

THE THIRD PART
of
The Guide of the Perplexed

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*In the name of the Lord, God of the World*¹

[INTRODUCTION]

We have already made it clear several times that the chief aim of this Treatise is to explain what can be explained of the *Account of the Beginning* and the *Account of the Chariot*, with a view to him for whom this Treatise has been composed. We have already made it clear that these matters belong to *the mysteries of the Torah*, and you know that [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, blame those who divulge *the mysteries of the Torah*. They, *may their memory be blessed*, have already made it clear that the reward of him who conceals *the mysteries of the Torah*, which are clear and manifest to the men of speculation, is very great. At the conclusion of *Pesaḥim*, when speaking of the signification of the dictum²—*For her gain shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat their fill, and limekhasse athiq*³—they say: *For him who covers the things revealed by the Ancient of Days, namely, the mysteries of the Torah*.⁴ Understand the extent of that toward which they give guidance, if you are of those that understand. They have already made it clear how secret the *Account of the Chariot* was and how foreign to the mind of the multitude. And it has been made clear that even that portion of it that becomes clear to him who has been given access to the understanding of it, is subject to a legal prohibition against its being taught and explained except orally to one man having certain stated qualities, and even to that one only the *chapter headings* may be mentioned. This | is the reason why the knowledge of this matter has ceased to exist in the entire religious community, so that nothing great or small remains of it. And it had to happen like this, for this knowledge was only transmitted from one chief⁵ to another and has never been set down in writing. If this is so, what stratagem can I use to draw attention toward that which may have appeared to me as indubitably clear, manifest, and evident in my opinion, according to what I have understood in these matters? On the other hand, if I had omitted setting down something of that which has appeared to me as clear,

1. Gen. 21:33. Cf. above, Epistle Dedicatory, n. 1. 2. Isa. 23:18.

3. Translated in the English Bible: *for stately clothing*. The meaning of these two words is not clear. They may signify: *in order to have luxurious garments*. Taken literally, however, they may mean: *for him who covers the Ancient*. The latter seems to be the interpretation adopted in the talmudic passage quoted in the text.

4. B.T., *Pesaḥim*, 119a.

5. *ṣadr*. The Arabic word means both "breast" and "chief" or "principal."

so that that knowledge would perish when I perish, as is inevitable, I should have considered that conduct as extremely cowardly with regard to you and everyone who is perplexed. It would have been, as it were, robbing one who deserves the truth of the truth, or begrudging an heir his inheritance. And both those traits are blameworthy. On the other hand, as has been stated before, an explicit exposition of this knowledge is denied by a legal prohibition, in addition to that which is imposed by judgment.⁶ In addition to this there is the fact that in that which has occurred to me with regard to these matters, I followed conjecture and supposition; no divine revelation has come to me to teach me that the intention in the matter in question was such and such, nor did I receive what I believe in these matters from a teacher. But the texts of the prophetic books and the dicta of the *Sages*, together with the speculative premises that I possess, showed me that things are indubitably so and so. Yet it is possible that they are different and that something else is intended. Now rightly guided reflection and divine aid in this matter have moved me to a position, which I shall describe. Namely, I shall interpret to you that which was said by *Ezekiel the prophet*, peace be on him, in such a way that anyone who heard that interpretation would think that I do not say anything over and beyond what is indicated by the text, but that it is as if I translated words from one language to another or summarized the meaning of the external sense of the speech. On the other hand, if that interpretation is examined with a perfect care by him for whom this Treatise is composed and who has understood | all its chapters — every chapter in its turn — the whole matter, which has become clear and manifest to me, will become clear to him so that nothing in it will remain hidden from him. This is the ultimate term that it is possible to attain in combining utility⁷ for everyone with abstention from explicit statements in teaching anything about this subject — as is obligatory.⁸

After this introduction has preceded, apply your mind to the chapters that will follow concerning this great, noble, and sublime subject, which is *a stake upon which everything hangs and a pillar upon which everything is supported*.⁹

6. *ra'y*. Literally: opinion. 7. Or: teaching.

8. Syntactically it is not clear in the Arabic text whether the words rendered "as is obligatory" refer to "in combining" or to "abstention." The sense of the sentence is not affected.

9. The Hebrew does not seem to be an exact quotation. The first part of the phrase (up through "everything hangs") has a parallel in J.T., Berakhoth, IV, 19a; the second part, in the Bible, Judg. 16:26.

CHAPTER 1

It is known that there are men the form of whose faces resembles that of one of the other animals, so that one may see an individual whose face resembles that of a lion and another individual whose face resembles that of an ox and so forth. It is according to the shapes that tend to have a likeness to those of animals that people are nicknamed. Thus his saying: *The face of an ox and the face of a lion and the face of an eagle;*¹ all of them merely indicate *the face of a man* that tends to have a likeness to forms belonging to these species. Two proofs indicate this to you. One of them is his saying with regard to the *living creatures* in general: *And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.*² Thereafter he describes every *living creature* among them as having *the face of a man and the face of an eagle and the face of a lion and the face of an ox*. The second proof is his explanation in the second *Chariot*, which he set forth in order to explain things left obscure in the first *Chariot*. He says in the second *Chariot*: | *And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.*³ Thus he explicitly indicates that what he had called *the face of an ox* is *the face of the cherub*. Now *cherub* designates a human being of tender age. With regard to the two remaining faces, the analogy likewise applies. Also he has omitted in this passage *the face of an ox* in order to draw attention to a certain derivation of words, as we have indicated in a flash.⁴ It is impossible to say: Perhaps this was an apprehension of other forms. For he says at the end of this second description: *This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Khebar.*⁵ Thus that which we have begun to make clear has already become clear.

CHAPTER 2

He¹ states that he saw four *living creatures* and that every *living creature* among them had four faces, four wings, and two hands. As a whole, the form of each creature was that of a man; as he says: *They had the likeness of a man.*² He also states that their two hands were likewise the hands of a man,

1. Ezek. 1:10. 2. Ezek. 1:5. 3. Ezek. 10:14. 4. Cf. II 43. 5. Ezek. 10:20.
1. Ezekiel. 2. Ezek. 1:5.

it being known that a man's hands are indubitably formed as they are in order to be engaged in the arts of craftsmanship. Then he states that their feet are straight; he means that they have no articulations. This is the meaning of his dictum, *straight feet*,³ according to its external sense. [The Sages] have likewise said: *And their feet were straight feet—this teaches [us] that above,⁴ there is no sitting.⁵* Understand this also. Then he states that the soles of their two feet, which are instruments for walking, are not like the feet of a man, whereas their hands | are like the hands of a man. For the feet were round, *Like the sole of a calf's [ʿegel] foot.⁶* Then he states that there is no interval and no space between those four *living creatures*, each of them adhering to the other; he says, *Coupled together, a woman to her sister.⁷* Then he states that though they adhered to one another, their faces and their wings were separated above; he says: *And their faces and their wings were separated above.⁸* Consider his saying *above*. For only the bodies adhered to one another, whereas their faces and their wings were separated, but only from above. That is why he says: *And their faces and their wings were separated above.* Then he states that they were brilliant *like the color of burnished brass.⁹* Then he states that they also gave light; he says: *Their appearance was like coals of fire.¹⁰* This is all that he says concerning the form of the *living creatures*, I mean their shape, their substance, their forms, their wings, their hands, and their feet.

Then he began to describe the manner of the motions of these *living creatures*. Regarding these he states that which you will hear. He says that in the motions of the *living creatures*, there was no turning, no deviation, and no curve, but only one motion. For he says: *They turned not when they went.¹¹* Then he states that each of the *living creatures* went in the direction toward which its face was turned. For he says: *Each goes in the direction of its face.¹²* Thus he makes it clear that each *living creature* went only in the direction that was contiguous to its face. Would only that I knew to which face, for they had many faces. However, to sum up, the four did not all of them go in one direction. For if it had been so, he would not have assigned to each of them a separate motion, saying: *Each goes in the direction of its face.* Then he states that the form of the motion of these *living creatures* was running and that it was likewise by running that they retraced their way.

3. Ezek. 1:7. 4. I.e., in the upper world. 5. Genesis Rabbah, LXV.

6. Ezek. 1:7. The word ʿegel (calf) has the same radicals as the verb and adjective ʿagol (to be round, round). Maimonides implies that the word used in this verse has, or contains an allusion to, this meaning.

7. Ezek. 1:9. 8. Ezek. 1:11. 9. Ezek. 1:7. 10. Ezek. 1:13.

11. Ezek. 1:12. 12. Ezek. 1:9.

For he says: *And the living creatures ran and returned [rašo va-shob].*¹³ For *rašo* is the infinitive of the verb *raš* [to run] and *shob* is the infinitive of the verb | *shab* [to return]. He did not use the verbs *halokh* [to go] and *bo* [to come], but said that their motion consisted in running and retracing their way. And he made it clear in an image, saying: *As the appearance of a flash of lightning [bazaq].*¹⁴ For *bazaq* is another word for *baraq* [lightning]. Accordingly he says that it is like *lightning [baraq]*, whose motion appears to be the swiftest of motions and which stretches out rapidly and at a rush from a certain place and then with the same rapidity contracts and returns time after time to the place whence it moved. *Jonathan ben Uziel*, peace be on him, interpreted the words *rašo va-shob* as follows: *They went round the world and returned [as] one creature and rapid as the appearance of lightning.* Then he¹⁵ states that the motion takes place, not because of the direction toward which the *living creature* moves in this motion of running and retracing one's way, but because of something else, I mean the divine purpose. Accordingly he says that it is in the direction toward which the *living creature* should move according to the divine purpose that it accomplishes this rapid movement, which is a *running and returning [rašo va-shobh]*. For he says concerning the *living creatures*: *Whither the air [ruah] will be [yihyeh] they will go; they turned not when they went.*¹⁶ *Ruah* here does not mean wind, but purpose, as we have made clear when speaking of the equivocality of *ruah*.¹⁷ He says accordingly that the *living creature* runs in the direction in which it is the divine purpose that the *living creature* run. *Jonathan ben Uziel*, peace be on him, has already interpreted this too in a similar way, saying: *They went wherever the will was that they should go, and they did not turn when going.* Now inasmuch as his saying reads, *Whither the air will be they will go*, and consequently its outer meaning signifies that sometimes God will wish in the future that the *living creature* should go in a certain direction and then it would take that direction and sometimes again He will wish that it should go in another direction different from the first and it would go accordingly; he¹⁸ goes back to the passage and explains this obscure point, | letting us know that this is not so and that *yihyeh [will be]* has here the meaning *hayah [has been]*, as is often the case in Hebrew. Thus the direction in which God wished the *living creature* to go had been determined; the *living creature* takes the direction that God had wished it to take; and the will¹⁹ is constant regarding this direction. In order to explain this matter and to complete what he has to say about it, he says in

13. Ezek. 1:14.

14. Ezek. 1:14.

15. I.e., the prophet.

16. Ezek. 1:12.

17. Cf. I 40.

18. I.e., the prophet.

19. Of God.

another *verse*: *Whithersoever the air*²⁰ *will go, they will go thither, as the air*²⁰ *to go.*²¹ Understand this wondrous explanation. This too belongs to his description of the form of the motion of the four *living creatures*, which comes after the description of their shapes.

Then he started upon another description, saying that he had seen a single body beneath the *living creatures* and adhering to them. This body was joined to the earth and also formed four bodies and likewise had four faces. He does not ascribe to it any form at all, neither a man's form nor another form pertaining to living beings, but states that they were great, terrible, and fearful bodies without ascribing to them any shape at all. He states that all their bodies were *eyes*.²² They are those that he calls *wheels* [*ophannim*], saying: *And I saw the living creatures, and, behold, one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.*²³ Accordingly he has made it clear that it was a single body whose one extremity was *by the living creatures* while the other was on the earth, and that this *wheel* had four faces. He says: *The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl; and they four had one likeness.*²⁴ Thus after having spoken of one *wheel*, he goes on to speak of *four*. Accordingly he makes it quite clear that the four *faces* that the *wheel* has are the four *wheels*. Then he states that the shape of the four *wheels* is one and the same, for he says: *And the four had one likeness.* Then he explains with regard to these *wheels* that they | were encased one within the other, for he says: *And their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within* [*be-tokh*] *a wheel.*²⁵ This is an expression that is not used with regard to the *living creatures*; for he does not use with regard to the *living creatures* the word *tokh* [*within*]. Rather do they adhere to each other; as he says: *Coupled together, a woman to her sister.*²⁶ As for the *wheels*, he states that they were encased one within the other, *as it were a wheel within a wheel*. As for the whole body of the *wheels* of which he says that it was *full of eyes* [*einayim*],²⁷ it is possible that he meant that they were really full of eyes; but it is also possible that he meant that they had many colors, as in the passage: *And the color thereof* [*ve-eino*] *as the color of* [*ke-ein*] *bdellium.*²⁸ It is likewise possible that he meant that they were likenesses, just as we find that the ancient masters of the language say, *Ke-ein she-ganab, ke-ein she-gazal*,²⁹ meaning: Like

20. *ruah*. According to Maimonides' explanation: *the purpose*. 21. Ezek. 1:20.

22. Cf. Ezek. 1:18. 23. Ezek. 1:15.

24. Ezek. 1:16. 25. Ezek. 1:16. 26. Ezek. 1:9. 27. Cf. Ezek. 1:18.

28. Num. 11:7. In this passage, the word *ayin*, which usually means "eye," signifies "color."

29. Cf. B.T., Baba Qamma, 65a and 66. The word *ke-ein*, in which the word *ayin* (eye) is included, means in this passage: *like unto*.

unto what one has stolen, like unto what one has robbed. [The word “*einayim*” may also mean] various states and attributes, as in its dictum:³⁰ *It may be that the Lord will look be-^ceini*³¹ – he means, [on] my state. This is what he describes with regard to the form of the *wheels*.

As for the motion of the *wheels*, he again says that there was in their motion no curve, no turning, and no deviation; there were only straight motions that did not vary. This is his saying: *When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not when they went.*³² Then he states that these four *wheels* do not move essentially, as do the *living creatures*; for they have no essential motion at all, moving only when moved by something other than themselves. He insistently repeats this notion and reaffirms it several times. And he makes out that the movers³³ of the *wheels* are none other than the *living creatures*, so that, to use an image, the relation of a *wheel* to a *living creature* could be likened to what happens when one ties an inanimate body to the hands and the feet of a living being: every time the living being moves, the piece of timber or the stone tied to a limb of that living being moves likewise. Accordingly he says: *And when the living creatures went, | the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.*³⁴ And he also says: *And the wheels were lifted up facing them.*³⁵ And he explains the cause of this, saying: *For the air of the living creature was in the wheels.*³⁶ He repeats this notion in order to confirm it and to make it understood, saying: *When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up facing them; for the air of the living creature was in the wheels.*³⁷

Accordingly the order of these motions is as follows: The *living creatures* moved in whatever direction it was the divine purpose that the *living creatures* should move, and by the motion of the *living creatures* the *wheels* were moved, following the former through being bound to them. For the *wheels* do not of their own accord move the *living creatures*. And he sets forth the order of that grade, saying: *Whithersoever the air will go, they will go thither, as the air to go; and the wheels were lifted up facing them; for the air of the living creature was in the wheels.*³⁸ I have already made known to you the translation of *Jonathan ben Uziel*, peace be on him: *Wherever the will was that they should go, and so on.*

When he had finished the description of the *living creatures*, of their

30. II Sam. 16:12. 31. I.e., in my *ayin*. 32. Ezek. 1:17.
 33. In the singular in Arabic. 34. Ezek. 1:19. 35. Ezek. 1:20.
 36. Ezek. 1:20. 37. Ezek. 1:21. 38. Ezek. 1:20.

forms, and of their motions, and had mentioned the *wheels* that are beneath the *living creatures*, their being bound to the latter and moved with their motion, he starts to set forth a third apprehension that he had and goes back to another description concerning that which is above the *living creatures*. He says that above the four *living creatures*, there is a *firmament*; upon the *firmament, the likeness of a throne*;³⁹ and upon the *throne, a likeness as the appearance of a man*.⁴⁰ This is the whole of the description he has made of what he has first apprehended *by the river of Khebar*. |

CHAPTER 3

After Ezekiel, peace be on him, had set forth the description of the *Chariot* as given in the beginning of the book, the selfsame apprehension returned to him a second time when, *in a vision of prophecy*, he was borne to *Jerusalem*. Thereupon he explained to us things that at first had not been explained. Thus for our benefit he replaced the word *living creatures* by the word *cherubim*, making it known to us that the *living creatures* that were mentioned at first are also angels – I mean, the *cherubim*. He says: *And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them*.¹ Thus he confirms the fact that, as we have mentioned, the two motions were bound together. Then he says: *This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Khebar; and I knew that they were the cherubim*.² Accordingly he repeats the description of the selfsame forms and the selfsame motions and makes it clear that the *living creatures* are the *cherubim* and the *cherubim* are the *living creatures*. Thereupon he explains in this second description another notion, namely, the notion that the *wheels* [*ophannim*] are the *galgallim*³ [*spheres*]; he says:⁴ *As for the wheels* [*ophannim*], *they were called in my hearing: Hagalgal*.⁵ Then he explains a third notion regarding the *wheels* [*ophannim*],

39. Ezek. 1:22. 40. Ezek. 1:26.

1. Ezek. 10:16. 2. Ezek. 10:20.

3. The word *galgallim*, meaning “wheels” (like the word *ophannim*), has in later Hebrew the signification of “heavenly spheres.”

4. Ezek. 10:13.

5. In the English Bible, this word is translated: *the wheelwork*. Maimonides takes it to refer to the heavenly spheres.

saying with reference to them: *But to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went.*⁶ Thus he states explicitly that the compulsory motion of the *wheels* followed *to the place whither the head looked*. That is to say, as he has explained, it followed *whither the air will be.*⁷ Then he adds a fourth notion regarding the *wheels*; he says: *And the wheels were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had.*⁸ | He did not mention this notion at first. Then he says in this last apprehension with regard to the *wheels*: *their flesh and their backs and their hands and their wings.*⁹ At first he had not mentioned that the wheels had *flesh* or *hands* or *wings*, but only that they were bodies. Finally, however, he goes so far as to say that they have flesh, hands, and wings; but he does not ascribe to them any form whatever. In this second apprehension he also explains that every *wheel* is related to a *cherub*, saying: *One wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub.*¹⁰ He also explains there that the four *living creatures* are *one living creature* because of the adherence of all of them to one another; for he says: *This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Khebar.*¹¹ Similarly he calls the *wheels*, *One wheel upon the earth,*¹² in spite of there being, as he also mentions, *four wheels*; and this because of their being joined to one another and of their having¹³ *all four one likeness.*¹⁴ These are the explanations, regarding the forms of the *living creatures* and the *wheels*, that are added for our benefit in this second apprehension.

CHAPTER 4

It behooves us to draw your attention to a certain thought adopted by *Jonathan ben Uziel*, peace be on him. When he saw the explicit statement,¹ *As for the wheels [ophannim], they were called in my hearing: Hagalgal [the sphere],*² he categorically decided that the *wheels* [ophannim] are the heavens. Accordingly he translated in every case *ophan* [wheel] by *galgala* [sphere]³ and *ophannim* [wheels] by *galgalaya* [spheres]. I have no doubt that to his mind, peace be on him, this interpretation was corroborated | by the dictum of *Ezekiel*, peace be on him, regarding the

6. Ezek. 10:11. 7. Cf. Ezek. 1:20. Cf. preceding chapter. 8. Ezek. 10:12.

9. Ezek. 10:12. 10. Ezek. 10:9. 11. Ezek. 10:20. 12. Ezek. 1:15.

13. Literally: being all of them. 14. Ezek. 1:16.

1. Ezek. 10:13. 2. Cf. preceding chap., n. 3. 3. Cf. preceding chap., n. 3.

wheels [ophannim] that they were like unto the color of a beryl,⁴ a color that is that attributed to the heavens, as is generally known. However, when he found the text, *Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth,*⁵ which indubitably indicates that the *wheels* are upon the earth, this appeared to him to constitute a difficulty with regard to this interpretation. Accordingly he went further in his interpretation, interpreting [the word] *earth* in this passage as referring to the surface of heaven, which is an *earth* with respect to what is above it. Accordingly he translated: *One wheel upon the earth beneath the height of heaven.* Understand this interpretation as it is in reality. It seems to me that he was led to this interpretation by his belief, peace be on him, that *galgal* is a term designating in the first place the heavens. It seems, however, to me that the matter is as follows. The [Hebrew] term for rolling is *galgel*. Thus: *And roll thee down* [ve-gilgaltikha] *from the rocks,*⁶ *And rolled* [va-yagel] *the stone.*⁷ For this reason it is said, *And like a rolling thing* [u-khe-galgal] *before the whirlwind,*⁸ because of its rolling. For this reason too the cranium is called *gulgoleth*, because of its being nearly round. Because every sphere rolls rapidly, every spherical thing was called *galgal*. Hence the heavens were called *galgallim* because of their being round — I mean, because of their being spherical. Accordingly [the Sages] say [with reference to fate]: *it is a revolving galgal* [sphere].⁹ For the selfsame reason they likewise call a pulley *galgal*. Accordingly [Ezekiel's] dictum — *As for the wheels* [ophannim], *they were called in my hearing: Hagalgal*¹⁰ — makes their shape known to us. For he does not ascribe to them any shape or form except by saying that they are *galgallim*.

With regard to his saying about them, *like unto beryl*,¹¹ he interprets this also in the second description, saying with regard to the *wheels* [ophannim]: *And the appearance of the wheels was as the color of a beryl stone.*¹² Jonathan ben Uziel, peace be on him, translated this: *like unto a precious stone.* Now you know already that Onqelos used this very expression to translate: *As it were, a work of the whiteness of sapphire stone;*¹³ he says: *As the work of a precious stone.* There is consequently no difference | between its saying, *As the color of a beryl stone*, and its saying, *As it were, a work of the whiteness of sapphire stone.* Understand this.

You must not find it incongruous that, having mentioned the interpretation of Jonathan ben Uziel, peace be on him, I propounded a different interpretation. You will find that many among the Sages, and even among

4. Ezek. 1:16.

5. Ezek. 1:15.

6. Jer. 51:25.

7. Gen. 29:10.

8. Isa. 17:13.

9. B.T., Shabbath, 151b.

10. Ezek. 10:13.

11. Cf. Ezek. 1:16.

12. Ezek. 10:9.

13. Exod. 24:10.

the commentators, differ from his interpretation with regard to certain words and many notions that are set forth by the *prophets*. How could this not be with regard to these obscure matters? Moreover I do not oblige you to decide in favor of my interpretation.¹⁴ Understand the whole of his interpretation from that to which I have drawn your attention, and understand my interpretation. God knows in which of the two interpretations there is a correspondence to what has been intended.

CHAPTER 5

Among the things to which your attention ought to be directed is his¹ expression: *visions of God*.² He does not say *vision*, in the singular, but *visions*, because there were many apprehensions differing in species; I mean to say three apprehensions, that of the *wheels*, that of the *living creatures*, and that of the *man*, who is above the *living creatures*. With regard to every apprehension he says: *And I saw*. Thus with reference to the apprehension of the *living creatures* he says: *And I saw, and, behold, a whirlwind, and so on*;³ with reference to the apprehension of the *wheels* he says: *And I saw the living creatures, and, behold, one wheel upon the earth*;⁴ and with reference to the *man*, who in degree is above the *living creatures*, he says: *And I saw as the color of hashmal*,⁵ and so on, from the appearance of his loins, and so on.⁶ In the description of the *Chariot*, he only repeats the word *I saw* these three times. The *Sages of the Mishnah* have already explained this matter; in fact it is they who drew my attention to it. For they said that it is permissible to teach the first two apprehensions only, I mean | the apprehension of the *living creatures* and that of the *wheels*; whereas only *the chapter headings* may be taught with regard to the third apprehension, that of the *hashmal* and of what is connected with it. However, *our holy Rabbi*⁷ believes that all three apprehensions are called the *Account of the Chariot* and that with respect to none of them may anything other than *the chapter headings* be taught. Their text with regard to this is as follows: *Till where [is it permissible to teach] the Account of the Chariot? Rabbi Meir says: Till the last*

14. Or, according to certain manuscripts: of one interpretation.

1. I.e., Ezekiel's. 2. Ezek. 1:1. 3. Ezek. 1:4. 4. Ezek. 1:15.

5. Several explanations of this Hebrew word are set forth below in III 7.

6. Ezek. 1:27. 7. I.e., Rabbi Judah, compiler of the Mishnah.

"*And I saw.*"⁸ Rabbi Isaac says: Till [the word] "*hashmal.*" From [the first] "*And I saw*"⁹ till [the word] "*hashmal,*" [it is permissible] to teach; from there on the chapter headings are transmitted to [the disciple]. Some say: from [the first] "*And I saw*" till [the word] "*hashmal,*" the chapter headings are transmitted to him; from there on, [he may be taught] if he is a wise man, understanding in virtue of his own intelligence; and [he may] not, if [he is] not [that].¹⁰ It has thus become clear to you from their texts that there were various apprehensions to which attention is drawn by the expression: *And I saw, And I saw, And I saw*; that these signified different degrees; and that the last apprehension, that referred to in the words: *And I saw as the color of hashmal*¹¹ – I mean the apprehension of the form of the divided man of which it is said: *From the appearance of his loins and upward, and from the appearance of his loins and downward*¹² – is the ultimate perception and the highest of all. There is also a difference of opinion among the Sages about whether it is permissible for it to be alluded to in any way through teaching – I mean to say *through the transmission of the chapter headings* – or whether it is not permissible in any way that an allusion be made to the teaching of this third apprehension, though it be only *through the chapter headings*; but he who is a wise man will understand in virtue of his own intelligence. Similarly there is also, as you see, a difference of opinion among the Sages with regard to the first two apprehensions likewise – I mean those concerning the *living creatures* and the *wheels* – about whether it is permissible to teach explicitly the notions concerning them, or whether this is only permitted to be done through allusions and enigmas *through the chapter headings*.

You ought also to have your attention directed to the order of these | three apprehensions. Thus he¹³ has put first the apprehension of the *living creatures*, for they come first because of their nobility and of their causality – according to what he says: *For the air of the living creature was in the wheels*¹⁴ – and because of other things too. After the *wheels* comes the third apprehension, which is higher in degree than that of the *living creatures*, as is clear. The reason for this lies in the fact that the first two apprehensions necessarily precede the third apprehension in the order of knowledge, the latter being inferred with the help of the other two.

8. Ezek. 1:27. 9. Ezek. 1:4. 10. B.T., Hagigah, 13a. 11. Ezek. 1:27.
12. Ezek. 1:27. 13. I.e., Ezekiel. 14. Ezek. 1:20.

CHAPTER 6

Know that the great and sublime notion that *Ezekiel*, peace be on him—being moved by the prophetic motive force that incited him to let us know this began to teach us in describing the *Chariot* is the very notion that *Isaiah*, peace be on him, let us know summarily without having the need to go into these details. For he says: *And I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. The seraphim stood, and so on.*¹ The *Sages* have explained all this to us and have called our attention to this subject. They said that the apprehension grasped by *Ezekiel* was identical with that grasped by *Isaiah*. They made about it a comparison with two men who saw the ruler while the latter was riding: one of them belonged to the settled population and the other to the desert nomads. Because the former knew that city people know in what state the ruler rides, he did not describe that state, but said only: I saw the ruler. The latter, however, wishing to describe this to the desert nomads, | who have no knowledge at all regarding the state in which the ruler rides, described to them in detail this state and the characteristic of the ruler's troops, his servants, and those who execute his orders. An intimation of this scope is of very great utility. I refer to their dictum in *Hagigah*: *All that was seen by Ezekiel was [likewise] seen by Isaiah. Isaiah is like unto a city man who saw the king; whereas Ezekiel is like unto a villager who saw the king.*² It is possible that this text was interpreted by its author in accordance with what I have said at the beginning [of the chapter]: namely, that the contemporaries of *Isaiah* had no need of his expounding those details to them, it being sufficient for them that he said: *And I saw the Lord, and so on*; whereas *the people of the Exile* required these details. It is also possible that the author of this remark believed that *Isaiah* was more perfect than *Ezekiel*, and that the apprehension that amazed *Ezekiel* and was regarded by him as terrible was known by *Isaiah* through a knowledge the exposition of which did not require extraordinary language, the subject being well known to those who are perfect.

1. Isa. 6: 1–2. 2. B.T., *Hagigah*, 13b.

CHAPTER 7

To the whole of things requiring investigation belongs the tying of the apprehension of the *Chariot* to a year, a month, and a day, and also to a place. This is something the significance of which ought to be sought. It should not be thought that this is a matter without significance. To the things that ought to be considered, for it is the key¹ to the whole, belongs his saying: *The heavens were opened.*² This is something that frequently occurs in the speech of the prophets — I mean the use of the figurative expressions of the opening and also of the opening of gates: *Open ye the gates;*³ *And He opened the doors of heaven;*⁴ *Yea, lift up the openings of the world;*⁵ *Open to me | the gates of righteousness.*⁶ This occurs frequently.

Among the things to which your attention ought to be directed belongs the fact that though this whole description⁷ is based indubitably *on a vision of prophecy* — for as he says: *And the hand of the Lord was there upon him*⁸ — there is between various parts of this description a very great difference in expression. For when he speaks of the *living creatures*, he says, *The likeness of four living creatures*, and does not only say, *Four living creatures.*⁹ Similarly he says: *And the likeness of the firmament was upon the heads of the living creature;*¹⁰ and: *The likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone;*¹¹ and: *The likeness as the appearance of a man.*¹² With regard to all this he uses the expression: *likeness*. With regard to the *wheels*, however, he by no means says concerning them, *the likeness of a wheel* or *the likeness of wheels*, but makes absolute statements regarding what they really are in a form expressive of that which really exists. Be not misled by his saying, *And the four had one likeness,*¹³ for this dictum is not ordered in the same way and has not the signification referred to. In the last apprehension he corroborates and explains this notion. He mentions the *firmament* in an absolute manner, beginning as he does with it and setting forth the details concerning it; he says: *Then I saw, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.*¹⁴ Thus he speaks

1. The Arabic and the Hebrew words for "key" derive from the same verbal root, which means in both languages, "to open."
2. Ezek. 1:1. 3. Isa. 26:2. 4. Ps. 78:23.
5. Ps. 24:9. In the English Bible this is translated: *Yea, lift them up, ye everlasting doors.*
6. Ps. 118:19. 7. That of Ezekiel. 8. Ezek. 1:3. 9. Ezek. 1:5.
10. Ezek. 1:22. 11. Ezek. 1:26. 12. Ezek. 1:26. 13. Ezek. 1:16.
14. Ezek. 10:1.

in this passage about the *firmament* in an absolute manner and does not say *the likeness of the firmament* as was the case when he spoke of it in connection with *the heads of the likeness of the living creatures*. As for the *throne* he says, *There appeared over them the likeness of a throne*, this being a proof that the apprehension of the *firmament* came first and that afterwards *there appeared to him over it the likeness of a throne*. Understand this.

Among the things to which your attention ought to be directed belongs the fact that in the first apprehension he states that the *living creatures* had both wings and the *hands of a man*; whereas in the second apprehension in which he explains that the *living creatures* are *cherubim*, he apprehended in the first place | only their wings, the *hands of a man* appearing in them afterwards in the course of his apprehension; for he says: *And there appeared in the cherubim the shape [tabnith] of a man's hand under their wings*.¹⁵ His saying *shape [tabnith]* is analogous to his saying *likeness [demuth]*. And the place of this¹⁶ is *under their wings*. Understand this.

Consider also how he makes an explicit statement in his dictum, *And the wheels were facing them*,¹⁷ though he does not ascribe a form to them.

He also says: *And the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*.¹⁸ The matter, the true reality, and the essence of the *rainbow* that is described are known. This is the most extraordinary comparison possible, as far as parables and similitudes are concerned; and it is indubitably due to a prophetic force. Understand this.

Among the things to which your attention should be drawn belongs his dividing *the likeness of the man that was on the throne*; the upper part of the likeness being *as the color of hashmal* and the lower *as the appearance of fire*.¹⁹ They²⁰ have explained²¹ that the word *hashmal* is composed of two notions, *hash* and *mal*; this means, of the notion of rapidity, indicated by *hash*, and of that of cutting, indicated by *mal*, the intention being to combine through a simile two separate notions regarding two sides, above and below. They also give us a second hint, saying that the word derives from the notions of speech and silence, saying that *they*²² *sometimes hashoth [are silent] and sometimes memalleloth [speak]*. They ascribe the meaning "silence" [to "hash"] from the verse: *hehesheiti [I have been silent] for a long time*;²³ there is thus an allusion to two notions through the indication of speech

15. Ezek. 10:8.

16. I.e., of the shape of a man's hand.

17. Ezek. 10:19.

18. Ezek. 1:28.

19. Cf. Ezek. 1:27 and 8:2.

20. I.e., the talmudic Sages.

21. B.T., Hagigah, 13a-b.

22. I.e., the hashmallim.

23. Isa. 42:14.

without a sound. There is no doubt that their dictum, *they sometimes are silent* [*hashoth*] and *sometimes speak* [*memalleloth*], refers to a created thing. See accordingly how they have made it quite clear to us that *the likeness of a man that was on the throne* and that was divided, is not a parable referring to Him, who is exalted above all composition, but to a created thing. Accordingly the prophet himself says: *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*²⁴ Now *the glory of the Lord* is not the *Lord*, as we have made clear several times. Accordingly everything | to which the parables contained in these apprehensions refer is only *the glory of the Lord*, I mean to say the *Chariot*, not the *Rider*, as He, may He be exalted, may not be presented in a likeness in a parable. Understand this.

We have thus given you also in this chapter such *chapter headings* that if you combine²⁵ the *headings* there will emerge from them a whole that is useful with regard to this theme. If you consider all that we have said in the chapters of this Treatise up to this chapter, the greater part or the entirety of the subject in question, except for a few slight details and repetitious speech, whose meaning remains hidden, will become clear to you. Perhaps upon thorough consideration, this too will be revealed, and nothing of this will remain hidden. Do not hope that, after this chapter, you will hear from me even a single word about this subject, be it as an explicit statement or in a flashlike allusion. For everything that it is possible to say about this has been said; I have even plunged deep into this with temerity. We shall accordingly start upon other subjects from among those that, I hope, I shall explain in this Treatise.

CHAPTER 8

All bodies subject to generation and corruption are attained by corruption **A** only because of their matter; with regard to form and with respect to the latter's essence, they are not attained by corruption, but are permanent. Do you not see that all the specific forms are perpetual and permanent? Corruption attains the form only by accident, I mean because of its being joined to matter. The nature and the true reality of matter are such that it never |

24. Ezek. 1:28.

25. Or, according to certain manuscripts and to Ibn Tibbon's translation: if you complete them.