

## THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET **EZEKIEL**

***Introduction to Ezekiel:** Ezekiel was one of the Jewish priests taken as a captive to Babylon likely at the second deportation which took place 596-7 B.C. Like Daniel, Ezekiel wrote from outside of the land of Israel. Though there are references to the “whole house of Israel” late in the book, the basic message of Ezekiel was to rebellious Jews still in the land prior to the final deportation of Judah in 586 B.C. He wrote to condemn rebellious Judah for their sin and exhort them to repentance. The name Ezekiel literally means ‘he who God strengthened.’ It seems that the Jews of the initial deportation in 605 B.C. were willing to hearken to Jeremiah’s warning to surrender to Babylon whereas those who remained in the land tended to be rebellious to that directive. The book is divided by seven statements noted by, “The hand of the Lord was upon me.” It seems to cover a period of about twenty years from the beginning of the second deportation and thereafter.*

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***Overview of Ezekiel 1:** The first chapter of Ezekiel deals with three matters: (1) the vision of God and of the angelic creatures in verses 1-14; (2) the description of the heavenly ‘wheels’ or spheres in verses 15-25; and, a revelation of God upon His*

*heavenly throne in verses 26-28. Though seemingly enigmatic, in the first chapter, Ezekiel in effect was ushered into the presence of God (by way of a vision) and given divine authority for his ministry. He thus had met with God and that was his authority.*

**1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.** The Book of Ezekiel commences in momentous fashion. Ezekiel announced when and where he first saw “visions of God.” There is not unanimity of opinion as to the precise time described. The fourth month of the Hebrew calendar roughly corresponds to July in our western calendar. However, the thirtieth year mentioned is uncertain. Some have suggested that it hearkens back to the time when the book of the Law was found by Hilkiah the priest during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Jewish tradition supports this view. Others suggest this was the thirtieth year of Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, which was the official beginning of the Babylonian Empire in 625 B.C. However, because of the date marker in the next verse, it seems rather that this may simply refer to the age Ezekiel. The date of the beginning of Ezekiel’s ministry probably was in about 593 or 592 B.C.

Ezekiel specifically describes himself as being “among the captives,” that is, the captives of Judah in Babylon. Though not stated, it is likely that he was part of the second group of captives taken at the first incursion against Jerusalem in 596-7 B.C. The Chebar River was a branch of the lower Euphrates as it neared the Persian Gulf. It was in the heart of historic Chaldea which was part of the central Babylonian Empire. Jews were settled there after their arrival from Judah. There and at that time, Ezekiel saw the heavens opened and God revealed

wondrous things to him. The unfolding scene will parallel that of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 when John was ushered into heaven by way of a vision.

**1:2-3 In the fifth *day* of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity.** Another specific date marker is noted and apparently is the same date as noted in verse 1—the fourth month—of the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. The latter was taken in captivity in 597 B.C. and the fifth year thereof would place this date in about 593 or 592 B.C. (depending whether inclusive years are included or not). Jehoiachin was the son of Jehoiakim who reigned a total of three months and ten days (II Chronicles 36:9).

**3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.** The first major section of the book is introduced in “the word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest.” The lineage of Ezekiel is noted in that He was a priest, the son of Buzi. Of interest is that Jewish tradition holds that Buzi (which means ‘despised’ or ‘contemptible’) actually was Jeremiah because he as despised and held in contempt by his countrymen. Though interesting, there is no basis in fact for that assumption. However, there is every reason to believe that Ezekiel knew Jeremiah prior to his being taken into captivity. Both were priests of Jehovah in Judah.

The specific site of the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry is again noted as by the River Chebar which is in the heart of Chaldea, south and east of Babylon. There and then, the hand of God was upon Ezekiel. On seven occasions throughout the Book of Ezekiel, he refers to the hand of God being upon him. This phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture of Elisha, Ezra, and Saul of Tarsus. The greater thought is of the blessing of God, or in this case, the Spirit of prophecy upon Ezekiel.

**1:4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.** The first ‘vision’ or revelation from God to Ezekiel is thus recorded. The words translated as **whirlwind** (רוּחַ סֶעָר or *ruwach ca‘ar*) literally means a ‘wind storm’ or ‘tempest.’ The greater thought is that Ezekiel saw a dark, roiling thunderstorm, full of lightning strikes, looming on the northern horizon. The thought of *amber* in this context is of brightness like electricity. In other words, Ezekiel saw a ominous, dark thunderstorm with great wind and lightning strikes emanating out of it. This was the month of July and describes a powerful summer thunderstorm. One having seen such storms in the American Midwest can understand the ominous threat of such a storm, for out of the back sides thereof come terrible tornados. Thus, the backdrop of the first message from God is presented in stark symbolism—a dark, ominous thunderstorm on the horizon. Some have suggested that because this storm came out of the north (which is unusual for thunderstorms), that the symbolism is of Babylon descending out of the north in judgment upon Judah.

**1:5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.** Ezekiel will now describe what he saw in this heavenly vision. He saw the *likenesses* of four living creatures in the midst of heaven. Moreover, each of these heavenly creatures had the likeness of a man. That is, they had human characteristics in their appearance. As this description unfolds, it will become apparent that there is a striking parallel here with what is revealed in the four ‘beasts’ of Revelation 4:6 *ff.* As will be seen, these are likely one and the same angelic creatures before the throne of God. In Ezekiel 10:20, the prophet described these angelic creatures as *cherubim(s)*.

**1:6-9 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.** The four angelic creatures each seemingly had four faces, perhaps pointing in the four basic directions of the compass. Additionally, these angelic creatures each had four wings (perhaps two sets of two). See 1:11 for further description.

**7 And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.** The feet of these angelic creatures were straight like that of a calf (not horizontal like a man's foot). Moreover, these feet (i.e., hoofs) were bright and shiny, like polished 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.** Under the wings of these angelic creatures were hands like those of men. Thus, in addition to four faces and four wings, they each evidently had four hands.

**9 Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.** Evidently, these angelic creatures which Ezekiel saw had their wings joined at about the same place on their respective bodies with one set of wings facing front and back and the other side to side. Therefore, they had no need to turn in flight for they faced in each direction. Moreover, they went only in one direction—straight ahead (but because they had four faces, any direction was straight ahead). The greater point is that they went straight where God directed.

**1:10-11 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.** Each of these four creatures had differing faces. Evidently, each creature had the following four faces, one on each of its four sides. The first was that of a *man* on the front. On the right side was the face of a *lion*; on the left

side, the face of an *ox*, and on the backside, the face of an *eagle*. These same four similes are used for the angelic ‘beasts’ (i.e., creatures) in Revelation 4:7. The text does not directly give a clear definition of the significance of these four creatures. Therefore varying ideas have been advanced to their significance. Some have likened them to varying aspects of the ministry, some to major eras of human history, others to the characteristics of God. It would seem the more likely sense is the latter, describing the attributes of God. If that be the case, it might be suggested the lion represents the royalty of God, the ox His strength, the face of a man His personality, and the flying eagle His heavenly nature. That certainly is conjecture, but it does describe the nature of God and these angelic creatures are before the throne of God. See comments for Revelation 4:7.

**11 Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.** The four faces are that which were described in the preceding verse. The thought is that the wings of these angelic creatures were stretched upward with two being paired (for flight?) and the other two to cover their bodies. In Isaiah’s account they cover their faces with two wings. Isaiah 6:2 also describes these same apparent creatures as having six wings. Perhaps Isaiah had a better view than did Ezekiel. In any event, what is here being described are angelic creatures (cherubim{s}) before the throne of God.

**1:12-14 And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.** The thought likely is that these went straight to where the Spirit of God directed them. They did not deviate from God’s direction.

**13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living**

**creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.** The appearance of these angelic creatures is further described as being like brilliant fire—they emanated a brilliant glow like yellow-hot coals of fire. Like a column of flame rising up and down, the brilliant glory of God pulsed through these angelic creatures. In the midst of all this brilliance emanated bolts of lightning—no doubt indicating the holy wrath of God against evil.

**14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.** What is clearly implied is that these angelic creatures before the throne of God are not stationary, but rather active, moving about in divinely choreographed motion—like coordinated lightning. Thus is described the perception of Ezekiel of the angelic creatures before the throne of God. They are not only awesome in their unique heavenly beauty, but threatening in their great power. They evidently are the ‘palace guard’ about the throne of God.

**1:15 Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.** As Ezekiel endeavored to describe what he saw in his vision of heaven and of God, he now describes another phenomena—*wheels*. Great speculation has been made as to exactly what these wheels are. The word so translated (אִפְּהָן ‘*owphan*’) literally refers to a ‘chariot wheel.’ Others have suggested that the wheels were ‘spheres’ or ‘orbs.’ Modern science-fiction aficionados have even suggested they were flying saucers. However, the thought of heavenly conveyances (or disks) for the angelic creatures described above seems to fit the greater context.

**1:16-18 The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it**