

Pentwater Bible Church

Book of Ezekiel
Message 2
August 30, 2015



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INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

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Ezekiel's Vision by Raphael cir. 1518

INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

The Christian Church at large has generally neglected this book. Some have found it fanciful or fail to get past the intricate visions Ezekiel was given in chapter one and elsewhere. The cultists, critics and Cabbalists have relied upon this book to further their corrupt theological view of the Bible. Added to this is the great difficulty the Jews had over getting this book included in their Tenach, our Old Testament. Very little is known regarding the process the Jews used to collect the various Old Testament books into their Scriptures. What is known is the various dates of books acceptance through their usage. The Old Testament itself does furnish some hints as to how the ancient Hebrews preserved their writings. For example in Exodus 40:20 it is stated that the “testimony,” by which is meant the two tables of the law containing the Ten Commandments, was put into the ark of the covenant for safekeeping. In Deuteronomy 31:9, 24–26, the laws of Deuteronomy are said to have been delivered to the sons of Levi, and by them deposited “by the side of the ark ... that it may be for a witness against you.” One other passages shows an acceptance of the books of the Law is 2 Kings 22:8. Here is a story regarding the “finding” of the “book of the law” and how Josiah the king on the basis of it instituted religious reforms while commanded the people to obey its precepts. This is an instance in which the Law, is regarded as authoritative as God’s Word. The king and his assistants immediately recognized that it contains the Word of God (2 Kings 22:13, 18). While they recognize its authority nothing is said of the process that was used to determine its inclusion into their Scripture. There is a tremendous amount of discussion regarding this in the theological literature. What is important to understand it that despite significant disputes regarding the book of Ezekiel’s authority it has been placed in to the Jewish Old Testament. Further much of it has been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls Cir. 200 B.C. and at Masada. The fragments, which survived range over the course of the entire book from chapters 1 to 41. The closest to any formal Jewish council recognizing the totality of the Old Testament was the Council of Jamnia.

The Council of Jamnia, which seems to have taken place around 90 AD established and closed the canon authoritatively for nearly all Jews. It has been their canon ever since. Yet it should be noted that the council did not speak for all Jews, for there were Jews living in Ethiopia who either did not hear of it or did not accept the decision of Jamnia. To this day they use a different canon than their Israeli brethren.¹

The Hebrew Bible refers to Yavne'el (Joshua 15:11; 2 Chronicles 26:6-8) (sometimes transliterated as Jebneel), a border city between the tribal allotments of Judah and Dan. In Roman times, the city was known as Iamnia, also spelled Jamnia. It was bequeathed by King Herod upon his death to his sister Salome. Upon her death it passed to Emperor Augustus who managed it as a private imperial estate, a status it was to maintain for at least a century.



Source: American Bible society

¹ Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol 6, p 1147

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai moved the Sanhedrin to Yavne. Some scholars believe the Council of Yavne (Jamnia) met there. The Sanhedrin left Yavne for Usha in 80 AD and returned in 116 AD. This group of Rabbi's who were survivors of the Roman annihilation of Jerusalem in 70 AD met at Jamnia and canonized a Hebrew Scripture specifically devoid of Greek writings. Any work of scripture not originally written in Hebrew was discarded as unclean.

This codification of the Hebrew Bible by the Jewish Rabbi's cancelled for the Jews the authority, not only of the contested books we now call apocryphal, but also the popular Septuagint itself that foreign Jews had been using for the previous 300 years. That work had earlier been authorized for publication by the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem for uses by the Jews of the Dispersion whose language was primarily Greek.

Jamnia was a seminal decision because it isolated Christians from Jews on the basis, not just of scripture, but of language as well. Its importance for the book of Ezekiel was its acceptance into the Hebrew Bible once and for all. There were disputes over its final acceptance. The centered around its apparent contradiction to the Mosaic Law in several areas, the visions of God's Throne produced speculative ideas such as the Merkaba, and the dimensions of the Temple did not coincide with either the first or second Temples.

One Hananiah ben Hezekiah ben Garon is said to be the Rabbi as one of several who weighed in on the question of the canonization of the Book of Ezekiel. The contradictions of the Book of Ezekiel are said to have been resolved in the aliyah, or upper chamber, of his house of study. He took 300 barrels of oil along with him, and shut himself at that place, where he looked up and studied their claims, until he was able to resolve the contradictions. Mostly it was decided that the images and descriptions in the book are prophecies of future events and not to be duplicates of prior periods.²

The early Christians stuck to the Greek Old Testament and the Jews consecrated themselves on the Hebrew Old Testament decided on by the Rabbi's at Jamnia.

The early Christians had good reason for their decision to retain the Greek scriptures. Not only did the entire pagan world speak Greek, but according to the Talmud, at the time Jesus preached, Hebrew and Greek scrolls hung side by side in Herod's Temple. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran include fragments written in both languages. When Christ's disciples wrote the New Testament books, they, too were composed in the same Greek language, allowing the world at large to read them.

The Jewish action, fixated as it was on the Greek language, nullified both sets of Christian books. The New Testament and the apocryphal books were both relegated to pagan classification and permanently discarded.

Within this book we see a significant amount of God's plan for the future includes the modern Zionist movement (Jews returning to Israel in unbelief), an imminent Russian led invasion of Israel, and the reinstatement of the Old Testament animal sacrificial system in a Millennial Temple yet future to us in Jerusalem.

² Wenger, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations, The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 1999 BridgePoint Books Division of Baker Books Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287 pgs.112-13

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIVING CREATURES

Ezekiel 1:1-14

¹ Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. ² In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of Jehovah came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Jehovah was there upon him.

⁴ And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof as it were glowing metal, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵ And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man; ⁶ and every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. ⁷ And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished brass. ⁸ And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹ their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. ¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. ¹¹ And their faces and their wings were separate above; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. ¹² And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went. ¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches: the fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. ¹⁴ And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning (ASV, 1901).

THE HEAVENS OPENED TO EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 1:1-3

¹ Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. ² In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of Jehovah came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Jehovah was there upon him (ASV, 1901).

In this first verse of the Book of Ezekiel we are given the exact timing of the visions he received. Even though there is much disagreement amongst commentators regarding the specific designation of the term "thirtieth year" the thirtieth year is most appropriately designated as the thirtieth year of his life. He was in the resettlement by the river Chebar a

canal off the Euphrates River that flowed to the east of Babylon. Since he was taken captive in March of 597 B.C. along with king Jehoiachin this first vision would be July 31, 593 B.C. As Ezekiel was thirty years old and saw heaven open at the banks of a river so was the case with the Lord Jesus. He was thirty years of age, when He saw heaven open at His baptism in Jordan (Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:21). Starting with the introduction to his prophetic ministry Ezekiel cites five notable experiences, which remain constant throughout his prophetic career.

1. The Heavens were opened.
2. He saw visions of God.
3. The Word of the Lord came upon him.
4. The hand of the Lord was upon him.
5. The visions came solely to him (Hebrew *hai* translated as expressly). The Hebrew word *hai* is used in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to describe the reception of God Word to the prophet.

Other men for whom God opened the Heavens were Daniel, Isaiah, Elisha, Stephen, Paul and John. The phrase “the hand of the Lord was upon him” or “came upon me” is found exactly seven times in the Book of Ezekiel 1:3; 3:14 and 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1 and 40:1. This describes Ezekiel’s direction for his ministry. He was not acting on his own. These visions were from God who constrained him to minister in a very detailed manner to the nation Israel at a critical time in their overall history when they would have been quite sensitive and receptive to God’s Word. Prophetic divine revelation to a legitimate biblical prophet is an overpowering experience.

Many commentators have had difficulty with the following passages. The imagery opened up to Ezekiel are impossible to describe using human terms. As a result he uses similes and metaphors to describe the indescribable (as and like). He sees visions within the throne of God that he cannot describe but he must do so anyway. He is attempting to put the magnificence of the infinite into our finite minds. This then is the task of the prophet, to convey the infinite to the finite.

THE STORM FROM THE NORTH

Ezekiel 1:4

⁴And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof as it were glowing metal, out of the midst of the fire (ASV, 1901).

The vision opens with Ezekiel looking and focusing his attention on the north where a *stormy wind, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself is in view*. Jeremiah 1:14 clearly explain that the Babylonians came and will come again from the north. He said, “*From the north the misfortune will break forth.*” This great cloud with a stormy wind give us the impression that there will be an appearance of God as in other Scriptures (Isaiah 29:6; Psalm 18:7-15, 104:3). The *fire infolding itself* gives the imagery of judgment, which was threatening to come upon Judah for her sins. Fire is associated with Judgment in the Scriptures (Amos 7:4; Jeremiah 15:14; Isaiah 4:4; 29:6; 66:16; Ezekiel 28:18; 30:8; Amos 1:14; Zechariah 13:9; etc.). This description of the fire lets us realize that the fire is consuming itself without expiring. It is essentially taking or engulfing itself. It is feeding

or kindling itself, which is adding its self as fuel to continue the fire. It is fire feeding fire! Picture a great wind with clouds bringing a fire consuming and feeding itself as the flames circle inward perpetually without end. This description of the consuming fire only appears here and Exodus 9:24 in the entire Bible where God's judgment is coming on Egypt in a series of plagues. Moses relates the experience as, "*So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*" Next the prophet relates a metal like substance that projects out of the middle of the fire that has the property of glowing as a red-hot iron that has been prepared for special work as in a blacksmith's forge. The Hebrew text designates the color of the fire and the metal like object as *chashmal*. Rashi a medieval French Jewish commentator called *chashmal* the name of an angel. He as well as others saw the celestial beings in the fire, which are about to be described. The *Hebrew, chashmal*, is from two roots, "smooth" and "brass" (Ezekiel 1:7; Revelation 1:15). The *Septuagint* and *Vulgate* translate it, "*electrum*"; a brilliant metal compounded of gold and silver.

THE CHERUBIM

Ezekiel 1:5-11

⁵And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man; ⁶and every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. ⁷And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished brass. ⁸And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. ¹⁰As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. ¹¹And their faces and their wings were separate above; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies (ASV, 1901).

These four living creatures are identified as Cherubim in chapter 10:5,20. The Hebrew word for living creature is *chayot* and it is used in a number of places in the Old Testament. For example we see it in the creation account (Genesis 1:20-21). Cherubim were placed on the top of the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. They guarded with flaming swords the Garden of Eden, which closed off access to the Garden. Their likeness was embroidered on the curtain of the Tabernacle to guard the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:31). Isaiah had a vision of Heaven opening up and a lower order of celestial beings was revealed to him, which are the Seraphim (Isaiah 6:2). However the apostle John saw the same four living beings in the Throne Room of God and around God (Revelation 4-5). Somehow each of these cherubim had a likeness of a human man. Each had four faces and four wings with human hands under the wings. The wings touched each other just and the wings of the cherubim touched each other across the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (I Kings 6:27). The human form in several expressions dominates the characteristics of the cherubim. Human form supersedes the other the other characteristics and is their predominate character. Yet *every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings*, which correspond to the human characteristics of each one. This is not a likeness of

God, which is expressly forbidden (Exodus 20:4). These are creatures of His not Him. He uses them as His instruments.



Ark of the covenant from Mishkan Ministries. <http://www.mishkanministries.org>

They are the celestial beings that are closest to Him, obedient to His will and they are used for His highest purposes. They are used for His government and in the Revelation they are seen in the midst of and around the Throne. Here they are underneath it for here the view Ezekiel is given is from the vantage point of the earth but in the Revelation Throne Room scenes (Revelation 4-5) John's vision is right there in Heaven so he sees them covering (encircling) the Throne. We see a similar scene in Ezekiel chapter 28 describing the fall of the anointed cherub Halal (Lucifer) who became Satan the adversary after his fall. He was covering the throne of God and was above it as the arch cherub.

So while the appearance of the cherubim has the dominant characteristic of a human (first character listed as a general appearance) they also have feet like an ox which are upright not at 90° angles from the human leg calf. They sparkle as glowing brass like the Revelation scene where John sees the Lord Jesus in His resurrected powerful form preparing to extract vengeance on the earth (Revelation 1:15). The sole of the foot in this vision is said to be like fine glowing brass as if they were burned in a furnace. There is an implication of trampling the earth in righteous judgment.

They all had human hands under their wings. Contrasted to the legs and feet the hand provided them with dexterity, which the lower extremities did not have. The hand is the symbol of *leading power, guided by skillfulness* (Psalm 78:72). The creatures were not quadrupedal, that is like an animal with four feet, they were like a human. Their hands are under wings, which show that they are fitted for service in the celestial sphere. The wings are joined together so there is perfect unity of action among the four living creatures. That is they moved together in perfect harmony of motion as the Lord directs. He guides and governs their actions. In the Throne Room scene in the Revelation the four living creatures are separated but here they are united for a different purpose.

Their faces; *they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle.* Here as mentioned the dominant feature is of a man followed by a lion then an ox and finally an eagle. In the Revelation the order of their likeness is Lion first followed by man, calf (ox) and a flying eagle. The activity seems to dictate their order. In Revelation the Lion of the Tribe of Judah our Lord Jesus is taking the reins of the control of the earth to extract vengeance on sin when He takes the seven-sealed scroll, the title deed to the earth. Here the focus is on man indicating God's tenderness of judgment. It will not be a total devastation of the earth as in the Tribulation.

The human face is seen first. On the right Ezekiel sees the lion, on the left the ox, and the face of the eagle is behind. (1) The human face represents the thought that man, as made "after the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), is the highest symbol of the Eternal. (2) The lion is the emblem of sovereignty, both in the temple (1 Kings 7:29) and in Solomon's palace (1 Kings 10:20; 2 Chronicles 9:18, 19). (3) The ox here, also in 1 Kings 7:25, 44, is aligned with the lion, as demonstrated in the twelve oxen that supported the "sea" or "laver" in the temple clearly indicated work or service. Here also we have a kind of sovereignty—the natural symbol of a strength made subservient to human uses. (4) The eagle is the emblem of kingly power, and is used elsewhere (Ezekiel 17:3, 7). The human face represents the Son of man who shared in the glory of the Father; the ox with that of his sacrifice; the lion with that of his sovereignty over Israel, as the Lion of the tribe of

Judah (Revelation 5:5); and the eagle with His bearing His people as on eagles' wings, into the highest heavens (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11).

There is a direct comparison to the Gospels and the Cherubim.

The linkage of the four aspects of the Cherubim to the Gospels has been recognized since the early Church fathers.³ The Fathers identified them with the four Gospels,

1. Matthew the lion,
2. Mark the ox,
3. Luke the man,
4. John the eagle:

What is interesting regarding these symbols is that they do not express the personal character of the Evangelists, but the different characteristics of the Lord Jesus our Christ in relation to the world (four being the number referring to the entire world, for example, the four quarters of the world).

1. The Lion expressing royalty, as Matthew describes this feature of Christ; The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.
2. The Ox, laboring in endurance, which is Christ's prominent characteristic in Mark.
3. The Man, brotherly sympathy with the whole race of man, Christ's prominent feature in Luke;
4. The Eagle, soaring majesty, prominent in John's description of Christ as the Divine Word.

This section of Scripture closes with; *and their faces and their wings were separate above*; i.e. were stretched upward, touching the neighboring wings at the tip, and so "joined," while the other two covered the bodies and were never stretched. The effect was to form a box like pattern with a cherub at each corner. Because they were ministering in God's presence they covered their bodies in holy reverence as did Isaiah see the Seraphim who did the same in Heaven (Isaiah 61-3). This is just like the way the cherubim were represented on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

NEXT MESSAGE: EZEKIEL MOVEMENT & SHEKINAH GLORY

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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³ ¹ Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, 1877), Rev. 4:8. Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, 1877), Rev. 4:8.