

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

וְאֵרֶא	וַיַּהֲפֹה	רְאֵם	רְאֵם	סָעֵךְ הַ	מִן
And I looked	H2009	and behold a whirlwind	H5591	came	H4480
H7200		H7307		H935	
בְּפָאָגֶן	מַתְלָךְ	סָתָת	בְּפָאָשָׁה	מִתְלָאָכָה	בְּגָהָה
out of the north	cloud	a great	and a fire	infolding	itself and a brightness
H6828	H6051	H1419	H784	H3947	H5051
מִתְבָּשֵׂם	לְ	בְּ	כְּעֵד	בְּ	בְּ
was about	it and out of the midst	thereof as the colour	of amber		
H0	H8432	H8432	H5869	H2830	
מִתְבָּשֵׂם	לְ	בְּ	כְּעֵד	בְּ	בְּ
it and out of the midst	and a fire				
H8432	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.