

## Prayer

Lead us into Your will Lord God. Guide us in our pathways, show us how to speak and what to say, lighten the darkness of this world, and ease the heavy loads we have to bear. We do not ask for an easy life, but for Your presence by which we know we are not alone, but loved and helped along our way. Thank You Lord God. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*If you are concerned about a someone and you wish to spend time praying for him or her, make the time to ring and discuss your concerns before praying*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the courts of justice:** *Pray earnestly that the courts in your country will remain outside political interference, and capable of being both independent of interference, and just.*
- *Pray for the sports clubs in your area, especially that they take their social responsibility seriously and work to better the lives of young people*
- *Give thanks to God for the gifts He has given you and the freedom to express those gifts. If you do not enjoy that freedom, pray to break down the barriers which prevent it.*

## Meditation

Where may we begin to find peace within this world?

In the company of other believers?  
Whilst doing the work of the Kingdom?  
In the home where love and care abide?  
Lost in 'wonder love and praise'?  
On the streets where Jesus would have us be?  
Speaking out for the poor and the oppressed?  
In a quiet place of Bible study and prayer?

Or is it just that peace may be found when we realise  
That God is there in every circumstance of life,  
And when we open our eyes and see Him  
We will find Him anywhere and everywhere .

That is the beauty of God's peace.

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## Bible passage -Ezekiel 1:4-14

<sup>4</sup> As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. <sup>5</sup> In the middle of it was something like four living creatures.

This was their appearance: they were of human form. <sup>6</sup> Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: <sup>9</sup> their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. <sup>10</sup> As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; <sup>11</sup> such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies.

<sup>12</sup> Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. <sup>13</sup> In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. <sup>14</sup> The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

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## Bible Study

### Review

After the briefest of introductions to his book, Ezekiel records this most powerful and enigmatic vision. It takes up most of chapter 1 and occupies us for two more studies yet. Ezekiel offers no explanation of the amazing sight he records, he simply reports the vision, and it is only at the end of chapter 1 that he dramatically reveals, *'this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD'* (1:28).

Now in Ezekiel's day, faithful Israelites simply did not believe that it was possible to see God *'face to face'* and live. Therefore, when they spoke about God's glory they meant His physical presence on earth, and they believed that this was to be found in the Jerusalem Temple before it was knocked down by the Babylonians. Ezekiel would have been amazed to see a vision of God's glory whilst living in Babylon, but he reported what he saw. God was revealing Himself to His people in the midst of their most desperate national trauma.

The vision is stunning. Ezekiel reports a variety of graphic images, light and movement, and we can almost hear the sound of the storm, wind and fire (1:4), of powerful fluttering wings (1:8,9), and of lightning (1:14). In the midst of this, God appears in the form of four living creatures each of human form, and Ezekiel's description of them is complex and surreal. It is almost impossible for the mind to comprehend this vision fully, but for centuries, artists have interpreted it with remarkable paintings.

To begin with, God approaches Ezekiel like a stormy wind with clouds and fire coming from the north. Traditional Israelite belief associated all of these things with God. In the beginning, God blew His *'breath'* to make the world (the same Hebrew word as *'wind'* – see Genesis 1:1,2), and later on, it was responsible for the creation of human life (Gen 2:7). In addition, God had revealed Himself to Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness in the form of cloud and fire, and He used this means to guide them for forty years (Exodus 13:21, 40:38). Also, although the Old Testament does not highlight this, ancient people of that part of the world believed that the *'gods'* came from the north, a mountainous region of the Middle East, now part of Armenia, Iran and Azerbaijan. This was not a significant belief in Israel, but it is reflected in a number of places in scripture, for example,

*'Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain is beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King.'* (Psalm 48:2)

In the midst of this approaching manifestation, Ezekiel saw four figures *'of human form'* (1:5). These have many remarkable features and we do not know the meaning of them all, but the most notable is the creature's four wings. These demonstrate that they were heavenly not earthly beings, and Ezekiel's description of them is almost beyond our comprehension. He says that the wings *'touched one another'*. Then he says in verse 11 that the touching pairs of wings were spread out above the figures, whilst pairs of wings covered their bodies. Then in verse 12, he describes the creatures as moving straight ahead with purpose and unity. It is not easy to put all this together in our minds, but it does not read like a picture of anything worldly!

If we stop trying to make sense of the details of this vision, we may see more clearly its most important truth. God is seen on earth in human form, and more than this, He is coming towards His people with energy and vitality. Today, we may be captivated by the amazing sight of this vision is, but Ezekiel was probably more astonished by the fact that God was coming to meet him and the people of Israel in the midst of their suffering in Babylon. The dramatic lightning, lights and fire of verse 13 all indicate God's coming with power and authority, ready to act in this world.

Today, Christians are used to thinking of God as *'one in three and three in one'*. We are familiar with the concept of the Trinity, which describes God as Father and Son and Holy Spirit. It may seem odd therefore, to read the Old Testament vision about God in the form of four living creatures, not three. We could say that these living creatures are angels, but this only distracts us from the essential message of these verses, which is that God is coming! Now this vision presents us with a myriad fascinating questions to ask and

answer. For example, what do the four faces of God mean? What is the significance of the burning coals, the torches and the lightning? There is much to explore, but essentially, this is a vision of God Himself. Our first response must therefore be of awe.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage of Scripture tell you about the nature of God?
2. What parts of this passage are a total mystery to you? Within your group, share what you know about this passage, for the benefit of all.
3. What would it mean to you to see God coming into your own life right now, with power and ready to act? What is the difference between what you would like Him to do and what He might wish to do for you?

### **Personal comments by author**

*Personally, I find it very difficult to write a brief commentary upon the passage such as this. It is one of the most stunning and amazing passages of the Old Testament, and theses could be written about almost any sentence within it. Yet just as I have written above and as suggested in the group questions, I find the thought of God coming with power and ready to help his own people to be awe-inspiring. The vision is no dead piece of literature, it describes how God works in his world. If we want to explore its details, this must be borne in mind.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Take a few private moments to sit down and read carefully through this passage of Scripture. Let its graphic images penetrate your mind and spirit, and see what God is saying to you through this most remarkable passage.*
  - *How can God working power to help his people in the world today? Discuss this with someone close to you, and pray for God to come in power.*
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## Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have intervened in human history through thousands of years of history. Bless us with Your presence now, and may our trust in You be not just for the future, but for the present. You have done great things in the past, and will do great things in the future. Work among us now we pray. AMEN

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