

The Wheel of Fortune versus the Wheel of God Ezekiel 1:4

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 67-68, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

Compare Lamentations 5:19

“You, O LORD, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation.”

The throne of God is set in opposition to chance or uncertain changes which ungodly men dream of; for when they see things in great confusion in the world, they say that it is the **wheel of fortune**, they say that all things happen through blind fate.¹

Ezekiel 1:4

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

. . . **As to the four wheels, I do not doubt their signifying those changes which we commonly call revolutions:** for we see the world continually changing and putting on, as it were, new faces, *each* being represented by a fresh revolution of the wheel, effected [brought about] by either its own or by some external impulse. Since, then, there exists no fixed condition of the world, but continual changes are discerned, the Prophet joins the wheels to the angels, as if he would assert **that no changes occur by chance, but depend upon some agency, namely, that of angels;** not that they move things by their inherent power, but because **they are**, as we have said, **God’s hands**.

And because these changes are really contortions, the Prophet says, *I saw wheel within wheel;* for the course of things is not continuous, but when God begins to do anything, He seems, as we shall again perceive, to recede: then many things mutually concur, from which **the Stoics** fancied that fate arose from what they called a connection of causes.

But **God here teaches His people far otherwise, namely, that the changes of the world are so connected together, that all motion depends upon the angels, whom He guides according to His will.** Hence the wheels are said to be full of eyes.

I think that God opposed this form of the wheels to the foolish opinion of men, because **men fancy Fortune blind**, and that all things roll on in a kind of turbulent confusion. God, then, when He compares the changes which happen in the world to wheels, calls them “full of eyes,” to show that **nothing is done with rashness or through the blind impulse of fortune.**

¹ From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations*, trans. Rev. John Owen (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. V, 512, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

This imagination surely arises from our blindness: we are blind in the midst of light, and therefore when God works, we think that he turns all things upside down; and because we dare not utter such gross blasphemy against Him, we say that Fortune acts without consideration, but in the meantime we transfer the empire of God to Fortune itself.

Seneca tells a story of a jester belonging to his wife's father, who, when he lost the use of his eyes through old age, exclaimed that he had done nothing to deserve being cast into darkness—for he thought that the sun no longer gave light to the world; but the blindness was in himself. This is our condition: we are blind, as I have already said, and yet we wish to throw the cause of our blindness upon God Himself; and because we do not dare openly to bring a charge against Him, we impose upon Him the name of fortune; and for this reason the Prophet says the wheels have eyes. We now understand the scope of the vision, and we must next approach its several parts. . . .