

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Sweet Chariot Swings Lo”

1:15-21

Comic superheros have cool vehicles:

- There have been several versions of the Batmobile. Batman also has at his disposal the Batbike, the Batjet, the Batboat, and the Batsub.
- Captain America has a rad motorcycle.
- Wonder Woman flies an invisible jet.
- The X-Men use the X-Jet, also called Blackbird.
- By far the coolest superhero mode of transportation has to be the Silver Surfer’s surfboard.

Way cooler is the sweet chariot of the Lord that swings lo over the earth so Ezekiel can get a close-up.

We met Ezekiel in exile by the banks of the River Chebar. Babylon was the world-ruling power. King Nebuchadnezzar had twice besieged Jerusalem and carried away captives. Ezekiel was taken in the second siege.

The opening half of his book occurs before the third and final siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s visions and his dramatizations serve to both prepare the people for a long exile and to set their sights on the future restoration of Israel to the land God had unconditionally promised.

Ezekiel sees the heavens open and a storm approaching. But there is something in the storm. There are four cherubim - of the type that minister constantly around the throne of God.

As the chapter continues, Ezekiel sees further into the storm:

- In verses fifteen through twenty-one he sees what appears to be a supernatural chariot.
- Then he'll see a platform atop the chariot.
- Then he'll see God seated upon a throne upon the platform; and by "God" we'll see that it is Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 1:15 Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.

These "living creatures" are identified by Ezekiel later in his book as cherubim. As he sees them moving through the heavens he notices a "wheel" associated with each of them that is touching the "earth."

Ezekiel 1:16 The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

All manner of explanations have been suggested for what Ezekiel really saw. UFOlogists argue that he saw the landing of an extraterrestrial craft. One such researcher says,

We... encounter mechanical nomenclature, such as rings, rims, strakes, spokes and "eyes" (which could well be port holes)... Ezekiel clearly indicates that these vehicles land, take off, hover, and even fly in formation as they zip to and fro in all directions. They are able to do so without needing to bank and turn as do airplanes or birds. As they flash through the sky they are - like the mighty flying machines (vimanas) of the Hindu epics - accompanied by a thunderous roar. Finally, as they land on earth they "let down their wings" - a curious statement from our UFO oriented standpoint, unless we realize that these "wings" could conceivably be metal stairways as seen from the side. Such "gangplanks" might be lowered smoothly until they touched the ground, giving him the impression that the cherubim had "let down their wings."

We find this humorous but it is something we ought to address. You see, a lot of folks who study prophecy believe that some sort of UFO hoax perpetrated by demons will be characteristic of the last days.

The main reason, for me, that we must reject the notion that Ezekiel was the victim of a UFO sighting is that it offends the Bible's claim of inspiration. Ezekiel tells us that these are cherubim and that the vision is of the Lord. He isn't a guy living in a van down by the river who sees a UFO. He is God's prophet who sees the Lord.

Ezekiel 1:17 When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went.

The mechanics of the wheel within a wheel were such that they had free movement in all directions. They didn't "turn" as on an axle.

I admit I have trouble visualizing this. I've seen various artistic representations but that's all they are.

The important concept is motion. These wheels allow the chariot unrestricted motion in all directions.

Why do I keep referring to this as a chariot? The Bible itself seems to comment upon God's throne as a chariot in connection with the cherubim. For example, when describing the construction of the mercy seat for the ark of the covenant in Solomon's Temple, it's described like this:

1 Chronicles 28:18 ... the chariot, that is, the gold cherubim that spread their wings and overshadowed the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

In Psalm eighteen you read,

Psalms 18:6 In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears.

Psalms 18:9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet.

Psalms 18:10 And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind.

In Psalm 104:3 you read,

Psalm 104:3 He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind,

Psalm 104 may be poetic, a poetic description of God's omnipresence, but the other texts are not. They depict a literal vehicle, a chariot associated with the cherubim. It's God's sweet ride!

It's got custom rims:

Ezekiel 1:18 As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them.

I don't want to confuse the chariot with modern innovations or to in any way suggest that Ezekiel was seeing a future, mechanical vehicle. But I can't help but think of the new cars that come equipped with various sensors. Mercedes pioneered radar-guided pre-crash technology that senses when a car might crash and takes preventive measures.

God's chariot "sees" everything in every direction. It speaks to us of discernment. You've heard, probably memorized, this famous verse:

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

Do you know that there is more to that verse? It ends saying, "In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars." It was a prophet's warning to King Asa who put his trust in armies. Instead Asa ought to have known that the Lord's chariot was about, 'looking' to give victory as God forwarded His plan for His people.

The whole vision is intended to communicate that the earth and its history is moving according to God's eternal plan. His throne touches the earth. His wheels set the earth - its history - in motion. Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall according to God's plan for His people on the earth.

Ezekiel 1:19 When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.

Sounds like a series of touch-and-goes. Only this wasn't for training purposes. This was the real thing.

Why these touch-and-goes? We'll see one reason why in chapter nine. Let me give you a preview.

Ezekiel 9:1 Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand."

Ezekiel 9:2 And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Ezekiel 9:3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side;

Ezekiel 9:4 and the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."

Ezekiel 9:5 To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity.

Ezekiel 9:6 Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple.

God was looking for those whose hearts were aligned with His. He always is! Perhaps the cherubim were touching down to mark these faithful saints prior to the final siege against Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 1:20 Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

OK, so the "spirit" of these cherubim were "in the wheels." They had some sort of a connection with the wheels, what we might call an interface, that rendered the wheels at their complete immediate control.

They themselves were following the leading of God's Spirit. They did not act independently.

Angels must get mind-blown by God's unfolding plan for history. One angel is on record as slaying 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. Their exploits

are amazing. Yet God is working in and through human beings. His strength is on display in our weakness.

Ezekiel 1:21 When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Babylon was a monster. In no time at all Nebuchadnezzar would again besiege Jerusalem. During this siege, which lasted about eighteen months, "every worst woe befell the devoted city, which drank the cup of God's fury to the dregs" (Second Kings 25:3; Lamentations 4:4, 5, 9). The city was plundered and reduced to ruins.

King Zedekiah and his followers attempted to escape, making their way out of the city, but were captured on the plains of Jericho, and were taken to Riblah. There, after seeing his own sons put to death, his own eyes were put out, and, being loaded with chains, he was carried captive to Babylon (Second Kings 25:1-7; Second Chronicles 36:12; Jeremiah 32:4,5; 34:2, 3; 39:1-7; 52:4-11; Ezekiel 12:12) where he remained a prisoner to the day of his death.

After the fall of Jerusalem the Babylonian general Nebuzaraddan was sent to carry out its complete destruction. The city was razed to the ground. Only a small number of vinedressers and husbandmen were permitted to remain in the land (Jeremiah 52:16). Gedeliah, with a Chaldean guard stationed at Mizpah, was left to rule over Judah (Second Kings 25:22, 24; Jeremiah 40:1, 2, 5, 6).

Habakkuk was a prophet contemporary with Ezekiel but a little prior. He complained that the Lord wasn't doing anything about His people living in sin. God told Habakkuk He was definitely going to do something. He was going to send Babylon against them as a discipline.

All this was set in motion by God. He remained firmly in command.

Whatever superior weapons and tactics Nebuchadnezzar might have over the nations of the earth, God's chariot was superior. But as a weapon it

doesn't simply annihilate enemies. No, it can use enemies to its advantage.

God is interested looking for hearts loyal to Him. Has He touched down near you lately?