

Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 1

Theme: Display of the Lord's glory

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Missler Introduction:

For background let's look at 2 Peter 1:20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." This means that what God expressed God intended. Scripture does not have one meaning for you and another for me. In all these prophecies God had an intended communication. They were given to us in the Bible for our learning and enlightenment. Now, there may be areas in the Scripture where you and I may have different views. However, it is not a selective nor secret knowledge type of thing. Your only guide is the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 continues saying, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." This is very evident in the book we are about to study, Ezekiel. It is probably the most ignored book in the Old Testament.¹

Ezekiel (Missler): Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens, or God will strengthen." Ezekiel is one of the three that were called the *Captivity Prophets* (the other two are Jeremiah and Daniel).

The key historical event that occurred in the life of the Nation Israel was their enslavement by the Babylonian Empire. That is very important historically and very, very important spiritually. It gives rise to the whole context of what Ezekiel was dealing with.

Jeremiah was slightly earlier, but Jeremiah and Ezekiel were roughly contemporaries. Daniel was a young man, but also writing at that time. Ezekiel never mentions Jeremiah in his writings, but he does mention Daniel three times.

After King David came King Solomon, and after Solomon was the civil war which divided the nation into two "houses" as they were called—The Northern House of Israel, and the Southern House of Judah.

Since the Northern House fell into idolatry earlier, many of the faithful from the Northern tribes migrated south. The Northern House of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and deported to Nineveh.

The Southern House of Judah survived longer, but it also fell into idolatry and spiritual decay. This led to the Babylonian captivity in a spiritual sense. The Scriptures speak a lot on God using the Babylonians to execute His judgment on the Nation Israel. The Babylonians were prophesied to rise up and take them into captivity. That captivity was to last 70 years. Jeremiah prophesied so much on this theme that he was put into prison as a traitor.

The Captivity (Missler): There were three deportations. The big event in roughly 606 B.C. was when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh-Necho at the Battle of Carchemish. That is when Babylon sustained victory over its biggest enemy and thus became the most powerful empire in the known world. On his way back, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege on Jerusalem.

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

It was during that siege that he discovered that his father had died. Not only was he general of the army, but that made him King as well.

He then set up a puppet king for Judah, and left for home, taking captive the most promising young men including the teenager Daniel and his three friends who had been educated in court. That gave rise to the Book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar also took spoils of the Temple vessels. This first siege caused Judah to cease being a free nation. Some years later there was a rebellion; so, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem the second time, and again captives were taken.

More years went by and again there was a rebellion. This time Nebuchadnezzar had enough of this trouble spot and besieged the city for the third time, this time leveling it. That was the fall of Jerusalem, and the turning point in Ezekiel's ministry. Ezekiel had been ministering to the Jews who were deported and enslaved with him in Babylon. They were not all there yet, just a group; but when Jerusalem finally fell, that was the point at which all his prophecies had been vindicated to his people, because he had said that it was going to happen. It then led him to shift his message to the future.

Chapters 25 through 32 deal with the judgment of the nations. He talks about Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistine, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, the Gentile nations around there and God's judgment upon those nations. It is interesting to note that he does NOT speak against Babylon. There were some reasons for that which we will get into.

The Future (Missler): In Chapter 33 Ezekiel shifts his message to the future restoration of the city of Jerusalem and the Nation of Israel and the reestablishment of the Temple.

What makes the Book of Ezekiel so popular, and fascinating to you and I, is that 2500 years ago Ezekiel described the political situation surrounding Israel today, and the technology of weaponry and the assault on Israel, a situation which God set up specifically to show Himself strong on behalf of Israel.

Chapters 38 and 39 deal with situations and events surrounding Israel in a totally unique way never previously fulfilled, and very much ripe for our observation. So we are going to have an interesting time. We are going to study Ezekiel as a laboratory course.

Ezekiel the Priest (Missler): Ezekiel was a priest. He was the son of Buzi who was also a priest, so he was well qualified to record the Millennial Temple in great detail. He was basically a mystic, well equipped for the calling God gave him which included a vision of God's holiness in Chapter 1.

It is interesting that even though he never served as a priest, he apparently had so influenced later worship that today he called by some "The Father of Judaism." From Numbers 4:3 we know that Kohathites had to be 30 before they could begin service as priests. When Ezekiel became 30, however, that is when he was deported. It was roughly the eightieth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. In his captivity he lived at the River Chebar which we now believe was the royal canal southeast of the Euphrates of Babylon, used for irrigation. It was the primary settlement location of the Jewish captives.

Ezekiel was born in approximately 627 B.C. and lived in a time of moral decline, distress and uprooting. His messages were not well received at first, but did ultimately result in the nation being purged of idolatrous practices. He was married and owned his home. His wife died during his ministry and he was forbidden to mourn her.

We will also learn that God intended his life to be a sign to Israel; therefore, he does all kinds of things. He shuts himself up in his home. He binds himself. He is struck dumb. He was to lie on his right and his left sides for a total of 430 days. He ate bread that was prepared in an unclean manner. He shaved his head and beard, which was considered a shame in his particular calling.

Throughout the book his main theme was the sovereignty and glory of God. This is good for us, because we get so focused in the New Testament orientation of God's grace that we tend to forget there is also a governing role of God, and that his glory requires justice.

Ezekiel was very direct. He carefully vindicated God's justice throughout the book, although he deals more in symbol and allegory than any other Old Testament prophet. He is probably the great mystic of the Old Testament. He had a dramatic vision of God which never left him. It is not just introduced in the early chapter, but it is referenced all the way through.

We will start from the time period after the second deportation when Jerusalem was still in existence some hundreds of miles away, and it was under a vassal king. The nation had many warnings by Jeremiah to repent, and the result of that was recorded in 2 Chronicles 36. It is interesting how the "Times of the Gentiles" is always when there is a Judean king in exile. That is true right now, isn't it?

Statistics by Dake: 26th book of the Bible; 48 chapters; 1,273 verses; 39,407 words; 310 verses of history; 530 verses of fulfilled prophecy; 433 verses of unfulfilled prophecy; 953 predictions; 659 predictions fulfilled; 294 predictions unfulfilled; 345 commands; 25 promises; 80 questions; and 179 messages from God (Ezekiel 1:2; Ezekiel 2:1,3,8; Ezekiel 3:1,3,4,17,22,24; Ezekiel 4:1,3,4; Ezekiel 7:1,5; Ezekiel 8:5,6,8,12,13,15,17; Ezekiel 9:1,4,5,7,9; Ezekiel 10:2,5; Ezekiel 11:2,4,5,7,14,16,17; Ezekiel 12:1,5,8,17,21,26; Ezekiel 13:1,8,11,13,17; Ezekiel 14:2,4,6,12,21; Ezekiel 15:1; Ezekiel 16:1,35,59; Ezekiel 17:1,9,11,19,22; Ezekiel 18:1,3; Ezekiel 19:1; Ezekiel 20:2,5,27,30,33,39,45; Ezekiel 21:1,8,18,24,26,28; Ezekiel 22:1,3,17,23; Ezekiel 23:1,22,28,35,36,47; Ezekiel 24:1,15,21; Ezekiel 25:1,6,8,12,15; Ezekiel 26:1,15,19; Ezekiel 27:1; Ezekiel 28:1,11,20,25; Ezekiel 29:1,8,13,19; Ezekiel 30:1,6,10,13,20,22; Ezekiel 31:1,10,15; Ezekiel 32:1,3,11,17; Ezekiel 33:1,7,10,11,12,21,23; Ezekiel 34:1,7,11,20; Ezekiel 35:1,6,11; Ezekiel 36:1,3,5,6,7,13,16,22,33,37; Ezekiel 37:3,4,9,11,15,19,21; Ezekiel 38:1,10,17; Ezekiel 39:1,17,25; Ezekiel 40:4; Ezekiel 42:13; Ezekiel 43:7,13,18; Ezekiel 44:2,5,9; Ezekiel 45:1,9,18; Ezekiel 46:1,16,18,20,24; Ezekiel 47:8,13; Ezekiel 48:1,10,21,22,23,30).²

Clarke Introduction: This chapter contains that extraordinary vision of the Divine glory with which the prophet was favored when he received the commission and instructions respecting the discharge of his office, which are contained in the two following chapters. The time of this Divine manifestation to the prophet, vv. 1-3. The vision of the four living creatures, and of the four wheels, vv. 4-25. Description of the firmament that was spread over them, and of the throne upon which one sat in appearance as a man, vv. 26-28. This vision, proceeding in a whirlwind from the NORTH, seems to indicate the dreadful

² Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

judgments that were coming upon the whole land of Judah through the instrumentality of the cruel Chaldeans, who lay to the north of it. See Jeremiah 1:14; 4:6; 6:1.³

TIMELINE

Jeremiah becomes a prophet to Judah	627 B.C.
Daniel taken captive to Babylon	605
Ezekiel taken captive to Babylon	597
Ezekiel becomes a prophet to exiles	593
Judah falls; Jerusalem destroyed	586
Ezekiel's ministry ends	571
Babylon overthrown by Cyrus	539
First exiles return to Judah	538

The record of God's commissioning of Ezekiel is the longest such prophetic call in the Bible (cf. Isa. 6; Jer. 1). Ezekiel, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, was prepared for his ministry by receiving a vision of the glory and majesty of God before he was called to serve the Lord.⁴

McGee Introduction: Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord may very well be a key to all of the visions in the entire Word of God; it certainly is the key to the rest of the Book of Ezekiel. Many people think of the Book of the Revelation as resting upon the prophecy of Daniel and the Olivet Discourse of our Lord. That is true, but I believe it rests primarily upon the apocalypse of Ezekiel; you will find a striking similarity between the vision in Ezekiel 1 and chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation.

This vision is a very difficult one to deal with. John Calvin said, "If anyone asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity, and that I can scarcely understand it." I am certainly a Calvinist in the sense that I must concur with his statement—neither do I understand Ezekiel's vision clearly.

However, there is one thing that I am confident this vision is not: it is *not* a vision of the present mechanical age. Ezekiel's vision of the wheels within wheels is not a prophecy of the airplane! When the old propeller planes were first developed, several prophetic teachers were saying that this vision was a prophecy of the airplane. Today we have jet planes and they have no wheels within wheels, and we must set aside that interpretation. Such interpretations are juvenile. Silly and senile chatter like that is what has brought prophecy into disrepute.

What we do have in this first chapter of Ezekiel, I believe, is a vision of the glory of the Lord. In the Book of Isaiah we have the *principles* of the throne of God; in Jeremiah we have the *practice* of that throne; but in Ezekiel we have the *Person* who is on the throne. I want to hasten to add that we do not have God Himself exposed in this vision—you do not have a window display of Him. When I began my ministry I considered this to

³ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

be a vision of God, but it is not that. It is instead a vision of the *glory* of God, a vision of the *presence* of God.

We see here a vision of the chariot of God as He rides triumphantly and irresistibly through time. There is one feature of this vision which shocked me when I discovered it: the chariot is vacant. I had taken for granted that God was there. There are four living creatures, the cherubim, connected with the chariot; yet they are distinct from it. Above all, there is a throne, and on the throne there is a Man. This is the highest vision of God that we are given, and it is most difficult to understand. We will note just a few of its impressive aspects.⁵

Ancient Jewish writers found in this passage what they called the *merkabah*, the divine throne chariot. The chapter is rich in symbolism which underscores various attributes of God. Modern science fiction writers who attempt to find here a vehicle from outer space have missed the whole point of the account. The one who appears riding atop the *merkabah* is not some alien astronaut, but rather the Living God. The focus of attention here should not be the mechanics of the divine chariot, but the message it conveys. Ezekiel describes in detail five things which he saw on that fateful day.⁶

Four elements that mark the commission narratives in the prophets are all present in this account of Ezekiel's calling. These include a divine confrontation, an explanation of the prophet's task and its importance, objections that the prophet might offer, and divine reassurance answering these objections and assuring the prophet of the Lord's enabling presence.⁴³ The record of God's commissioning of Ezekiel constitutes the longest prophetic call in the Bible (cf. Isa. 6; Jer. 1).

The passage has a chiastic structure that focuses attention on the importance of Ezekiel receiving revelations from the Lord (2:8b—3:3).

A Circumstances of the vision (1:1-3)

B Divine confrontation: the chariot's approach (1:4-28)

C Introductory word (2:1-2)

D First commission and reassurance (2:3-8a)

E Confirmatory sign (2:8b—3:3)

D' Second commission (3:4-11)

C' Introductory word (3:12)

B' Divine confrontation: the chariot's departure (3:13)

A' Circumstances of the vision (3:14-15)

It is important to bear four principles of normal historical-grammatical hermeneutics in mind when interpreting visionary literature such as what we have in this chapter.

1. Seek to understand the major idea presented through the vision and do not dwell on minutiae. This guideline is underscored in the second principle.
2. Follow the divine interpretations normally accompanying the visions. These divine interpretations concentrate on the overall concept

⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (La 5:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 1:1–28). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

rather than on details.⁴⁶

3. Be keenly aware of parallel passages and the harmony of Scripture, since the prophets normally sought to apply past revelations of God to their contemporary situations. The general prophetic message among the prophets is essentially the same.
4. Use the same approach with the symbols and imagery of visionary literature as used with figurative language. Thus symbols and imagery are properly understood as figures and are not to be taken literally."

Six Visions in Ezekiel

1. Vision of God (1:4-28)
2. Vision of the Scroll (2:9-3:3)
3. Vision of the Plain (3:22-23)
4. Visions of Jerusalem
 - a. Wickedness in the Temple (8:1-18)
 - b. Inhabitants of the city killed (9:1-11)
 - c. Burning of the city (10:1-22)
 - d. Wicked princes & the departure of God's glory (11:1-25)
5. Vision of Dry Bones (37:1-10)
6. Vision of New Temple, New Worship, and Restored Land (40:1-48:35)

Ezekiel 1:1

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

The book begins with an introductory formula that is typical of narrative literature: "Now it came about" (Heb. *wayhi*; cf. Josh. 1:1; Judg. 1:1; Ruth 1:1; 1 Sam. 1:1; Esth. 1:1; Jon. 1:1). Ezekiel is essentially a narrative that contains other types of literature.

[thirtieth year] - several views. Most scholars felt that this was Ezekiel's thirtieth year, which would make it, significantly, the year that he would be entering the priesthood had he not been in captivity. (30 years old was the minimum age for priesthood.) It was the same age as that of John the Baptist and Christ when they began their ministries (Luke 1:26,36; Luke 3:23).

WBC: In the thirtieth year. Since the time of Origen (185–254) this time note has been held to be a reference to the prophet's own age, the age when priests began their ministry (Num 4:3, 4), a dating system without parallel in Hebrew history. Other proposed

interpretations: thirtieth year of Jehoiachin's age, 585 B.C. (Snaith); thirtieth year after Josiah's reform, 593/592 B.C. (so Targum, Jerome, Hermann, Holscher, L. Finkelstein); thirtieth year of the current jubilee period (*Seder Olam*, Kimchi, Hitzig); thirtieth year of the neo-Babylonian empire, 606/605 B.C. (Scaliger, Ewald); thirtieth year of Manasseh, 667 B.C. (Torrey); thirtieth year of Artaxerxes III, 328 B.C. (sic! L. E. Browne); various emendations: thirteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar's reign, 592 B.C. (Rothstein, Bertholet); fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, 595/594 B.C. (Hertrich). Albright and Howie suggest that this was the thirtieth year of the editing of Ezekiel's book, three years after the twenty-seventh year of 29:17, or 567 B.C., and the thirtieth year of Jehoiachin's reign. Compare II Kgs 25:27. All the other dates in the prophecy are reckoned from Jehoiachin's "reign" or captivity, also.⁷

[fifth day of the month] All the days referred to in the book of Ezekiel are the days of the month, not days of the week (Ezekiel 1:1; Ezekiel 8:1; Ezekiel 20:1; Ezekiel 24:1; Ezekiel 26:1; Ezekiel 29:1; Ezekiel 30:20; Ezekiel 31:1; Ezekiel 32:1; Ezekiel 40:1).

Fourth month—Thammuz, This is about what would be our July.

[the captives] The Jewish captives that had already been taken from Judah to Babylon. Ezekiel himself was taken when Jehoiachin was (Ezekiel 1:2; 2 Kings 24:6-17).

The fourth (month) was mid-June to mid-July, reckoning from the first month, mid-March to mid-April.⁸

[Chebar] Chebar, now Khabour, which flows into the Euphrates about 200 miles north of Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1,2; Ezekiel 3:15,23; Ezekiel 10:15-22; Ezekiel 43:3).

WBC: The river Chebar (Ké-bär) or *Nfhar-Kfbār* (1:1, 3; 3:15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3). Probably the *nāru kabari*, "the great river," "the grand canal," an artificial watercourse of the Euphrates. Beginning above Babylon, it flows southeast, passes through Nippur, site of ancient Jewish settlements (and of the wealthy banking house of Murashu and Sons, whose archives (464–405 B.C.) contain many Jewish names), and joins the Euphrates again below Ur. Its modern name is Shatt en Nil, "the river Nile" (see H. V. Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 409ff.).⁹

[the heavens were opened] In vision he saw the heavens opened and a chariot drawn by cherubim coming out of them to the place where he was dwelling in a Jewish settlement on the river Chebar.

[visions of God] Visions of God literally means that God gave him visions from heaven (cp. Exodus 24:10; Isaiah 6; Daniel 7:9; Rev. 4:2).

⁷ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press.

⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press.

⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press.

LAN: Ezekiel, born and raised in the land of Judah, was preparing to become a priest in God's temple when the Babylonians attacked in 597 B.C. and carried him away along with 10,000 other captives (2 Kings 24:10-14). The nation was on the brink of complete destruction. Four to five years later, when Ezekiel was 30 (the normal age for becoming a priest), God called him to be a prophet. During the first six years when Ezekiel ministered in Babylonia (Ezekiel 1:3), Jeremiah was preaching to the Jews still in Judah, and Daniel was serving in Nebuchadnezzar's court. The Kebar River connected to the Euphrates in Babylonia and was the location of a Jewish settlement of exiles.¹⁰

When God appeared to Ezekiel to inaugurate his prophetic ministry, it was **in the 30th year, in the fourth month on the fifth day**; it was also **the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin**. As noted under "Authorship and Date" in the *Introduction* this was July 31, 593 B.C. "The 30th year" probably referred to Ezekiel's age. As a priest (v. 3) this was the age he would normally have entered the Lord's service.

Ezekiel had been taken into captivity with King Jehoiachin in March of 597. He was one of **the exiles** who had been resettled **by the Kebar River**—a canal off the Euphrates River that flowed to the east of Babylon (see "Historical Background" in the *Introduction*).¹¹

ESV: What **the thirtieth year** signifies is obscure, as it does not follow the usual pattern for dates in Ezekiel. It may refer to the prophet's age. Reference to the **Chebar canal** locates the prophet near ancient Nippur (or, in modern terms, halfway between Baghdad and Basra) and thus not in the city of Babylon itself. **Visions of God** links this vision with 8:3 and 40:2; the other great vision in the book (37:1-14) does not use this language.

McGee: "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year" would seem to indicate that Ezekiel was thirty years of age. However, it is the belief of many scholars that this is geared to a little different calendar. I will not go into any detail on this as, frankly, it gets a little intricate, and I do not feel that it is essential.

"I saw visions of God." While the captives in Babylon had sat down and wept by the rivers of Babylon (see Ps. 137:1), Ezekiel was seeing visions of God. What a contrast—seeing visions and weeping!¹²

Chuck Smith: Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the second captivity at the time when Jehoiachin was also taken captive. There were three times that Nebuchadnezzar's armies came against Jerusalem, taking captives back to Babylon. Daniel went back in the first captivity. Ezekiel went in the second captivity.

Now, basically Ezekiel was prophesying to the captives, and when he began his prophecy Jerusalem was still standing. Now, there were false prophets in Babylon that were telling the people, "Look, don't settle down. Don't get a house. God is going to soon defeat Babylon, and we're going to go back right away. So, hang loose, because we're

¹⁰ Life Application Notes

¹¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

only going to be a little while. The Lord is going to deliver His people, and we're going to return from Babylon very shortly. So just don't settle down."

Now, Jeremiah had been writing to them saying, "Don't listen to the prophets or so-called prophets who are telling you not to settle down. But instead, settle down, get adjusted, because you're going to be there for seventy years. Most of you are going to die in Babylon. So you might as well get used to that fact and just settle down, make the best of the situation."

And so, there were two schools of prophets: the true prophets, the false prophets. But Ezekiel, the true prophet of God, was declaring to them the same thing that Jeremiah was saying--that Jerusalem is not going to be restored immediately, but that Jerusalem is going to be completely destroyed by Babylon. The people are going to be destroyed and scattered, and he is telling the people in Babylon. Now, Jeremiah is writing from Jerusalem, but Ezekiel is there among them, saying, "Now, look, listen to the word of the Lord. Just go ahead and settle down here and settle in, because it's going to be a long time that you'll be in captivity."

So, at the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecies, he began his prophecy before Jerusalem was destroyed in 596. So, in the beginning of his prophecies, he is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem. As he moves further into his prophecy, as time goes on and the prophecy is fulfilled and Jerusalem is destroyed, then there is a change, and now he is encouraging the people that God, in His time, is going to restore again the glory to Israel. Now, he saw the glory of God depart from Jerusalem through the east gate. But as the prophecies continue and as the people are discouraged, when they hear the news that Jerusalem has been devastated, destroyed, he then begins to encourage them, "God is going to work yet again among His people. The glory of God shall return. The glory of God is going to fill the house and the latter glory is going to be greater than the former glory." Israel has not yet seen its heyday, in a sense. It's not yet seen the peak. God is going to yet restore His glory and all, upon Jerusalem and upon Israel. Hard times will intervene or be in the intermittent periods, yet God's work will yet be accomplished among His people.

So, Ezekiel's prophecies actually then go out beyond even our present day. Now Ezekiel saw the restoration of the land. He saw the nation being reborn. He predicted the modern Zionist movement, and the rebirth of the nation Israel. And he predicted that when Israel was born again as a nation, that Russia would come and invade Israel. And as we move on into the prophecy of Ezekiel, we get into all of these interesting, marvelous things, because we move actually from the present on into the future. And we see not only what is happening now, but Ezekiel continues to move on and we see things that will be happening within a year or so, or five, ten years at the most. And then he moves on even beyond that. And we see things that will be happening in Israel during the Kingdom Age and the glorious reign of Jesus Christ, as He comes again and enters in through the east gate of the city and establishes His kingdom here upon the earth. And so, the prophecy of Ezekiel really begins from this point, when he was about thirty years old, when the word of the Lord first came to him, when he saw these visions of God. This is before the fall of Jerusalem, the complete destruction, and he describes here his vision of God.

Now, Isaiah had a vision of God. Ezekiel had a vision of the throne of God, and John in the New Testament had a vision of the throne of God. And so from these insights of

these three men, we gather our information, concerning the throne of God, concerning the heavenly scene. Now, immediately there arises a difficulty because we are talking now of heavenly things. But we are seeking to describe them in earthly language. Now, there is, no doubt, words we do not yet know that aptly describe the things in heaven. But at the present time they have to remain to us only as word pictures.

So, you take the language that is common to man, words that are common to man, and you use them to the best of your ability to express things that you've never seen before. Weird-looking creatures like you've never dreamed of, intelligent beings, and you try to describe with human language what you're seeing. And immediately you're limited by language, even as if we tried to describe, if we should suddenly have an insight to, say, the year 2000 and we could see all the technical advances and all that man will have achieved by the year 2000. And we try to describe now with our present language, the modes of transportation and all that man will have developed by that time. As we're looking at weird gadgets that we have no concept what they are all about, and yet we see them operating and moving and all, and we say, "You know, the thing just has these stacks or whatever, and the smoke comes out. And people, you know..." and you try to describe the things, but you're limited because of language.

So, it makes the defining of them or the relating of them difficult because of limitation of language. So, we'll have to sort of try to envision those things which Ezekiel is talking about.

You remember when Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, and talking about the fact that a man has to be born again. And he was trying to explain to Nicodemus these concepts that were unfamiliar to Nicodemus. And Nicodemus was asking these questions, "Well how can a man be born again when he's old? You know, you can't return again to your mother's womb to be born. How can you do it?"

And Jesus said, "Look, if I have talked to you about earthly things and you can't understand them, how would you understand if I tried to talk to you about heavenly things? Now the Bible says, "No man understands the things of God, save the Spirit reveal them unto him." So, in getting into these areas, we're talking about things of God. We definitely need the help of the Holy Spirit in our understanding and comprehension of these things. That we might get somewhat of a glimpse or a grasp of them.

Now, I am convinced that what they saw we will be seeing when we enter into the heavenly scene. So it is well for you to acquaint yourself as best as possible with these things, though for right now they may seem to be difficult to really comprehend in your mind, yet one day when we actually see them, and we put, you know, this side by side, we'll say, "Well, he didn't do too bad a job. Yeah, it looks pretty much like that, you know."

So, this was the fifth year in which Jehoiachin had been brought as a captive unto Babylon. Zedekiah was presently the king in Judah, in Jerusalem. Jehoiachin had reigned only three months when Nebuchadnezzar came and took him captive along with his mother and his family, and others of Judah.

Ezekiel 1:2

In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,

Jehoiachin's captivity—He was also called Jeconiah and Coniah; see 2 Kings 24:12. He was carried away by Nebuchadnezzar; see 2 Kings 24:14.

[fifth year of king Jehoiachin's] This identifies the 30th year of Ezekiel 1:1 with the 5th year of Jehoiachin's captivity to Babylon. If this refers to Ezekiel's age, then he was taken captive when he was 25 years of age; but if the 30th year refers to another date, then it could only be the 30th year after the covenant Josiah made in the 18th year of his reign (2 Kings 22:3). Josiah reigned 31 years, or 13 years after the making of this covenant. Jehoiakim reigned 11 years, and Jehoiachin 3 months; then he was taken captive (2 Kings 24:6-17). The 5th year of his captivity would make 30 years, taking into account the month of the 18th year of Josiah.¹³

Why did the Jewish exiles in Babylonia need a prophet? God wanted Ezekiel to (1) help the exiles understand why they had been taken captive, (2) dispel the false hope that the captivity was going to be short, (3) bring a new message of hope, and (4) call the people to a new awareness of their dependence upon God.

LAN: Ezekiel's latest dated message from God (Ezekiel 29:17) was given in 571 B.C. He was taken captive during the second Babylonian invasion of Judah in 597 B.C. The Babylonians invaded Judah a third and final time in 586 B.C., completely destroying Jerusalem, burning the temple, and deporting the rest of the people (see 2 Kings 25). Ezekiel dates all his messages from the year he was taken captive (597). His first prophecy to the exiles occurred four to five years after he arrived in the land of Babylon (593 B.C.).

King Jehoiachin. The eighteenth, and next to the last, king of Judah, was the son of the petty tyrant, Jehoiakim, and grandson of the godly Josiah. His name, meaning "The Lord establishes," is variously spelled: *Yôyākîn*, Ezk 1:2; *Yfhôykîn*, II Kgs 24:6, 8, 12, 15; 25:27 a,b; Jer 52:31 a,b; II Chr 36:8, 9; *Yfkonyā*, Jer 27:20; *Qfrê*; 28:4; 29:2; Est 2:6; I Chr 3:16, 17; *Yfkon Yāhû*, Jer 24:1; *Konyāhû*, Jer 22:24, 28; 37:1. Enthroned by Pharaoh-necho of Egypt, he reigned only three months, when he was deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 597, along with the upper classes (II Kgs 24:8-16). He was released by Amel Marduk (Evil Merodach), son of Nebuchadnezzar in 560, the thirty-seventh year of his exile (II Kgs 25:27). "The Jehoiachin tablets," published in 1939, refer to "Yaukin" and his sons as receiving rations (Albright, BA, V (Dec. 1942), pp. 49-55). Jeremiah (22:20-30) and Ezekiel 19:5-9) appear sympathetic toward him. His grandson Zerubbabel was in the Messianic line (cf. Mt 1:11, 12; Ezr 3:8; I Chr 3:17-19).¹⁴

The fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity (June–July, 592) is the first of fourteen date references in the book of Ezekiel (cf. 1:2; 3:16; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 29:17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1; 32:17; 33:21; 40:1). Ezekiel was the first prophet to date his messages

¹³ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:2). Chicago: Moody Press.

chronologically. (For dates of the period, cf. J. Finegan, "Nebuchadnezzar and Jerusalem," JBR, 25 (1957), pp. 203-205.)¹⁵

We have not quite come to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem which took place during the reign of Zedekiah.

ESV: Probably the "thirtieth year" of v. 1 should be linked with the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (i.e., 593 b.c.). Jehoiachin's exile is the regular chronological marker for dates given throughout the book. Jehoiachin was only 18 at the time of exile in 597 b.c., and had then been king for only three months (see 2 Kings 24:8).

Ezekiel 1:3

The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

"The word of the Lord" occurs 7 times in this book. He also uses the phrase "the hand of the Lord was there upon him." What he is really saying is that he was in the grip of God Himself. He was not having an hallucination or some kind of dream. The word of the Lord was coming very, very vividly to Ezekiel.

It is interesting to recall Jacob when he saw God at Peniel. He was transformed there for the rest of his life. Moses saw God at Mount Sinai, communed with Him "face to face," Scripture says, and that marked him for the rest of his life. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the Sanctuary, and from that point on, his entire ministry was infused with the beauty and the holiness of the Lord. Paul on the Damascus road saw the Lord and was blinded to the allurements of this world from that day on. In each of these cases the person who had the experience was changed permanently by the experience.

I believe that it is God's intention for you and me, to be confronted with God in such a way as to be permanently changed. That is what we are here about today.

Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet. His father was Buzi, evidently of Zadok's branch of Aaron's family (cf. 1 Kings 1:32-35). As a priest, Ezekiel was familiar with the Mosaic Covenant and the priestly functions and paraphernalia of the temple, which becomes clear in this book. The Chaldeans were the rulers of the Babylonian Empire at the time of Israel's captivity.

[came expressly unto Ezekiel] In very deed, or in reality to Ezekiel.

[the priest] Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah were priests called to the prophetic office.

[the hand of the LORD was there upon him] An expression in prophecy used to denote the power or constraining influence of the Holy Spirit operating through men as they yielded to God's will.

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:2). Chicago: Moody Press.

The name *Ezekiel* means “God is strong” or “God strengthens.” In a very real sense, this sums up the basic message of the book—that in spite of the captivity, God’s sovereign strength prevails, and he will judge his enemies and restore his true people.

"The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel" and "The hand of the Lord was upon him" are phrases that typically introduce revelations from God in this book (3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1; cf. 2 Kings 3:15). The hand reference especially distinguishes Ezekiel as being under the controlling influence of God's Spirit, compared to other prophets.⁵⁴ Perhaps this was important in this book since Ezekiel's visions and actions have called his sanity into question. Several psychoanalytical studies have been done on Ezekiel.

Ezekiel (*Yfhezqē.l*, “God strengthens”) **the priest**. Nothing is known of his father Buzi. Other prophets with priestly background were: Samuel (I Chr 6:28; I Sam 7:9; 11:14; 16:2 ff.); Jeremiah 1:1; Zechariah (1:7; Neh 12:4, 16; Ezr 5:1). **The hand of the Lord was ... upon him**. An expression describing a condition approaching prophetic ecstasy. (See also 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1.) Thirteen Hebrew MSS and the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions read *upon me*.¹⁶

“The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest.” Ezekiel belonged to the tribe of Levi, apparently the priestly branch, and probably to the sons of Kohath. We are told that he was “the son of Buzi.”

“Chebar” was the main canal that came off the Euphrates River, which watered that area. Evidently, the Jewish captives were put there to till the land. This area was removed by quite a few miles from Babylon, and that may be the reason that Daniel and Ezekiel did not have the opportunity to meet together for a meal. Daniel may have visited the area, but I doubt that Ezekiel would have been permitted to visit Daniel.¹⁷

Ezekiel first noticed a “storm wind” coming from the north. Then his eye caught a great cloud with “fire,” i.e., lightning, “flashing forth continually.” In subsequent revelation Ezekiel learned that this ominous black cloud symbolized God’s judgment against Jerusalem which Jeremiah had represented as coming from the north. The cloud was surrounded by a “bright light.” In the middle of the cloud Ezekiel saw “something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.” Through the blackness of judgment Ezekiel could see the splendor of God. Storm, cloud and fire are all used in the Old Testament as symbols of God’s coming judgment.¹⁸

Ezekiel uses this expression seven times, "the hand of the Lord was upon me." And this is the first of the seven times that he uses it. We'll find it again in our study tonight in chapter 3, verses 14 and 22, and then we won't find it again until chapter 8.

¹⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:3). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 1:4). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Ezekiel 1:4

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.

We have a whirlwind coming out of the north. North is a strange direction in prophecy. Scholars attribute the north to the advance of their enemies, the Babylonians, which we think of as really being east; but the path of attack was from the north. We will see the Soviet forces and their allies will come from the uttermost parts of the north in Chapter 38.

We could go through dozens of references about fire and wind being symbols of God's judgment. Ps 18, Hab 3, and Jer 4 are examples of these elements, and of course, Revelation, being used to speak of God's judgment.

[And I looked, and behold ...] Fivefold vision of the cloud:

1. A whirlwind came from the north
2. A great cloud
3. A fire infolding
4. Brightness was about the cloud
5. Out of the cloud and out of the fire came a color of amber

[whirlwind] Four whirlwinds of Scripture:

1. Elijah taken to heaven in one (2 Kings 2:1,11)
2. The Lord answered Job out of one (Job 38:1; Job 40:6)
3. Ezekiel saw one (Ezekiel 1:4)
4. The Lord will come to the earth in one (Isaiah 66:15; Zech. 9:14)

[out of the north] This is the direction that judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem was coming from (Ezekiel 26:7; Jeremiah 1:13-15; Jeremiah 3:12,18; Jeremiah 4:6; Jeremiah 6:1,22; Jeremiah 10:22; Jeremiah 13:20). Nebuchadnezzar, whose land, Babylonia lay north of Judea. Chaldea is frequently denominated by Jeremiah.

[fire infolding itself] "Fire infolding itself" means that it was traveling in a circle, flames following one another in rapid succession as the framework of the vision.

LAN: In this first vision, God called Ezekiel to be a prophet (see Ezekiel 2:5). Nothing in Ezekiel's previous experience had prepared him for such a display of God's glorious presence and power. The immense cloud flashed with lightning and was surrounded by a brilliant light. From the fire in the cloud came four living creatures. They showed Ezekiel that Jerusalem's coming destruction was God's punishment of Judah for its sins. (These living creatures are also seen in Rev. 4:6-7.)

When Ezekiel received this vision, he was far away from the temple in Jerusalem, the physical symbol of God's presence. Through this vision, he learned that God is present everywhere and that God's activities in heaven are shaping the events on earth.

Ezekiel saw three things in this vision: living beings (vv. 4-14), wheels in motion (vv. 15-

21), and a great expanse (vv. 22-28).

Ezekiel saw within the opened heavens a great cloud blown toward him by the north wind with lightning flashing from it almost constantly (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13; Job 38:1; 40:6; Ps. 29:3-5). Israel's enemies had invaded from the north, so the implication was that an invasion was coming. He also saw a bright light around this cloud and something like hot glowing metal shining in its midst, evidently God Himself (cf. Exod. 13:17-22; 19:16-18; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:28-29). The biblical writers sometimes described God's abode as in the north (e.g., Ps. 48:2; Isa. 14:13; cf. Matt. 24:30; 26:32; 1 Thess. 4:17), and they often associated storms and clouds with theophanies (e.g., Job 38:1; Ps. 29:3-9; 104:3; Isa. 29:6; cf. Exod. 13:21; Lev. 16:2).

As God had riveted the attention of Moses by showing him a bush that was burning but not burning up (Exod. 3:1-15), so God captured Ezekiel's attention with this vision of a burning cloud.

Ezekiel's call came in the form of a theophany, a manifestation of God in the midst of a storm. His vision is described in much greater detail than the theophanies of Moses (Ex 33; 24:9 ff.), (Amos 7:15), Isaiah (ch. 6), Jeremiah (1:4-10), or Daniel (7:9ff.). He starts from below, describing first the four living beings with the four wings and the four faces, combining human and animal forms to make the throne-car (vv. 4-14), then the wheels within wheels enabling the chariot to move in all four directions without turning (vv. 15-21), and lastly the crystal platform on which was the likeness of a throne, where was seated the likeness of one like fire encircled with rainbow glory (vv. 22-28).¹⁹

For God's appearance in stormy wind (ASV; AV, *whirlwind*) and cloud, see also Ex 9:24; 19:16; Judges 5:4; 1 Kgs 19:11; Ps 29; Zech 9:14. Out of the north. Ezekiel here is not borrowing the mythological concept of the north as the home of the gods, but may be suggesting God's transcendence. Fire flashing forth continually. Literally, *fire taking hold of itself*. Gleaming bronze (RSV). Hebrew, *like the eye of hashmal*. Used only in 1:4, 27; 8:2. Compare Akkadian *elmešhû* and Egyptian *hesmen*, "bronze" (G. R. Driver, VT, I (1951), 60-62).²⁰

McGee: "Behold, a whirlwind came out of the north." I know that many people have made a great deal of this idea that there is a great vacant space up yonder in the north and that this is the direction that leads to the presence of God. Our modern radio electronic telescopes with their big dishes have shown that there are stars out there—it is not vacant. However, "the north" is used in Scripture to point to the throne of God. In Isaiah 14:13 we read (speaking of the fall of Satan): "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." I believe the idea is that, instead of pointing to the north pole, we are to look up—God's throne is out yonder, not relative to any direction at all. After all, its location is not something you and I can understand. We

¹⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press.

²⁰ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament (Eze 1:4)*. Chicago: Moody Press.

are told, "... look up ... for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). That is the direction in which our attention should be focused today.

Also in Psalm 75:5–7 we read: "Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." The only direction that is not mentioned is *north*, and I would say the thought is that it is *up*—God's throne is out yonder, even beyond space.

This whirlwind out of the north, then, indicates a tremendous movement from the throne of God—it is a judgment from God.

"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." This is the first thing we observe—a light flashing forth, revealing and also concealing. Obscuring and yet bringing out where it can be seen, it is a light brighter than the sun. Perhaps it could be compared to the inside of an atomic blast. It was incandescent, like lightning.

The Word of God says that "... our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), and that "... God is light ..." (1 John 1:5). Paul said that at the time of his conversion he saw "... a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun ..." (Acts 26:13). All of this speaks of the unapproachable presence of God (see also vv. 13–14).²¹

ESV: A **stormy wind** (Hb. *ruakh se'arah*) heralds the approach of the Lord, as in Job 38:1; 40:6. Likewise, the **north** is associated with the divine abode (see Ps. 48:2), and in Jeremiah it indicates the source of divine judgment (Jer. 1:13–15). The phrase **as it were** translates the Hebrew preposition *ke-*, "like," which is used 18 times in this description; half of those are in Ezek. 1:24–28. Clearly Ezekiel is groping for language to describe the vision.

ESV: 1:4–3:15 Inaugural Vision. The vision forms a unified whole, in spite of its being comprised of distinct episodes. It is symmetrically structured, having onion-like layers: the "frame" (1:1–3 and 3:14–15) is wrapped around the approach and departure of the cherub-throne (1:4–28 and 3:12–13), with the prophet's audience before the Lord contained in 2:1–3:11. That central section has its own internal "nesting."

ESV: 4–28 The Throne of the Lord Approaches. The richness of detail in Ezekiel's account of this vision is both inspiring and perplexing. It recalls the traditions of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10–22), especially within the context of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:6–8), and stands at the head of the later mystical *mer*

Chuck Smith: Now the north here would be actually the dwelling place of God. In Isaiah in speaking of Satan's exalting of himself, he said, "I will ascend into the sides of the north." It is thought that in relationship, of course, to the earth that that heavenly kingdom of God dwells somewhere in the area of the north.

Recently this past week, in fact, there was an interesting article in the paper of a vast empty space that has been found in the universe that is baffling to the scientists. And it is sort of upsetting certain theories that they have had in the past. It could really be very

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

disturbing to the big bang theory, because supposedly the debris of the big bang was sort of distributed equally throughout the entire universe and doesn't really give place for vast areas of empty space. But yet, there has been discovered recently this extremely vast area of empty space. And the area happens to be actually towards the North Star. And there is this vast area of emptiness in space, which at the present time is a real enigma to the astronomers that are studying it, as they try to align this discovery with the current theories that exist of the origin of the universe.

This whirlwind came out of the north. This would not be out of Babylon. He was in Babylon when he saw it.

Ezekiel is seeing now, coming out of this area of the north, this great cloud, and it is interesting that the Bible speaks so often of God being covered with a cloud. The clouds of glory that surround God. There on the mount when God came down and spoke with Moses, there was the cloud of God's glory that covered Mount Sinai and the fire, again, the fireballs that were emitting forth from it.

The formula, "coming out of the north" is often used to represent something coming from a position of power, like a mighty nation. The one coming from the North is coming to conquer. We see the object that is coming to conquer as a whirlwind of cloud and fire. This is a common image that represents the presence of God, as illustrated in the pillar of fire that continued to reside over the temple in Jerusalem, the same pillar of fire that led the ancient Israelites through the wilderness following the exodus from Egypt. When Ezekiel looked up, he saw the presence of God, Himself, coming in power to conquer.²²

Ezekiel 1:5

Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.

We are going to quickly get into this bizarre, complicated, strange thing that Ezekiel records. It's hard for us to even imagine what Ezekiel saw. (However, it is NOT a UFO as that is not what God intended). God has very specific actions here. On the other hand, this is not at all allegorical in the sense that it is just some kind of fanciful show.

"Living" - These are real beings. We know from the Scriptures that Cherubim and Seraphim are real beings. We are talking about some super form of angelic entity. These four cherubim, similar to the "seraphim" in Isa 6, show up as prominent features in John's introduction to the Throne of God in Revelation, and they are mentioned 17 times in his book.

[four living creatures] These living creatures are called cherubims in Ezekiel 10:1,3,5-9. See all four descriptions of God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4-28; Ezekiel 3:12-13; Ezekiel 8:2-4; Ezekiel 10:1-22).

²² http://www.biblicaltheology.com/eze/26_00_00.html

[likeness of a man] Their bodily frame was like a man, and they had one face like a man and three additional faces on the head (Ezekiel 1:5-11). The hands were like those of a man, and there were four hands instead of two (Ezekiel 1:8). The feet were different from a man's—like a calf's feet (Ezekiel 1:7). Their four wings were where the four hands were—one on each side. When the creatures went forward their wings were stretched forth; when they stood still they were lowered (Ezekiel 1:9,25).

Clarke: Also out on the midst thereof came—four living creatures—As the amber-coloured body was the center of the fire, and this fire was in the center of the cloud; so out of this amber-coloured igneous center came the living creatures just mentioned.

LAN: Each of the four living creatures had four faces, symbolizing God's perfect nature. Some believe that the lion represented strength; the ox, diligent service; the man, intelligence; and the eagle, divinity. Others see these as the most majestic of God's creatures and say that they therefore represent God's whole creation. The early church fathers saw a connection between these beings and the four Gospels: the lion with Matthew, presenting Christ as the Lion of Judah; the ox with Mark, portraying Christ as the Servant; the human with Luke, portraying Christ as the perfect human; the eagle with John, portraying Christ as the Son of God, exalted and divine. The vision of John in Rev. 4 parallels Ezekiel's vision.

5-7 Within the cloud the prophet saw four figures that resembled living beings (cf. Rev. 4). They had human form, but each of them had four faces and four wings.⁵⁸ Each face represents the highest form of animal life in a general category, probably showing that God is lord of all creation.⁵⁹ Their legs did not have knee joints, which made them very stable. Their feet looked like the hoofs of calves, but they shone like they were polished bronze. Calves' feet suggest nimbleness (cf. Ps. 29:6; Mal. 4:2), and their sheen may represent their strength.

These living creatures were cherubim (cf. 10:15, 20; Gen. 3:22-24). Appearances of cherubim sometime accompany references to God's glory and holiness in the Old Testament, but their specific function remains a mystery. Ezekiel would have been familiar with cherubim because they were represented on the ark and in the curtains of the temple (Exod. 25:17-22; 26:31; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chron. 28:18; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16). The Mesopotamians also pictured spirit beings guarding their temples in their artwork.

Likeness (*dfmût*) and **appearance** (*mar,eh*) occur ten and fourteen times in the account. The prophet senses the inadequacy of human speech to describe the ineffable, but he is also careful to avoid anthropomorphism. The **four living creatures** (*hayyôt*) are later identified as cherubim (10:15, 20).²³

This verse and also verse 26 (“the appearance of a man”) speak of the incarnation of Christ, the fact that God became a man. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [pitched His tent] among us ...” (John 1:14). Isaiah 52:7 tells us, “How beautiful upon

²³ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:5). Chicago: Moody Press.

the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” God came to earth a Man, walked the dusty trails of Palestine, and finally spikes were driven into His feet.²⁴

This theophany, i.e., vision of God (vv. 4-28), is unique (cf. Isa 6:1, note). The “living creatures,” better rendered “living ones,” are identified as cherubim (10:5; 10:20, note). The cherubim were stationed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:22-24). Images of cherubim were also embroidered on the veil which hung before the Most Holy Place (Ex 26:31). Two cherubim were placed atop the ark of the covenant (Ex 25:18-22) as the guardians of God’s holiness. It is their responsibility to keep anything that is unholy from His presence (Gen 3:24). The four “wheels” (vv. 15-21) are possible representations of God’s omnipresence. Likewise, the four faces of the living beings would be representative of all living beings and suggest the highest forms of intelligent life in God’s creation. “Man,” made in the image of God, is mentioned first. The “lion” represents sovereignty or kingly power; whereas the “ox” suggests strength or servanthood. Finally, the “eagle,” the most noble of winged creatures, is representative of swiftness (v. 10). It should be noted that the four living beings in the Book of Revelation closely follow the description that Ezekiel gives.²⁵

The many uses of the term **likeness** (Hb. *demut*, 10 times in ch. 1) emphasize the impressionistic nature of the vision's description.

The Cherubim (1:5–14).

Ezekiel’s attention next focused on four figures which resembled “four living beings.” Later (10:20) the living beings are identified as cherubim, angelic beings which are always depicted guarding something sacred. These living beings were stationed in a square pattern. Their very persons formed the supports for the mysterious *merkabhah*. Not all the details in the text are clear, nor are they meant to be. The very purpose of the *merkabhah* is to inspire wonder and contemplation. Such details as are given stretch the human imagination to its limits.

1. In general the bodies of these cherubim had a human-like appearance.
2. Each had four faces facing in different directions. These were the faces of (1) man, (2) lion, (3) eagle, and (4) ox. The four represent all sentient creation. Man is the highest creature God made. Lion, eagle and ox dominate the wild animal kingdom, the skies, and the domesticated animals respectively. Since God sits on a throne above the cherubim, the thought is that all sentient creation is subordinate to him.
3. Each had four wings. Two were used to cover the naked bodies of these creatures. In flight the second pair of wings stretched to the right and left and touched the wing tips of the other creatures, implying unity of purpose.
4. Their legs were “straight,” i.e., unjointed. The soles of their feet were like the hoof of a calf, i.e., rounded. These feet glistened like polished bronze.
5. Under their wings on four sides were human hands. Whether each creature had two

²⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ Believer’s Study Bible

hands or four hands is not clear.

6. The creatures seemed to glow. Inside the hollow square formed by them was a bright fire which seemed to move back and forth among the living beings.
7. The creatures darted about with the speed of lightning. Since the creatures had four faces, they did not need to turn their heads no matter what direction the *merkabah* might be going.

Ezekiel 1:6

And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.

See also Isaiah 6, Revelation 4, and Ezekiel 10. Maybe the same creatures but viewed from different vantage points, thereby revealing different aspects. Ezekiel is using human language to describe creatures like he had never seen before. And so we have to use our imaginations in trying to, in our minds, picture or visualize these four living creatures, looking somewhat like a man, each one having four faces, each of them having four wings. Their feet are sort of like a calf's, sort of cloven like a calf's foot, but they look like bright burnished brass.

Ezekiel 1:7

And their feet *were* straight feet; and the sole of their feet *was* like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.

[burnished bronze] is the Levitical symbol of Judgment. (Remember this is a priest communicating in mystical terms).

[calf's foot] - the foot speaks of service; the calf, speaks of the ox, the domesticated beast of service.

In analyzing the different details remember to view them through the eyes of a Levitically trained priest (as Ezekiel was). See Edersheim's writings if you want to pursue these further. God was communicating to Ezekiel in terms that Ezekiel was used to. God meets you on your ground. Ezekiel was trained for this calling; he was receiving communication from God disclosed to him in Levitical terms.

Their legs (rather than *feet*; cf. Gen 49:10; Isa 6:2; 7:20) **were straight**, without knee joints; and **the sole(s) of their feet** were rounded (Targum, Aquila) like calves' feet, to exclude bending and turning. 8. Each cherub probably had two hands, for **on their four sides** may mean "upon the sides of the four of them."²⁶

Ezekiel 1:8

²⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:7). Chicago: Moody Press.

And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings.

8-9 There were four wings on each of the cherubim, one on each of their four sides, and under each wing Ezekiel could see a human hand. The wings of each creature touched each other, and these creatures also had a face on each of their four sides. This enabled them to move in any direction without having to turn their faces. They enjoyed maximum mobility and awareness.

Ezekiel spotted **four living creatures** in the midst of **the fire**. These beings are identified in chapter 10 as cherubim, a special order of angelic beings. They have special access to God (cf. 28:14, 16) and are bearers of God's throne-chariot. On the tabernacle's ark of the covenant, gold images of cherubim, with outstretched wings, guarded the mercy seat where the glory of the Lord dwelt (Ex. 25:17-22; Num. 7:89). God was "enthroned between the cherubim" of the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Pss. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16). This place where God was enthroned was called "the chariot" (1 Chron. 28:18). Since the earthly tabernacle and temple were a copy of the heavenly reality (Heb. 8:5), Ezekiel's vision was of the actual throne-chariot of God, borne by cherubim.

The general **appearance** of the living beings was somewhat like **a man**. However, they would not be mistaken for humans. They **each** had **four faces and four wings**. (The prophet explained these features in detail, Ezek. 1:10-11.) The cherubim's **legs were straight**, which implies that they were standing upright, but **their feet** were calf-like instead of human, and were **like burnished** (highly polished) **bronze**. Ezekiel said the four cherubim also had human-like **hands**.

1:8b-9. Ezekiel then explained how the **four** creatures functioned as a unit. Two of the four **wings** of each creature were outstretched so that **their wings touched one another**, forming a connecting square. Having four **faces** on four sides of their heads and being connected in a square, they were able to travel **straight** in any direction and to change direction without turning. Thus **they did not turn as they moved**.²⁷

Ezekiel 1:9

Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.

"No variableness or turning," James wrote in James 1:17 [Parallax; focus at infinity.]

The cherubim, with a pair of outstretched wings touching one another, formed the sides of the chariot, which could move in all four directions, **without turning** (RSV; cf. v. 12). A second pair of wings **covered their bodies** (v. 11). 10. Each cherub had four faces, **the**

²⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 1:5-8). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

face of a man in front, ... the face of a lion, on the right side ... the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back (cf. 10:14; Rev 4:7).²⁸

ESV: The notice that **their wings touched** is reminiscent of the description of the cherubim in the Most Holy Place in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:27). The four-sided form of the creatures ensures that they can always do the impossible: go **straight forward**, in any direction, but **without turning** (cf. "went straight forward" [Ezek. 1:12] with "darted to and fro" [v. 14]).

Chuck Smith: As we go on with the description of these four living creatures, we realize that these are paralleled to the four living creatures that John saw, when in the book of Revelation, chapter 4, he also had a vision of the throne of God. And he saw these four living creatures with their four faces, and John also describes them in the book of Revelation. Ezekiel describes them again in chapter 10, when he sees them in chapter 10. And there he identifies to us what these living creatures are, and there we discover that these are cherubim--a created being of God, intelligent beings of God, beings that surround God. In Revelation we are told that they cease not day or night saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which is, which was, and which is to come."

Now this ties in then with God's directions to Moses in the building of the tabernacle, which the book of Hebrews tells us is a model of heaven. Now most of you fellows have built at some time or other in your life a model of either a car or a plane. And you're not building a P-51, but you're building a model of the P-51. You can't get in and fly it, but when you build the model, it looks like, it resembles the real thing. A model is just a resemblance of the real thing. So, the tabernacle was just a model of the real thing. The real thing is in heaven. The tabernacle was a model of heaven. And in the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, which is a model of the throne of God in heaven, Moses was told to have these cherubim made out of gold above the mercy seat. Their wings touching each other, and the edges of their wings touching the edge of this little cubical, which was fifteen feet cubical, golden room, and this is again the model of the heavenly things.

So, there are these cherubim, these living creatures, no doubt highly intelligent creatures, though they look like they are, perhaps, some kind of a genetic freak, as far as combining with four faces and feet like a calf and all, but yet they are these creatures that are there about the throne of God.

Ezekiel 1:10

As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

These same four faces: man, lion, ox, and eagle, are involved in Rev 4 also.

10-11 The forward face on each creature looked like a man, another like a lion, another like a bull, and the fourth like an eagle (cf. Rev. 4:7). These were traditionally the four

²⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:9). Chicago: Moody Press.

most impressive animals, man being the chief overall, the lion chief of the wild animals, the ox chief of the domesticated animals, and the eagle chief of the birds.⁶¹ Their faces may represent the intelligence, majesty (or strength), strength (or ferocity), and speed (or freedom) of these creatures. Their wings spread out above them, evidently to support the platform above (vv. 22-23). Another view is that the cherubim were the wheels in the sense that the life spirit of the creatures was in the wheels.⁶² Two wings of each creature touched the wings of another of the creatures uniting them in action, and two of them covered the bodies of each creature, probably demonstrating humility. The church fathers connected the lion with Matthew, the ox with Mark, the man with Luke, and the eagle with John. They believed that these writers stressed a prominent characteristic of Jesus Christ represented by each of these creatures in their Gospels, namely, royalty, service, humanity, and godlikeness.

These four faces (compare this with Rev. 4:6–8) remind us of the four Gospels in which Christ is revealed in four aspects: His kingship (Matthew) symbolized here by the lion; His servanthood (Mark) symbolized by the ox; His perfect humanity (Luke) symbolized by the face of a man; and His deity (John) symbolized by the flying eagle.

These four living creatures resemble the description we have of the cherubim who were in the Garden of Eden to guard the way of the Tree of Life. They were not shutting man out from God; they were keeping the way open. What did Adam and Eve see when they looked back as they left the garden? They saw a slain animal whose skins they were wearing. And they saw the cherubim overshadowing, keeping open the way to God. It is the blood that makes an atonement for the sin of man. When Moses made the mercy seat, there were cherubim above which looked down upon the blood of the sacrifices—the same thing Adam and Eve had seen. Through the blood is the only way man can approach God. The Lord Jesus said, “. . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).²⁹

ESV: The creatures had a predominantly human shape, but each had four different **faces**. This assemblage is unique, although complex combinations of supernatural beings are known throughout the ancient Near East. Many suggestions have been made to explain their symbolism. Certainly each creature is majestic in its realm, whether among the wild (**lion**; Prov. 30:30) and domestic (**ox**; Prov. 14:4) animals, or in the air (**eagle**; Prov. 23:5; cf. Obad. 4), with each of them noticed subsequently to the **human face** (cf. Gen. 1:26). This imagery is later echoed in the four (separate) creatures before the throne in Rev. 4:7.

Chuck Smith: So, there were four faces on each of them. The front face was like a man. The right side of it was like a lion. The left side like an ox, and behind like an eagle. Now, as I say, they looked like some kind of genetic monstrosity as you look at them. There are some who see in these four faces the four gospels as they describe Jesus Christ. For in the gospels, Christ is described as the Son of man in Luke's gospel. In Matthew's gospel He is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah--or rather, Mark's gospel. Matthew's gospel, He is the servant, the ox, the beast of service. And in John's gospel, the deity, the eagle.

²⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 1:11

Thus *were* their faces: and their wings *were* stretched upward; two *wings* of every one *were* joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.

Ezekiel 1:12

And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.

Some have suggested that what they are seeing is a priestly portrayal of omnipresence.

Each creature moved straight forward without deviating, in the direction of the front of each body. Each one followed the lead of the Spirit without twisting as it went. In this context, the Spirit in view is probably the Holy Spirit of God. Other possibilities are the wind that brought the cloud, the spirit of the creatures themselves, or the "vital energy or impulse by which God from His throne acted upon them"

The Spirit of God directed their movements (cf. 20; 10:17), just as he directed Ezekiel (2:2; 3:12, 24; 11:24). 13. Read **and in the midst of the living creatures** (so RV marg., Moffatt, RSV, LXX, and Old Lat.). **Fire, torches** (ASV), and **lightning** flashed forth from their midst (cf. Ex 3:2; 13:22; 19:18; Num 11:1-3; Deut 4:24; II Kgs 1:12). 14. This verse is omitted by LXX B as a marginal amplification of verse 13. The Hebrew text seems corrupt.³⁰

ESV: straight forward ... without turning. See note on v. 9. Should this **spirit** (Hb. *ruakh*) be identified with that of v. 20? It is certainly different from the *ruakh* (Hb. for "wind") of v. 4. Given the closer identification of the spirit in v. 20, it seems likely that here the reference is to a "spirit" beyond the living creatures—in other words, the creatures' movements are responsive to the divine spirit (for "Spirit," see note on 3:12).

Ezekiel 1:13

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

[coals of fire] - see Isa 6:6.

³⁰ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:12–15). Chicago: Moody Press.

In the center of this group of four living beings was something that looked to Ezekiel like a fire of burning coals that sent out sparks toward the creatures (cf. 2 Sam. 22:9, 13; Ps. 18:8). This fire was very bright, and what appeared to be lightning as well as sparks flashed forth from it (cf. Ps. 18:12; 77:17-18; 97:4).

These **creatures**, already described as “brilliant light... glowing metal... burnished bronze” (vv. 4, 7), were also said to look **like burning coals of fire or like torches**. The glowing embers were interspersed with **fire that moved back and forth among the creatures**. This seemed to presage Ezekiel’s message of God’s burning judgment on Judah.

Ezekiel 1:14

And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

The four living beings themselves darted about in Ezekiel's vision like bolts of lightning. Perhaps this presages the prophet's message of God's burning judgment on Judah.⁶⁴ "These spiritual beings who were part angel, part human, and part animal were fitting representatives of the whole created order. Their activity affirmed the relationship of God to his creation as Lord of all things. This idea was vital in helping Ezekiel and the captives in exile and the people in Judah understand that in the midst of the storms of life, God was still on his throne. He was not oblivious to their circumstances."

McGee: The Scripture tells us “... God is light ...” (1 John 1:5). This is a tremendous vision of the glory of God, a vision out of the person of God. The Lord Jesus said, “... I am the light of the world ...” (John 8:12). What does this reveal to us? It reveals the righteousness and holiness of God. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We would be scorched by the holiness of God if we had not been redeemed by the blood of Christ and covered with His righteousness.

God is not exposed in this vision—He is portrayed. It is still true that no man has seen God at any time. Moses said, “... Shew me thy glory,” and God hid him in the cleft of the rock so that Moses saw only the glory of God, not the person of God. The Lord told him, “... Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33:18–23). Man has been forbidden to make a likeness of God (see Exod. 20:4). We do not know what He looks like. We do not even know how the Lord Jesus who became a man looked. But there is in the human heart a longing to see God; I think every idol witnesses to that desire. Although idols are perverted and profane representations, they reveal that men want to *see* God. Yet God has not chosen to reveal His Person to man.³¹

Ezekiel 1:15

Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

³¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel also saw a prominent wheel standing upright on the ground beside each of the four living creatures.

The prophet next saw **beside the living creatures** (RSV) wheels. 16. **Their appearance was like the gleaming** (lit., *eye*) **of a chrysolite** (RSV; AV, *beryl*). Hebrew, *tarshîsh*. The stone named from Tarshish, or Tartessus, in southern Spain, is probably the ancient chrysolite (*goldstone*), corresponding to our gold-colored topaz, not the pale green aquamarine or beryl. **A wheel in the middle of a wheel.** The most common explanation is that each wheel looked like two wheels cutting each other at right angles to form a compound wheel, which could move in different directions without changing front (v. 17). 18. The Hebrew text is in disorder. The LXX suggests: **And they had rims** (or, felloes; AV, *rings*). **And I looked at them** (instead of Heb *and terror was to them*). **And their rims were full of eyes**, symbolizing life and intelligence.³²

The Wheels (1:15–21).

Beside each creature was a “wheel on the earth.” The four wheels were beautiful in workmanship. They were the color of “beryl,” i.e., topaz. They appeared to Ezekiel as though one wheel were within another bisecting it at right angles. This seems to be the prophet’s way of explaining that the four wheels were omnidirectional. Like a ball-bearing they could move in any direction without any steering mechanism (1:15–17).

The wheels were huge in comparison to the total vehicle. They were terrifying because of their size. Their rims were “full of eyes round about.” The wheels moved in conjunction with the living creatures because “the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.” The *merkabah* could move on the ground or through the air (1:18–21). The wheels symbolize God’s omnipresence; the eyes, his omniscience.³³

Ezekiel 1:16

The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

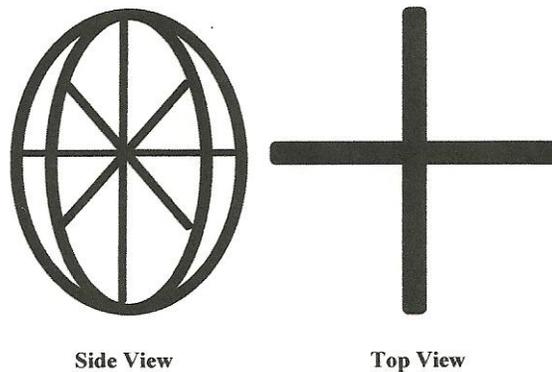
LAN 16-18: The “wheel intersecting a wheel” was probably two wheels at right angles to each other, one on a north-south and the other on an east-west axis. Able to move anywhere, these wheels show that God is present everywhere and is able to see all things (Ezekiel 1:18). God is not restricted to Jerusalem, but rules all of life and history. Though the exiles had experienced great change, God was still in control.

These wheels appeared to have been skillfully made of some valuable material, the

³² Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:15). Chicago: Moody Press.

³³ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 1:15–21). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

exact identity of which is unknown today. They all looked alike, and each wheel appeared to have another wheel, which seems to have been the same size, within it (attached to it). Another interpretation is that the wheels' rims were concentric, a smaller one within a larger one. Evidently the axis of these wheels was the same and was vertical, forming a somewhat globe-like structure.⁶⁶ Chariot wheels seem to be what Ezekiel saw with other equally large chariot wheels intersecting the main wheels. These second wheels would have enabled the previously mentioned wheels to rotate left and right as well as forward and backward, as modern spherical casters do.



The complex structure of their **wheels** is difficult to envisage, though something gyroscopic seems to be suggested.

McGee: Again may I emphasize that this is not a prophecy of the present mechanical age or even of the invention of the wheel. I am sure that in the beginning man felled a tree, cut off part of the trunk, and found that he had a wheelbarrow. When he put two wheels on it, he had a cart. Then when he put four wheels on it, he had a Ford automobile! If that is what you want to see in this vision, may I say to you, that is silly and senile, that is garbage and rubbish. We need to read further to gain an understanding of these wheels within wheels.³⁴

ESV: Beryl (Hb. *tarshish*) is a crystalline mineral found in different colors. Here, it is likely to be the pale green to gold variety. The Septuagint does not use a consistent Greek equivalent.

Ezekiel 1:17

When they went, they went upon their four sides: *and* they turned not when they went.

These wheels moved in every direction, but they did not appear to rotate when they moved. Ease of movement seems to be the point. They did, however, make rumbling sounds when they moved, as large wheels would do (cf. v. 24; 3:12-13; 10:5, 13).

³⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 1:18

As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.

[rings] The rims of the wheels.

[so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four] This should read: "They were high and dreadful; and the four rims were full of eyes round about." The rim of a wheel having many eyes all moving and looking in one or more directions would seem dreadful to a man who had never seen such things before.

They were dreadful—They were exceedingly great in their diameter, so that it was Clarke: tremendous to look from the part that touched the ground to that which was opposite above.

The rims around these wheels had eyes all around them (cf. Rev. 4:6). This gave the wheels an even more awesome appearance. Many eyes elsewhere in figurative language represent great intelligence and perception (cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3; Zech. 3:9; 4:10; Rev. 4:6).

McGee: God is a God of intelligent purpose. You and I are not living in a universe that is moving into the future aimlessly and without purpose. God has a purpose for every atom which he has created, and he has a purpose for you, my friend, in His plan and program. The very fact that you and I are alive today reveals that we are to accomplish a purpose for God. God is intelligently carrying out His purpose in the world.

ESV: The wheels' eyes should be understood metaphorically and as related to the "gleaming" beryl of v. 16 (perhaps protruding gemstones).

Ezekiel 1:19

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.

There was some coordination between the living beings and these wheels because whenever one of the living creatures moved, its corresponding wheel moved with it. The creatures and wheels could move vertically above the ground as well as horizontally along the ground.

19-21. There was a unity between the **living creatures** and the wheels, directed by the Spirit of God. Compare references to the wheels of the throne of "the Ancient of days" in Dan 7:9, and of the bases in Solomon's Temple, I Kgs 7:27-30, and to the chariot in I Chr

28:18. In later times the “Ophannim,” wheels personified, stand next to the cherubim and seraphim in the presence of God (Enoch 61:10; 71:7).³⁵

Ezekiel 1:20

Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was *their* spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

20-21 Just as the creatures moved at the impulse of the Spirit (v. 12), so their corresponding wheels also moved at its impulse. The creatures and the wheels always moved or rested together regardless of the direction in which they moved because the Spirit controlled them.

Most expositors view these cherubim as forming, supporting, or pulling a throne-chariot on which Ezekiel saw God riding (cf. Exod. 25:10-22; 2 Sam. 22:11; 1 Chron. 28:18; Ps. 18:11; Dan. 7:9; Heb. 8:5; Rev. 4). I think this makes sense. Perhaps the mobility of the wheels suggests God's omnipresence, the eyes His omniscience, and the elevated position His omnipotence.

"God had wheels! He was not limited. He could go anywhere anytime. . . .

"Thus ultimately the chariot vision is a vision of hope for a people who needed encouragement to hope once again. A vision of God's mobility was for them a message not to despair but to anticipate: in what way was God on the move and how did it concern them? The following passages provided the answer."

McGee: Now we can see more clearly that these wheels speak of the ceaseless activity and energy of God. Our God is omnipotent. The Lord Jesus said, "... All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). God is moving forward, and He *will* accomplish His purposes.

In Revelation 4 we again read of these four living creatures of Ezekiel's vision. They are set to guard the throne of God, and in guarding the throne they do two things: (1) they protect the throne in the sense that they do not allow man in his sin to come into the presence of God; and (2) they indicate the way that man is to come. "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there's no other way but this" ("The Way of the Cross Leads Home" by Jessie Brown Pounds). The cherubim show the way.

However, I think that Ezekiel saw something infinitely greater. He saw the cherubim over the world, extending mercy to this little piece of dirt that is flying through space. Someone has said that man "is nothing in the world but a rash on the epidermis of a second-rate planet." But God made the whole world a mercy seat when Christ died down here, and God is hovering over this world today, ready to receive any sinner who will come through Christ to Him.³⁶

³⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:19–22). Chicago: Moody Press.

³⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 1:21

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 over against them: for the spirit of the living creatures *was* in the wheels.

Ezekiel 1:22

And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature *was* as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.

Ezekiel also saw something like a clear expanse (Heb. *raqia'*, firmament, Gen. 1:6; Ps. 19:1; 150:1; Dan. 12:3) of ice (Heb. *qerah*, crystal) over the heads of these four living creatures. Rather than being empty space this expanse appeared to be a firm, level surface or platform.

The likeness of the firmament. Hebrew *rāqî'a* occurs seventeen times in the Scriptures, in Gen 1; Ezk 1; 10:1; Ps 19:1; 150:1; Dan 12:3. Here the picture is that of a “platform” **spread out above** (RSV) the heads of the living creatures like **crystal** (lit., *as the eye or gleam of ice*; so LXX, Syr, Vulg. Cf. Rev 4:6. Omit “terrible,” with LXX).³⁷

The Expanse (1:22–25).

Over the heads of the creatures was an “expanse,” lit., something stretched out. This expanse was the platform upon which the throne of God rested. It glittered “like ice.” The platform symbolizes the glories of heaven. The entire persons of the creatures including their outstretched wings were under the platform. When the *merkabhah* was in motion the whirring wings sounded like roaring waters or like “the voice of the Almighty,” i.e., loud thunder. The movement of the *merkabhah* was directed by the voice of God from above the platform (1:22–25). The symbolism points to God as high and lifted up above the heavens, far removed from this world. Yet he still gives direction and order to his creation from his heavenly throne.³⁸

ESV: 22–28 The climax of the vision: a form can be discerned **above** the wheels, above the creatures, above the expanse, on a throne. Wrapped in light, **the glory of the Lord** cannot be captured in human language.

ESV: 22–23 Expanse appears four times in the immediate context (vv. 22–23, 25–26) and forms a strong link to Gen. 1:6–8, 14–20, where it is used nine times (out of a total of 17 times in the whole OT). There the expanse forms the dome of the sky; here it is borne

³⁷ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:22). Chicago: Moody Press.

³⁸ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 1:22–25). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

on the wings of the creatures and forms a boundary *beyond* which comes the culmination of the vision.

Ezekiel 1:23

And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies.

As the creatures stood under this transparent expanse, Ezekiel saw two of the wings of each creature stretched out straight from their bodies and the other two wings of each one covering either side of their bodies.

Ezekiel 1:24

And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.

Clarke: The noise of their wings—When the whirlwind drove the wheels, the wind rustling among the wings was like the noise of many waters; like a waterfall, or waters dashing continually against the rocks, or rushing down precipices.

The prophet also heard a sound that the movement of the creatures' wings produced, a sound like a white-water torrent, or like the voice of Almighty God, or like an army on the move. When the creatures did not move, they dropped their wings.

When in motion, the sound of their wings was **like the noise of great waters** (Ps 42:7; Isa 17:12), **like the thunder of the Almighty** (Ps 29, “voice of God,” seven times), **a sound of tumult like the sound of a host** (RSV; Isa 17:12; Joel 2:5). **Almighty**. Hebrew *Shaddai* is a pre-Mosaic term for God, used chiefly in poetry, or in prose with *El* (God) prefixed (Gen 17:1). The name is of uncertain derivation, but may mean “omniscient, all-knowing,” rather than “Almighty,” or “of the mountains” (cf. N. Walker, “A New Interpretation of the Divine Name Shaddai,” *ZAW*, 72 (1960), pp. 64-66). 25. This verse is omitted by nine Hebrew manuscripts, the LXX, and a Syriac manuscript, as a dittography.³⁹

ESV: For the first time in the vision, sound dominates sight, even though the preceding description includes a violent thunderstorm (v. 4). The sound of **many waters** will again accompany the approaching glory of God in 43:2.

Ezekiel 1:25

³⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:24). Chicago: Moody Press.

And there was a voice from the firmament that *was* over their heads, when they stood, *and* had let down their wings.

[a voice from the firmament] This was the voice of God Himself. This was God's throne which was set above the firmament over the heads of the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

Ezekiel also heard a voice coming from above the expanse over the creatures. It was evidently the voice of God (cf. Job 37:4-5; 40:9; Ps. 18:13; 104:7).

Ezekiel 1:26

And above the firmament that *was* over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne *was* the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

85 times in the book of Ezekiel, he is apparently given the title “son of man,” (*ben Adam*); and that is just his title. It is also to emphasize that he is a son of the dust. The term is also used once of Daniel.

Interestingly enough, the Lord in his ministry seemed to make that His favorite title of Himself: “Son of Man.” Son of God emphasizes His Deity. Son of Man emphasized His mission to save us. “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:10.

[sapphire stone] A sapphire—clear heavenly blue.

[a man above] God's body is like that of a man, for man was created in His likeness and His image bodily (□Genesis 1:26, notes; see Anthropomorphism). Here He is described as being like a man from His loins downward (Ezekiel 1:26-27; Ezekiel 8:2). In Ezekiel 8:3 He (the person on the throne) is referred to as putting forth a hand like that of a man, taking the prophet by the hair of the head, lifting him up between heaven and earth, and bringing him to Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 10:20 the person sitting in the throne is called the God of Israel. This entire description is one of the literal chariots of God on which He rides from place to place when He chooses. That He does ride upon the cherub is stated in 2 Samuel 22:11; Psalm 18:10. God also has many other means of travel and physically goes from one place to another as all other beings in existence. He is omnipresent, but not omnibody.⁴⁰

LAN: This “figure like that of a man” revealed God’s holiness and prepared Ezekiel for what God was about to tell him. The figure represented God himself on the throne. In a similar way, Christ revealed God in human form and prepared us for his message of salvation. Christ came into history in a real, human body.

Over the heads of the creatures was also something like a throne that was dark blue and very beautiful, like lapis lazuli. Lapis lazuli is a dark blue semiprecious stone that the

⁴⁰ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

ancients valued greatly. Sitting on the throne high above the expanse was a figure that looked like a man (cf. Exod. 24:10; Rev. 4:2).

On the platform was a throne in **appearance of a sapphire** (cf. Ex 24:10). This may be the ancient marble-like, azure stone known as *lapis lazuli*.⁴¹ The upper part of the human likeness seated on the throne shown like **gleaming bronze** (RSV; lit., *like the eye of hashmal*; cf. v. 4), which fire enclosed round about (lit., *like the appearance of fire a house to it round about*); while the lower part, also, was covered by a fiery brightness.⁴¹

The Throne (1:26–28).

The most important aspect of the vision has been put last for emphasis. Above the platform was a sapphire-like throne (cf. Exod 24:10), the majestic throne of God himself. Ezekiel reverently backs away from describing in detail the one who sat on the throne. He says only that he had “the appearance of a man.” From his waist and upward the figure resembled “glowing metal” that looked like it was full of fire. From the waist and downward Ezekiel saw only fire. Around the entire figure was a radiance. This brilliant light was multi-colored like the colors of a rainbow. The rainbow in this vision suggests that mercy as well as judgment was in the offing (1:26f.).

Ezekiel identified what he saw there beside the river Chebar as “the glory of the Lord.” This is a technical term for the presence of God among his people. The basic idea conveyed through this entire vision is that God is present with the captives in Babylon. Ezekiel fell on his face in the presence of this awesome sight (1:28).⁴²

Ezekiel 1:27

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.

LAN:27-28 The glory of the Lord appeared like fire and brilliant light to Ezekiel. Ezekiel fell facedown, overwhelmed by the contrast between God’s holiness and his own sinfulness and insignificance. Eventually every person will fall before God, either out of reverence and awe for his mercy or out of fear of his judgment. Based on the way you are living today, how will you respond to God’s holiness?

Above his waist he seemed similar to hot metal glowing with heat (cf. v. 4), and below his waist he seemed to resemble fire (cf. 8:2; Dan. 10:6; Rev. 4:3, 5). All around him there appeared to be a radiance, like the glow that surrounds red-hot metal and fire.

⁴¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:26). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁴² Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 1:26–28). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Ezekiel 1:28

As the appearance of the bow 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. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

The rainbow represents the covenant of God with respect to the earth (here and in Rev 4). See also Isa 6:1-3; Rev 4:3, 6-8.

[bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain] This is a literal bow and not a symbol (Genesis 9:12-17; Rev. 4:3; Rev. 10:1).

[This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD] As stated this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, and not merely a symbolism for us to differ over.

Clarke: As the appearance of the bow—Over the canopy on which this glorious personage sat there was a fine rainbow, which, from the description here, had all its colors vivid, distinct, and in perfection—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. In all this description we must understand every metal, every color, and every natural appearance, to be in their utmost perfection of shape, color, and splendor. “And this,” as above described, “was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Splendid and glorious as it was, it was only the “appearance of the likeness,” a faint representation of the real thing.

LAN 27-28 The four living creatures and the four wheels are powerful pictures of judgment, yet the rainbow over the throne symbolizes God’s never-ending faithfulness to his people. Just as God sent a rainbow to Noah to symbolize his promise never again to destroy the earth by a flood (Genesis 9:8-17), so this rainbow symbolizes God’s promise to preserve those who remain faithful to him. The purpose of God’s judgment is to correct us and, ultimately, to allow perfect peace and righteousness to reign on the earth forever.

This radiance resembled a rainbow; it encircled the person on the throne. This radiance represents the glory that surrounds Yahweh as He sits on this heavenly throne (cf. Exod. 19; 1 Kings 8; Isa. 6; Dan. 10; Rev. 4).

"Noah saw the rainbow *after the storm* (Gen. 9:13-16), the Apostle John saw it *before the storm* (Rev. 4:3), but Ezekiel saw it *over the storm and in control of the storm.*"

Ezekiel realized that what he was seeing was a representation of Yahweh, perhaps the preincarnate Christ, and he fell prostrate on the ground (cf. 3:23; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 8:17; 10:8-9; Rev. 1:17). Then he heard a voice speaking.

"It was a deeply-held tenet of Israelite religion from Moses onwards that God could not be visibly expressed, and for that very reason idolatry was out. But given the possibility of a theophany, no form but the human form could conceivably have been used to represent the Deity. It was, however, no mere human that Ezekiel saw: His

radiance was surrounded by the glory of a rainbow, and the prophet could show his awe in no other way than by falling on his face in the dust before his God (28)."

Ezekiel realized that he was in the presence of the glorious, holy God who could judge sin and uncleanness instantaneously and finally. His only appropriate response was humble prostration, throwing himself on God's mercy (cf. Isa. 6:5).

"The opening vision of Ezekiel's ministry affirmed three significant truths about God that are summarized in v. 28. First, the vision was a reaffirmation of the nature of God as holy, powerful, and majestic. Second, the rainbow was a reminder of God's promise-making and promise-keeping character (Gen 9:16). It was a rekindler of hope that God could and would help. Third, it was an assurance that nothing, including geographic location, separated one from God (cf. Rom 8:38-39)."

The awesome holiness (otherness, difference, purity, perfection) of God overwhelmed Ezekiel. He undoubtedly associated the revelation in this vision with other similar manifestations that God had given of Himself in Israel's past: at Mount Sinai, in the wilderness wanderings, at the dedications of the tabernacle and temple, and in Isaiah's commission. As a priest Ezekiel would have been familiar with these former revelations, as the modern reader of the Old Testament is. Consequently he would have understood much that he saw. It provided a backdrop against which he understood Israel's sinfulness and God's judgment of sinful nations.

"Jacob saw God at Peniel and his life was transformed from that hour. Moses went up to Mount Sinai and communed with God face to face and thereafter was marked for the rest of his life. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the sanctuary and his entire ministry was suffused with the beauty of the holiness of the Lord. Paul saw the risen and glorified Redeemer on the Damascus road and was blinded from that day on to all the allurements of the world. John saw visions of the glorious unfolding of God's program for Christ, the church and all the redeemed, and as a result was unmoved by the adverse circumstances that surrounded him. Ezekiel saw visions of the glory of the Lord God of Israel and his ministry never lost the impress of it."

Every servant of the Lord must appreciate the glory of God to serve Him effectively. One may not see a vision of God's glory or have a strongly emotional experience that devastates him or her, as Ezekiel did. Nevertheless the Holy Spirit will impress the glory of God on the servant's heart as that person views God in His Word. Appreciating the glory of God humbles a person and affects how one views other people and all of life.

"Let us hope that the majesty of God would always cause us, similarly, to respect and honor Him.

The brightness round about the Lord's throne was **as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud**. This suggests calm after storm. To the Hebrews and to us the rainbow recalls the covenant made with Noah (cf. Gen 9:12ff.; Rev 4:3; 10:1). **The glory of the Lord** (*kfbôd YHWH*, 1:28; 3:12, 23; 10:4, 18; 11:23; 43:4, 5; 44:4 and "the glory of the God of Israel," 8:4; 9:3; 10:19; 11:22; 43:2) in Ezekiel means primarily "an appearance of light and splendor indicating the divine Presence" (Cook, *Ezekiel*, ICC, p. 22). The root idea of *kābôd* is "weight," "heaviness," and conveys the idea of some external, physical manifestation of dignity, pre-eminence, or majesty (cf. Betteridge, "Glory," ISBE, II, 1235ff.).

In the presence of God, Ezekiel recognized his unworthiness (cf. Gen 32:30; Ex 20:19, 20; 24:11; Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6).

From his vision Ezekiel learned that God was not limited to Palestine, but was present in Babylon among the exiles, descending to the earth on cherubim and storm (Ps 18:10; 104:3). The chariot could move swiftly in all directions, symbolized by the number four. The figures facing four directions (vv. 9, 10, 17) suggest the thought that all parts of the universe are open to the gaze of God. The wings connected the vision with heaven and the wheels with earth. Thus no spot is inaccessible to the divine presence and energy. The omnipresence of God is hereby forcefully conveyed.

The figure seated on the throne speaks of the omnipotence and sovereign rule of God (v. 26). The sovereignty of God is manifested over inanimate creation—wind, cloud, fire, thunder (vv. 4, 24), and animate creation—the four living beings (vv. 5, 10).

The general human form and various faces of the living creatures express the dignity assigned by God to the various portions of his creation, a reflection of His majesty: man, intelligence; the eagle, swiftness; the ox, strength; the lion, majesty. The rabbis explain the symbolism thus: “Man is exalted among creatures; the eagle is exalted among birds; the ox is exalted among the wild beasts; and all of them have received dominion, and greatness has been given them, yet they are stationed below the chariot of the Holy One” (Midrash Rabbah *Shemoth*, section 23, on Ex 15:1). The noise of the cherubim’s wings (v. 24) is the testimony of all creation to God (Ps 19:1), while the veiled bodies (vv. 8, 11) represent the inability of all creatures to stand in the presence of a holy God (cf. Isa 6:2). The Church Fathers employed the four faces as emblems of the Evangelists. Irenaeus, Jerome, Athanasius, and Augustine vary in their usage. Jerome’s, which has the greatest currency, is as follows: the man, Matthew; the lion, Mark; the ox, Luke; the eagle, John. While the Babylonian deities Marduk, Nebo, Nergal, and Ninib were denoted by the ox, man, lion, and eagle respectively (Jeremias), Ezekiel most likely derived his symbolism from the figures in Solomon’s Temple (I Kgs 6:23-35; 7:27-37) and from the mercy seat above the ark in the Tabernacle (Ex 25:10-22).

The eyes on the wheels suggest omniscient intelligence (v. 18), while the spirit in the wings and the wheels (vv. 20, 21) pictures the pervasive working of God’s Spirit seen in the unity and harmony of his works. The divine purity and holiness are exhibited by the fire (v. 27), while the rainbow around the throne illustrates sublime beauty, and perhaps, also, the idea of forgiveness and mercy (v. 28).

This glory was seen by Ezekiel at Chebar (1:4-28), gave him a message at Telabib (3:12ff., 22ff.), transported him from his home in the exile to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court of the Temple in Jerusalem (8:4, 5), departed from the cherubim in the Temple to the threshold of the Temple (9:3; 10:4), mounted up from the threshold to the eastern gate of the Temple’s outer court (10:15, 16, 18, 19), went up from the midst of the city to the Mount of Olives on the east side of the city (11:22, 23), but returned to fill the new Temple and cleansed people (43:2-7; 44:4).⁴³

As the cherubim came to a halt and the sound of their **wings** stopped, Ezekiel became aware of another sound. It was **a voice from above the expanse over their heads**. This was the voice of God seated on the throne. As Ezekiel instinctively glanced upward in the

⁴³ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 1:28). Chicago: Moody Press.

direction of the voice, he saw above the expanse **what looked like a throne of sapphire**. “Sapphire” (*'eben-sappîr*) or, more properly, *lapis lazuli* (NIV marg.) is an azure-blue stone, prized since ancient times. It is cut and polished for ornamental purposes.

Seated on this shining blue **throne** was Someone who looked like **a man**. Ezekiel’s gaze was drawn first to the upper part of His body and then to the lower part. Though Ezekiel could describe the cherubim in detail, all he could say of God was that **He looked like glowing metal and fire**. The splendor of His glory was so bright that Ezekiel could see only His form before he was forced to look down. Ezekiel then noticed a **radiance** surrounding the vision. It looked **like ... a rainbow**. The multi-splendored colors of the rainbow were refracted from the blazing light of God’s glory. The Apostle John described the same beauty in his vision of God’s throne in heaven (Rev. 4:3).

Lest anyone doubt what Ezekiel saw, he stated clearly that it **was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD**. The Lord’s glory is referred to 16 times in Ezekiel (1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; 39:21; 43:2 [twice], 4-5; 44:4; see comments under “Structure and Style” in the *Introduction*). Ezekiel had seen a theophany, as God had appeared to him in a visionary form. By using the terms “appearance” and “likeness” Ezekiel was pointing out that he had not seen God directly. That would have caused immediate death (cf. Ex. 33:18-23; John 1:18).

Ezekiel responded in humble submission; he **fell facedown** (cf. Ezek. 3:23). As he prostrated himself in awe before God’s majesty, he **heard** God speak. This was probably the same **voice** mentioned in 1:25.⁴⁴

McGee: “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.” Ezekiel saw more than Moses saw, more than David, Isaiah, or Daniel saw. He saw a vision of the glory of God—not His Person, but His glory. The presence of God was there. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth and took upon Himself our humanity, His glory was not seen. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord.

“And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.” This vision had a tremendous effect upon Ezekiel, and it should have this effect upon us: “Oh, God, I am undone. I’m lost and I need You. I turn to You and accept You.”

We find throughout the Old Testament that when men came into the presence of God, they went down on their faces. This was true of Isaiah who said: “... Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). In the presence of the Lord, this man found himself horizontal with the ground. That was the position Daniel took also. It was the position John took on the isle of Patmos: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead ...” (Rev. 1:17).

What a picture of our holy God we have here! I must say that I stand merely on the fringe, thankful that I’m hidden in the cleft of the rock. Someday I am going to look upon the face of my Savior. I do not know what He looks like, but I am looking forward to that day.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 1:25–28). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 1:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel was a faithful witness to all that he saw. A good witness is marked by five essential characteristics: (1) he has a sense of divine call which gives him his commission and authority (1:28-2:8); (2) he must be saturated with the message of God (2:8-3:3); (3) he shares the message, and does not receive it solely for personal enjoyment (3:4-11); (4) he shares the word with compassion, identifying with the plight of the hearer (3:12-15); and (5) he understands and accepts the responsibility to warn those who are out of God's will, and to call them to repentance (3:16-21). The "rainbow" is a sign of God's mercy and covenant love (see 10:1ff.; Gen 9:11-17; Rev 4:3).⁴⁶

ESV: The **bow ... on the day of rain** could signal the covenant rainbow of Gen. 9:13–16. Given the ominous message that follows, the more likely symbolic reference is to the bow that is the Lord's weapon from the storm, which shoots arrows of lightning (see Ps. 7:12–13; Hab. 3:9). The **glory of the Lord** is his manifested presence with his people, visible in the wilderness (Ex. 16:7) and then accessible through the sanctuary (Ex. 40:34–35); in Ezekiel the term appears in Ezek. 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23; 43:2–5; 44:4. This glory will leave the temple (chs. 9–11) and then will return to the restored temple (43:2–5). See note on Isa. 6:3. **I fell on my face**. In the NT, John's vision of the risen Christ (Rev. 1:9–20, esp. v. 17) stirred a similar response.

Chuck Smith: o, you might find it interesting when you have your own study to read Daniel 7, 9, and 10, as Daniel describes his vision of God. Isaiah chapter 6, as he describes his vision of the throne of God, and then Revelation chapter 4, as John describes his, and you put them all together and you get a pretty good composite of what the heavenly scene must look like.

This bow, John describes it in Revelation chapter 4, a bow like emerald, sort of a greenish in color that is around about the throne of God. Ezekiel describes it here. John had much the same reaction of just falling on his face. Daniel was weak as a result of his vision. He just was totally weakened by it. Ezekiel fell on his face and he heard the voice of one that spake.

Now, flying saucer buffs declare that Ezekiel actually sighted a flying saucer. That there are extraterrestrial beings that have visited the earth and have been visiting the earth during the historic period of man. And that they actually account for many of the otherwise unaccountable phenomena of history, some of the mammoth building projects of ancient man, which still baffle us today. And they, of course, go out to the desert or to various areas, and they have these sightings of these flying saucers, and there is just an awful lot that has been written, has been discussed, has been talked about flying saucers, and there have been many reports and much interesting phenomena surrounding these flying saucers.

Many of them can be accounted for as, perhaps, swamp gases and other things, but yet there are others that reasonably intelligent men have expressed and described and it's hard to discount them all.

Lambert Dolphin who is a scientist up at the University of Stanford, one of the scientists, I believe his area is that of astrophysics, quite outstanding, very intelligent man, was asked to speak at one of these flying saucer conventions. And so he prepared a

⁴⁶ Believer's Study Bible

paper on flying saucers in which he thought that he would, before the convention, thoroughly debunk this whole flying saucer kind of a... what he thought mythology. And he was approaching it from just a purely scientific standpoint, and was going to take so many of the concepts that they had about moving on the magnetic forces and all of this, and seek to thoroughly, from a scientific standpoint, debunk the thing.

As he was sitting there on the platform, and there were about three thousand people at this convention, the speaker, and of course he was interested that these weren't freaky people. You know, you think that people who see flying saucers and all are sort of fringe, freaky kind of people. But he realized that among them there were professors, other scientists, peace officers, a wide cross-section of our society.

The leader of the convention asked the people, "How many of you have ever seen a flying saucer?" And he was shocked that about two-thirds of the hands in the auditorium went up. People had said they had sighted flying saucers. He then asked, "How many of you have been taken aboard a flying saucer?" And a third of the people raised their hands. And he began to get a little concerned. When he stood up to speak, he heard this screaming noise that was extremely distracting to him. And he wondered, "Where is that coming from?" And he looked around the audience to see what direction the people might be looking, because he figured that those that were closest to the screaming noise would be looking at it and he could localize where it was and then ask the ushers or someone to take care of that and get rid of it. But he said, suddenly he realized that nobody was looking around anywhere and that he was the only one that was hearing this screaming noise. And to this man of science there came suddenly the awareness, "Hey, this whole thing is demonic." And he got so shook that he was unable to deliver his paper in which he was going to debunk the whole flying saucer theory or ideas, concepts. He was just totally shaken.

Now, the interesting thing to me is that these people do try to bring Ezekiel into their fold, into their number. "Look, he describes it. He perfectly describes it in his book." Wait a minute, what does Ezekiel describe? As I said, in chapter 10 Ezekiel again describes it, but he tells us what it is, "These are the cherubim that are there before the throne of God." These wheels within the wheels, with the flashes of lightning and the movements and so forth. And if you heard them describe how the flying saucers move in the straight type of lines, they don't make a wide arc when they turn. They just... straight line type of movement, being able to change directions and so forth with tremendous speed. Able to hover and then suddenly move off with tremendous speeds.

Is it possible that these people who are sighting these UFO's are also dabbling into the occult and are seeing fallen cherubim? We know that when Satan fell that one-third of the angelic host went with him. It is interesting that the Bible says that Satan was indeed a cherubim. He was the anointed--not a cherubim, because cherubim is plural. Cherub is the singular. He was an anointed cherub that covered. But there are cherubim, plural. It is very possible that we are dealing in an interesting area of the occult and that there are these cherubim that are making themselves visible to those who are dabbling into that realm of occultism.

Now what Ezekiel saw were the cherubim there at the throne of God, but it would also stand that the cherubim who fell would have a similar likeness or appearance and movements. So, it is possible that we cannot thoroughly discount this whole flying saucer phenomena as a bunch of junk, but it could indeed be that in these last days, as satanic

forces are growing, as far as the demonstrations of their power. That as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of man. And there was strong demonic activity in the days of Noah, and we're coming into the area again of strong demonic activity.

Now I offer that as only a suggestion. I'm not declaring to you, "Oh, I've got some great mysterious truth I'm revealing now, you know. This is the way it happened or this is the way." This is just a suggestion. Something to think about. And I'll let it go at that.

The Manifestations of God

Now as we go through this book, we should never forget that Ezekiel was trained as a priest. We can give Ezekiel the benefit of full training. He knew the Torah cold. I am sure that he had done a systematic study of all the manifestations of God.

For those of you who really want to do that for yourselves, there are a number of texts: Ex 19:16, 24:10; 1 Kgs 19:11, 22:19; Nahum 1:3; Ps 18:11, 50:3; 1 Sam 4:3; 2 Sam 6:2; and Isa 6:1 being some of them.

LAN: PROFILE: EZEKIEL

Although Ezekiel's visions and prophecies were clear and vivid, very little is known about the prophet's personal life. He was among the thousands of young men deported from Judah to Babylon when King Jehoiakim surrendered. Until those tragic days, Ezekiel was being trained for the priesthood. But during the exile in Babylon, God called Ezekiel to be his prophet during one of Israel's darkest times.

Ezekiel experienced the same kind of shocking encounter with God that Isaiah had reported 150 years earlier. Like Isaiah, Ezekiel was never the same after his personal encounter with God. Although God's messages through both these prophets had many points in common, the conditions in which they lived were very different. Isaiah warned of the coming storm; Ezekiel spoke in the midst of the storm of national defeat that devastated his people. He announced that even Jerusalem would not escape destruction. In addition, during this time Ezekiel had to endure the pain of his wife's death.

God's description of Ezekiel as a watchman on the walls of the city captures the personal nature of his ministry. A watchman's job was dangerous. If he failed at his post, he and the entire city might be destroyed. His own safety depended on the quality of his work. The importance of each person's accountability before God was a central part of Ezekiel's message. He taught the exiles that God expected personal obedience and worship from each of them.

As in Ezekiel's day, it is easy for us today to forget that God has a personal interest in each one of us. We may feel insignificant or out of control when we look at world events.

But knowing that God is ultimately in control, that he cares, and that he is willing to be known by us can bring a new sense of purpose to our lives. How do you measure your worth? Are you valuable because of your achievements and potential, or because God, your Creator and Designer, declares you valuable?

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Was a priest by training, a prophet by God’s call
- Received vivid visions and delivered powerful messages
- Served as God’s messenger during Israel’s captivity in Babylon
- God shaped his character to fit his mission—a tough and courageous man to reach a hard and stubborn people (Ezekiel 3:8)

Lessons from his life:

- Even the repeated failures of his people will not prevent God’s plan for the world from being fulfilled
- Each person’s response to God determines his or her eternal destiny
- In seemingly hopeless situations God still has people through whom he can work

Vital statistics:

- Where: Babylon
- Occupation: Prophet to the captives in Babylon
- Relatives: Father: Buzi. Wife: Unknown
- Contemporaries: Jehoiachin, Jeremiah, Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar

Key verses:

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says,” whether they listen or fail to listen’ ” (Ezekiel 3:10-11).

Ezekiel’s story is told in the book of Ezekiel and 2 Kings 24:10-17.

LAN: CHART: EZEKIEL

Ezekiel served as a prophet to the exiles in Babylon from 593-571 B.C.

Climate of the times

- Ezekiel and his people are taken to Babylon as captives.
- The Jews become foreigners in a strange land ruled by an authoritarian government.

Main message

Because of the people’s sins, God allowed the nation of Judah to be destroyed. But there was still hope—God promised to restore the land to

those who remained faithful to him.

*Importance of
message*

God never forgets those who
faithfully seek to obey him. They
have a glorious future ahead.

*Contemporary
prophets*

Daniel (605-536)
Habakkuk (612-588)
Jeremiah (627-586)

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