

Ezekiel's Vision, Part 1

(1a) Ezekiel 1:1-10

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What do we know about the Prophet Ezekiel?

- The name Ezekiel means, God will strengthen
- He was a priest in captivity in Babylon, like Daniel only earlier and not with Daniel's governmental authority.
- He was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3)
- He was taken captive with King Jehoiachin in 597 b.c. (Ezekiel 1:2, 33:21)
- He was married & had his own home (Ezek 8:1, 24:18)
- His wife died during his ministry and God commanded him to not remarry (Ezekiel 24:16-18)
- He served during the same time as Jeremiah and Daniel, making no mention of Jeremiah but three mentions of Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14, 14:20, 28:3)
- He prophesied about 20 years (Ezekiel 1:2 and 29:17)
- The purpose of Ezekiel's ministry was to keep before the generation born in exile the national sins that brought Israel so low; to sustain the faith of the exiles by predictions of national restoration, the execution of justice upon their oppressors, and of national glory under the Davidic monarchy.

Matthew Henry on the writings of Ezekiel:

- There is much in it that is very mysterious, dark, and hard to be understood which therefore the Jewish rabbis forbade the reading of to their young men, till they came to be thirty years of age, lest by the difficulties they met with there they should be prejudiced against the scriptures.
- But if we diligently study Ezekiel, we may gather a great deal for the confirming of our faith and the encouraging of our hope in the God we worship.
- Ezekiel was constantly attended (for we read of their *sitting before him as God's people sat to hear his words*, ch. 33:31), and we read of the elders of Israel who came to *enquire of the Lord* by him, ch. 14:1, 3. And as it was of great use to the oppressed captives themselves to have a prophet with them, so it was a testimony to their holy religion against their oppressors who ridiculed it and them.

- Though the reproofs are very sharp and bold, yet there are also comforting assurances given of great mercy God had in store for them
- Those who would apply the comforts to themselves must apply the convictions to themselves.

Ezekiel's Vision of God, Ezekiel 1:1-10

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. ² On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. ⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵ Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. ⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. ⁸ The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. ⁹ Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward. ¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.

v1-3 – What was the significance of the 30th year?

The **thirtieth year** was likely the age of the prophet Ezekiel. According to Numbers 4:3, priests normally began their temple service in their **thirtieth year**. When Ezekiel's ministry was due to begin but not possible due to exile, God called this priest to be a prophet.

What does it tell us about Jesus that per Luke 3:23, He was 30 when He began His ministry?

Hebrews 4:14 – *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession*

As a priest represents God to men, so too did Jesus...

John 8:19 – *If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also.*

And priests also represent people to God...

1 John 2:1 – *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*

What other time-frame clues are given here?

If Ezekiel were thirty years old in 593, therefore, he would have been born about 622, during the reign of the pious King Josiah.

- About 600, when he was 23 years of age, the prophet married. With his wife he went to Babylonia as an exile in 597 at the age of 26.
- By many reckonings, the captivity of King Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24) happened in 597 b.c.
- The last dated prophecy of his book (Ezek. 29:17) is that of the year 571, when he would have been fifty-six. Meanwhile he would have lost his wife when he was thirty-seven (Eze 24:18).” (Vawter and Hoppe)

When did Babylonian captivity begin?

The Babylonian Empire overwhelmed the Kingdom of Judah and they carried away captives in three waves:

- 605 b.c. – Jerusalem was attacked and Daniel and other captives were taken to Babylon.
- 597 b.c. – Jerusalem was attacked, treasure taken from the temple, and more captives taken to Babylon.
 - Ezekiel was taken captive in this wave. 2 Kings 24:12-16 describes the conquest that led to Ezekiel’s captivity. There is no indication that he ever returned to Judah.
- 587 b.c. – Jerusalem falls and almost everyone remaining in the kingdom was exiled.

What does the fact that Ezekiel was, “among the captives” tell us about him?

The fact that Ezekiel was a man in exile at a time when the national outlook was darkest, God unveiled amazing things to him.

Where was Ezekiel when he had this vision of God?

The River Chebar was a navigable royal canal of Nebuchadnezzar, flowed southeast from the city of Babylon. Ezekiel likely lived with other Jewish captives in the town of Chebar on the river.

What is a vision of God?

A vision of God consists of mental images like dreams God gave Ezekiel while he was awake.

What does it mean the heavens were opened?

The revelations Ezekiel received were of Divine power and authority.

What does it mean, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel?

Not only did God’s word come to **Ezekiel the priest**, but it came in a remarkable way – **expressly** (explicitly, clearly).

What does it mean the hand of the Lord was upon him?

Ezekiel received God’s word in a special way: expressly – exclusively and in a remarkable way. He also was God’s agent or representative in a special way, because the hand of the Lord was upon him.

v4 – What did Ezekiel see in his vision?

A whirlwind was coming out of the north: Ezekiel saw something like a tornado

- This begins Ezekiel’s description of what might be the most unusual and detailed vision of God in the Scriptures.
- Taking Ezekiel 1-3 as a unit, it is also the longest and most in-depth description of a prophet’s calling in the Scriptures.

What was the significance of this whirlwind coming from the north?

The **north** is often associated with God’s judgment through Israel’s powerful enemies (Jeremiah 1:14-15) and Israel’s captivity (Jeremiah 3:18).

- It was significant that this vision of God and the living creatures came from the direction of captivity and conquest imposed upon Israel. It was a way of saying that those calamities were from God.

What was the significance of the great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself?

The whirlwind Ezekiel saw was associated with the great images of God’s presence. The cloud by day and fire by night was the expression of God’s presence with Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

- A raging fire engulfing itself is a reminder of the burning bush that Moses saw, which burned but did not consume itself (Exodus 3:2).

What was the significance of the brightness all around it and radiating out of its midst?

This radiating brightness is an expression of the glory of God. Also known as the shekinah glory of God.

Given the splendor of Babylon, what impact might this vision of God have had on Ezekiel?

This vision probably served to assure Ezekiel that Yahweh was in fact the sovereign God of all creation – no matter how great Babylon and her gods seemed to be.

v5-9 – What were the four living creatures?

Four remarkable beings were notable from within this whirlwind of God's presence. Ezekiel later identified these remarkable creatures as *cherubim* (Ezek 10:8-15), angels of unique power and glory surrounding God.

What can we learn about cherubim from these other appearances in Scripture?

Genesis 3:24 – *So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

- Cherubim first appear at the garden of Eden, those who guarded the way to the tree of life with a flaming sword.

Ezekiel 28:14 – *You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.*

- Before his fall, Satan was among the cherubim covering God's throne
- Satan is powerful because he was among the angels that were close to God

Ex 25:18-20 – *And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.*

- Artistic designs of cherubim were on the lid to the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat.

Exodus 26:1 – *Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them*

- The interior of the tabernacle was decorated with designs of cherubim, giving the impression to anyone in the tabernacle that they were surrounded by cherubim.
- The veil separating the most holy place of the tabernacle was decorated with cherubim, adding to the sense of their presence (Exodus 26:31).
- The designs of cherubim were prominent in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:23-35).

Revelation 4:6-8 – *Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

- The four creatures mentioned by John surrounding the throne of God are rightly thought to be cherubim.
- In Revelation, the four creatures are described with each one having one of the four faces. John simply described the particular face that was turned towards his line of sight.

What was the significance of the cherubim being on the ark of the covenant?

Since the ark of the covenant represented the presence of God among Israel, Yahweh was sometimes called *He who dwells between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4, 6:2; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1, 99:1; Isaiah 37:16).

- This was an earthly artistic expression of a heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5). Sometimes the phrase speaks of the earthly picture, and sometimes the heavenly reality.

What does it mean that the cherubim had the likeness of a man?

That they were *not* men but were angelic beings. Yet in general form and structure, they looked like men (despite their wings). While they were unlike any person on earth, they were generally more like men than dragons or any other creatures.

- When angelic beings appear to men and women in the Bible, they often have *the likeness of a man*. Perhaps the general form and appearance of angels is something like that of human beings.

What is the significance of the 4 faces of the cherubim?

From the fact that one being had four faces perhaps indicates that some beings can comprise more than one person. In a way beyond our total comprehension, there is one God in three persons; perhaps the four faces indicate that these cherubim comprise one being in four persons.

What is the significance in the cherubim having wings?

Cherubim are a very special class of angelic beings, and this is one of the few places in Scripture that tells us that **wings** are associated with angelic beings at all.

What is the difference between the Ezekiel's cherubim and Isaiah's seraphim?

In Isaiah 6:1-4, the prophet described his heavenly vision where he saw beings he called *seraphim* who had six wings. It is likely that cherubim and seraphim are the same beings described from slightly different perspectives or noting different details. The name *seraphim* means *burning ones*, which seems to fit with these cherubim.

What was the significance of the cherubim having feet like calves' sparkling like burnished bronze?

These beings had a shiny, radiant appearance which sparkled and gave off something of a bronze color. Jesus is represented with legs like *burnished brass* in Revelation 1:15. Calves' feet – a creature; bronze not as brilliant as brass but similar in many respects.

What was the significance of the cherubim moving straight forward?

They did not turn to the left or the right, but kept straight in their course. There was nothing erratic or chaotic about their movements; they moved deliberately with confidence and authority.

v10 – What did their four different faces represent?

Each of the cherubim had the face of **a man**, a **lion**, an **ox**, and an **eagle**.

- Some commentators say these four creatures speak of the ensigns of the head tribes as Israel camped in four groups around the tabernacle in the wilderness (see Numbers 2:3, 2:10, 2:18, and 2:25). Judah's standard had a lion, according to Jacob's prophecy of that tribe, Genesis 49:9, Ephraim had an ox, Reuben had a man, Dan an eagle.
- Some commentators point out the similarity with the four gospels and the different aspects of Christ: Matthew – Jesus was the Lion of Judah. Mark – Jesus was the ultimate servant (ox), Luke – Jesus came as a man, John – Jesus was God in the flesh (eagle, symbolic of deity, high over all).

- Others say that the four faces are important because they represent all of animate creation... The lion is the mightiest of wild animals, the ox strongest of domesticated animals, the eagle king of all birds, and man is highest of all creation.

What does it reveal about God that the cherubim were always associated with His throne?

- These were special, powerful angels that are close to God.
- Those in authority are always surrounded by powerful gatekeepers... US Army aides: 1LT assigned to BG, CPT to MG, MAJ to LTG, LTC to GEN
- God is holy and no unholy being may be in His presence... His cherubim will make sure of it.

How could Satan, a fallen cherub still have access to God since he had rebelled against God?

Job 1:6 – *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.*

Angels are spirit-beings and have access to the spiritual realm where they meet with God... fallen angels would not be permitted to meet with God in the "holy of holies" which is the throne of God.

What applications do you see in this vision of the throne of God?

Romans 8:34 – *It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*

With such a powerful, holy Creator-God in control of our universe, it is good news that our Savior is at His right-hand interceding for us.