

Lesson 111

Experiencing God's Glory

God reveals himself in visions of glory to Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The prophet Ezekiel was privileged to experience a vision from God that gave him a glimpse of God's glory. Isaiah and the Apostle John had similar visions. In all three cases, the men of God reacted with complete awe as they saw God's glory. God alone is truly awesome!

Key Passages

Ezekiel 1:1, 1:4, 1:26–28; Isaiah 6:1–5; Revelation 1:12–18

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe Ezekiel's response to God's presence.

Compare the reactions of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John to God's glory.

Memory Verse

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Ezekiel was a prophet in Judah for more than 20 years. He ministered at the same time as the prophets Daniel and Jeremiah.

He was among the captives that Nebuchadnezzar took from Jerusalem in the second wave of the captivity, Jehoiachin's captivity, in 599 BC (2 Kings 24:11–16). There is no other information about Ezekiel outside of his book. His death is not recorded in Scripture, but Jewish tradition says that he was killed at the hands of a prince he was rebuking. Ezekiel was called by God to be a priest and a prophet. His role was to deliver messages of encouragement and calls to repentance to the captives in Babylon. He also told of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 588 BC. He lived along the Chebar River in Babylon—modern-day Syria—with the other captives from Judah. There he saw the heavens open and visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

This vision was extraordinary. Ezekiel was brought into the very presence of God where he witnessed amazing creatures beyond description. In fact, as he wrote down what he experienced, you will notice that Ezekiel referred to the different

parts of the vision as looking “like” something. He was at a loss to articulate in words what he was seeing and was left to use the pale and weak things in this world to describe the glories of the heavenly realm. What Ezekiel saw was surely awesome!

After describing the creatures around God’s throne and the wheels that accompanied them (Ezekiel 1:4–25), Ezekiel shifted his focus to the place where God was: “above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance” (Ezekiel 1:26). God appeared like gleaming metal on fire and brightness all around. The brightness appeared as a rainbow on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord! The glory of God is surely more than can be put into mere words.

In response to this awesome scene, Ezekiel fell on his face as he realized the magnitude of what he was witnessing—an appropriate response to appearing before the King of kings.

As a prophet of God, Ezekiel was being called to a difficult and disheartening task; he was to deliver a message to a rebellious people, whether or not they would listen (Ezekiel 2:3–7). Ezekiel was encouraged by the vision of God and strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 2:2). And so, he was able to stand, hear God’s message, and with courage and power from the Holy Spirit, deliver the message of judgment to God’s people.

God had given Isaiah a similar vision 150 years before Ezekiel. Isaiah, too, was commanded to deliver a message of judgment, one the Israelites would not heed. But like Ezekiel, Isaiah was brought to the holy throne room of God (Isaiah 6). Isaiah witnessed creatures similar to those Ezekiel saw. He heard them crying out before the throne, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). Isaiah’s response to seeing the glory of God was similar to Ezekiel’s—he felt lost and recognized his sinfulness in the presence of a holy God (Isaiah 6:5). Like Ezekiel, Isaiah’s vision not only humbled the prophet, but also equipped him with strength and courage to persevere in the job he had been given—to call the people to repent or face the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Apostle John experienced a similar vision hundreds of years later. The book of Revelation tells us that John heard a loud voice—the Alpha and the Omega. He turned to see the voice and saw one like a son of man. John attempted to describe what he witnessed—Jesus in all of his heavenly glory—in the limited language of this world (Revelation 1:10–16). Like Ezekiel and Isaiah before him, the glory of the Lord humbled him, and he fell at his feet as dead (Revelation 1:17).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Awestruck! That is what Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John were—filled with awe in the presence of God’s glory and holiness. What happened to them? The wonder of what they saw left them weak, humbled, contrite, and facedown before the holiness of God. Awe is a word that is not very common in Western culture, but

one of its forms can be found everywhere. "This cheeseburger is awesome!" "That movie was awesome!" "So-and-so is an awesome actor!"

Really? Do those entities really deserve the description "awesome"? Merriam-Webster defines awe as "an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime." A cheeseburger did that for you? If so, you have turned the cheeseburger into something that it shouldn't be. God, however, should rightly inspire awe in us, and the things he does or has created might do the same. You may have experienced awe at a sunset over the mountains as the colors explode through the clouds, or at the birth of a child. Remember the awe you experienced at salvation or during moments of fellowship with God. It is God and his wonderful works that should inspire such feelings in us.

If we use a word like awesome to refer to everything around us that is remotely better than average, we risk losing an appreciation for the distinctive nature of God and confusing unbelievers when we refer to him as awesome. Surely, when we sing of the awesomeness of God, we are not comparing him to a cheeseburger, so maybe we could find a different word for the cheeseburger and reserve the word awesome for the One who truly is and his works that truly are.

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