

## Ezekiel Lesson 01

Ezekiel Chapter 1

*Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies*

Email: [mail@KjvBibleStudies2.net](mailto:mail@KjvBibleStudies2.net)

Website: [www.KjvBibleStudies.net](http://www.KjvBibleStudies.net)

**Introduction:** We begin our new study on the book of Ezekiel. This is a long book and my take the better part of a year to complete. 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 exhorted them to repent.

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 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. Ezekiel in effect was ushered into the presence of God (by way of a vision) and given divine authority for his ministry.

### I. Ezekiel Sees Visions of God

*Eze 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 begins with visions, the very root of his purpose concerning God’s people. Ezekiel announced when and where he first saw “visions of God.” The fourth month of the Hebrew calendar roughly corresponds to July in our western calendar. It is unclear what the thirtieth year mentioned is referring to.

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. 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.

Because of the date marker in the next verse, I believe that this may simply refer to the age of 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- 597 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.

*Eze 1:2 In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,*

*Eze 1:3 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.*

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).

*2Ch 36:9 Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.*

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 was despised and held in contempt by his countrymen. Though interesting, there is no basis in fact for that assumption.

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.

*Eze 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.*

*Eze 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.*

The first 'vision' or revelation from God to Ezekiel is here recorded beginning in verse 4. The words translated as whirlwind (*ruwach ca'ar*) literally means a 'wind storm' or 'tempest.' The greater thought is that Ezekiel saw a dark, rolling 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 threat of such a storm, for out of the back sides thereof come terrible tornados. The backdrop of the first message from God is presented in stark symbolism—a dark, threatening thunderstorm on the horizon.

This storm came out of the north (which is unusual for thunderstorms), that the symbolism may be of Babylon descending out of the north in judgment upon Judah.

In verse 5, Ezekiel begins to 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.

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)*.

*Eze 1:6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.*

*Eze 1:7 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.*

*Eze 1:8 And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings.*

*Eze 1:9 Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.*

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.

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.

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.

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.

*Eze 1:10 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.*

*Eze 1:11 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.*

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.

*Rev 4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.*

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. I believe to the characteristics of God. If that be the case, it might be suggested the lion represents the royalty of God, the ox is His strength, the face of a man His personality, and the flying eagle His heavenly nature.

That is merely supposition; it does describe the nature of God and these angelic creatures are before the throne of God. See comments for Revelation 4:7. 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, cherubims before the throne of God.

*Eze 1:12 And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.*

*Eze 1:13 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.*

*Eze 1:14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.*

The thought likely is that these went straight to where the Spirit of God directed them. They did not deviate from God's direction. 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 pulsated through these angelic creatures.

In the midst of all this brilliance emanated bolts of lighting—no doubt indicating the holy wrath of God against evil. What is clearly implied is that these angelic creatures before the throne of God are not stationary, but rather active, moving about in divinely determined motion—like coordinated lightning. And so here 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 guard about the throne of God.

*Eze 1:15 Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.*

*Eze 1:16 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 were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.*

*Eze 1:17 When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went.*

*Eze 1:18 As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.*

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 (Npwa '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.(what an imagination). The thought of heavenly conveyances for the angelic creatures described above seems to fit the greater context.

In verse 16, these great heavenly spheres (or disks) had the color of beryl, perhaps like chrysolite, yellow jasper, or other yellow colored stone. Implicit is the thought of 'golden.' The wheel in the midst of the wheel may refer to some sort of hub with no apparent structure connecting it to the outer wheel. The heavenly wheels (spheres or disks) went in their four pairs at the direction the angelic creatures upon them. There was no deviation or variation when they moved.

Clearly implied is resoluteness as God sent them. As for the circumference (of the wheels or spheres), they were great and awesome. And the circumference sparkled all around the four of them. Implicit is the awesome character of the conveyance of the angelic creatures of God. They were immense and gleamed as they moved.

*Eze 1:19 And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.*

*Eze 1:20 Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.*

*Eze 1:21 When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.*

These wheels were likely conveyances of the heavenly, angelic creatures. Wherever God sent these angelic creatures, they evidently went in their wheeled conveyances. Described may be some sort of 'horseless' heavenly conveyance which was completely unfamiliar to Ezekiel.

Wherever the Spirit of God went, these angelic creatures went along with their heavenly wheels (i.e., conveyances). Implied is that the angelic creatures 'rode' in the wheeled (or spherical) conveyances made by God.

Wherever the angelic living creatures went (apparently in relation to the earth) these heavenly conveyances likewise went either as consorts or modes of transportation. Clearly implied is that the heavenly angelic creatures described earlier in the chapter have made visits to the earth along with (or in) their heavenly wheeled (or circular) conveyance.

John Gill said this about verse 20:

### **Ezekiel 1:20**

**Whithersoever the spirit was to go they went...** That is, the Spirit of God; wherever that leads and directs, whether in the paths of faith or duty, they follow; they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; he guides their feet in the way of peace, and into all truth; and leads them in a right way to the land of uprightness:

**thither was their spirit to go;** their spirits or souls being regenerated by the

spirit of God, are moved and actuated by him, and readily go where that directs:

**and the wheels were lifted up over against them;** that is, over against the living creatures; being by their sides going where they go, and being lifted up when they are:

**for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels;** the same Spirit of God, which is a spirit of life, a quickening spirit, and a free spirit; which gives motion and liberty in religious exercises; that which is in the ministers of the Gospel is in the churches of God; there is but one Spirit, and ministers and members are actuated and influenced by it; see Eph 4:4.

## II. Explanation of the Living Creature

*Eze 1:22 And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.*

*Eze 1:23 And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies.*

*Eze 1:24 And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.*

*Eze 1:25 And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings.*

The firmament in the Old Testament usually refers to the atmospheric heavens. Here a *likeness* of the firmament (i.e., the atmospheric heavens) was above the heads of the angelic creatures and had the color of awesome *crystal*.

The word so translated (*xrq qerach*) literally means 'ice' or crystals thereof. Apparently above the heads of these angelic creatures is a striking 'halo' or aura of crystal (like crystalline ice). Another striking feature of these angelic creatures is described. Under the halo of crystal, their wings were upright toward each

other. Each angelic creature had two which covered one side and two which covered the other side of their bodies.'

Though the preceding context described some sort of heavenly conveyance of these angelic creatures, here they are described as flying. Their wings making a powerful sound like the roar of ocean surf, like the voice of the Almighty, or like the noise of an army marching. Yet, when they stood still, their wings were at ease. When God spoke from above, these angelic creatures were still.

### **III. Definition of Firmament over their Heads Like a Throne**

*Eze 1:26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.*

Higher still than these angelic creatures with their awesome, striking appearance was the likeness of a throne—the throne of God. That throne is described as like an immense sapphire. See also Revelation 4:2-6. The parallels are striking. Evident are the unique descriptions given by separate eyewitnesses of the throne of God (i.e., John and Ezekiel).

*Rev 4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

*Rev 4:3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*

*Rev 4:4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*

*Rev 4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

*Rev 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.*

Upon the throne was the Almighty whose appearance was like a man. Indeed, we are made in the image of God.

*Eze 1:27 And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.*

*Eze 1:28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.*

Ezekiel struggles to find words to describe the awesome scene he is viewing—a vision of God upon His throne. Again, the color of amber is bright yellow or golden like blazing fire. Though having the likeness of a man, Ezekiel described Him who sat upon the throne as a flame of fire, brilliant and bright. Indeed, our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

*Heb 12:27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

*Heb 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:*

*Heb 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.*

The greater thought likely is of infinite brilliance and glory. In fashion remarkably similar to Revelation 4:3, Ezekiel described a rainbow above the throne, brilliant in glory. Ezekiel has thus, in his own inspired words described the vision he was given of the throne of God and the attendant angelic creatures before it with their appurtenances.

He summarized it all by saying, “*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*” Ezekiel had been given a glimpse of the glory of God upon His throne in heaven. Undoubtedly, the purpose of that vision and its unique description in this chapter was to give authority to the coming prophecies of Ezekiel.

He had been allowed into the presence of God Himself (albeit by way of a vision). He thus, like Moses, Isaiah, and later Paul and John, spoke and wrote with the divine authority of one who had been transported to heaven for a meeting with God.

The prophet concludes this introductory chapter by saying, *"and I heard a voice of one that spake."* He could write with authority because he had heard the voice of God.

Ezekiel recorded what God said to him in the next chapter.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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