

# A Study of Ezekiel

Part One:

Cherubim and the call of God

Chapters 1-3, 10

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Dedication:

To those who desire to comprehend.

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# CONTENTS

Preface and five parts listed, 4

Why Ezekiel?, 5

## **The Cherubim visions, 7**

Date issues, 7

Setting, 10

Author, 13

Judgment coming, 15

Cherubim, 19

Faces, 25

Wings, feet etc. 28

Wheels, 32

Eyes, 36

Above the cherubim, 38

## **The calling, 45**

Son of man, 45

The charge, 47

Eating a scroll, 50

The Spirit, 54

Watchman, 57

Final vision, 61

Other books by Bob Faulkner, 65

## PREFACE

It soon became clear that creating a commentary on “the book of Ezekiel” was undertaking a task that would soon overwhelm.

There was just so much! Just too many styles and messages. It would have to be broken down. When I was able to do that, the weight of the task lifted. I believe it will be the same for my readers.

Ezekiel is not just a book of prophecy.

- It is a description of heavenly mysteries.
- It is a series of fiery judgments.
- It is a collection of parables and visuals.

I have attempted to demonstrate this diversity by grouping the chapters according to the given style.

The general plan is as follows:

**Part I** will deal with Ezekiel’s calling in chapters 1-3, and some duplicate material in chapter 10.

**Part II** will speak of the unusual visual aids God asked Ezekiel to act out, and the parables he told.

**Part III** extracts all the purely judgmental passages regarding Jerusalem and Israel.

**Part IV** contains judgments on surrounding nations.

**Part V** records the incredible promises to the Israel of God of a restored land and Temple.

This volume contains Part I.

## Why Ezekiel?

I was asking God for good books to read, as my “free time” was devolving toward novels and fantasy. Only the retired understand the concept of “free time” and how it can become a trap to the unobservant.

But wasn't the Bible enough? I was reading through It in a scheduled program every morning. I was reading from It online in connection with daily recordings for Sermonaudio. I was hearing It in my church. What could I do more?

The answer was study. Not just read. Study. Study what? Ezekiel came to mind often but I brushed the thought away as Ezekiel presented so many challenges. Frankly, I had never been able to comprehend various portions:

What in the world do the *wheels* portray? Is the antichrist mentioned by Ezekiel? What is the proper placement of “Gog and Magog”? And that Ezekiel Temple... is there any way to help God's people figure all this out? Without muddying the waters even more, that is?

On the other hand, will I be useful to the Kingdom of God by reading Dickens or Austen or Bronte in my spare time?

I could not ignore the challenge I was receiving. So Ezekiel it was. The book soon became my daily delight. I dug in, and this is what I found. Here is the way I will proceed with this study:

- I will forego the normal tradition of suggesting author and date and other background materials in this introductory place, choosing rather to indicate these matters as they are suggested in the text.

- I will use the ESV throughout. Eventually the entire text of the ESV Ezekiel will be incorporated in the books.
- Nearly all the interpretations will be mine, with an occasional assist from MacArthur, Unger, Strong and other references.
- I have included much of the “Ezekiel” section of my question-and-answer volume called *Through the Bible Q & A*. (2017)
- In keeping with that 2017 text, I will continue the use of question and answer. For the most part I will pose questions that came to me as I read through Ezekiel.
- I believe the Lord did indeed help me, this time around, to understand things I had not grasped before. But I make no claim of inspiration for my findings. Prayer, study, meditation all bring some illumination. You may find that by using my discoveries, you will be able to go on to even deeper conclusions. I’d like to hear from you if that is the case. No humanly authored book should be allowed to stand uncorrected.

# A STUDY of EZEKIEL

## PART ONE

### Cherubim and the call of God: Chapters 1-3, 10

#### THE CHERUBIM VISIONS (chapters 1 and 10)

##### 1. Can we identify the date of Ezekiel's visions?

**1:1-2. *In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month... (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin)...***

The book of Ezekiel opens with an enigma and shall be followed by many of the same. We may as well get used to mystery from the outset.

The simple question here is, the thirtieth year of *what*? Why start this narrative by saying where you were and what you were doing, Ezekiel, without being specific as to when it all happened? Indeed, some have conjectured that the very beginning of our story was somehow left off, that Ezekiel had indeed been very specific, but for some reason that portion of the text has been lost.

We probably won't need to go there, but let's dig a little deeper to resolve this issue, lest we be discouraged from moving on into weightier matters.

We will work from what we do know. Thankfully, verse 2 lets us in on the fact that this “thirtieth year” is equal to the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s deportation.

Perhaps a little background will help. Jerusalem and its surroundings were forced into exile as God promised, for a seventy-year period, by the Babylonian powers that finally overtook it. But the deportation did not take place all at once. There were three separate waves of destruction and captivity.

In 605 B.C., the first band of captives, including the prophet Daniel, made its way out of the Promised Land. Then wave two occurred in 597 B.C. This group included 10,000 people, and another prophet, the subject of our study.

King Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim and grandson of the great Josiah, went with this band of prisoners. He probably remained in Babylon the rest of his life, first as a prisoner, and after thirty-six years, as a friend of the court.

There would be a third and final round-up, in 586 B.C., involving the tragic end of Zedekiah and the release of Jeremiah.

But it is Jehoiachin, the king captured with Ezekiel, that captures our attention here. From his exile are dated the prophecies we shall study.

This first encounter is in Jehoiachin’s 5<sup>th</sup> year of imprisonment. Then consider other references,

8:1, *“In the sixth year...”*

20:1, *“In the seventh year...”*

(eighth year not mentioned)

24:1, *"In the ninth year..."*

29:1, *"In the tenth year..."*

26:1, (This one is out of order.) 30:20, 31:1 *"In the eleventh year..."*

32:1, 32:17, 33:21, *In the twelfth year..."* (In this latter verse, Ezekiel refers to the year of "our" exile.)

40:1, *"In the twenty-fifth year of our exile..."*

29:17, *"In the twenty-seventh year..."* (Also out of order.)

So we understand that the prophecies of Ezekiel date from 605 B.C., when he and Jehoiachin and 10,000 others were pulled out of their homeland and placed in a foreign residence.

But that still does not answer the "thirtieth year" question. That year and the year 605 are one and the same. But why mention it? We already have a way to trace the actual calendar year via Jehoiachin.

What had happened thirty years earlier? Some of the finest minds, from Jerome to our own Macarthur, believe that Ezekiel is merely telling us that he was thirty years old when all this happened. Jesus and John the Baptist and evidently many Jewish men came of age at that time. Thirty years was when priests, as was Ezekiel, began their functionality. Ezekiel was merely saying that when he was thirty, God called him to be a prophet.

With all due respect to the fine minds, and mine is feeble by comparison, I must say this sounds a bit weak. No other Bible character who has age attached to his history, is so introduced.

Some of the lesser lights have come up with two other possibilities. One, it was *thirty years* earlier that Josiah had found the book of the Law. Israel was turned around. A new era.

And two, which I prefer, though unfortunately not any one of them can be proved, is that in 625 B.C., thirty years before Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, King Nabopolassar came to the throne of Babylon, in the days when Assyria's power was winding down. It was this king who eventually overtook Assyria and established the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which Nebuchadnezzar now ruled. In other words, This was the *thirtieth year* of the Nabopolassar/Nebuchadnezzar era. Ezekiel was merely stating the truth of his new surroundings. Babylon now ruled the world, and that rule had begun, by some definitions, thirty years ago.

When we state the year in which we live, we do not usually say what that year means, the years since Christ was born. In the year in which I write these words, it is 2021 and I expect people to understand what I mean, that it was 2,021 years ago that Christ was born. I am going to assume for now that Ezekiel was speaking the language of the people around him, who lived in year 30 in Babylon-speak.

But more mysteries seriously need our attention, and we hasten on.

## **2. Where was the priest Ezekiel when the prophetic call came to him?**

***1:1, 3. I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal... in the land of the Chaldeans...***

These fellow-exiles of the prophet-to-be had evidently formed a community at Tel-Abib (3:15), "mound of the deluge", so named

because of the regular flooding by the Euphrates. The ancient Nippur in Iraq, now an excavation site fifty miles southeast of Babylon, is thought to be the location of this settlement.

The modern *Tel Aviv* is named after this ancient settlement, though in no way near it.

As to the Chebar canal, whose name means “thick” or “wide”, there is some indication that it is the ancient "Naru Kabari", whose modern name is Shatt en-Nil.

At one time an important link between old Nippur and the Euphrates River, and even called “the Euphrates of Nippur”, the Shatt en-Nil is now a dry river-bed/canal in southern Iraq.

So a large group of Jews had found a comfortable landing place near Babylon’s center, in the land of the *Chaldeans*, another name for the original founders of the Babylonian Empire. Here was a major city on one end of the canal, and the mighty Euphrates nearby. Fertility. Convenience.

But of course, it wasn’t Israel. There was and is no place like home. The people needed to keep hearing the words of the prophet of God, and God provided such a one among them.

Ezekiel moves about during the prophecies recorded. It is not clear whether this was merely his first stopping place, or a permanent residence, but he refers to this moment in his history several times (3:23, 10:15-22, 43:3). Definitely, an unforgettable experience and location for the transplanted priest.

**3. Was Ezekiel's call merely a stirring from within his own heart?**

**1:1, 3. ... *the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God... the word of the Lord came... the hand of the Lord was upon him there.***

Yahweh draws a clear line between the true and the false prophet. In Ezekiel's own book, chapter 13, God tells the prophet to speak against men who create a message out of their inner being, rather than from the Lord. Foolish prophets are those who have seen nothing but continue to speak as though they know everything. Those who have seen visions have mostly seen false ones. Any person on earth can imagine. Only God's select men can see truth.

Ezekiel saw ultimate Truth. Heavens opened. Visions from God Himself. The Word came and Ezekiel heard it and recorded it and we still have it today. This is the Word of God.

Need I say that there are multitudes among us today who are seeing and saying, and feeling and saying, and imagining and saying? And not one of them has a word worth hearing. God has spoken through the prophets and the apostles and His own Son. It is enough. Shut the others out.

**4. What is different about the setting of the book of Ezekiel?**

In Isaiah and Jeremiah, all the destruction by Babylon is imminent, and repentance is still possible. But in Ezekiel, some of the punishment has already taken place. The carrying away of the second wave of captives has begun, and Ezekiel is in that number. The prophet must speak to his fellow exiles the Word of the Lord,

for even more judgment is coming to their beloved nation. He will be called upon to announce these coming catastrophes on the way.

Knowing these facts will help us to understand some of the prophecies.

## **5. Who was Ezekiel?**

### **1:3. ... *the priest, the son of Buzi.***

Precious little is given to us about this man. A priest. We assume he was of the tribe of Levi, as was his father Buzi, of whom nothing more is said in Scripture.

To be a functioning priest, as mentioned above, he had to be at least thirty years of age. We know that Daniel had come to this same Babylon as a teenager, in 605, eight years earlier. Daniel would now (597) be in his mid-20's, Ezekiel not far from that. Jeremiah had begun preaching when the grandfather of Jehoiachin, Josiah, was still living. But he was still alive when Nebuchadnezzar was pulling people out of Judah, as late as 586. So these three prophets all lived at the same time, at least for a while.

Ezekiel was among a select group of men who either served or were eligible to serve as both prophet and priest. The others:

Melchizedek was a mysterious prophet, priest, *and king*.

Samuel the prophet was in the Levitical family but served as a priest.

Jeremiah was a priest though he may not have functioned as one.

Zechariah was in the priestly lineage, but also may not have served as a priest.

Summing up, Ezekiel, like men before and after him, was in the priestly line, but had that career cut short by deportation and a call to prophesy. We know that he was carried away with his king and 10,000 citizens to the land of the Chaldeans in or about 597 B.C. and spent some or much of his time with a community of Jewish exiles south of Babylon, on a tributary of the Euphrates River.

#### **6. Is Ezekiel found elsewhere in Scripture, whether by name, quotation, or allusion?**

“By name” is easy. The name Ezekiel appears nowhere in the Bible outside this book (1:3, 24:24).

But quotes and allusions can be found.

The problem is, in many cases the quotes may not be exclusively from Ezekiel. Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16, and John in Revelation 21:7 tell how God “... shall be their God,” and His people “will be My people.” These words are all over Ezekiel: 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:27. But the same words can be found in Jeremiah 30:22 and 31:33. Even Moses uses the terminology in Leviticus 26:12. That is, God said the same thing through at least three different men in the Old Testament. Who were Paul and John quoting?

Since there is no definitive answer to that last question, some scholars have concluded that, no, Ezekiel is not quoted by any of the New Testament writers.

Then, allusions? Is not Ezekiel alluded to by Jesus when He speaks of the “Son of Man”? Is not Ezekiel also called the Son of Man (2:1)?

Yes. But so is Daniel, though to be fair, only once, as opposed to 90 times in Ezekiel's case.

And Jesus' talk of shepherds, sheep, goats, is this not Ezekiel language (chapter 34)? Yes, and Zechariah language, too.

But one clear connection between the New Testament and the words of this prophet is when Jesus speaks in John 5 of opening graves and resurrecting people. Ezekiel 37:12 has God saying, "I will open your graves."

The book of Revelation contains by far the largest collection of Ezekiel themes. I do not imply that writers simply copied from one another, only that the Holy Spirit connects one author to another by using similar words and describing similar situations.

As we will see, Revelation's living creatures, its description of Jesus, the eating of the Word, Gog and Magog, the measuring of a Temple, the glories of Heaven and the Throne and God Himself, are all very clearly identifiable in only one Old Testament prophet, the one we are studying.

## **7. From what direction is judgment coming?**

***1:4. As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north...***

As we have pointed out, God is not finished with the judgment of Judah, He here says through the prophet. 597 is past but 586 is coming. Be ready Jerusalem. Trouble is coming *from the north*.

Here and in 26:7 it is clear that the “north” can refer only to Babylon. Contemporary Jeremiah sees the same thing in his book (1:13-15, 4:6, 6:1, 10:22, 46:10).

But you say, the city of Babylon is *due east* of Jerusalem. How can Babylon be a threat from the north? We think in terms of airplanes, and the distance “the crow flies.” But Bible trips were taken on foot, over roads made hard by traders, travelers, and armies. The trails through this part of the world moved along what we still call the “fertile crescent”, the civilization, by then, built up in the neighborhood around Babel, and now extending somewhat north, very much west, and then south through Canaan/Israel.

The armies of Babylon were on the move quite often. Ezekiel sees them on the move again, heading towards his precious homeland, from the north.

To be sure, there is another northern threat mentioned in Ezekiel (38:15, 39:2) and Jeremiah (50:3). In these passages, a land even to the *north of Babylon* is seen as a threat. A remote land. The uttermost north. A quick look at a map shows us none other than today’s Russia as the target of these end-time prophecies. We shall visit them later.

I say that verse 1 indicates that *judgment* comes from the north. Yet this entire chapter is a description of the *glory of God* in Heaven. If “north” had not been added by the Spirit, I would have seen this only as John saw it all in the early chapters of Revelation. Here, God seems to be putting His glory and His judgment in one breath.

But then, if John is to be a reference, John himself sees this judgment factor added in quite often in his book. In fact, most of Revelation is judgment, yet the bulk of that message follows a

revelation of the God-man Jesus in chapters 4 and 5 that is probably unequalled in Scripture.

The splendor of the heavens and the evils of men are in stark contrast. The prophets show us both.

And yes, when Babylon, whether Ezekiel's Babylon or John's, is destroyed, a chorus of praise rises up to Heaven (Revelation 18:20.)

We must rejoice with God when God is happy. And He is happy to judge evil.

**8. Is the proposed threat to Israel merely a human army backed by a mighty human emperor?**

***1:4. ...and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal.***

***10:3-4. ... and a cloud filled the inner court, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord***

Wind surrounded by storm. A cloud surrounded by brightness. Metal surrounded by fire. What is brewing here? Is this the fury of Nebuchadnezzar? Or has God Himself been aroused to fight against His own people in a blaze of glory they will not soon forget?

Yes, the glory of God shall be propelling the Emperor and his hordes. Judgment day has come. God's judgment. Though it looks like man from our end, it is not man. God is not mocked. He will repay evil unrepentant men.

## 9. What is the significance of the “cloud” in Scripture?

The cloud appears often in God’s Word.

- The glory of the Lord is in a cloud as the ark is brought into Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:10-11).
- The glory-cloud of judgment is in Isaiah, threatening Egypt (Isaiah 19:1).
- The leaders of Israel returned from exile, remind the Israelites of the cloud that led them by day. That was no ordinary cloud (Nehemiah 9:19).
- A cloud interrupts Peter’s suggestions on Transfiguration mount, and brings terror to the disciples’ hearts.
- Jesus will return, not *on* a cloud, as we picture, but according to Luke, *in* a cloud (Luke 21:27).
- The magnificent angel of Revelation 10 is literally *wrapped* in a cloud (Revelation 10:1).
- The two prophets die on the streets of Jerusalem. But three days later they are resurrected and raptured to Heaven *in a cloud* (Revelation 11:12).

For us and all God’s people, a cloud means God is near, but for the lost it means something very terrible. Even God’s people are shaken in its presence. Strange to hear in our own day the casual interactions between believers and what they are claiming to be the cloud of God’s glory. I don’t think so...

And it is from the midst of all this spectacular show of glory that there are sent forth four living creatures.

### **Are the cloud and the fire ever associated elsewhere?**

- It was a cloud by day, but fire by night, in the wilderness. And on the day before the Law was given from Sinai, thunders and lightnings combined with a thick cloud (Exodus 19:16).
- Fire and cloud are mixed together and called the glory of God in the story of Moses' encounter with God on Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18).
- The cloud, alternating with fire, covered the tabernacle (Numbers 9:15-16).
- In Revelation an angel wrapped in a cloud has feet of fire (Revelation 10:1).
- Isaiah predicts that the cloud-by-day and fire-by-night phenomenon is in our future (Isaiah 4:5).

### **10. Is there anything in Scripture that compares to Ezekiel's "living creatures"?**

***1:5. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.***

***10:3-4. Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house... and the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house.***

First it must be understood that the visions of chapter 1 and chapter 10 take place at different times. But the wording of these appearances is so similar that we will treat them as one vision.

In chapter 1, there is an appearance of the cherubim that suggests oncoming judgment as God's wrath is gathering in the skies above Ezekiel. Chapter 10 paints the picture of a departure, Ichabod-like, signaling to Ezekiel that the glory of the Lord is departing from Israel.

Next please understand that the reference to "living creatures" in the chapter 1 vision and "cherubim" in chapter 10 is a connection that Ezekiel himself makes, not my speculation: Verse 20 of chapter 10:

***These [cherubim] were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Chebar canal [chapter 1]***

But, yes, these living beings or ones like them can be seen elsewhere: John the apostle sees similar beings in his vision (Revelation 4:6-8). Note especially there the lion, calf, man, and eagle, of John, plus the wings. And then there are the "eyes", that compare to what Ezekiel will see (verse 18). Both of these give constant glory to God. Certainly there are overlapping characteristics.

But right away we must point out differences as well. Ezekiel's beings, which he will label cherubim in chapter 10, have four wings, not six. And whereas Ezekiel sees four faces on each of the cherubim, John sees only one face on each of the four beings, but with the animal characteristics of the four seen by Ezekiel.

Going from John and searching in Scripture for a one-faced being with six wings leads us to Isaiah, not Ezekiel. In his chapter 6 we see

beings that use those six wings to cover and to fly. And Isaiah gives them a name: seraphim (Isaiah 6:2-3).

So there seem to be at least two sets of four (per John and Ezekiel) living beings that bring glory to God in an intimate special way. All three prophets see these creations around the Throne of God lost in constant praise, the very reason for their existence. One group is called cherubim, the other seraphim. There may be a third. Or a three-hundredth. We haven't seen everything that Heaven holds!

Note that none of these created beings are called angels. We are led then to believe either that "angels" is a generic term that includes many different orders, or that angels and cherubim and seraphim and "living creatures" are separate classifications of God's heavenly creation. We are struck with wonder either way.

You will note that I try to steer clear of the term "creature" in Ezekiel, and especially the KJV "beast" of John. Modern translations have upgraded from the "beast" mentality to "creature", but I find this word, because of modern usage, a bit repugnant also.

We must not view, as Heaven does not view, these entities as ghastly or bizarre. The cherubim and seraphim are exquisitely beautiful and a constant delight to the One Who created them for their specific purpose.

The Hebrew from which Ezekiel's "creature" comes, merely means *alive*. Living. It is good for us that Ezekiel later names this living one a "cherub" and that Isaiah likewise gives us an identification: seraph. John's Greek usage is the word from which we obtain "Zoology". The translators realized the word usually means *animal life*, hence the "beast" notion. Beast is *animal* in old English.

It is obvious the modern translators had to deal with the possibility that many would see “beast” as “monster”. The change to “creature” was helpful but not corrective. Creatures come out of dark lagoons and kill people. Creatures crawl all over the ground and invade houses.

Better to go back to the simple “life” definition that is acceptable in the Greek or Hebrew word.

John does not further identify his living beings, nor shall we. But as suggested above, they certainly seem to be of the seraphim class.

### **11. Was Ezekiel the only one who spoke of cherubim in the Scriptures?**

No, not at all, though his description is the only one that concerns the living beings of heaven. Nearly every other reference is to art-work: statues, carvings, etc. inside the tabernacle or temple. Yet these references are invaluable to us as we try to see what Ezekiel saw.

Moses records for us the earliest mention of real cherubim. He tells us that God placed cherubim at the entrance to Eden, to be sure that Paradise could not be accessed by sinful man (Genesis 3:24).

But beginning in Exodus, the mention of the cherubim is of man-made replicas of the heavenly.

Right away we are asking, how did men, other than by inspiration from Heaven, know how to begin to create a likeness of a cherub, the magnificent creation that stands in the presence of God Almighty?

Answer: That inspiration is promised, and delivered to two men introduced to us in Exodus 31:

*“See,” God says, “I have called by name Bezalel... I have filled him with the Spirit of God... and Oholiab... that they may make all that I have commanded you... the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it.”*

Regarding that mercy seat (Exodus 25: 17 ff) there were to be two cherubim of gold, one placed on either end of the ark. Their wings were to be spread out in such a way as to touch one another! This corresponds exactly to what Ezekiel sees (1:11). *“Their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings each of which touched the wing of another...”*

In this way they were to serve as a covering of the ark. God would meet with Israel from that time on in that holy place, and would be known as the God “who spoke from between the two cherubim,” the God Who is “enthroned on the cherubim.” So did David and Hezekiah, and Psalmists speak of this God. There is a constant association between these created splendors and the God of Israel (1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, 2 Kings 19:15).

Solomon would expand the role of the man-created cherubim. His renditions were not golden statues sitting above the ark, but full-length figures that actually stood *on the floor*, whose combined ark-covering wingspan was some thirty feet!

Throughout the Temple were carvings of cherubim as well as humans and lions, all reminding us of the real beings Ezekiel viewed and their several faces.

Hebrews 9:5 in reviewing the furniture of those ancient times, speaks of the *“cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.”*

How significant then, that the one prophet who sees in detail the real cherubim, also seems to give to us the picture of one particular cherub who is called the “*covering cherub*” (KJV rendering, ch. 28:14). Reading through this chapter addressed to the King of Tyre reminds us often of Satan, the enemy of all ages, who seems to have so infested this evil king as to make him become worthy of judgment with the Devil.

Oh yes, there are cherubim. All over the Bible and all over Heaven. No, they are not just carvings and gold statues. Ezekiel will show us what the artwork meant all along.

## **12. How many cherubim did Ezekiel see??**

### **1:5. ...*four living creatures.***

Ezekiel saw exactly *four* of these creations of God. Four cherubim. Four faces. Four wings. Later, four wheels. Four sides.

Four is more prominent a number than we realize at first.

Four is the number of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, each introduced there by one of the four living creatures (seraphim).

Zechariah sees four chariots on the move to patrol the earth: red, black, white, dappled. There are four winds of heaven in that same chapter (Zechariah 6).

In Daniel, four animals. Four wings on one of them. Four heads on another.

But please note that this vision does not limit the number of cherubim to four. It is merely that Ezekiel *saw* four of them. We have no idea how many may have been created.

And as indicated, we shall see later that Satan himself was once in that number.

### **13. In what sense were the cherubim human-like?**

**1:5, 7, 8, 10. *And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness... Their legs were straight... Under their wings on their four sides, they had human hands... each had a human face...***

**10:8, 14. *The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings... the second face was a human face...***

They looked human to Ezekiel. This is a fascinating insight when you realize they had multiple faces, wings, and animal feet. How can such a being suggest a *human* being?

Well, at least one of the *faces* was human (1:10). Their body was evidently human in *shape*, if without wings. Straight legs (1:7). All in all, Ezekiel became aware that he was in the presence of something or someone at least a little like himself.

### **14. Why would the cherubim have animal faces?**

**1:6, 10. *...but each had four faces... As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.***

**10:14. *And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face,***

***and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.***

Their faces. There were four of them, in both Ezekiel passages, four faces per cherub.

The nature of their faces. Ezekiel 1: a human face, a lion face, an ox face, an eagle face. But in Ezekiel 10:14-15, though the prophet claims these are the very living creatures he saw at Chebar, with the same faces as in chapter 1, the ox face is missing, and is replaced by the *cherub* face. See more below.

We must affirm here that these beings, these cherubim, are *unimaginably* beautiful. Words fail here.

But for us to see beauty in a four-faced being is difficult, unless the faces speak of something beautiful.

My first guess was that somehow Daniel with his animal prophecy held the key. But the key would not fit in the door. How could it be that the nations of the world, which these Daniel animals represent, are flashed before the Father as something beautiful day and night through all the ages?

Other possibilities came and went. Then: what is more beautiful to the Father than the Son? Could it be that these cherubim flash images of the Son before the Father constantly and make His heart glad, even as my own heart gladdened at the prospect?

The lion face? That was relatively simple to put in place. Jesus, the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The human face? Could this not be Jesus the Son of Man, the God-man who came to earth as one of us?

The ox had me troubled for some time. Where in the world is Jesus compared to an ox? In the providence of God my devotional reading on the morning I was contemplating all of this was from Leviticus 9.

Why had I never seen the ox as a sacrifice? We speak often of the Lamb. The bull. But an ox? There it was. Leviticus 9:4. Yes, the KJV has it "bullock". But *the same Hebrew word* is translated "ox" in our Ezekiel passage. I shall not quibble about which English word translates the Hebrew *shore*. But I can definitely say that whatever was sacrificed in Leviticus as a *peace offering* is being represented in Ezekiel as a feature of a cherub's person.

And I can be thankful for modern translations, without which I would not have guessed the connection.

Is not Christ our peace offering? Whether bullock or ox I care not. The image is clear.

So, Jesus the Lion-King. Jesus the Son of Man. Jesus the peace sacrifice. But what of the eagle?

The eagle represents swift judgment. In Ezekiel's own book (17), God compares and contrasts himself to two eagles who represent Babylon and Egypt. As these two made plans to destroy Israel, He, as an eagle Himself, will destroy their plans and plant Israel under the Messiah.

Swift judgment is portrayed by Jeremiah (48) as an eagle is about to pounce on Israel's enemies.

Jesus Himself will return with swift judgment as a vulture/eagle always shows up quickly when there is carnage (Matthew 24:27-28).

The picture of Ezekiel's cherubim faces is now complete. They speak of Jesus! Jesus comes to earth as a man (human face), to offer Himself as the sacrifice for our peace (ox). For those who will not accept that peace there will be judgment (eagle), followed by the reign of the King of Kings (lion).

And is not this Jesus a reflection of the Father? Does the Father look in a mirror when He sees these cherubim and seraphim before Him reminding Him of Who He is?

Before we move on. As I stated earlier, there is a difference between chapters one and ten as regards the "ox" face. Initially he sees this animal, but it has been changed to "cherub" in chapter 10.

The one possibility I see is that chapter 1 is talking about the faces *around the head*, as we know faces, whereas chapter 10 seems to be talking about the faces or sides, in connection with *the wheels*. We will observe later that in Solomon's Temple there are carts with panels, and on the panels are engravings of these very animals.

#### **15. What was unusual about the wings of the cherubim?**

***1:6, 8-9, 11-12. ...and each of them had four wings... and their wings thus: their wings touched one another... 9. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies... and each went straight forward.***

***10:21 "... and each four wings."***

Four wings, says Ezekiel. In both passages. John and Isaiah are specific as to a count of *six* wings, and Isaiah labels these beings as seraphim. But there is much overlapping functionality between the two creations.

Their wings, two of them, touched another cherub's wings, and in so doing, covered the ark of the covenant, while the other two covered themselves.

The comment that each of them went *straight forward without turning*, could mean that the specific assignment of these particular cherubim was the covering of, the guarding of, the ark of the covenant, seen even as late as the book of Revelation in Heaven.

Both in verse 9 and in verses 11 and 12, the idea of "straight forward" is entered following a description of the wings.

#### **16. What was unusual about the feet of the cherubim?**

**1:7. ...and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze.**

Soles *as on* a calf's foot. Note it is *not* a calf's foot. It is *like* the bottom, or sole, of a calf's foot. Wide, solid, stable, firm.

Or, perhaps this portion of their anatomy represents the "ox" part of the image.

Consider: Their wings would correspond to eagles in flight. Their "human" appearance is seen in straight legs, the presence of hands, and a human face. So, perhaps, these feet are like *ox calves'* feet.

As to the gleaming of brass, even their under-most part is glorified by the God of Heaven, whose ministering spirits never touch earth

soil, never are concerned about hiding their beauty or lessening it. Even the soles of their feet are beautiful.

Or it could well be that “they” refers to the cherubim as a whole entity. They dwell in the cloud of the glory of God, after all.

**17. How should we interpret the movements of the cherubim?**

***1:12-14. And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.***

I seem to see a chessboard. Call it Heaven. On this board every piece has its directions and its assignment. As lightning does not turn, but heads straight out, these beings, as glorious as they are, seem to have been created with Divine restrictions. When they are needed to go, they go. Straight and direct to their destination. No hesitation. Their seeming haphazard and constant movement has a plan and a purpose behind it, which we shall never be favored to know, nor shall we need to know.

## **18. What was the overall appearance of the cherubim?**

**1:13, 14. *As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning ... like the appearance of a flash of lightning.***

**10:2, 6, 7. *...burning coals from between the cherubim... fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim... the fire that was between the cherubim... like sparkling beryl...***

Fire. Though we are caught up in the beauty and splendor of it all, we need to be aware that these beings stand for the justice of God. It was the God who appeared in a *burning* bush who was about to send judgment on Pharaoh. In a passage that puts cherubim and clouds and coals of fire together, David cries out,

*“He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering... thick cloud dark with water. Out of the brightness before Him hailstones and coals of fire broke through His clouds... the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire (Psalm 18:10-13).”*

The apostle Paul tells us to be good to our enemies, thereby *heaping coals of fire on their heads!*

This is not a light show, this is not entertainment. These beings blowing in from the north come ahead of the judgment of God.

19.1:15-21. Do the wheels that now appear in the narrative suggest any other Biblical reference?

*1:15-21 Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl. And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.*

*10:2, 6, 9-13, 16-18 ... the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim ... fire from between the whirling wheels, And I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl. And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went, but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without turning as they went. And their whole*

***body, their rims, and their spokes, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around – the wheels that the four of them had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing “the whirling wheels.” And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them. And when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels did not turn from beside them. When they stood still, these stood still, and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in them.***

It may be helpful to compare the descriptions of each chapter, an item at a time. Note the similarities and the differences in the chart of the next page.

Description is what we are given in chapter 1. In chapter 10, with some of the same description, we are told of an incident that occurs dealing with the cherubim. We center now on description, and will talk of the narrative later on.

The fact that the wheels moved in unison with each other and with the living beings, suggests a chariot, especially when “fire” is added to the mix. Yes, we can almost see Elijah and his heavenly escort to the Spirit realm at the end of his life. Ezekiel is perhaps seeing the chariots of fire that transport angelic beings. How awesome must have been this moment for a mere man, whether the Prophet Elijah who rode in that chariot, or Ezekiel who now sees many of them in one place (2 Kings 2:11-12).

Notice successor prophet Elisha’s words as he sees chariots and horses of fire: “... the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” Here was

Chapter 1:15-21	Chapter 10:2, 6, 9-11, 13, 16-17
I saw a wheel on the earth beside the <b>living creature</b> , one for each of the four of them.	I looked and, Behold, there were four wheels beside the <b>cherubim</b> , one <b>beside</b> each cherub.
Their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl.	And the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl.
And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel.	And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel.
When they went, they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went.	When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went
And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.	And their <b>whole body</b> , their rims, and their <b>spokes</b> , their <b>wings</b> , and the <b>wheels</b> were full of eyes all around – the wheels that the four of them had.
(no match)	As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing “the <b>whirling wheels</b> .”
And when the <b>living creatures</b> went, the wheels went beside them.	And when the <b>cherubim</b> went, the wheels went beside them.
And when the <b>living creatures</b> rose from the earth, the wheels rose.	And when the <b>cherubim</b> lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels <b>did not turn from beside them</b> .
Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them.	(no match)

(no match)	In whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without turning as they went
When those went, these went	(no match)
And when those stood, these stood, and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them.	When they <b>stood still</b> , these stood still, and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them.
For the spirit of the living creatures was <b>in the wheels</b> .	For the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

the true guardian of his people! Here was the heavenly reality of the wars fought for and against Israel!

A passage that is even more seriously linked to this one is found in the story of the assembling of the Temple furniture.

The structure and the components of the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon were meant to communicate, parable-like, the essence of Heavenly things. How amazing to find the following description of a purely earthly creation mimicking a clearly heavenly reality. It is in 1 Kings 7:27-37. Hiram of Tyre is slowly putting together the elements of the Temple.

To support ten water basins each holding 240 gallons of water, per MacArthur, Hiram had to make ten stands, or pedestals. They are called “bases” in the KJV. Notice the familiar words...

*“Each stand was four cubits long and four cubits wide.”* A framed edifice was covered with panels, and the art-work on the panels was a combination of *lions, oxen, and cherubim*. Then there were

*four wheels*, for this stand was to be portable. These *wheels* were underneath the panels and made like chariot wheels.

Mini-chariots, portable carriers of water to move about in the Temple as needed. Are these the pictures of the cherubim, the real cherubim? Only, in the heavens, these water-bearers are made of fire and spirit?

How I wish I could explain to my readers how a set of wheels can be filled with the Spirit. And the significance of a wheel being within a wheel. How body and chariot could be of one piece and all be filled with eyes.

But I can ask us all to gaze on this wonder until it fills us with better things than we are accustomed to lust after in this world. Oh to desire to know, and then to know, the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

## **20. "Full of eyes?" What could this mean?**

***1:18. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims were full of eyes all around.***

***10:12. And their whole body, their rims, and their spokes, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around – the wheels that the four of them had.***

Whether the beings of Revelation are seraphim or cherubim, one thing they have in common with Ezekiel's creations is that they are "full of eyes":

*"And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind... and the four living*

*creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within..." Revelation 4:6-8.*

One thing becomes established in this Ezekiel passage. The bodies, faces, wings *and* the chariot-like features of these beings are one. What can be said of the wheels can be said of the entire person being described. I say "person" because angelic beings are not robots or things. Created they are for a specific purpose, but somehow person-hood is built into them.

So when Ezekiel says the "rims" (of the wheels), and the "wheels" were full of eyes, he is saying that cherubim are full of eyes.

The meaning, the visual effect of all this, is so difficult for us. We want to fall down like a Daniel or Ezekiel and ask what is meant? Why? How?

The only authoritative location to be searching for Scripture answers is Scripture itself. Consider these:

Hanani the prophet says to the erring King Asa: *"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him (2 Chronicles 16:9)."*

David agrees in Psalm 34:15. *"The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous."* And in Psalm 66:7: *"His eyes keep watch on the nations."*

David's son adds in the Proverbs (15:3): *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."*

John sees one at the beginning (1:14) and end (19:12) Whose eyes are *"like a flame of fire"* reminding us of earlier descriptions we have of the nature of these beings.

It takes a lot of eyes to run throughout the whole earth, to watch out for the nations, and the righteous within those nations. Could it be that God has given to these living beings the power of His own eyesight as they dart around hither and yon watching every activity of humanity every moment of every day, and simultaneously reporting their findings to the Lord of all?

Are all these eyes on the cherubim simply “*the eyes of the Lord*”?

**21. What are we privileged to see – and hear – over the heads of the cherubim?**

***1:22-25. Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings.***

***10:1, 5. Then I looked, and behold, on the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim... and the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.***

As though all of this glory and movement and beauty were not enough, our eyes and ears are now directed over the heads of the cherubim to even greater wonders.

It would seem that all we have seen so far is happening on earth. A magnificent invasion of heavenly beings has riveted Ezekiel's attention, but somehow his gaze is averted upward, to an "expanse", in KJV terms, a "firmament," the word that should remind us of Genesis 1, a place called "Heaven" by God. Genesis 1 is not the heaven of heavens, but the first heaven. The sky. The atmosphere around us.

But this Ezekiel sky was markedly different. It was shining like crystal. Is this the "*sea of glass, like crystal*" that John saw in his parallel revelation (Revelation 4:6)? There in John's vision, it is before the throne, which is our next destination here in Ezekiel. And sure enough, four living beings are in attendance in both places. Ezekiel and John are in the same theater beholding glories we cannot imagine!

Is this then the "third heaven" to which Paul was caught up?

And is this pictured by the fifteen-foot diameter "sea" of Solomon's Temple, a huge basin filled with water for the cleansing of the priests, corresponding to the laver in the Tabernacle?

Next we are told again of the wing formations of the cherubim, positioned below the expanse. And for the first time, we *hear* something. It is the sound of whirring cherub wings, a sound equal, says Ezekiel, to many waters and the sound of God Himself! The sound of an army can be imagined as well.

Then all is stilled. A voice. Wings stop. Absolute quiet. And we are asked to look even farther into the glory of God. Above the cherubim with their covering wings. Above the expanse of the crystal heaven. To the very Throne of God.

A description of the Throne, then of the One Who speaks, then His very words.

## **22. What is the throne of God like?**

**1:26. *And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire...***

**10:1. *There appeared above them something like a sapphire, in appearance like a throne...***

There is much talk in Scripture of the Throne of God. Let us look at a few of the references.

The sons of Korah remind us that God's Throne and kingdom are without end. Sitting on this Throne it is God who reigns over the nations (Psalms 45:6, 47:8).

The Throne of the ancient of days, with the under-thrones of those who will reign with Him, are all seen in Daniel 7:9.

And by far the greatest mention of this center of all things is in Revelation.

The first thing that John sees upon his arrival in heaven is the Throne and Him Who sat on it (Revelation 4:2-3). Twenty-four thrones surround this one (4:4). Flashes of the lightning with which we are becoming familiar as we study Ezekiel, emanate from the Throne (4:5). Torches of fire are burning there, symbolic of the Spirit of God (4:5). The sea of glass is there, as in the temple and in our Ezekiel narrative (4:6).

And there are four living creatures in that John passage, reminding us somewhat of what Ezekiel beheld (4:8).

More. There is the Lamb (5:6). And elders. And untold thousands of angels. And constant worship (5:11-14). Then an innumerable company of saved humans, come to God during the Tribulation (7:9-14).

And then all the dead, while the books are opened (20:11-12).

Finally, I see a river of life flowing from that Throne (22:1). I believe Brother Ezekiel will be showing us that too, a bit later.

This is some of what Ezekiel was experiencing six hundred years before Christ came to earth. The Throne of God. And someone is seated there.

### **23. Did Ezekiel see God?**

***1:26-28. ... and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.***

Scripture interprets Scripture. No man has seen God at any time. Moses could only see a bit of God. Jesus became God in the flesh so we could get to know Him. And only once did Jesus begin to show the disciples the true glory of the Father.

To see all of God is to die instantly.

Ezekiel couches his revelation in very careful terms, again very much *unlike* the proud men and women of our own day who boldly declare they were in the throne room of God and chatted with Him about this and that. Notice his humble approach:

*“the likeness of a throne.”* It looked like a throne, but what man can see the very Throne of this omnipotent God? *“The likeness with a human appearance.”* I knew He represented God but He was in human form. *“The appearance of fire.”* It looked like fire, but what it was Ezekiel cannot tell.

This was the apex of the vision that would start Ezekiel’s prophetic career. He ends his description of the Throne Room and Him Who occupied it by recalling a spring rain that is followed by a rainbow! In the midst of the fire and lightning and thunderings and awesome threatening power of God, Ezekiel sees the beauty of the bow, the symbol of the promise-keeping God.

Both Daniel and John the apostle saw a vision of the Lord. Consider the following similarities to Ezekiel’s vision in the chart of the next page. Note the fire, the brightness. And it is interesting that from Ezekiel 9 on we are introduced to “a man clothed in linen”, exactly the term used by Daniel to describe the Lord.

Especially note the reaction. To see the Lord is not a casual thing.

<b>Daniel 10</b>	<b>Revelation 1</b>	<b>Ezekiel 1</b>
<b>Man</b> clothed in linen		<b>Human</b> appearance
	Long robe	
Belt of fine <b>gold</b>	<b>Golden</b> sash	
	White hair	
Body like beryl. (can be gold color, bright)		Body like <b>fire</b> , bright all around
Face like <b>lightning</b>	Face like <b>sun</b> shining in full strength	
Eyes like <b>torches</b>	Eyes like flame of <b>fire</b>	
	Sword out of mouth	
Arms and legs like gleam of <b>burnished bronze</b>		
	Feet like <b>burnished bronze</b>	
Sound of words like sound of <b>multitude</b>	Voice as the roar of <b>many waters</b>	
Reaction: No strength. Fell on my face in deep sleep.	Reaction: Fell at his feet as dead.	Reaction: Fell on my face.

**24. What was Ezekiel's response to the cherubim vision? (See chart above)**

**1:28. *Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.***

Think of it. Wind. Cloud. Fire. Cherubim, angelic beings attached to spirit carriages. A crystal sky, sounds of many waters and a marching army. The Throne. The Lord Himself in human form. The glory of Yahweh, the great I Am.

He falls on His face, not out of duty but out of exhaustion. His very breath is taken away. Though he stands up in the next verse, it is only with the supernatural power of the Spirit upon him.

How strange, I say again, to hear visionaries in our day talk so casually of their so-called encounters with Heaven. It would seem that in fact one would come out of such experiences wounded emotionally and sometimes physically (think Paul or Daniel or Jacob or Isaiah or John). It is not an everyday occurrence. And it cannot ever be forgotten. We are so glad that Ezekiel was told to write it down. We wish certain among us would not cheapen Ezekiel's encounter with the fake ones of their own.

We move on to the Voice of the Lord now. Ezekiel is not given time to think about all these things. Time to listen. As Isaiah and John and all God's prophets, Ezekiel is going to be told now what is his lot in life. It is not a pleasant one. Would the prophets of today know what is the cost of being a real man of God, how many would claim the office?

## THE CALLING

### 25. Why is Ezekiel called “Son of man”?

**2:1. And he said to me, “son of Man.”**

Yes, He did. Ninety-one times the Lord addressed this prophet as *son of man*. Only one other (merely human) man of God is so designated, and he only once. Daniel is called *son of man* by Gabriel (Daniel 8:17). And of course the Son of God calls *Himself* the *Son of man*, around fifty times in Matthew and John. (We are assuming there is much repetition from Matthew, in Luke and Mark.)

A dozen times or so in Scripture, the term “son of man” merely means a human being. For example, “*What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man...?*” (Psalm 8:4)

So why does the Father choose this term for Ezekiel, and why does Jesus choose it for Himself? Perhaps we need not strain our thinking beyond what we have already said: the term means simply “human being.”

Could it be that Ezekiel the priest needed to be reminded that he was after all only a son of man, a mere mortal? He would be walking in the glory of heavenly visions, but he would be reminded ninety-one times that he was a man.

Saul had to become “little one”, *Paul*, and in addition be afflicted by that thorn in his flesh, when suddenly he was taken into Paradise. What New Testament character besides, perhaps, John had more reason to be lifted to pride with the number of revelations received than Paul?

John himself did not lead a picnic-like life. Legends about his suffering are numerous.

And Jesus? Son of Man indeed? The High King of Heaven lowers Himself to be called by His own mouth, a man? Oh the definite article is helpful, “the” Son of Man, but still his favorite designation is simply a human one. One of us.

It seems to me that the term is not an elevated one at all, but a mark of the most abject humility. For Ezekiel it was necessary. For Jesus it was voluntary.

**26. How was Ezekiel ready to listen to God so quickly after the marvels He has just witnessed?**

***2:1-2. ... stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. And as he spoke to me the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet and I heard him speaking to me.***

We have already established that, like John and Daniel, Ezekiel simply fell to the floor after all of this encountering of Heaven. The answer to my question, then, must come outside of Ezekiel. Yes, the text is clear. As Jesus and Peter could speak to cripples and tell them to arise and walk, God here not only speaks a command to Ezekiel, but also gives him the ability to keep the command.

If the Spirit had not come into our dear brother here, he would have lain in that prone position for some time. But the ever-urgent Christ now wants to be heard. Get up, Prophet.

## 27. How is Israel described by God to the prophet?

**2:3-4 5-8. And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn... they are a rebellious house... they are a rebellious house... they are a rebellious house... that rebellious house..."**

Not just in chapter 2 do we hear the Israelites called rebellious and impudent and stiff-hearted. In chapter 3, verses 7, 9, 26, and 27 God repeats these accusations. Enough is enough, Ezekiel. My people have turned against Me. Now I will turn against them, and you will be my mouthpiece to tell them about it

Was this disappointing to Ezekiel? Is this the duty he expected? Was he of the same mind-set, or did Almighty God have to show Ezekiel His holiness and magnificence to shake him into an acceptance of the real situation?

One wonders what it will take for our own nation to be so shaken? What does it take to get through to a people who have been warned over and over yet continue in their sinful ways? Is there a prophet to be raised up among us? Or has God spoken adequately through the prophets of Scripture to make us without excuse?

Ezekiel's commission comes in several phases. The spectacular introduction has taken place, now the Voice speaks. Here is what Ezekiel is to say to these rebels called Israel.

## 28. How does the Voice summarize Ezekiel's commission?

**2:4-8. You shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." And whether they hear or refuse to hear they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks...and you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear...**

The words of this passage, as well as those of most of the book, are not meant to describe everyone who "feels" like a prophet of God today. Those who are called to say "*Thus says the Lord*" are few. Our only call today is to say what God has already said. To speak in the name of the Lord is a fearful thing. A man who has not received a dramatic call from God is limited to Scripture.

Did I say "limited"? How limiting is it to have access to the plan of salvation, the Gospel histories of the Lord, the very words of the prophets, the songs of David, the writings of Spirit-filled apostles? Come to think of it, knowing "only" the Bible is quite sufficient, yes?

Ezekiel is not called to success here. As most called prophets, his success rate is going to be very low, his person will be attacked, his body humiliated. Such is the calling of the prophet, yet how many today claim this office as their own?

The bottom line that the Lord draws is that the people to whom Ezekiel speaks will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that a true prophet has been among them. Follow Ezekiel's story. The visuals. The untimely deaths. The parables. The fulfilled prophecies. They may have rejected his words, but looking back they knew God had visited them in this man.

True as are all things spoken by Jesus, the prophet – the true prophet – is without honor in his day and time and place. He must be killed to seal his testimony. All the true prophets suffered this fate.

And where are the true prophets today? Do you know one?

God tells his man not to be afraid. When we hear comforting words like these, we assume that means no trouble. Life will be good. Pleasant. Victorious.

Not so. Briers, thorns, and scorpions may abound. And when they do, *“Fear not.”* Ultimately there is nothing that can harm your soul. Nothing can separate you from His love and purpose. But oh so much can separate you from comfort and ease.

“No weapon formed against you shall prosper.” I hear that a lot. And the proclaimer seems to think that means guns won’t fire, swords won’t cut, bombs won’t drop. Again, not so. All of the above will take place, but your place in God’s heart and eternal home will not be changed one whit by it all.

### **29. What warning is issued to Ezekiel?**

***2:8. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.***

Ezekiel, keep remembering that I am angry with Israel because they have not kept My Word. They have rebelled against everything I have told them. Don’t be like them. Don’t compromise the truth I am going to give you. Whatever I say, you say, and you do.

And then a most unusual visual aid appears to reenforce what the Lord has been saying to this son of man.

We thus enter phase two of the commission: the eating of the scroll.

### **30. Was this eating of a scroll unique to Ezekiel?**

***2:9-3:3. And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find there. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you, and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.***

No, not unique. I have found two other instances of men eating words from God. You can compare the encounter of John in Revelation 10, to that of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 15. See how they line up with what happened to Ezekiel in the chart (p. 52). In all three cases, the sweet Word became a bitter one. Ezekiel's bitterness is recorded later in chapter 3:

***"I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit."***

Looking at the literal facts first, we see a hand in mid-air. Attached to a body, we are not sure. In the hand, a scroll. The scroll is unrolled and reveals writing on front and back. The writing is all

negative. In this, Ezekiel is like all the prophets of yesterday and none of the prophets of today, that I know of.

Next, eat. Here is where most of us have to stop and think. Does the Lord mean, literally eat the papyrus? Or is this scroll even made of papyrus? Is the material something heavenly and therefore edible? Is this how God's words are normally consumed?

I love being literal. It leads to good things eventually. If Israelites can eat literal manna from heaven, why not literal scroll material?

So far, so good, from Ezekiel's standpoint. The scroll was tasty.

Though as I say, I do not deny the literal, there is certainly a figurative lesson here too, with many applications.

The minister who is called to preach enjoys *studying* God's Word. He delights in the *illumination* that comes to him in his study. His eyes are opened. Such tasty morsels. He prepares to pass them on to his people at the next meeting of the church. The meeting comes. The message is delivered. More joy. *More sweetness*. At least in the pulpit.

But someone doesn't like the word of the morning. Some are even furious. Trouble starts. Division comes. Moving vans. What did I do wrong? I was just telling the truth that God told me.

Any number of examples have probably come into your own life. You start a project knowing God is in it. What a joy. But something about what you are doing is offensive to someone else and the trouble starts.

Sweet becomes sour quite often in our lives. Then is it good to remember what God said to Ezekiel about not being afraid. Stay the course. The boat will right itself eventually.

John	Jeremiah
The voice that I heard from heaven spoke to me again,	
Go take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel...	
So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll.	
And he said to me, Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter	
But in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.	
And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it.	Your words were found and I ate them
It was sweet as honey in my mouth	And your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.
But when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter,	Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?
Result: John prophesies to many after this incident.	Result: Jeremiah continues to prophesy, but is abused.

This then was the introduction to phase two of Ezekiel's commission, much like phase one, with the added thought that God's very words are to be inside Ezekiel.

Here is the continuation of the prophet's charge. Notice how often the Lord has to repeat Himself to get the message to His man:

### **31. How is Ezekiel's commission a bit like Moses' ?**

**3:4-11. *And he said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead. Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house." Moreover, he said to me, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear or refuse to hear."***

Consider the call of Moses: (Exodus 3)

"I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go..." "I will harden his heart..." "Pharaoh will not listen to you."

And so it went. Moses obeyed. God hardened Pharaoh's heart as he said. But Pharaoh had been warned and was without excuse.

So it will be with Ezekiel and Israel. Ezekiel will fail in large measure. But God's purposes will be spoken and done. Judgment will come, but then restoration.

Ezekiel is reminded that he is not going to have to learn a language or take a long trip, as though he were a missionary to a foreign tribe. The people are right in front of you.

The exiles have just arrived, yet they have not repented. They are still harboring disobedient thoughts about their God. Ezekiel knows these people, and how they think. Yet they will not receive his words. They are going to reject you.

How many young ministers would fare a bit better if they went out with the certain knowledge that many are not going to hear them, that their ministry is going to be filled with rejection. The stubborn and hard-hearted live not only in Israel. Churches are filled with them. I am one. And so are you.

But whether they like you or don't, you keep saying "Thus says the Lord." That is your job. Ezekiel was a success at least in obedience to this one command.

Now how shall God drive the point home another way? An out-of-body experience?

### **32. Where did the Spirit take Ezekiel?**

***3:12-15 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: "Blessed be the glory of***

***the Lord from its place!" It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake. The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. And I came to the exiles at Tel-Abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.***

There is no indication of physical movement from chapter 1 until now. It seems that the Spirit grabbed him out of the exile settlement, dealt with him in some way, then set him back where he started, and where this book started.

As to "the Spirit", there are two categories in Ezekiel that translators have made for us. One is the lower-case spirit of the living creatures. We met this spirit three times in chapter 1 and once in chapter 10.

Three times in the present chapter and six more times in the rest of Ezekiel we will read of an upper-case Spirit, presumably the Holy Spirit. But never is this One defined. He, like the other spirit, just shows up in the text, and readers are expected to know what Ezekiel is talking about.

Of course, upper- and lower-case letters are not in the Hebrew. Their placement is a translator decision. Is it not possible that God's Holy Spirit abides in the cherubim, as He does in His church?

The regular presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the prophet and the cherubim makes this book stand out even more from the other books of prophecy. This man was being introduced to God in a most intimate way.

The commission had begun with a Voice (1:28), and now a Voice seems to be fairly shouting at the astonished man. Was it spoken by the Lord, the cherubim, or is this Ezekiel responding to what He is seeing and feeling?

The message itself is a bit unclear at first.

*“Blessed be the glory of the Lord,”* we understand. But *“from its place”*? KJV has it, *“from His place.”* *Its* would refer to the glory. *His* refers to the person of the Lord. No problem. But what is *the place* for the glory of the Lord?

In chapter ten we will see the glory of the Lord leaving the earthly Temple. Some say it has already left by this chapter. Others want to say that it is somewhere in the “north” as indicated in chapter 1. To me it seems more likely that the glory of the Lord is wherever God and His living beings are.

If so, Ezekiel is hearing a message that we must hear also. Namely, that God’s glory is not resident in a human-made building. God’s glory is resident in Himself, in the heaven of heavens that He fills. Ezekiel has been experiencing this glory, and he is nowhere near the Temple of Jerusalem, a place that is about to be destroyed.

Whether “Voice” or merely sound, the volume is overwhelming. Earthquake-level noise. The whirring of wings and wheels. Unforgettable encounter, this.

But by this time, the scroll which he had consumed was winding its way into his digestive tract and had turned his stomach somewhat. It began to dawn on him, perhaps, the absolute holiness of his holy God compared to the absolute evil of the people calling God their own.

Is it possible he could be “lifted up” by the Spirit, yet be bitter inside? Bitter with the anger of God, not his own unresolved issues? When the hand of the Lord is strong on the man of the Lord, that man will begin to experience new sensations, especially when he has consumed great portions of the Word of God.

So after this wild ride through Heaven, Ezekiel is set down with the exiles. They have not changed a bit. But he has. He now will see them differently. For seven days he ponders among them the glories He has seen, and the charge he has been given. Life will never be the same for Ezekiel the priest of Israel.

Phase one of the commission: Israel is wicked. Speak to them.

Phase two: Eat this book, let the Spirit show you even more.

Now comes phase three, the watchman message.

### **33. Is everyone called to Ezekiel’s “watchman” anointing?**

**3:16-21. *And at the end of the seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before***

***him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.”***

***33:7-9. “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.***

Seven days have passed. What thoughts travel through Ezekiel’s mind? Yahweh now revisits him and describes his new occupation a bit further.

He is to be a watchman. The imagery is taken from the days of the walled city and the enemies who approached it. A man, several men, stood atop those walls and scanned the horizon to see what threats might be approaching. Should something appear, the watchman immediately warned the inhabitants, who could now prepare to defend themselves.

Ezekiel is to have such a ministry. He will be the watchman. He will hear from God of approaching judgment, then transfer that information to the people of Israel, who will be allowed to repent or ignore.

This description is repeated in chapter 33 following a call to all of Israel's watchmen which we will cover there.

Unusual in this prophetic setting is the notion of individual responsibility as opposed to warnings only about national demise. Wicked men are to be told one by one that their wickedness needs to be dealt with. They are to be threatened with death if repentance is not forthcoming.

Also unusual is the threat to the prophet's life. If for some reason the message is not delivered, and the wickedness continues, Ezekiel will be held responsible along with the sinner.

Then a second circumstance is presented. Suppose a normally "good" man begins to do evil. He too will die, and Ezekiel will once more be accountable if he does not warn this backslider.

Several issues here.

1. In verse 20 God talks about God laying a "stumbling block" before an otherwise righteous man. Does this passage picture our God as trying deliberately to trip up "good" people so they can sin and be judged?

We know from other depictions of this loving God that that is not His way. He cannot tempt man to sin. Notice the committing of the injustice *precedes* the laying of the stumbling block. A man that turns from a life of righteousness to a life of sin will find the judgment of God hindering his progress in every direction. Even the good things he has done will be forgotten.

Men think differently than the Most High. Even little children believe they can store up enough points with their

authority figures to give them a license to go astray now and then. Such thinking is abhorrent to our God.

2. And what of the notion of a prophet being killed if he does not deliver warning to the wicked? Is this to be the norm for all believers, as we have heard in the exposition of this passage often? Am I to be killed if I do not tell those around me about the coming judgment? Are we all little Ezekiels?

Yes, there is a sense in which we all are watchmen. Anyone in any authority whatever needs to be on guard for enemies who would hurt our charges. Fathers, mothers, teachers, preachers. There is a watching that is commanded simply to guard our own lives.

But to speak of killing all believers who do not take every opportunity to share the Gospel, takes us into a different realm. There would be few if any Christians alive on earth if this were God's policy with every believer. Ezekiel's was a special call for a certain time. Even the other prophets are not given directions such as these.

MacArthur suggests though, that sloppy guardianship could well lead to loss of heavenly rewards. It is a notion we should take seriously.

Perhaps in the next section of the chapter we will get an insight as to how this command was to work in this particular prophet. For, God does not tell us to do something we cannot do. The way Ezekiel will save his life through all of the words from God becomes clearer in verses 25 and following.

3. And then finally, unanswered, is the question of amount and severity of the wickedness of which God is speaking to Ezekiel. What is righteous behavior? Does this mean perfection? How wicked is wicked? We must recall that the covenant of grace has not yet been sealed at Calvary. Ezekiel the priest lives under the Mosaic code. Are we talking about men's efforts to please God here? Surely the righteousness of Christ is not in view.

Questions of personal responsibility will be further addressed in chapter 18.

Anyway, the word does go forth from God's mouth to Ezekiel and to the people. And men die. As in chapter 9. And chapter 11. Ezekiel has entered into a serious business.

Had he always desired such a work? Had he asked God for it? We don't know. We do know that many of God's favorites were caught by surprise and argued with Him about their calling. Moses comes to mind.

Ezekiel is in awe, and even bitter. But no arguments as yet.

**34. In what places does the final phase of Ezekiel's commission take place?**

***3:22-23. And the hand of the LORD was upon me there. And he said to me, "Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you." So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face.***

Visions of glory. The Throne of God. Ezekiel on his face. Picked up and given a charge. Told to eat a scroll. The charge continues. Lifted by the Spirit. Seven days meditating over his experiences. The watchman anointing.

And now, a trip to the valley (KJV *plain*) for a final word before work begins.

Whether valley or plain, and no particular place is referenced, Ezekiel is to find a secluded area, away from the crowded settlement there by the river, where God can speak to him in private.

Upon his arrival in the plain, Ezekiel is greeted with more glorious visions, much like the ones he has already recorded for us. Once more he is overwhelmed and sent to his knees and face before God. And once more God picks him up and strengthens him in order that he can hear this final bit of instruction for his ministry.

**35. By what method will Ezekiel be able to obey his serious assignments?**

***3:24-27. But the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself within your house. And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people. And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who***

***will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house.***

And that instruction is as follows:

1. Lock yourself in your house, where cords will bind you and keep you from going out to the people.
2. You are not to speak to these people in your own strength. When I want you to say something, I will loose your tongue. In that way, everything you say will be from me.

Now that is prophetic ministry! The false prophets spoke what was in their own spirit, and they spoke it glibly and freely, as do the false prophets of our own day. The true prophet speaks only what God allows him to speak when God allows him to speak it.

Whether Ezekiel had literal cords around his body and a literal cleaving of his tongue to the roof of his mouth is not clear to me. But restraint there was. God needed a vessel to speak God's Word, not a nice man to say nice things to nice people.

Judgment is coming. And it begins in the house of God with the man of God. No time to take chances on a man given to his own feelings about things.

As chapter 4 opens, Ezekiel is given his first assignment. It will be typical of many such tasks. So typical that I have gathered them all together and placed them in Part Two of this work,

# A Study of Ezekiel

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4. Twenty questions & answers. 12-15
  5. Jude. 6-20
6. Thro the Bible in 52 lessons. 5-12
  7. Romans I. 11-19
  8. Romans II. 11-19
9. Of Jesus, Grace, and Salvation. 3-16
  10. Who is Jesus? 12-13
  11. One of them. 12-15
12. Thro the Bible Q & A. 3-17
13. Speak My Language! 12-20
14. A Study of Galatians 12-20

### END-TIME PROPHECY:

1. Caught up but when? 4-12
2. The last message of Daniel. 4-12
3. The scroll of Revelation. 4-12
  4. The last things. 3-16
  5. John and Daniel. 3-16
  6. Yes, we will. 8-18
  7. There are seven kings. 2-16
8. Who comes first, Christ or antichrist? 8-13
  9. Coming our way. 12-15
  10. Who is the antichrist? 4-12
  11. The Kingdom Handbook. 4-12
12. The Seventy Sevens of Gabriel. 9-20
  13. The Greater Reset. 1-21

**SCARLET THREADS:**

1. Part 1. 5-12
2. Part 2. 5-12
3. Part 3. 6-12
4. Part 4. 6-12
5. Part 5. 6-12
6. Parts 6-7. 6-12
7. Scarlet Threads 3-16

**HACKBERRY HOUSE:**

1. Volume 1. 6-12
2. Volume 2. 6-12
3. Volume 3. 6-12
4. Volume 4. 6-12
5. Volume 5. 12-14

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1. Jehovah's true witnesses agree: Jesus is God. 5-12
2. On the witness stand. 11-16
3. A Christian's Guide to Koran. 6-12
4. Jesus: First, best, last. 6-12
5. A Christian view of Islam, Muhammad and Koran. 4-16
6. Submitted to His will. 12-15

**THE CHURCH:**

1. The Spirit in the church, today. 6-12
2. The church and the Spirit in her. 4-16
3. A time to speak. 2-18
4. To the church of Albany Park. 11-13

**PERSONAL:**

1. The road I've taken. 4-16
2. Potpourri. 4-16
3. The change of a lifetime. 6-12
4. Cries from among us. 12-19
5. Thoughts on the "Passion of Christ." 6-12
6. Word Pictures from "my" Romania. 1-21