. 1. s. 162.

cannot be, for Nabopolassar reigned twenty-one years, but Nebuchadnezzar, his son, was already upon the throne of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, so that the 30th year of this era could not possibly be the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. The most ancient opinion, according to which the reckoning is from the eighteenth year of Josiah, is, therefore, the only tenable one. In favor of it are the following considerations. 1. This reckoning exactly agrees with the date of the prophecy; there belong to it fourteen years of Josiah and Jehoahaz, eleven years of Jehoiakim; five years of Jehoiachin added thereto = thirty years. 2. The importance of that epoch; the 18th year of Josiah was distinguished by the discovery of the book of the law, the reforms connected therewith, the celebration of the passover in a peculiar manner, 2 Kings 22, 23. 2 Chron. 34, 35. 3. This explanation is alone pertinent to the connection. The latest adversity is put in contrast with the latest prosperity. The dates are prophetically significant, referring to the importance of the prophet's inauguration in a memorable, eventful age. In this way alone is the double date satisfactorily explained, and no well-grounded complaint can be made of the obscurity of the first date, since it is perfectly removed by the definiteness of the second. 4. The fact that Ezekiel joins himself so closely to Jeremiah harmonizes with this mode of reckoning. This appears in the beginning of the book by the use of *יְהוָה* which would otherwise seem strange. The prophet wishes to continue the work of another. Maurer's remark: *dicit igitur יְהוָה vates quasi praeessorum temporum historias continuaturus*, contains a presentiment of the truth, but needs to be restricted more especially to Jeremiah. This prophet entered upon his office in the 13th year of Josiah; Ezekiel connects also his prophecy with the same king and his memorable reign.

The prophet minutely describes the state of prophetic inspiration or ecstasy in which he found himself. The fourfold designation, (the heavens were opened—I saw visions of God—The word of Jehovah came to me—The hand of Jehovah was upon me) so relate to each other that the first three express the effect, the last, the cause. The exalted nature of Divine revelation is denoted by the opening heavens; *caelos suos aperit Deus, non quod scindantur re ipsa, sed ubi discussis omnibus obstaculis, facit ut fidelium oculi usque ad gloriam ipsius caelestem penetrent.*—*Calvin.* The *מְרִאוֹת אֱלֹהִים* are not visions praestantissimae, but the consequences of the opening of heaven; as the cloud which envelopes the Divine glory opens for the prophet, he has visions of God, he sees the otherwise inaccessible majesty of God itself. Then the word of the Lord comes to him;

the vision itself is not the highest end, it is only a means to a higher end; a preparation for the seer, to make him receptive for the communication of the word. This is the summit and completion of the Divine revelation. But the efficient cause of this ecstatic vision of the higher and heavenly world does not lie in the prophet himself; the hand of the Lord is upon him; such elevation, such communications come through the power of God alone.

The place, where the prophet receives these Divine revelations, is also important in his view both for himself and for his vision; therefore designated by *בְּתוֹךְ הַחֹלְבִים*. He is among that portion of the exiles which had been transferred to the banks of the Chebar. Here a colony had been formed as the most suitable place in northern Mesopotamia for agriculture. In the district of the Chebar, which takes its rise near Bas-el-Ain, at the foot of Mt. Masius, and flows through Upper Mesopotamia parallel with the two great rivers, suddenly turning at a right angle towards the west, through a cross valley, empties into the Euphrates at Circesium, there were even so late as during the middle ages many cities; it was an important district in the time of Saladin. Here Tel-abib was situated, 3: 15, where the prophet had a house, 3: 24, probably so called from the rich cornfields of the neighboring valley, *וּבְקֶצֶר*, 3: 23. The Chebar is formed out of an uncommonly large number of springs—some say 300—it might, therefore, properly bear two names, *בְּבִיר*, the mighty, cf. Is. 17: 12. 28: 2, and *רִבּוֹר*, the *binding together*, the *uniting* stream. So then this river is the same that is mentioned in 2 Kings 17: 6. 18: 11. 1 Chron. 5: 26, and inhabitants of the kingdom of the ten tribes had already been led into this country. This agrees with what is said in 3: 15 of the earlier and more recent Israelitic settlers with whom Ezekiel was brought into connection. Thus the place, in more than one respect, was rich in mementos, and of high importance for the seer, living as he was in a gloomy present, and far removed from the land of promise.

V. 4. The description itself, sustained in a strictly psychological character, at first given in general outlines, and gradually proceeding to more particular detail. There appears to the prophet a great, fiery cloud, from the midst of which a wonderful metallic splendor shines forth. The expression *אֵשׁ מְרִזְקִים*, compressed fire, is antique and taken from the Pentateuch, Ex. 9: 24. Thence it follows that Jehovah appears in the majesty of his administrative, punitive justice as formerly in Egypt, cf. Deut. 4: 24. The pronoun *לוֹ* refers to *אֵשׁ מְרִזְקִים* as *אֵשׁ מְרִזְקִים*. But it were a pleonasm unparalleled even by Ezekiel, if *מְרִזְקִים* were explained by *אֵשׁ מְרִזְקִים*. It can belong only to *הַחֹלְבִים*, and gives to this word a more intensive meaning. *הַחֹלְבִים* is a *beatus*

*metallic work*, from *הַשֵּׁל*, formed either by an inserted *נ* (as *שֵׁלֵנָה* from *שֵׁלֵנָה*), or composed of *הַשֵּׁל* and *הַשֵּׁם* as *הַשֵּׁל הַשֵּׁם* and *הַשֵּׁל הַשֵּׁם*.<sup>1</sup> To this, *בְּהוֹךְ הַאֵשׁ* is very appropriate: a metallic work beaten in the fire and therefore emitting sparks.

The design of the theophany is expressed not only by the manner in which it comes, but by the local designation *מִצְפוֹן*. According to a standing mode of expression in use by the prophets, the north, the north country, is a designation of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Out of the north came the punitive judgments of God upon Israel, cf. Jer. 1: 14. 4: 6. 6: 1, 22. 10: 22. The key to this mode of expression is given, not in the beginning of the vision as in 8: 3, but at the close, 3: 4, 11, 15, after which the prophet is to return to his usual place of abode. Consequently, as the reader might conjecture from *בְּאֵרוֹ מִצְפוֹן*, he finds himself in spirit in Jerusalem, in the temple, where the priest is expected to be, cf. 10: 1 sq. The expression is entirely misunderstood by those who suppose that reference is had to the pagan conception of a mountain in the north, as the dwelling-place of the gods, Is. 14: 18.

V. 5. The form comes nearer to the eye of the seer; he perceives in the midst of the fire four living creatures. *רִיזוֹת*, not *beasts* (as Rosenmüller, Gesenius, De Wette), but living beings, animantia, the ζῶα of the Apoc. 4: 6 sq. For (a) their form is expressly described as prominently human, *הִמָּוֶה אָדָם*. (b) The reason of the designation is given, v. 12. The *רִיזוֹת הַרִיזוֹת* that is in them makes them *רִיזוֹת*. There is the same difference, moreover, between *מְרֻמָּה* and *רִיזוֹת* as between *θηρίον* and ζῶον, cf. Is. 46: 1.

These four beings form the outer environment of the Divine throne; they stand nearest the prophet, and form, in some degree, the foreground of the theophany, they serve as a medium through which the seer is prepared for the manifestation of Jehovah.

Vs. 6—14. The nature of these figures is more particularly described. Each cherub bears a fourfold face (*פְּנִיִּים*). The remark of Calvin respecting the number of the cherubs being four: *quod numerum spectat, non dubito quin Deus voluerit docere, diffundi suam virtutem per omnes mundi plagas*, has also a fit application to the fourfold form of the face. Every cherub is thereby individually a representative of creation and of the life dwelling therein. The ideal nature, the heavenly character of these forms is symbolized by the four wings corresponding to the four faces. Nowhere in the Old Testament do

<sup>1</sup> Gesenius, Lehrgebäude, s. 866.

the angels appear winged, but only those altogether higher ideal forms of the cherubim and seraphim.<sup>1</sup> Creative and life-giving power is revealed in the cherubim, not only in their general appearance, but in each individually and also in their individual parts.

Vs. 7—10. The general thought is, that all the members—feet, hands, wings—as well as the face, have a wonderful, a higher than earthly character, befitting those who are the immediate attendants of God.

The feet, it is said, were straight. This is often supposed to mean a shape opposite to the natural structure of the human foot; they were vertical, not horizontal, as the foot of man. But the peculiarity of their feet is afterwards described. יָרָאֵם must here be taken in the same sense as in vs. 2, 3, where it is applied to the wings. Rosenmüller rightly explains it: in rectum extensae; wings spread out straight or in a right line, not folded, cf. the contrast, vs. 24, 25. So here; feet extended in a right line, so that the prophet could clearly perceive their form, which was that of a steer's foot. The outward occasion of this representation may have been given by the ox-footed figures upon the Babylonian monuments.<sup>2</sup> The form of the foot is accordingly round, or rather square, and it seems to be a motive with Ezekiel to make this feature prominent, in order to carry out as far as possible the fourfold form of the cherubim. At the same time the feet fulfil the purpose of motion in any direction without turning round, cf. v. 9; they symbolize the idea of free mobility. Moreover, they are glorious in appearance, glittering like the lustre of burnished brass.<sup>3</sup>

V. 8. Four hands correspond to the four wings and are underneath the wings on their four sides. Here, also, the predominance of the number four is the chief point with the writer. No other symbolical meaning is hinted at. Instead of יָדָי the Qeri reads יָדָי (manus hominum). It is not necessary to regard the Kethibh as an old form of the construct state, but let it be pointed יָדָי; his hands (i. e. of each one) were the hands of a man.<sup>4</sup> In the last words of the verse, the wings and the faces are again mentioned, because they are especially significant. In the former, the living power is manifested; in the latter, their nature as representatives of creation.

V. 9. The wings were united together, the tips of the outspread wings touched one another, as over the ark of the covenant, 1 Kings

<sup>1</sup> Commentar z. Daniel, s. 351.

<sup>2</sup> Münter, Rel. d. Babylonier, Tab. II. fig. 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Commentar z. Daniel 10: 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gesenius, Lehrgebäude, s. 852.

6: 27; and in this way there was such a connection of the whole, that in their motions they turned not round, but each went straightforward. אָל עֲבָרָה עָבְרוּ.

V. 11. The meaning is, as the faces, so were the wings of the cherubim separate above, each subsisting for itself, yet two of each uniting and connected at the ends; the two lower wings covered the body. This is a token of reverence; especially the covering of the face and feet is an oriental symbol of the reverence due to a ruler;<sup>1</sup> here the idea is strengthened by the mention of the body in general.

V. 12. The moving principle by which these heavenly forms are led in their course, is the spirit, the spirit of life, vs. 20, 21. The passage is intelligible only by reference to Gen. 3: 24, where it is said a cherub was to keep the way to the tree of life in the garden of Eden—a passage so much the more to be regarded, as the prophet again refers to it, 28: 11—16. The connection of the thought is as follows: the garden of Eden is the proper place of life wherein the fulness of life which flows out from God and is imparted to the creation, is most purely and gloriously revealed. After the fall of man, a cherub took the place of the original keeper of paradise,<sup>2</sup> Gen. 2: 15. What was once the real world for man is now for him only an ideal one. The cherub belongs to it. As the keeper and guardian of the tree of life, he represents the ideal revelation of the Divine fulness of life. There dwells in him in pure and undisturbed energy and outgoing, the Divine breath of life, once imparted to the creation. Wherever this original Divine source of life moves those heavenly living creatures (חַיִּוִּים), thither they go. In this connection some writers<sup>3</sup> have called attention to the difference between the Hebrew and Grecian symbols. In those celestial forms of art from the hand of Vulcan, described by Homer (Iliad, XVIII. 374. 420), there shows itself a purely plastic mode of view, which everywhere makes the beautiful and useful predominant; in the genius of the Hebrew artist there appears a fulness of idea which scarcely allows of a sensuous representation.

Vs. 13, 14. The entire form of the living creatures radiates with awful splendor, consuming and destroying, like coals of fire and lightning. עֲבָרֵי אֵשׁ לְעִירֹהּ is probably an imitation of Ps. 18: 8. One cannot fail to observe the climax in the expressions: coals, torches, lightnings. מְנַקֵּם — flashes of lightning. The forms move forwards and backwards (שׁוֹבֵב), yet without turning round (עֲבָרָה), v. 12. Some of the elder commentators took offence at this, and according to Je-

<sup>1</sup> Gesenius, Comment. z. Jesaja, I. s. 258.

<sup>2</sup> Bähr, Symbolik, I. s. 347.

<sup>3</sup> Köster, Erläuterungen, s. 28 ff.

rome, this was the reason why the LXX left out v. 14, (silendum putaverunt, ne legenti scandalum faceret).

Vs. 15—21. As the entire composition is carried through in a peculiar manner, so the following addition to the forms of the cherubim belongs to the special idea which is in the mind of the prophet. By four wheels connected with the cherubim and which move equally with them, the prophet strengthens the thought of the power and fullness of life which had already been symbolized by the cherubim. The genuine oriental nature of Ezekiel is not yet satisfied; he calls up all the symbols that are at his command, in order to prepare an image suited to the exalted character of the theophany; unconcerned about the form and the plastic relation of the parts to each other, the form must yield to the essence, to the idea. In the entire description there is a constant striving after that which is in the highest degree grand and ideal. What the prophet will express by these wheels he himself tells most clearly; the spirit of the cherubim was also in the wheels; their motions were most clearly connected together; the spirit of life showed itself active in the wheels, v. 21; they bear the name: whirlwind, רַמְלִים, expressive of the swiftest, impetuous, revolving motion. They are a still more highly empowered witness of the Divine energy of life in created being, and are designed to produce a deeper impression of the almighty and ever-present agency of God as it is mirrored forth in the domain of life to which he has given its being and its form.

V. 15. Every wheel had a fourfold face, looked towards four sides, because two wheels cut through each other in the middle, so that every wheel thus formed could move towards any of the four quarters of the heaven without turning round, vs. 17, 18.

V. 16. תַּרְשִׁישׁ the Tarshish-stone, probably the topaz. The Syriac retains the word ܬܪܫܝܫ, while generally the name of the chrysolite or topaz is ܬܪܫܝܫ.

V. 17. They moved upon their four sides. Instead of ܕ we have ܕܐ as more energetic. Cf. v. 20, where ܕܐ is employed, to be sure, in a weaker sense for ܕܐ.

V. 18. עֵינֵי the wheels, here the circumference, the felloes, were set all around with eyes, cf. Rev. 4: 6. The eye is the most lively expression of inner activity, the fairest testimony of living power, and especially the symbol of intelligence and wisdom. Exprimitt hoc prudentiam acutam et omnium rerum providam cognitionem, ut nulli in volatu impediri et retardari possunt.<sup>1</sup> This image seems es-

<sup>1</sup> Ewald. Apoc. p. 138.



pecially to have come into use among the prophets during the exile, cf. Dan. 7: 8, perhaps from the influence of the heathen symbols by which they were surrounded, as e. g. the ancient statue of Jupiter in Larissa had three eyes, and is to be referred probably to Trojan, at any rate to Asiatic origin.<sup>1</sup> The prophets after the exile go still further, as Zechariah, 8: 9. 4: 10, who speaks of the seven eyes of Jehovah, wherein both the number seven<sup>2</sup> and the eye itself were Persian symbolic modes of expression. The most confidential servants of the Persian king were called the eyes and ears of the king, as we learn from the classics,<sup>3</sup> and also from inscriptions upon Cilician coins. That this designation of earthly relations, however, was derived from the holy representations of celestial relations, from the Parsee religion, is evident from the Zend-avesta, where it is said of Mithra, he has a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes.<sup>4</sup>

Vs. 20, 21. In going and in standing still, the cherubim had the wheels for their constant companions. In both there was the same moving principle רִיחַ רִיחַ. Most commentators<sup>5</sup> understand this to mean the spirit of the living creatures. (רִיחַ understood collectively of the cherubim.) But in that case the prophet would certainly have written רִיחַ רִיחַ. By רִיחַ, he means the entire living creature, the cherubim and the wheels taken collectively so far as they make out one whole, 1: 22. 10: 20. Not only in poetry but also in the later Hebrew prose, then, we find רִיחַ instead of the earlier רִיחַ, life; so Ezekiel 7: 18. Thus we have the appropriate meaning; the principle of life in both was identical; this was the proper cause (צִי) of their equal movement.

Vs. 22—28. Now the crowning point of the theophany, the throne of Jehovah and Jehovah himself upon it in venerable human form. The description is founded upon Ex. 24: 10, of which our passage contains only the amplification. Beneath the throne, as the footstool of Jehovah, is the firmament (רָקִיעַ) like a mass of crystal, elsewhere, Job 37: 18, compared to a molten mirror. The imagery in Rev. 4: 6, is drawn from Ezekiel. Under the crystal are the cherubs full of reverential fear, but at the same time moving on with a mighty rushing noise, and letting down their wings only when Jehovah's voice sounds from above. קוֹל הַחֲמָה — קוֹל הַחֲמָה, loud noise, compared to that of a camp, cf. Dan. 10: 6.

Jehovah appears to the prophet in a two-fold aspect. On the one side as bearing in himself the fulness of the greatest majesty and

<sup>1</sup> Pausanias II. 24. 5. *Creuzer Symbolik*. II. s. 484 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Heeren, *Ideen*, I. 2. s. 480.

<sup>3</sup> Xenoph. *Cyropaedia* VIII. 2. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Barnouf. Comment. sur le Yasna*. I. p. 209—222. <sup>5</sup> Rosenmüller, *De Wette*.

glory. Wherever the prophet may turn his eye, the appearance throughout is shining and fiery, v. 27. This belongs to the idea of the *קבודת ה'קוה* which the prophet beholds in the spirit. On the other hand Jehovah condescends to appear in a human form, partly because only thus can the prophet endure the sight and live, and partly because the appearance of God is only thus capable of representation, and suited to the symbolic, graphic, dramatic character of the vision. Closely akin to this is Dan. 7: 9. This parallel passage and the clear distinction therein between the Ancient of days and the Son of man, 7: 13, throw light upon our verse so far as it shows the untenableness of the earlier opinion, according to which the Messiah was supposed to be intended. Intellige Christum, filium Dei, qui a patre iudex hujus universi constitutus incarnationis suae mysterium ita quoque praefigurabat (Michaelis). *המראה קבודת ה'קוה*; the prophet regards the glory of the LORD as of so exalted a nature that it cannot be described, cannot be brought completely to the view of mortal eye. It is the *המראה ה'קוה* as it is called, Numb. 12: 8. cf. Ps. 17: 15; a reflection, a copy of the Divine glory reminding of its true essence, but in no way exhausting it. Among all forms, however, is none so fit for its representation as that of man, whom Jehovah has made in his own image, and will have regarded as his representative and deputy upon the earth, Gen. 1: 27 sq. Ps. 8: 6 sq.

To this condescension of Jehovah to the prophet, the comparison of the shining appearance to the rainbow refers. Not only the words employed, but the nature of the thought shows that reference is had to Gen. 9: 12—17. J. H. Michaelis says aptly: *Iris est symbolum foederis et gratiae*. This ethical idea is present in the symbolic language of the prophet; Jehovah appears to him, as he is about to enter upon his high calling, in human form as the covenant God, full of condescending grace and love. The same is seen in Rev. 4: 3. A rainbow of the brilliancy of an emerald appears around the throne of God—a beautiful symbol there, as introductory to the manifestation of the glory of God in the work of redemption, 5: 12—14. Vitringsa says: "The covenant made with the family of Noah is symbolic, and the rainbow itself according to its highest symbolic meaning, is to be referred to that kingdom of grace, which God in the economy of grace in a most illustrious manner exhibits in Christ Jesus his Son." That the remark of Heinrichs, "the royal dignity is indicated by the rainbow," is incorrect, is evident from Rev. 10: 1, where the last angel bears the rainbow upon his head, undoubtedly with reference to the purport of his announcement, the realization of the work of redemption, the completion of the plan of salvation, *ἐτελείσθη τὸ μυστήριον*

*τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Rev. 10: 7. The symbol of the covenant, the sign of the Mediator's office is there entirely in its place. With regard to the same application of the symbol here, it cannot be objected that the vision is one which excites only fear; *tota haec visio fuit formidabilis*, as Calvin says, who accordingly sees expressed in it only the idea of the *majestas Dei refulgens in coelis*. For the condescension of God, his sign of the covenant does not exclude his glory, but includes it. The prophet means to say: notwithstanding that Jehovah thus revealed himself to him and did not let the signs of his grace and love be wanting, yet he could not endure the sight of his glory. Thus the symbol of the rainbow involves the thought expressed, chap. 2: 1; the gracious God raises up again him who was at first cast down by terror.

CHAP. II. vs. 1, 2. The prophet first describes the subjective operation of the theophany upon his own soul. So deeply humbled, so prostrate with terror as he was before the exalted revelation of God, even so mightily does the Divine voice raise him up again. Calvin says, "as it regards the wicked, they are so terrified by the sight of God, that they utterly fall and rise not again. But it is not so with the faithful, because in them their natural pride is corrected; thereupon God extends his hand to them and restores them as if from death to life. At the same time the prophet teaches that nothing was done by the voice until the Spirit came. God indeed works efficaciously by his word, but it is to be maintained that the efficacy is not in the sound, but comes forth from the secret impulse of the Spirit." By the Spirit of God is here to be understood in part, the power which seizes upon and overmasters the prophet, and in part the Divine strength in his own soul which shows itself victorious, and in which his genuine courage and elevated joy in prospect of his high calling had their root.

The address, *son of man*, is characteristic for the peculiarity impressed with noble constancy upon all the prophecies of Ezekiel; it is found more than eighty times, and elsewhere only by his contemporary, Daniel 8: 17, as also for the prophet's inner disposition and ethical mode of view. To regard this appellation as a mere Hebrew or Chaldaic idiom for man, and to see nothing therein but a common mode of address, everything forbids. For its frequent repetition with no other as its substitute shows its emphasis, its significance for the prophet. In the next place it cannot be shown to be elsewhere a common idiom that precisely this phrase is used in address; and when thus used it lies in the nature of the case that it contains a meaning

characteristic for the person spoken to.<sup>1</sup> This is clearly evident from the different modes of address to Daniel.<sup>2</sup> Finally, regard is to be had to the choice of the expression *בְּרֵאשִׁית* and its original relation to other designations of man. Precisely in these anthropological designations is seen the peculiar religious depth and accurate distinction of conceptions in the Hebrew mind. While the words *אִישׁ* and *אָדָם* are used simply as designations of sex, *אָנָשׁ* which is etymologically akin to *אִישׁ*<sup>3</sup> is employed with constant reference to its original meaning, *to be weak, sick*; it is the ethical designation of man,<sup>4</sup> but *אָדָם* denotes man as to his physical, natural condition,<sup>5</sup> whence the use of the word in such passages as Ps. 8: 4. Job 25: 6, and also its connection with *גִּבּוֹר* are satisfactorily explained. Opposed to both *אָנָשׁ* and *אָדָם* is *גִּבּוֹר* a designation of man with reference to his power.<sup>6</sup> The emphatic address *בְּרֵאשִׁית* is therefore a continual admonition to the prophet to remember that he is a man like all the rest. This is characteristic for an age like that of the exile, which felt more sensibly than any other the distance of man from God, what man is before God; characteristic also for the prophet whose powerful and energetic soul needed to be continually reminded of what he was by nature in the sight of God, "lest he should be exalted above measure," 2 Cor. 12: 7. Thus the name was a continual humiliation for the man who was called to a high office and chosen to do great things. Most of the early commentators apprehended the meaning correctly, as Jerome: *ne eleventur (prophetae) in superbiam—admonentur fragilitatis suae et filii hominum nuncupantur, ut homines se esse noverint*. Similar is the designation of Zechariah 'by, *young man*, 2: 4, on which Vitringa rightly remarks: *hominem brevis aevi, multarum rerum imperitum, coelestium maxime ignarum, non tam contemptus, quam differentiae causa, appellat זְבַרְיָה, et liceat dicere rudem, multa docendum, quo eodem sensu Ezechiel passim בְּרֵאשִׁית appellatur*. But at the same time this prophetic designation contained an important

<sup>1</sup> Cf. respecting the Grecian address *ὁ ἀνθρώπος*, *Heindorf ad Platonem. Gorgias* § 15 and 155. *Sophist* § 30, according to whom it contains lenis quaedam contemptus significatio.

<sup>2</sup> *Commentar. s. 298.*

<sup>3</sup> *Tuch. Comment z. Genesis, s. 83.*

<sup>4</sup> *Tholuck. Beiträge zur Spracherklärung d. N. T. s. 61 ff.*

<sup>5</sup> Thence its use in the Mosaic Cosmogony, Gen. 2: 7, whence, however, nothing follows for the etymological derivation of the word; the primary meaning is undoubtedly, *to be red*, from the red color of the flesh, especially since significant definitions of this kind are favorite ones in the oriental languages, vid. *Frähn z. Ibn Fossan, p. 72 sq.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. respecting the difference between *vir* and *homo*, *Herzog. Caesar de Bello Gallico V. 58.*

practical thought for his contemporaries, his hearers. They should thereby be taught to look away altogether from him the man to God and the Spirit of God, who spoke to them through the prophet. Calvin well makes this prominent: non dubito quin Deus voluerit consilio proponere ipsum quasi gregarium hominem et contemptibilem externo aspectu; interea vero ipsum attollere supra cunctos mortales, quia dignatus fuerat ipsum dono prophetiae.

Vs. 3—7. His spirit thus disciplined and equipped, the prophet receives his commission. Undismayed by the corruption of the people, the greatness of their apostasy and all the consequent bitterness of the prophetic calling, he is to execute his office.

V. 8. First of all a forcible description of the people, of their sinful course. The prophet does not call Israel גוי, but he uses a more expressive word, גוים (gentiles, heathen). Ea voce eos aequiparat reliquis gentibus, ut *non populus*, Hos. 1: 9. Sed eo quod sequitur eos infra reliquas gentes dejicit.—*Michaelis*.

V. 4. וְיִתְּמֵי and to such children as these. If the people did not stand in this peculiar relation to Jehovah, no prophet would be sent to them at all; the revolt, the apostasy of the children of God, makes this mission even so pressingly necessary as it is difficult and toilsome. The words קָשִׁי טָמִים are closely related to v. 3. The shamelessness shows itself in the rebellion of children against their father (טָרְדֵיבֵי), so entire forgetfulness of the guiding grace of God manifested to them as a people in innumerable acts of loving kindness; this shamelessness, this degree of corruption, proceeds, however, out of the inner disposition, their hardness of heart, thence their obstinacy in sinning: they and their fathers even to this day, v. 3.

V. 5. Amid such circumstances, the *result* of the prophet's labors is exceedingly doubtful. But to have reference to that, to act according to that, is merely human weakness and narrowness; in the sight of Jehovah higher motives avail, he desires a course of action with a single eye to him and his ever holy will. In Jehovah and his covenant relations to his people lies the necessity of his revelation; his testimony, his message must be made known in the midst of Israel; there lies upon the part of God the perfect right to punish the unfaithful people; they are without excuse. Thus Jehovah himself wills not merely the conversion, but also the hardening of the people, Is. 6: 9 sq.; so far as primarily he wills only the announcement of his paternal sovereignty and authority, this he must will in virtue of his paternal relation and faithfulness to his people. So strictly, therefore, as on the one side the prophetic announcement is to be referred to the will of God, and is to be regarded as an outflow and copy of the same,

so also no less are its results; the hearing and not-hearing are likewise God's will, otherwise he were obliged to keep back his word. אָם — אַם, sive — sive.

V. 6. In considerations of this kind there lies for the prophet an unfailing source of courage and intrepidity. סְרָבִים וְסֹאזִים אִתְּךָ is undoubtedly a proverbial phrase. סֹלֶן a *thorn*, a *prickle*. The primary meaning is סָלַל to ascend, spring forth, thence literally, a projecting point. The groundmeaning of סְרָבִים is clear from the many kindred words, שָׂרַב, שָׂרָה, צָרָה, צָרַב, צָרַב, to *burn*, cf. Num. 33: 55. Among the Arabs thorns are proverbially designations of the passions. That elsewhere thorns and thistles are designations of ungodliness, as also of hostile and dangerous powers, is well known.<sup>1</sup> The thought of the greatness of the painful dangers to which the prophet would be exposed is strengthened by: thou shalt dwell among scorpions, cf. Deut. 8: 15.

Verses 8—III. 3. The positive side of the admonition. In contrast to the rebellious people the prophet is to set forth in himself the image of an obedient servant of Jehovah, who finds his highest joy in the word of God. The thought is expressed by a symbolic action. A roll of a book written full of lamentations is given to the prophet to eat; he obeys and finds the roll of sweet taste. However difficult his calling may appear, yet the consciousness of being the servant of God is a rich source of far more exceeding joy. The prophet appears acting at once as one who without delay inwardly fulfils the Divine command. Thus the symbolic action is by no means a matter of mere form or fiction. It is the reality of an inner condition, of the highest spiritual excitement, of a true and rare union with the Divine will. It is an excellent remark of Vitranga: "The nature of the case stands thus, the prophets wholly rapt out of themselves passed over as it were to become the organs of God, and, having put off the affections of the flesh and elevated to a pure and spiritual contemplation, they approved with their spirit whatever they saw could conduce to the glory of God and illustrate not only his grace but also his justice. Having clearly seen the righteousness and wisdom of all God's ways, they had great pleasure in meditation upon all his words, whatever their purport might be."<sup>2</sup> The symbol is employed in a somewhat different manner in the Apocalypse. To John the taste of the roll is bitter and sweet, 10: 8, with reference to the subject of his announcements—the contests and the victory of the kingdom of God. The lofty energy of the symbol as employed by Ezekiel is comparatively very much lowered in the 4th Book of Ezra, 14: 38, where only the idea of in-

<sup>1</sup> Gesenius, z. Jesaja, I s. 378, 400.

<sup>2</sup> Vitranga ad Apocalypsin, p. 441.

spiration is intended to be expressed thereby; an illustration of the difference between apocryphal imitation and the living possession and production of thought.

V. 10. The roll was an *ὀπισθόγραφος*, i. e. entirely filled with all possible lamentations. *תָּקַוּ*, *sighing*, as the verb is employed, Is. 16: 7. Jer. 48: 31. *תָּוּ*, the cry of woe, a clearer form for *תָּוִי*, (Ewald, § 440).

CHAP. III. vs. 4—9. The genuine prophetic consciousness has its root in God, the ultimate source of life, but, therefore, at the same time keeps the aim of the prophecy steadily in view. This relates to the ancient, chosen covenant people of God, already so variously warned and so often called to salvation; over against their perverseness and presumptuous ungodliness is to be placed an example of even so high and godly courage and the power of genuine faith. Because the people are stubborn and hard hearted, the prophet, in order to meet them, needs a diamond brow, harder than rock.

V. 5. The prophetic mission is not directed to heathen nations, the enemies of the theocracy, but to the house of Israel. There is special emphasis in *אֶל-בְּרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ*; the ancient chosen people of God, and even now so far not deserted by God as this manifestation of grace is still allowed them. The gentiles are denoted by Ezekiel after the example of Isaiah, 33: 19, as people "of obscure speech and unintelligible language." So had Isaiah already named the terrible foes who laid waste the land.<sup>1</sup> But to Ezekiel the outward difference of language seemed as a symbol of obtuseness, of mental irreceptivity for the spiritual and divine. Non de dialecto tantum, sed etiam de ipso sermonis argumento hic cogitandum.—*Cocceius*.<sup>2</sup> *עֲמֻקָּה*, deep, here emphatic: unfathomable = unintelligible.

Vs. 6, 7. However much the Israelites may regard themselves as privileged in comparison with the gentile mass—they can hear very well, they can understand the word of Jehovah, they are acquainted with it, for it has often come to them—even so much is there wanting on the other hand their good will (*לֵא יִאֱבֹדוּ*) to give heed to it. In

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Handbuch der Einleitung, I. 1. s. 95.

<sup>2</sup> A kindred phraseology is found also in Arabic; cf. Frähn zu Ibn Foszlan, p. 189 sq., where a remark by Schems-eddin is introduced: "The Varengians are an unintelligibly speaking people that understand scarcely a word;" on which Frähn remarks: "In this expression there seems to be the idea not merely of a distant people with whom the Arabians had no intercourse, and who spoke a language different from theirs and unintelligible by them, but also the idea of stupidity, rudeness, uncultivation, as *βάρβαρος* in Greek." Very aptly Frähn refers to the passage in the Koran, Sur. 18: 92, "a people that understood no language" = barbarian, stupid people.

this respect Israel stands far below his heathen neighbors. Among these the discourse of the prophet would find accord sooner than in Israel. אֲמַלֵּא is to be taken as a formula of swearing, and the clause הֲלִיָּדִים אֲלֵיָּדִים אֲמַלֵּא as hypothetical: verily, were this mission for those heathen, they would hear thee. The prophet declares a principle confirmed by experience. He is doubtless reminded of the memorable event in the life of Jonah, whose unique history exhibited to the disgrace of the covenant people the contrast between impenitent Israel and the heathen city deeply impressed and moved to repentance by the word of the prophet. Rightly, therefore, does Jäger, although indeed acknowledging the harmony for another purpose, speak of Jonah 3: 5 sq. as an actual confirmation of the words of Ezekiel.<sup>1</sup> The country in which Ezekiel now is, reminds him of that history; he is not sent to those people, to whom Jonah was formerly sent and in whose midst he is now living, in order to call forth a new *μετάνοια* in them; he was to make yet one energetic attempt with his own people, cf. Matt. 11: 21. 12: 41.

V. 9. Cf. Is. 50: 7. Jer. 1: 18. 15: 20. יָדָא, most probably the *diamond*, whose hardness was already well known to the ancients.<sup>2</sup>

Vs. 10—15. In conclusion the prophet receives the charge now without delay to enter upon his new office among his countrymen, and to speak unto them as the prophet of the Lord. Therefore, the Spirit bears him away from the scene of the vision, Jerusalem and the temple, back again to his usual place of abode. He hears behind him the noise of the great rushing of the cherubim and their songs of praise to Jehovah. מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, from his place, can denote only the temple, the place where Jehovah makes himself known — מִמְּקוֹמוֹ קָדְשִׁי, Ps. 24: 3. cf. 1 Chron. 16: 27. With this agrees the beginning of the vision, 1: 4, where the ecstatic continuance of the prophet in the sanctuary was intimated. מִמְּקוֹמוֹ stands here in the primary meaning of מָצַא, *to join, to put in a row*, as elsewhere, Gen. 41: 40, with a slight modification of the meaning, *to adjust one's self, to direct*.

V. 14. The prophet allows us next to cast a glance into his own soul, his disposition and conduct. Full of bitter sadness he leaves the scene of the exalted vision—Jehovah's hand sways mightily over him—he remains seven days a mourner among his people. The words מָרַע בְּרִיבָה רִיבָהרָא admit of various explanation. The interpretation of Grotius has become quite common: *valde tristis ob mala imminuentia quorum esse jubebatur κακός ἄγγελος*. But although מָרַע is

<sup>1</sup> Tübingen, Zeitschrift, 1840. 1 H. s. 134, 138.

<sup>2</sup> Plinius. hist. nat. 37: 15, duritia inenarrabilis est. cf. Winer. Realwörterbuch, I. s. 333 ff.



used to denote the emotion of anger as a painful one, yet this is decidedly contrary to the constant meaning of *חַמָּד* which never stands for pain or sorrow, but only for wrath, and by which in the present instance the meaning of *חַמָּד* is more definitely determined. For this reason a return to the former weakness and despondency, 2: 1, cannot here be supposed. What, then, are we to think of the sadness and anger of the prophet? Some may lay stress upon *וַיִּהְיֶה* as if the prophet opposed his own spirit, his natural consciousness to the Divine Spirit, to the Divine influences, which were working in his soul. This has Calvin especially very beautifully set forth: *videtur tacita esse antithesis inter motum illum quo abreptus erat, et inter affectum non quidem prorsus vitiosum, sed qui aliquantum distaret a gratia illa spiritus; quia propheta sic flagrabat zelo, ut fere sui oblitus Dei jussa capesseret.* We may well suppose such a disposition to have been in the prophet after the foregoing description of Israel's relation to his God; now in the moment that he is about to acquit himself of his commission to his people, an indignation overpowers him which needs to be sanctified from above in order not to result in decided transgression. But I confess, that it seems to me this thought must then have been otherwise expressed. The word *חַמָּד* especially appears strange. For whenever merely natural, human and unholy displeasure or anger is spoken of, the Hebrews use *חַמָּד*, cf. Jon. 4: 1. 4: 9, and the many places noticed by Gesenius thes. 2, p. 518. Also here we should certainly then read *וַיִּהְיֶה לוֹ*. On the other hand, Michaelis with true discrimination has defined *חַמָּד*: *nobilis irae nomen, cum fortitudine conjunctae.* This is confirmed by constant Hebrew usage, by etymology, as also by kindred words in Arabic. We therefore take the word in its good sense and compare parallel passages, as Jer. 6: 11, "I am full of the fury of the Lord." Especially Jer. 15: 17, "Because of thy hand (the hand of Jehovah upon the prophet) I sat alone; for thou hast filled me with indignation." It is with Ezekiel as with his contemporary Jeremiah. He, also, in view of the apostasy of the people and the punitive judgments which they deserve, is filled with a holy indignation, that deep emotion united with clear knowledge such as also the New Testament everywhere approves of;<sup>1</sup> for God himself has opened the eye of his Spirit to see the exceeding wickedness of the people and called him to be a herald of judgment; and the seer powerfully feels the hand of Jehovah, the inner movement of the Spirit impelling him to speak the word of the Lord, and which would not suffer him to rest till he had fulfilled the Divine commission.

V. 15. *וַיִּהְיֶה לוֹ חַמָּד* — *וַיִּהְיֶה לוֹ חַמָּד*, Ezra 9: 3, 4. *חַמָּד*,

<sup>1</sup> Vid. Tholuck Commentar zur Bergpredigt s. 171.

literally, one who keeps silence, thence, one who has no intercourse with others, solitary. To sit on the ground, especially to sit in solitude and silence was a sign of sorrow, Job. 2: 13. Lam. 1: 1. 8: 28. cf. also Jer, 15: 17. *Seven days* was the usual time of mourning, Job 2: 13. As Jeremiah, 7: 29 sq., received the direction to put on the deepest mourning and to sound a dirge over his unhappy country, so we see Ezekiel from the outset a mourner, as suited to the purport of the message which he was to communicate. So ought the people in like manner to sit down in penitent sorrow and humiliation before God, but their representative, the solitary servant of God is a sign, how forgetful the multitude around him are of God, and also how just are the judgments of God which are coming upon them. The outward appearance of the prophet was, accordingly, an announcement of something extraordinary, and was a signal to his contemporaries, that by his mouth Jehovah would make known what he purposed concerning Israel.

---

[We subjoin a few notes upon the symbolic character of the vision of Ezekiel from Hitzig's commentary. *Der Prophet Ezechiel, erklärt von Dr. Ferdinand Hitzig, Professor der Theologie in Zürich. Leipzig, 1847.*]

In the description of the theophany, the most prominent point seems to be the fourfold division which is carried through so far as possible, and the most significant application of which is, doubtless, to the faces of the cherubim. Each cherub had four faces. They looked towards the four quarters of the world. In the vision of Isaiah the faces of the seraphim were covered, Is. 6: 2. In the vision of Ezekiel, two wings covered the bodies of the cherubim as a token of reverence, but their faces were not allowed to be covered. Why now must the cherubim look at the same time towards the four quarters of the world? Why are they not permitted to turn round? The matter is plain, if it is meant to be expressed thereby, that God has everything before him; that for him there is no backwards and no forwards. In fact the symbolic character of these creations admits of no doubt. The composition of their forms proves it. Since they never in real life offer themselves to our perception, Ezekiel must have intended by such an image to have expressed an idea; and what is this idea? The cherubim belong to the immediate environment of God, are as it were brought close to his throne; they seem, therefore, to stand in a relation to the idea of God, and to receive their form from

it, as truly as the lions by the throne of Solomon, 1 Kings 10: 19, 20, are symbols of dominion, i. e. of the attributes belonging to the king. Since moreover each cherub has four faces, he sees, even as God does, both *πρόσω και ὀπίσω*, is consequently participant of a specific Divine attribute; and it is highly probable that to denote this idea four faces are given to him. For this purpose, however, four faces of the same kind would be sufficient, but they are of different and specified creatures. That their selection was made with special reference to the idea of God, is in itself probable, and becomes certain, if without constraint they may be shown to signify attributes of God.

If we examine the modes of expression in the Old Testament, the symbols, lion and eagle, are readily explained. The former is undoubtedly an image of the authority and dominion of God as resting upon surpassing strength, Prov. 30: 30. 19: 12. 20: 2. Hos. 11: 10. Amos 3: 8. Jer. 49: 19. The eagle is either an expression of a careful and loving Providence, as Deut. 32: 11. cf. Ex. 19: 2, or rather, since this is less an attribute than an outflow of one, and is limited to Israel, a symbol of perennial life, of eternal youth, Ps. 103: 5. As seeing into the distance, Job 89: 29. cf. 28: 7, the eagle never serves to symbolize the all-seeing eye of God; and as king of birds, as symbol of authority,—Ezek. 17: 3 sq., is no proof—he is foreign to the Old Testament. Man might symbolize the power of God, cf. Gen. 1: 28. 9: 2. Ps. 8: 6, but most probably each face of the cherub has a special meaning. The human face here signifies the intelligence of God. Prov. 30: 2. Job 32: 8. Dan. 7: 4. The ox, finally, Ezekiel might have known as a symbol of Jehovah from the Egyptian idolatry. There, as well as in the service of Siva, the steer was a symbol of generation, and accordingly of creation. But perhaps Moloch not only in Carthage and Crete, but also in Phœnicia and Ammon, bore the head of an ox, and thus the face of an ox in the image of Ezekiel might symbolize annihilating power. Jehovah would thereby be denoted as one who killeth and maketh alive, 1 Sam. 2: 6, as Creator and Destroyer; by the other symbols, as the Eternal, or as the Provider and Preserver, vid. e. g. Ps. 65: 10 sq. 36: 6. Job 38: 39—41, and as searching in understanding and mighty in power, Job 9: 4. 12: 13. Is. 40: 26.