

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"Weird-faced Scenario"

1:4-14

It's often argued by UFOlogists that Ezekiel was an ancient man using primitive language to describe an encounter or encounters with aliens.

NASA engineer Josef F. Blumrich wrote a book titled *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*. Blumrich says that the description of the "wheel within a wheel" of chapter one was extraterrestrial and he goes one step further and claims that it only describes a small part of the craft. According to Blumrich the whole chapter was a detailed description of an encounter with an UFO.

He even concludes that Ezekiel went aboard the craft and interacted with the commander of the vehicle a number of times.

Was Ezekiel a primitive man doing his best to put an alien encounter on papyrus?

First of all, he wasn't so 'ancient.' By that I mean he wasn't a cave man who had never seen a wheel before. And he had a pretty good grasp of language.

But here is the real problem with the alien-encounter theory. Ezekiel said in verse twenty-eight, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Several times in his book he indicates the vision was of the Lord.

Now if you want to say that it was really aliens and that Ezekiel was just doing his best to describe what happened, you are denying the inspiration of Scripture. You are reducing Ezekiel to a man struggling to put his thoughts on paper rather than an instrument in the hands of almighty God.

Why is it easier for some to believe in aliens than in angels? Because mankind does not like to retain God in our knowledge. We'd rather believe some fantastic tale than the truth that we were created by, and then visited by, the loving and merciful and forgiving God of the Bible. Because if there really is a God then we need to face the fact we are sinners in need of His saving and in our pride we want instead to go our own way.

We met Ezekiel in verses one, two, and three. He had been taken away from Judah and Jerusalem in the second siege by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The Jews believed that God would shortly deliver them and that they would return to life-as-usual in the Holy Land. Ezekiel would prophesy that their exile would be a long one. He would tell them, in words and through skits, that Jerusalem and the Temple would be ruined.

Then he would go on to give them prophecies of hope in a return to the land - prophecies that look beyond even our own time to the future rule of Jesus on the earth after His Second Coming.

As we continue in chapter one we see Ezekiel's primary vision. I say 'primary' because he will mention it frequently. We'll see it in chapter ten, in chapter eleven, and in chapter forty-three. Each time we get a little more detail about what the vision means:

- As I already noted, we learn in chapter one it is a vision of the Lord in His glory.
- In chapter ten we see that it portends judgment upon Jerusalem.
- In chapter eleven we'll see that it portrays the glory of the Lord departing from Israel for a time.
- Finally, in chapter forty-three, we'll see that the vision promises that the glory of the Lord will one day return and cover the land.

The vision is recounted in chapter one in three stages:

1. In verses four through fourteen we get an overview.
2. Then in verses fifteen through twenty-one he sees further details about a heavenly chariot.
3. Then in verses twenty-two through twenty-eight he sees further details about the heavenly throne and God upon the throne.

Ezekiel 1:4 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.

Ezekiel saw a great storm coming upon him from the north. The storm has at least two meanings:

1. It means judgment was coming upon Israel from the north. Judah had watched as Assyria came from the north to overrun Israel during the time of the divided kingdom. Now Babylon would come and ruin Judah.
2. But it also meant God was coming to them. In Psalm 75:6 & 7 we read, “For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.” Commentators say “exaltation” has to do with help. Help comes from God, from the north, from above. He was using the Babylonians to discipline His people. He was behind the Babylonians, caring for His people.

In verse twenty-eight Ezekiel mentions a “rainbow” in this storm. The rainbow would remind the Israelites that in His wrath God remembers mercy. The storm would not destroy them. It would purify them and God would restore them.

Ezekiel 1:5 Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.

Ezekiel 1:6 Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.

Ezekiel 1:7 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.

Ezekiel 1:8 The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings.

There's no mystery here. In chapter ten Ezekiel identifies these "living creatures" as cherubim. Some say they are a kind of angel while others say they are a unique class of created beings. They are not aliens, however.

They are associated in Scripture with the presence of God:

- In the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple cherubim were carved on the cover that sat atop the mercy seat.
- They were embroidered into the curtains that surrounded the Tabernacle.

A Jew would therefore recognize these as cherubim that ministered in the presence of Jehovah. Ezekiel was not struggling to describe aliens; he was careful to describe the well-known cherubim.

We see them prominently in the Revelation of Jesus Christ ministering before the throne of God.

Their description seems weird to us. I wonder what we look like to them!

There are all manner of suggestions as to what their faces, etc., represent. These cherubim may have a special relationship to the covenant God made with Noah. We've already seen that there is a rainbow. The rainbow always reminds us of God's promises to Noah.

As part of His promises, we read in Genesis 9:9&10,

Genesis 9:9 "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you,
Genesis 9:10 and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.

God established His covenant with four creatures:

1. You, meaning Noah representing the human race.
2. Birds.
3. Cattle.
4. And every beast.

These correspond to the four faces of the cherubim.

There is something else about the description of the cherubim. We've seen this exact formation before in our Bible. In the Book of Numbers God told the nation of Israel how they were to set up camp around the Tabernacle in the wilderness and set up their flag. Each of the four sides were to be encamped by three tribes. The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulon were to camp on the east and were collectively called the camp of Judah. What was the symbol on the flag of Judah? A lion.

The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were to camp on the west side and were collectively called the camp of Ephraim. What was the symbol on the flag of Ephraim? An ox.

The tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp on the south side and were collectively called the camp of Reuben. What was the symbol on the flag of Reuben? A man.

The tribes of Dan, Naphtali, and Asher were to camp on the north side and were collectively called the camp of Dan. What was the symbol on the flag of Dan? An eagle.

Israel camped about the Tabernacle as an earthly representation of the cherubim surrounding God's throne in Heaven. God was enthroned on earth as He was in Heaven. His people were to live in such a way as to bring Him never-ending praise.

If you want even more about the cherubim get our study on Revelation 4:7.

Ezekiel 1:9 Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

Ezekiel 1:10 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.

Ezekiel 1:11 Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies.

We're going to talk more about their movements in the next set of verses when we see them associated with the wheels within wheel.

For now I find it fascinating that "their wings touched one another." If you were a sixth century Jew you would immediately be reminded of the mercy seat covering the ark. I think it was Dr. J. Vernon McGee who suggested in his commentary that this vision was showing the Jews that the entire earth was now a mercy seat covered by the Lord's grace to forgive sin because of the blood that Jesus would shed.

Ezekiel 1:12 And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

If you have four faces and no knees you are always going forward no matter which direction you are going. They were at the total control of God's "spirit."

As we will see as we get into the next layers of this vision, God is over creation and it is moving in the direction He has determined. He has mighty living creatures who carry out His perfect will perfectly. Whatever else you get from this you must understand God is in control.

Ezekiel 1:13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning.

Ezekiel is getting more detail. The storm he saw at first was really these four living creatures hurrying along.

We talk about the storms of life. They are terrible - diseases, dilemmas, deaths and the like. If only we could 'see' into the storm. If only we could 'see' the providence of God in them, the power of God through them.

Well, we can see by faith if we so choose to do so. Every storm has God within it, over it, taking you through it.

Ezekiel 1:14 And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

Ezekiel likened the movement of these amazing living creatures carrying out the will of God to a lightning storm. There was power, but also precision. They struck, as it were, precisely where and when God determined.