

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 1:4-24

Topic

The LORD speeds to Ezekiel in Babylon, riding on His throne-chariot, carried by four living creatures.

Title

"Creature Features"

The Batmobile is just the most well-known.

There are additionally the Bat-Cycle, the Batwing, the Bat-Boat, the Bat-Sub, the Bat-Ski, the Bat-Glider, the Bat-Truck, the Bat-Shuttle, the Bat-Trike, the Bat-Copter, and the Bat-Train.

There may be cooler comic rides, but the Batman has the deepest inventory.

The LORD has a sweet ride!

- Its "wheels" are mentioned 10x.
- Its "rims" are mentioned 2x.

It is conveyed by four supernatural chauffeurs called "living creatures." Further on in the book, Ezekiel says, "I knew they *were* Cherubim" (10:20).

He knew because the Cherubim were associated with the presence of God in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. There were carved images of them, out of gold and olive wood; as well as images embroidered on curtains; and carvings.

The nation of Judah was a vassal of Babylon. No worries, thought the Jews. God's presence was in Solomon's Temple. Certainly God would not allow Babylon to prevail.

They were wrong to trust in the Temple; God allowed it to be leveled.

Before the Temple was destroyed, *God would remove His presence from the Temple.* Ezekiel was relocated in a refugee camp in a Babylonian city called Tel Abib, by the River Kebar. He would be God's prophet to break the awful news to the captives in Babylon that God had left the building!

Aren't you glad that can't happen today? *Not so fast!* Jesus wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus warning them that He was about to "remove [their] lampstand from its place - unless [they] repent" (Revelation 2:5).

I'll organize my comments around the two subjects we encounter: **#1 @therealCherubim**, and **#2 @therealChariot**.

#1 - @therealCherubim (v4-14)

Angels... or Aliens?

UFOlogists claim that Ezekiel was an ignorant man using primitive language to describe his encounters with extraterrestrial visitors, "Ancient Astronauts."

- Ezekiel was no ignorant man. He was God's prophet.
- His language is far from being primitive; it is marvelous.

Besides, we referenced earlier that he said he knew that were Cherubim - *not Chewbacca*.

We choose *aliens* over *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. We can fight ET, and win, on account of our indomitable human, Captain Kirk-like, spirit, that proclaims, "Never say die, never surrender." If there really is a God then we need to face the fact we are sinners in need of His saving and our submission.

Ezk 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.

Whirlwind Ezekiel, magnitude off the charts, was bearing down on the man who would never be priest. The storm was supernatural, in the unseen realm. It was geopolitical, involving God's plan for the ages, for Israel and the nations.

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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.

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

When we encounter visions like this in the Bible, we immediately look for symbolism. Let me give you an example. In verse eighteen we are told that these living creatures "were full of eyes."

- One commentator said, "The number of eyes, wherever they may be, speaks of multi-dimensional awareness. Our two eyes help us to perceive a three-dimensional reality. A multitude of eyes suggests a greater awareness than we know as human."
- Another commentator explains the eyes, "We can hide nothing from God. He sees and knows everything."

Symbolism is subjective. So what does Ezekiel mean? *He means that they were full of eyes!*

Another rather distinguishing physical trait is in verse seven. "Their legs were straight." *They don't have knees!*

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

Cherubim appear in a few other settings, associated with the presence of God, and especially His visible presence in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

In the Wilderness Tabernacle...

- Cherubim were woven into the the curtains of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1)
- Two golden figures of the Cherubim stretched their wings over the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-21).
- God said to Moses, "There I will meet with you, and from above the Mercy Seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the [Covenant], I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel" (Exodus 25:22). In essence, it was God's throne on Earth.

In Solomon's Temple...

- There were four Cherubim in the Temple - the two gold ones on the Mercy Seat and two larger ones, carved out of olive wood, overshadowing the entire Ark (First Kings 6:23-28).
- The doors leading to the Holy Place were decorated with carvings of Cherubim (First Kings 6.31-32).

Notice the phrase, "their wings touched one another." The Cherubim in the Temple were carved that way. Ezekiel saw the @therealCherubim which those in the Temple represented.

That place was where the presence of God visibly dwelt among His people.

This divine presence of God is called "*Shekinah*," the "*Shekinah glory*," the "glory of the LORD," "the cloud," and "the fire."

The *Shekinah* makes many appearances in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Exodus from Egypt, for instance, the pillar of fire by day and the cloud by night were *Shekinah*.

When Solomon's Temple was being dedicated, we read, "When Solomon had finished praying, **fire** came down from Heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and **the glory of the LORD** filled the Temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because **the glory of the LORD** had filled the LORD's house. When all the children of Israel saw how the **fire** came down, and **the glory of the LORD** on the Temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, *saying: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever"*(Second Chronicles 7:1-3).

God wants His creatures to dwell with Him. It's not an easy thing to accomplish, because we are depraved sinners and He is infinitely holy.

God is up to the task. The last four English words of this book declare the future time when, "*The LORD is there!*"

As we journey through Ezekiel and the temples, we will see the LORD was there, then He wasn't there, then He will be there.

Ezk 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.

They were like the Mayor of Halloween Town in *Nightmare Before Christmas*.

Weird as this was, a Jew would instantly 'recognize' these four faces. They are lifted from Jewish history.

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 where to put their tribal ensigns. Each of the four sides were to be encamped by three of the tribes:

1. The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were to camp on the east and were collectively called the camp of Judah. The symbol on the ensign of Judah was a lion.
2. The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were to camp on the west side and were collectively called the camp of Ephraim. The symbol on the ensign of Ephraim was an ox.
3. The tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp on the south side and were collectively called the camp of Reuben. The symbol on the ensign of Reuben was a man.
4. The tribes of Dan, Naphtali, and Asher were to camp on the north side and were collectively called the camp of Dan. The symbol on the ensign of Dan was an eagle.

Israel camped about the Tabernacle as an earthly representation of the Cherubim surrounding God's throne in Heaven.¹

¹ Chuck Missler points out that Bible gives an account of the number of Jews in each encampment. From an aerial view of their tents, it looks like a Cross!

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

In addition to Ezekiel's description, Isaiah, Daniel, and the apostle John describe them from their own experiences. There are slight differences in each, but that is to be expected. No contradictions, just different emphases that can be reconciled.

Ezk 1:12 And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the **spirit** [mentioned 4 more times in the next set of verses] wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

Ezk 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.

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

If, as a Christian, you have liberty to use AI, read this description into an artwork app and see what comes up.

We saw last time that this vision came to Ezekiel on his 30th birthday. It was the day he would have begun his service in the Temple.

God remembered Ezekiel's birthday and He crashed his non-party.

#2 - @therealChariot (v15-24)

The burning question I'm sure we all have is this: "What does God need with a starship?"

Ok, so maybe that's from *Star Trek V*. God doesn't need a starship to travel. He doesn't require Cherubim to drive Him. He doesn't need a prophet. He doesn't need you & He doesn't need me.

He has created us to have fellowship with Him & with one another as members of one another. It is the way of things. And we are to be in a local fellowship because we are a *body* & a *building*:

- If you are a stone for a building, you are useless alone.
- If you are a body part, you are useless alone. And gangrenous.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

I've seen what are called 'Omni-Wheels' on the Apple iCar prototype. They look like soccer balls & go in every direction. The car can go sideways.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

- The Cherubim had control of the wheels. When the Cherubim moved, the wheels moved.
- The Spirit of God had control of the Cherubim.

Ezk 1:22 The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.

There was a cover above the Cherubim, a platform. Light shone through it as light through a precious stone. The final verses of the chapter - we will look at them next time. There is a throne above the Cherubim & on the platform.

Ezk 1:23 And under the firmament their wings *spread out* straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body.

Ezk 1:24 When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings.

The Ark and Mercy Seat were removed before Solomon's Temple was destroyed. There are many theories as to where it went. Jeremiah may have hidden it. The Ethiopian Church claims that they have it.

It was never seen again after the First Temple was destroyed. In its place was a large stone slab onto which the High Priest sprinkled the blood on the Day of Atonement.

The *Shekinah* will return. There will be a Third Temple after the 7yr Time of Jacob's Trouble - the Millennial Temple (43:1-5).

In *Back to the Future* there is a scene where Marty McFly is worried about whether Doc Brown will show up to help him get 'back to the future.' As tension builds, another character reassures Marty by saying, "Don't worry, *he'll be here.*" This line underscores the trust and belief in the hero's timely arrival, despite the uncertainty of the moment.

Remember how Ezekiel ends - *"The LORD will be there!"*

God's people were conquered and held captive. Shortly their trust in the Temple would be taken away. Looking back on centuries of intense persecution and suffering, it is easy to conclude that Israel has been abandoned by God.

Has God abandoned them? "Certainly not! ... God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2).

Meanwhile...The Lord is here!

- If you are "in" Him, **then He is indwelling you.** Your body is the Temple of God the Holy Spirit.
- He is present when we gather together. Collectively, we are His temple on Earth, being built together.