

Ezekiel

December 2, 2007

Chapter 1

I. Who is Ezekiel?

All that we know about Ezekiel is in the book that bears his name. Some try to equate him to the other use of his name in the OT:

1 Chron 24:16

16 the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel,

NIV

Jehezkel is the same in the Hebrew as Ezekiel and is much closer to the original Hebrew. Jehezkel is a priest descended from Zadok; according to Ezekiel, Zadok is the ultimate priestly line in Chapters 40-48.

Jeremiah was a contemporary prophet; Daniel was older but still active. Neither of the other prophets mentions Ezekiel. Ezekiel does not mention Jeremiah, but he does mention Daniel in three places (14:14, 20, 28:3). The prophetic volume of this period was higher than any other.

II. Ezekiel's Time

The third and final Babylonian deportation occurred in 586 BC, a few years after the beginning of the book. Ezekiel is a prophet of a priestly family carried captive in an earlier deportation to Babylon in 597 BC when he was about 25 years old. His call to the prophetic ministry came five years later.

His book can be divided into two parts. The first 24 chapters concern the destruction and final deportation of the Jewish nation and its capital of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is speaking to those who have been deported basically telling them to give up hope that Jerusalem will not be destroyed. The final 24 chapters are written to give hope to the deportees. In Chapters 25-32, Israel's enemies are punished; in Chapters 33-48, we see the restoration of the Jewish nation, including not just the end of the Diaspora, but of a future time when Israel is apparently saved in the name of its Messiah.

Ezekiel lived during desperate times for the Jewish people. His testimony along with that of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel (and the Minor Prophets) are a testimony to God and His ability to bring about change.

Hab 1:5

5 "Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. NIV

III. The Setting

Ezek 1:1

1:1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. NIV

Although the chronology associated with the thirtieth year cannot be fully identified, most would agree that the book starts about 592/593 BC. Ezekiel prophesizes to the Jewish deportees in Babylon who are looking to return home soon. God tells Ezekiel that this will not happen.

IV. The Kings of Judah

Ezek 1:2-3

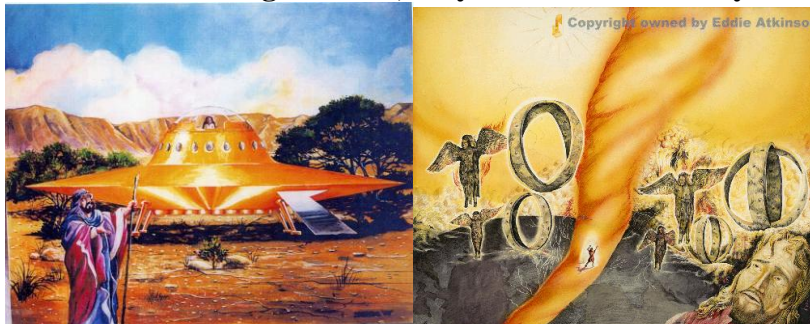
2 On the fifth of the month — it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin— 3 the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him. NIV

Jehoiachin had been taken into captive, probably at the same time as Ezekiel. Zezekiah was the “king” in Judah. Ezekiel never mentions Zedekiah’s name. He does refer to the “Prince” or “princes,” apparently including references to Zedekiah. Ezekiel has a low opinion of him. NOTE: The “hand of the LORD” introduces very sections in the book, used three times in the first three chapters and seven times in the book.

V. Ezekiel’s Chariot

Ezek 1:4-9

4 I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, 5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, 6 but each of them had four faces and four wings. 7 Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. 8 Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, 9 and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. NIV



A lot of silly things has been said and written about Ezekiel’s chariot. Basically, it is a vehicle powered by angels that anthropometrically moves God from Jerusalem to the Babylon. It was probably something similar to the Ark of the Covenant but with wheels.

Including Ezekiel, the deportees were probably influenced by the false concept that Yahweh was a local god. Their concept of the true God was profoundly too small. Ezekiel's vision has an important message to show that the Israelites are in captivity not because God is weak, but because Israel has sinned. Yahweh is the God everywhere, not just in Judah.

The word "creature" means created being. In Chapter 10 (verse 15), we see these living creatures again, and they are called cherubim, which is a type of angel.

Where have we seen cherubim before? What limits do you place on God's power? Why do you limit God's power?

Characteristics of the Living Creatures include (and might be interpreted):

1. They had the form of a man—mortals were the pinnacles of God's creation.
2. Each one had four faces—shows that God is the Lord of creation.
3. They had straight legs like hooves—indicating the stability of the animals in performing their task.
4. Under each wing, each creature has a human hand—might be a neighbor-helping-neighbor-like hand.
5. The creatures went forward—any way that they went would be forward since they had four faces. This indicates them being ready for any task.
6. They were winged creatures, each having four wings—two wings were used to support things (such as on the ark) and to touch other cherubim. The other two are used to cover the bodies of the cherubim.
7. They followed the spirit in movement
8. Their appearances were like burnished bronze, coals of fire, and torches—This probably represents their purity and therefore their ability to be close to the LORD.
9. The movement of the creatures were as quick as flash of lightning
10. The wings made an awesome sound

While this is huge leap, church fathers connected the faces with the gospels. Some also suggest that the Israelites had special meanings for each face:

Lion	Matthew	Strength, ferocity, courage, and royalty
Ox	Mark	Most valuable domestic animal/symbol of fertility/divinity
Man	Luke	Image of God
Eagle	John	Swiftest and most stately of birds

Charles Feinberg interprets the faces as: The face of a man speaks of intelligence; the lion, of majesty and power; the ox, of patient service; and the eagle, of swiftness in meting out judgment and discernment from afar.

VI. The Appearance of God

Ezek 1:25-28

25 Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. 26 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. NIV

In Hebrew, the word “likeness” is used nine times in this chapter. Apparently above the creatures and the “chariot” God was located. Rather than being abandoned by God, God is coming to Ezekiel.

-The lowered wings show respect for God.

-Sapphire is often associated with God as in the stone in Aaron’s breastplate (Ex 28:18), in the foundation of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:19), and in the pavement under God’s feet in (Ex. 24:10).

-“Glowing metal, as if full of fire,” such as perhaps in:

Matt 17:5

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" NIV

Concerning rainbows, the New Unger’s Bible Dictionary has:

“Springing as it does from the effect of the sun upon the dark mass of the clouds, it typifies the readiness of the heavenly to pervade the earthly; spread out as it is between heaven and earth, it proclaims peace between God and man; and while spanning the whole horizon, it teaches the all-embracing universality of the Noahic covenant. In the wondrous vision shown to John in the Apocalypse (Rev 4:3), it is said that "there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance"; amid the awful vision of surpassing glory is seen the symbol of hope, the emblem of mercy and of love, looking forward from the awful judgments of the Great Tribulation to the establishment of the millennial kingdom and finally to the sinless eternal state.”

VII. Man’s Response:

Ezek 1:28

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. NIV