



## What Overwhelms You?

Ezekiel 1-3

Doug Dunton

July 15, 2012

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I'm thankful to Pastor Sunday for the privilege of speaking. Along with that invitation came an assignment. He asked if I could preach from Ezekiel 1-3. My answer was yes because I had wheels and lightening going off in my mind. I've never preached a sermon out of Ezekiel. I've done overviews and Bible surveys but I've always kind of shrunk back from this book. I found in studying that I'm not alone when it comes to preaching Ezekiel because of the difficulty in interpreting the figurative language and the visions in this prophecy. The book of Ezekiel is the most neglected of all the prophets. It seems as though many are afraid of maybe saying too much or too little. How do we interpret these visions and images? I'm going to read some selected passages from Ezekiel 1-3 to help give us a flow of the context of these three chapters.

*<sup>1</sup>In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. <sup>2</sup>On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), <sup>3</sup>the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.<sup>4</sup> As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal, <sup>5</sup>And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures...*

*<sup>15</sup>Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.*

*<sup>22</sup>Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. <sup>23</sup>And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. <sup>24</sup>And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty...*

*<sup>26</sup>And 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.*

*<sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.*

*<sup>2:1</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man stand on your feet, and I will speak with you."<sup>2</sup> And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me...*

*<sup>3:1</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."<sup>2</sup> So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.*

*<sup>15</sup> And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.*

*<sup>27</sup> But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.*

Father, I thank You for these words. These are truly ancient words and yet they are ever true. Our prayer is that they will speak to us and change each of us. May our hearts be open to receive the truth. He that has an ear, let him hear that he would be saved, encouraged and strengthened. As we just read, there will be some who are rebellious because that's what is in their hearts. They do not want to see the glory of God and receive the Word of truth. We know You are able to soften those hearts. May we see You Lord Jesus, high and lifted up. May we rejoice in the glory of the cross. We thank You Lord Jesus for what You are going to do. You have said it. You are doing it. We submit to You with great joy and expectation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What overwhelms you? I can see your wheels turning. Not the wheels of Ezekiel 1 but the wheels within your brains and hearts. When we think of being overwhelmed we think of many things. Let me give you a brief definition. Overwhelmed means to be moved deeply in grief or in kindness. Overwhelmed is the idea of being covered as it were with water.

To illustrate the point, to be overwhelmed often involves personal issues. As individuals we have issues. How do we manage without them overwhelming us? We have

family issues, financial issues and issues with priorities in our lives. Our government has financial and political issues. These issues can overwhelm us. Have you ever laid in bed in the morning thinking of everything you have to do during the day? You can hardly get out of bed. It's as though an elephant is on your chest. You are overwhelmed.

Have you ever been overwhelmed with little projects? Just recently I had one of these little 20 minute projects. Have you ever had one of those around the house? All I had to do was change a little lens and a light in the bathroom fan. I went to the store to buy the lens and they no longer carry that size lens. Okay, well what do I do? They said I'll have to buy the whole unit. Okay, well my unit is this dimension. They replied we don't sell that dimension any longer. So I went online. Google has everything, right? I couldn't find it. So I had to buy the closest unit of its size, tear down the unit in our bathroom, cut a new hole, go into the attic and change all the wiring. A 20 minute project changing the lens in a light. I was becoming exasperated. It was overwhelming me. I had insulation in me, on me, outside of me. How does this happen?

We know what it means to be overwhelmed don't we? The word "overwhelmed" usually comes to us in the negative but many times it comes to us in the positive. A few weeks ago I was in Ethiopia. I was invited to a gathering of people who had received our training. I had taught 30 guys; now there were over 300 in the auditorium who were passionate about preaching the Word of God. Their lives had been transformed and their ministries changed. I sat there overwhelmed by what God was doing.

Could it be that God wants us to be overwhelmed with what He is doing and Who He is rather than our circumstances and issues? I believe it is. Those negative things that overwhelm us affect us in a way that becomes a very long, dark and downward spiral. But just the opposite is true of those things that affect us in the positive, reflecting on the glory of God. As we are ushered into the glory of God, the glory of the cross, the power of the Word of God, our focus begins to change. The things of this world start to become faint in the light of His glory and grace.

Ezekiel conveys that a prophet is overwhelmed with the glory of God which completely occupies his life and ministry. That grips my heart. He is so occupied with the glory of God in this vision he has received that it occupies his time and energy. It becomes a priority and focus of his life and ministry by the revelation of God. Therefore, we must see His glory and be overwhelmed and respond just as Ezekiel did. I pray that takes place in our lives.

To provide a little background, Ezekiel's name means God's strength. God was his strength. He was a man who was 30 years old when God called him into ministry. We saw that in verse one. He was exiled, taken in the second deportation from Jerusalem to Babylon. Daniel was taken in the first deportation. Instead of doing priestly duties, Ezekiel finds himself in exile.

At 30 years of age he should be a temple attendant. He should be taking care of worship. He should be in the presence of God in the temple of God. Instead he finds himself exiled. Ezekiel could have become bitter about that. "God what are you doing? It's my time to be a temple attendant." But instead we find him married. He has his own home. He is in exile five years when the Lord comes and speaks to him. Ezekiel is a contemporary with Jeremiah. As Jeremiah was ministering to the people back home, Ezekiel was now to preach to the people who were captive in Babylon.

What's interesting is nothing from the book of Ezekiel is directly quoted any other place in the rest of Scripture. However, his vision highly impacts several different Biblical writers, especially John's vision of the throne of God in Revelation. Ezekiel mentions Daniel four times. I think it's interesting that you have these contemporaries and he is alluding to the prophecies and the ministry of Daniel who preceded him in exile. Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to be an Ezekiel.

The book of Ezekiel is filled with personal experiences. God wanted his life to be an example. If God wants your life to be an example, hold on and get ready because who knows what God is going to do. God shut him up, tied his tongue, made him mute for years and charged him to lay on his right side and then his left side for 430 days. He wasn't even allowed to mourn his wife's death. In chapter 24 he lost his speech again. All of this happened because God wanted him to be an example to Israel, saying this is who you are, this is what is going to happen to you.

But God met him in exile. I want us to be encouraged by that. God met him in an unexpected place. God doesn't meet all of us in the same place, the same time, the same way but He always uses His Word. God called Moses in the wilderness, not in a palace. God called Samuel as a young man in the shadow of the High Priest. God called Elisha to serve as an apprentice to Elijah. God called Ezekiel in exile, not in the temple. God called Amos when he was a shepherd from the south to preach to the north. God called John the apostle on the Island of Patmos, not in a church.

Where did God meet you? God meets us in different places. God met me in the bedroom as an eight year old. My mother opened the Scriptures and led me to Christ. My wife met God at a funeral. How about you? Where did God meet you? It's always different but His Word is always there. We need to be encouraged by this.

Where is God going to meet that family member you are praying for? The loved one you care desperately for who doesn't have saving faith or evidence of faith in his or her life? Where is God going to meet those neighbors, those friends, those individuals we're praying for? He meets us all in different ways and places but He always meets us through the revelation of Himself through the Word and the gospel.

Ezekiel was overwhelmed. We have a little snapshot in this introduction of Ezekiel. I want to present three good reasons why Ezekiel was overwhelmed.

- First, because of what he saw.
- Second, because of what was said to him.
- Thirdly, because of what he had to do.

Ezekiel had a vision, a calling and a mission.

## **1. Ezekiel's Vision – Chapter 1**

Ezekiel was overwhelmed because of the vision of the Glory of God. I want us to see that before Ezekiel saw this vision the hand of the Lord was upon him there in Ezekiel 1:3. We need to pick up on that phrase and idea that the power of God is upon him is mentioned four times in these three chapters; the hand of the Lord is upon him or the Spirit of the Lord entered him.

It will be impossible to respond in a positive fashion and be overwhelmed positively if the power of God is not in us. We cannot do it in our own strength. Have you tried? I have. I cannot do it on my own strength. We cannot be overwhelmed with the glory and presence of God and have the courage we need to obey God without the power of God at work in our lives. Before Ezekiel saw, the hand of the Lord was stretched out upon him. Before he was called, the Spirit of the Lord entered him. Before he set out on his mission, the hand of the Lord was upon him. We need God's help. Jesus said without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

So Ezekiel is given a vision to describe God. If someone asked you to describe God, what would you say? A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into your mind when you think of God is the most important thing about you." I wonder why? Who God is or what we think He is

shapes our worldview. Many of us think God is our grandfather—he's wise but old and frail. Some think of Him as the Big Man upstairs. Others ask, "Is He really all powerful?"

Ezekiel says in 1:1, "*...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.*" The curtain is pulled back and we get to see Who God is. He's not the Old Man upstairs. He's full of power. What we think of God shapes our lives.

Ezekiel gives us three distinct descriptions in this vision. The first is the living creatures. They've come in a dust storm and there has been a vision that's been altered and yet this is some type of supernatural event that's taking place. Ezekiel understands that. In verse five, the four living creatures are out to support the platform of Yahweh's throne. They are extraordinary beings. I can't go into all the details and facets of what is going on. I can give you some of my thoughts and ideas of what I've read but I think the point we want to take away from this is the extraordinary, awesome description of God and His glory on His throne.

We see these four living creatures and they have four faces. One had the face of a man, one of a lion, one of an ox and one of an eagle. Four beings, each being having four faces. Interpret that. What is Ezekiel seeing? These creatures symbolize most likely the glory and power of God. They can see in every direction and move in all directions without even turning. How would you describe God? Living creatures, wings with various functions—wings to fly, wings to stretch out, wings that touched tip-to-tip. This type of square communicates the idea of a comprehensive viewpoint.

Who is God? He is omniscient. God sees all. We trick ourselves into thinking God doesn't see us. We do things at night so He doesn't see us. We find dark places physically or in our hearts. God sees all. He is the all-seeing, all knowing—omniscient—God. The creatures constitute a hollow square with Ezekiel right in the middle. But these creatures don't move on their own. Verse 12 says the Spirit animates them and enlivens them to act and move in concert. This is well orchestrated; four creatures, many wings, many faces. Verse 13 says they were like burning coals in the midst of this hollow square with flashes of lightening and torches of fire. These illustrate what? God's terrifying presence just as there was thunder, lightning and fire at the giving of the Law, so once again we see the throne of God. How would you describe God? What is Ezekiel really seeing? Are you drawing this scene in your mind's eye? I spent time looking at several drawings of this throne room.

The second description continues in verse 15 of wheels. The living creatures, the cherubim and now the idea of the wheels as if they were gyroscopes one going this way, one going that way, and another one going a third direction but they're always moving. Do you know what they have on them? Verse 18 says, "*And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.*" Just when you thought it was getting strange, there are eyes all over this gyroscope within these living creatures. Heaven opened.

Ezekiel is in exile and he's peering into Heaven. Is it the Old Man upstairs? No. The vision is not over. He keeps seeing more. Verse 22 says, "*Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal...*" Someone called this a huge wok sitting on top of these living creatures and wheels and this expansive room. Under these wings they were stretching out, going wherever they would go. There was movement all about, continuously communicating the awesome power of God. God is on His throne and He will accomplish what He will in this world.

In verse 26, Ezekiel sees him as a man in the likeness of a human. Verse 27 says, "*Upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around.*" Do you notice these words: like, likeness and appearance? Do you know why he used words like that? Not because you're from the Valley in California. It's because you lack the ability to articulate what you're seeing. "I don't know what this is. It's like... It reminds me of..." I don't care how extensive your ability to articulate is, when you see God you will struggle to describe Who He is.

What would you do if you saw this vision? "Hey, let me tell you what I just saw." Isn't that what we do? We get on our cell phones and call everybody saying, "Do you know what I just saw?"

Recently, we were seated on a plane traveling to Fort Lauderdale. People were boarding the plane and a really tall African-American man came on board. He had to duck. He had a baseball cap pulled down on his head, dark glasses and ear-buds communicating, "Here I am; everyone talk to me." Right? No. He got on and it was Scottie Pippen. He sat beside us. My wife was anxious to get his autograph. She asks, "Scottie, do you mind if I have your autograph?" He says, "Sure, no problem." And signed her napkin. What did we do immediately? We started telling everyone. "Hey, we saw Scottie Pippen. We got his autograph." As a matter of fact my wife took her picture with Scottie at the baggage claim area and we showed everybody!

Who did Ezekiel see? He saw God. Did he tell everybody? No. Verse 28 says, “*Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face...*” When you see a rainbow, the seven colors are kind of merged together. You don’t see them all crisply.

Ezekiel said such was, “*...like the appearance...like the glory of the Lord.*” If you really see Who God is, you fall on your face. God humbled Ezekiel. We see that in the lives of Moses, Isaiah, Paul and John. Those who really saw some type of formal revelation of God fell on their face. John said he fell on his face as a dead man. They knew they had seen something extraordinary—they had seen God.

How would you describe God? Even if you think he’s pure, holy, great and awesome you wouldn’t be able to articulate it. Psalm 50:1 says God is not like us. Mormonism believes in eternal progress which says what God is, man may become. That’s a lie from the Garden, isn’t it? “If you eat, you will become like God” (Genesis 3:5).

How does reflecting on the glory and character of God affect you? Does it affect you the way Scripture unveils Who God is or do you view Him more the way Hollywood depicts God? How do you see God?

Several years ago I was at a conference when John Piper was speaking on the holiness of God. Piper was filled with the Spirit, speaking boldly. As he was speaking, I found myself shrinking in my chair. At the end, there were several young people around and they were saying, “Can you believe the way he said that? Did you hear what he said about that?” One of the older guys in the group said, “We just need to sit and be quiet. We need to soak in what was just delivered to us.”

God keep us from being so quick to talk about the homiletic impact of a message or the academic vigor with which the speaker communicated. Can we just soak in Who God is? He changes lives. Once you see God, your life will be changed. Would we respond to God in humility, falling on our face? Philippians 2:5-6 says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...” Jesus was God of Gods. He says every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:19). If we see who He is, we will respond in humility.

Ezekiel responds in humility and is ready to do what God asks him to do. God picks him up in chapter two and gives him a message. God said, "I'm going to give you a word and I want you to say what I say."

## **2. Ezekiel's Calling – Chapter 2**

Ezekiel was overwhelmed with the calling to be a mouthpiece for God. Primarily we'll see this calling is to preach to a rebellious people. This idea of rebellion is repeated over 20 times. There is no desire within them to follow the Lord. God wants Ezekiel to preach the Word. D.A. Carson said,

"A man with a vision of the glory of God has a potent message for men. A man without a vision of God would be a false prophet. A vision without a man to preach the Lord's message to men would be useless."

God gave Ezekiel a message and he was ready to go and preach and do what God asked him to do.

In Ezekiel 2:5-6 God said, "Don't be afraid Ezekiel; don't be rebellious like them. Be willing to go and do. Are you willing? I have a scroll that's written on the front and back that is a comprehensive understanding of God and His Word. Will you eat it?" Ezekiel ate it. Verse ten says it was full of lamentation, mourning and woe but Ezekiel said it was sweet.

What type of man loves to preach lamentation, mourning and woe? A man who has seen God. He knows it's a message for the people's own good. God calls him "son of man" six times in this chapter and says, "Remember who you are. Say what I want you to say."

A preacher has the opportunity to say what he wants to say or say what God wants him to say. Every time we pretend to be a mouthpiece for God, we have those two options. When you speak, you should only say, "Thus says the Lord." God gives Ezekiel an extraordinary call to deliver the message of mourning, lamentation and woe. Ezekiel says, "I will do it."

These types of men are men of courage. These are the types of men we need who will go and share the Word of God with faith and confidence that God has said it. God uses His Word to condemn and judge but He also uses His Word to save and transform. Do we believe that?

### 3. Ezekiel's Mission – Chapter 3

Ezekiel is overwhelmed because he's been given a very hard mission. Ezekiel 3:27 says, "*He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are rebellious.*" Ezekiel has to preach a message of lamentation, mourning and woe to his own brothers and sisters. He doesn't do it with glee or joy. God is not angry. The heart of God is full of mercy, longsuffering and lovingkindness. God puts that heart in this illustration and proves it. In Ezekiel 3:15 we find Ezekiel sitting right where his brothers and sister were dwelling. He wasn't far away from them. He wasn't outside their camp. He sat "*where they were dwelling...overwhelmed among them seven days.*" This wasn't going to be an easy message.

Are you willing to go where people are hurting to preach a hard message that can either be received with joy unto salvation or not? Ezekiel is challenged in the rest of chapter three to go and be this watchman who will look out and warn them when trouble is ahead. We know historically it's going to be another six years and Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. Repent!

God causes Ezekiel to have a hard head, a face of flint; to be very hard like a rock because he's going to have a message that's butting heads against others who won't listen. Have we ever had that kind of ministry? Do you have a family member or neighbor you're trying to share the gospel with and you feel like you're just banging your head against a wall? But we're called to be the watchmen who are faithfully warning. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*"

Ezekiel had a hard message. He was overwhelmed with the vision of God and his call to say "thus says the Lord" and the head butting mission to a rebellious people. With the heart of God, Ezekiel was loving, patient and longsuffering; not driving his own agenda but only doing what God had called him to do.

Are we overwhelmed with God and His glory, fulfilling our calling and mission? John 1:14 says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Have you seen Him, the Lord Jesus Christ?

Revelation 4 and 5 talk about the throne room of God using much of the same imagery but we see there it is the Lamb from the Tribe of Judah Who was slain and Who is worthy to open the seals in the throne room of God. He is the One we worship. He is the

One Who is worthy. If you see Him in all His glory, He will overwhelm you and He will set the agenda and priorities in your life.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

(Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus by Helen H. Lemmel)

I trust you are overwhelmed with just a glimpse into the throne room of God. May we go and do the hard work of head butting ministry, sharing the Word, warning people, “Thus says the Lord, a day of judgment is coming.” Do we love our neighbors and our family members or are we afraid? May God help us.

Father thank You for these few moments. I pray that we’ve brought glory to You. Father I pray for those who continue to be overwhelmed with the circumstances of life. I pray that each of us will have a glimpse of who You are. Words cannot adequately describe You but we do understand that You are holy, omniscient, omnipresent and all powerful. May the things of this world truly grow strangely dim in the light of Your glory and grace. Help us Lord Jesus. Be glorified. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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