

Ezekiel 1:1-28

The Awesome Throne of God

Here's some of this week's headlines: 3 U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan, Pakistan PM condemns US missile strikes, Somali rebels call for foreign reinforcements, Gunmen kill 10 patients at Mexico rehab clinic, Suicide bomber in Chechnya targets police, One third of Afghan votes fraudulent, US dollar slips to one-year low, 'Bin Laden' tape harangues Obama, Germany boosts terrorism alert level.

These are troubling days we live in. Everyone knows something is up even if they can't put their finger on the specifics. The tension is in the air.

Well, there's good reason. The people who know the most about foreign affairs are the most concerned. The far east is anything but settled down, the middle east is like a time bomb waiting to go off. Leftist groups are increasing and winning more and more followers in Latin America and the radical Islamacists are gaining ground in African countries. Nothing seems steady or certain.

That's the world as it is. But, sad to say, a lot of Christians, who have every reason to know better, are really affected negatively by this world uneasiness.

The events in the world shouldn't take us by surprise. Jesus, didn't say things would get better and better. He said things would get worse and worse.

He said that wars and rumors of wars would increase. He said that the darkest days for the world are the end-time days. If we really believe that Jesus Christ is returning soon we should expect to be living in rough times.

The truth is, the person who really knows the Bible ought to be an incurable optimist. It sounds like a paradox but even though they know troublous times will come and increase they also don't fear the inevitable.

We know some very important things from the scriptures, like, the world can't be destroyed tomorrow by nuclear weapons because there are going to be multitudes around during the coming seven year tribulation period.

There'll be a 200 million man army from the far east. A great number of Gentiles as well as believing Jews, will survive the awesome tribulation days and go into the millennium when Jesus Christ rules.

All this despite the holocaust of those days, so terrible that Jesus said no flesh could survive unless those days were cut short by His supernatural return.

So a Bible believer shouldn't join in the gloom and despair of the culture. A Christian should be calm and stable enough to be busy explaining to those who want to know, what is going to happen on the earth. The person who knows the Bible knows for certain that the world isn't going to be left completely desolate in the wake of a nuclear war or global catastrophe. They know that the world is going to go on for a thousand years after Jesus comes.

Out side the UN building in New York is a statue based on Isaiah 2:4. There Isaiah predicted, *He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

I doubt if too many of the delegates to the UN believe that's ever going to happen. Yet there's no question about it, that time is coming. It's coming but of course it is only going to come through the intervention of God.

God followers are the only people who have a right to be optimists and they have a scriptural ground for it. By contrast, most secular thinkers of the world are pretty gloomy and pessimistic about the future.

How can we be optimistic in today's world? To me, this is the only way it's going to happen. It's going to happen by getting a view of the majestic throne of God and by seeing that God isn't aloof, or unconcerned or incompetent to handle the real problems which face the world. The first chapter of Ezekiel gives us a vision of God's awesome throne.

Turn to Ezekiel chapter 1 page 730.

Here's the setting. God's prophet Ezekiel is with a group of Jews already in captivity. He is living by the canal Chebar that connected the two great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Euphrates and the Tigris. He's in the oldest center of human activity dating back to the Garden of Eden.

He's there because his people, the Jews, are experiencing the judgment of God for disobedience. The nation has been steadily disintegrating. The cup of iniquity has been steadily filling. Soon God will say to Jeremiah, "Don't even pray for this people. The time of delay has passed. Judgment must fall."

This is about it for Jerusalem. In a little while, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (which is in modern day Iraq) will march on Zedekiah the king and destroy Jerusalem and the Jewish temple.

So the perspective is the fall and seeming destruction of the Jewish nation. Everything the Jews had dreamed was seemingly about to go down the drain. The throne of David and the Jewish state were going to come to an end. Worship would no longer be possible. The only place God had put His name and permitted official worship, the temple of Jerusalem, would be torn down.

Thousands would die in the siege from hunger and disease and thousands more will be killed outright by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Those who are left will either be sold into slavery, taken captive to Babylon, or a small group will be left to till the land.

What a comedown for a people who figured God was on their side and that all the nations of the world would be subject to them when Messiah came and took the throne of David. You almost couldn't blame them if they thought that all hope was lost and God wasn't listening.

It was to this time and to this generation that God gave this message of the first chapter of Ezekiel. Even though all seems lost, the throne of God is symbolically revealed in a vision. It's a majestic throne, It's high and lifter up and yet directly related to earth and earth's affairs.

To calm their fears with a divine perspective, God gives this foundational vision at the opening of this prophecy and Ezekiel's ministry. God appeared to Ezekiel to give hope and light in a dark and dismal situation, where there seemed like there wasn't any basis for hope.

God gave this vision to Ezekiel but He had it recorded in the Bible so it's just as relevant to God's people today. Maybe even more so now that we are approaching the end times.

So, just what did God say to Ezekiel and His people and to us centuries later?

We're not going to be able to read through the whole chapter this morning. I want you to go home and do that on your own to get the context. But we're going to pick out 10 things suggested by the words of what at first glance appears to be a very critic vision:

I. There Is A Throne **Read verse 26**

The nations of the world rise and fall, sometimes with startling suddenness. It is good to know that in a world that is in a constant state of change that there is something stable, something solid, something dependable, and something in authority when everything seems to be in chaos.

However distressing the world scene might be it is comforting to know that there is a throne.

What did God want Ezekiel to know? Someone's in charge. Someone's in control even though it might not appear so at first glance. If you don't have the Bible as the lens, history can look like just a random series of events. When you use the Bible you begin to see that God has had a plan and He's been working out that plan over the centuries.

What's hard to see is how the plan's working out when we're in the middle of it. The truth is God's still on His throne.

No believing person has the right to lean over the back fence or over a cup of coffee and woefully agree with a neighbor that everything's out of control.

Think about our message of salvation. Why would our friends want our God if He can't even give us peace?

Do you really believe that God's on a throne? Do you really believe that He's not biting his fingernails and sitting on the edge of His seat wondering what's going to happen next?

The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. (Psalm 103:19)

I. There Is A Throne

II. There Is A Man At The Throne

Verse 26 again... *on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.*

The Bible says *No one has seen God at any time.* (John 1:18) It says *God is Spirit,* (John 4:24) This isn't the Father but the angel of Jehovah, or Jesus Christ. Jesus said that all judgment will be eventually committed unto Him. During the 1000 year reign of

Christ on the earth Jesus Christ will rule from His throne in Jerusalem.

No one can ever complain that they are being judged by a God who doesn't understand them. There is a man at the throne who was down here living among us and understands fully. So, the throne of God is human-oriented and sympathetic, but also holy, righteousness and majestic.

I. There Is A Throne

II. There Is A Man At The Throne

III. The Man At The Throne Is Jesus Christ **Read verses 4-5, 10**

These guys are really intense, aren't they?

I'm not sure how much Ezekiel understood about all this, but in the New Testament Gospels we're given a four-fold picture of Jesus, which is king, servant, man, and God.

Matthew stresses Christ as king. Mark as servant. Luke as man and John as God.

Each of those aspects is shown in this vision. The lion signifies the king. The ox signifies the servant. The man obviously represents man. And the eagle represents God.

God's throne isn't static. Verse 15 says *Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.*

The wheels that Ezekiel writes about aren't flying saucers, like some people want to make them out to be. The imagery is Christ and His throne and notice it's moving over the earth. In other words it is "earth oriented."

The activities of God are concerned with our little speck of dust in an infinite universe. Planet earth. This is where God placed humanity. Regardless of what explanation Richard Dawkins tries to give for the order and design we see in creation, we didn't come in spaceships.

The earth is where the Son of God came. This is where God's plan of redemption is being worked out. This is where a throne of righteousness will one day be set up in Jerusalem for Jesus to rule over all the world.

But we don't need to wait for that day to see an active God in relation to our world.

Thomas Jefferson was a deist. He said that the earth was governed totally by impersonal natural laws and that God hadn't involved with us since creation.

The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar learned a different lesson. God put him down till he learned that *the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.* (Daniel 4:17)

Nothing happens without God's permission. In fact, the Bible says *the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*(Romans 13:1)

God is even using Kim Jong-Il and Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad to further His purpose in this world.

That leads us to point 4 which is this -

IV. God's Throne Is An Active Throne **Read verse 4**

Although the throne of God in Ezekiel's vision is stable, it isn't stationary. There is a constant reference to wheels in this chapter and wheels suggest movement. God is on the move in our world.

We're prone to think that God is up there and that things just "happen" down here. I don't mean to say that every detail that happens in our life has been predetermined by God. You know, if you fall down and skin your knee you don't get up and say, "Thank you God for ordaining my skinned knee."

The Bible doesn't teach fatalism but it does portray God as active. He's not sitting by and letting people act and then trying to salvage what He can out of the mess. He's directing the affairs of the world so that all nations will come to do battle at Armageddon. They will have made the choice to go there and yet God will ultimately be in control of their actions. God's throne is an active throne.

V. God's Throne Is Highly Personal **Verse 20**

You say, "Man what's that all about?" I don't know all the particulars but I do know this, *Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went.* In other words it wasn't the impersonal laws of nature that were ruling. It wasn't the survival of the fittest. A lion can easily kill a rabbit but there's a lot more rabbits than lions in this world.

The weak aren't necessarily overthrown in this wicked world. God's plans often

overrule man's plans. Sometimes great and powerful nations fall when puny nations survive. The survival of Israel since 1948 is a beautiful example of God working in a personal way in the affairs of this world.

I. There Is A Throne

II. There Is A Man At The Throne

III. The Man At The Throne Is Jesus Christ

IV. God's Throne Is An Active Throne

V. God's Throne Is Highly Personal

VI. Intelligence Sits On The Throne **Read verses 16-18**

There were rings, or rims, full of eyes in Ezekiel's vision. He's probably thinking, "Next time I'm skipping the anchovies on the pizza!"

But what this is displaying is that God is omniscient. He knows and sees everything. He's not driving blind as He directs the affairs of planet earth. His actions are always appropriate to the purposes He has in mind for individuals, families, groups and nations.

I like what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 11:33, Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Have you ever stopped and asked yourself, "Just what in the world is God up to?" Remember, there's intelligence on that throne. There is a God who doesn't have a past, present and future. He lives in an eternal now. He knows what He's doing. If you can't figure it all out, don't feel bad. His ways are past finding out.

VII. God's An Irresistible God **Read verse 9**

Remember, these living creatures represent the four-fold character of Jesus Christ. And notice, king, servant, man, God, they're all moving in the same direction.

God's purposes can't be hindered. God can't be diverted. He's moving in a purposeful direction in the world. Not only that but God isn't devious. He isn't trying to pull something on the world. He has spelled out all His plans in advance in the Bible.

We can know that the rapture is coming when believers will be taken from the earth. We know there's a time of tribulation that follows when all the forces of hell will be given free reign on the planet. We know that the nations of the world will gather

together to do battle in the plain of Meddido. And we know that Jesus Christ will return in judgement to set up His 1000 year kingdom. We know that following that thousand years there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

We can never use the excuse that we didn't have the chance to make the right decision. Paul's words in Romans 1 apply to nations as well as individuals - *so that they are without excuse*. To resist God is futile but more than that it is disastrous. He is the irresistible God.

History is His story.

VIII. God's Counter Forces Provide Checks And Balances

Read verse 16

My father was in the cigar business and I can remember going to work with him as a kid and watching the machines that make the cigars. They dump tobacco in this big tub at the top and it drops down just the right amount of material and the machine wraps that up in a binder, cuts out a piece of tobacco from a leaf and wraps it all up, cuts off the end and these little fingers push a cigar out. The whole thing is a bunch of belts and wheels running in all directions with hundreds of parts moving back and forth and it makes a racket like you wouldn't believe. It seems like chaos the first time you walk into a room full of these machines but actually all those belts and wheels are accomplishing a purpose.

So is the throne of God. *The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel*. God doesn't always deal directly with a person or a nation.

His 2nd, 3rd, and 4th causes are all fulfilling His purposes just as effectively as his more obvious primary interventions into human affairs. He can split a Red Sea if He wants to, but that's not His primary way of getting things done.

God uses the various actions of men and nations as checks and balances. God can work things together for good to cause the wrath of men to praise him even though things seem to be going in a hundred different directions.

God was going to use the pagan nation of Babylon to discipline His people, the Jews. They couldn't believe it, but He did.

IX. God's Throne Is A Throne Of Grace **Read verse 28**

The first time we read about a rainbow in the Bible God uses it as a sign that He won't judge the world with another universal flood.

God judges with an ultimate purpose in mind. And the vision lets us know that all the purposes and activities of God's throne are consistent with His grace and mercy. There is a rainbow around the throne.

People try to deny the existence of God by pointing to the injustices in the world. They ask, "Why does God allow pain and suffering? Why hunger and poverty? Why doesn't God just outlaw those things? He is God isn't He?"

God isn't callous to our sufferings. In fact He suffered as no human ever suffered on the cross. He paid for the sins of the world in Christ.

Our rebellious sin is the root cause of our trouble but people don't want to acknowledge that. We all cause pain and suffering to to others at some time in our lives. If God was going to remove all pain He'd have to remove us.

God is at work. The rainbow shows that even in judgment, God is gracious and there is coming a day when there truly will be justice on this earth. The throne is a throne of grace.

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*X. God's Throne Is An Authoritative Throne **Read verse 24***

Ezekiel heard that which was like the voice of the Almighty. All the secular voices in our world crying out for justice and human rights aren't ever going to change people's hearts. They might help some in the externals but they're not going to change people's hearts.

God's throne is an authoritative throne and it will only be by God's authority that

we'll experience peace on earth and an end to war and injustice. That day is coming, but it will only happen under God's rulership over the nations and over our hearts.

Is God at work in the world today? He sure is. And that fact ought to give us comfort no matter what lies ahead for our personal lives, our country, and our world. If anyone had a reason to be depressed it was Ezekiel and yet God gave him a glimpse of His glory and that vision strengthened Ezekiel for all that was to follow.

Catch a glimpse of God's unshakable throne. It will do the same for you.