

Ezekiel 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

Analysis

This verse introduces the theophany with apocalyptic imagery conveying both terror and majesty. The 'whirlwind from the north' (ruach se'arah min hatsafon) carries double meaning: meteorologically, storms in Israel typically came from the north via the Mediterranean; symbolically, Babylon lay north of Judah, and judgment came from that direction. The 'great cloud' and 'fire infolding itself' (esh mitlaqqachat) describe fire folding back upon itself in continuous motion, depicting divine energy and holiness. The Hebrew phrase suggests fire catching and flashing within the cloud, creating an awesome display. The 'brightness' (nogah) and 'amber' (chashmal)—possibly electrum, a gold-silver alloy—emphasize the glory's radiance and preciousness. This theophany echoes Sinai's manifestation (Exodus 19:16-18) while surpassing it in complexity and detail, revealing that the covenant God who appeared to Moses now appears to the exiles.

Historical Context

Ezekiel's vision draws on ancient Near Eastern throne-theophany traditions while remaining distinctly Yahwistic. Mesopotamian art depicted deities with animal attendants and storm imagery, but Ezekiel's vision transcends pagan mythology by emphasizing the incomparability and transcendence of Israel's God. The exiles, surrounded by Babylonian temples with their elaborate iconography of Marduk

and other deities, needed reassurance that Yahweh remained supreme. The vision's complexity and strangeness defied artistic representation, deliberately preventing idolatrous reproduction while overwhelming the imagination with divine glory.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the terrifying aspect of God's glory challenge contemporary tendencies to domesticate God into a comfortable deity?
2. What does the 'fire infolding itself' suggest about God's inexhaustible, self-sustaining holiness?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּאָרָא And I looked H7200	וַהֲנִיָּה H2009	וַיֵּרָא and behold a whirlwind H7307	הִסְעָרָה H5591	בָּאָה came H935	מִן H4480
הַצָּפֹן out of the north H6828	עָנָן cloud H6051	גָּדוֹל a great H1419	וְהָאֵשׁ and a fire H784	מִתְלַקֵּחַת infolding H3947	וְנֹגַהּ itself and a brightness H5051
לִי H0	סָבִיב was about H5439	מִתּוֹךְ it and out of the midst H8432	כְּעֵיִן thereof as the colour H5869	הַחֲשֵׁמֶל of amber H2830	
	מִתּוֹךְ it and out of the midst H8432	וְהָאֵשׁ and a fire H784			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 1:27 (Parallel theme): And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

Ezekiel 8:2 (Parallel theme): Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber.

Jeremiah 23:19 (Parallel theme): Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.

Isaiah 21:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.

Jeremiah 25:32 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.