

# Ezekiel—Introduction and Chapter 1:1-28—The Glory of the LORD

## Introduction to the Book of Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel covers a lot of ground, dealing with a wide range of topics and scenarios and time periods, but the core message of the book is that God desires an intimate and personal relationship with His people. Today we experience this as the **New Covenant**. Jesus initiated the New Covenant when He drank from the cup at the last supper.

Luke 22:19-20 NLT

He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

<sup>20</sup> After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “**This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood**, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.

The ancient prophets foretold the most important aspect of the New Covenant which makes this new relationship between God and man possible—*God will put His Spirit inside of us and give us a new heart with new desires that cause us to want to love and serve Him*. Here is one example:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV (Memory Verse)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

However, the New Covenant doesn't end with the rapture of the church. What the book of Ezekiel clearly shows is that the New Covenant is actually promised to Israel, and its ultimate fulfillment will be when Jesus restores the nation of Israel and rules the restored earth for 1,000 years from the new temple in Jerusalem (described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48). Israel will be the world superpower for 1,000 years. During that time, the Holy Spirit will be living in the hearts of all believing Jews, as well as all other believers. The Millennial (1,000 year) reign of Jesus starts 75 days after Jesus returns with the church to the earth at the end of the seven year Tribulation (Daniel 12:11).

We should be very thankful that God in His great mercy was willing to share the promises and blessings intended for Israel with the gentile church. Romans chapters 9-11 explain that we the church (the branches from the wild olive tree) are exceedingly privileged to have been grafted in to the cultivated olive tree (Israel) so we too can share in the blessings that God has for Israel (Romans 11:16-24). ***The church doesn't replace Israel, but rather God's blessings to Israel overflow to the church—the more Israel is blessed, the more we the church are blessed.***

Romans 11:11-12 NLT

Did God's people [Israel] stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles [through establishing the church]. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves.

<sup>12</sup> Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God's offer of salvation [rejected Jesus' at His first coming], think how much greater a blessing the world will share [the kingdom of God on earth] when they finally accept it [at the second coming when Jesus comes back at the end of the seven year tribulation].

***The book of Ezekiel also showcases God's heart towards sinful man***

Ezekiel 33:11 NLT

As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?

We will see God go to extraordinary lengths to get the attention of His people so that they will hear the message and repent. If we are willing to step back and take a look at our own lives, we will also see that God continues to go to great lengths in His pursuit of us.

### ***The book of Ezekiel also showcases God's rich mercy***

God gives amazing and wonderful promises of blessing to the nation of Israel, despite their current state of unbelief. One of the main purposes of these wonderful promises in these dark times for Israel was to give them hope for the future. God does the same for us the church in the New Testament (Romans 8:18).

Ezekiel 36:22 NLT

“Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign Lord: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations.”

This is like the Old Testament version of Ephesians 2:8-9 which clearly shows that God saves us and blesses us, not because we deserve it, but simply because God desired to give it to us—it was His good pleasure (Ephesians 1:9).

Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. <sup>9</sup> Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

## **Historical Background to the book of Ezekiel**

**Ezekiel 1:1 NKJV**

**Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.**

v 1 **In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day:** Each of Ezekiel's prophecies or visions are dated.

v 1 **The thirtieth year:** This was likely the age of the prophet Ezekiel. According to Numbers 4:3, priests normally began their temple service at 30 years of age. But instead of becoming a priest, God called Ezekiel to become a prophet.

### ***What do we know about the prophet Ezekiel?***

\* Ezekiel was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3).

\* He had his own home in Babylon (Ezekiel 8:1).

\* Assuming Ezekiel was 30 years old in 593 b.c. (the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity—Ezekiel 1:2) he would have been born about 622 b.c..

\* This means he would have been born during the reign of godly king Josiah, the last good king of the southern kingdom of Judah (640–608 b.c.). There was a good chance he had godly parents.

\* Ezekiel is assumed to have married when he was about 23 years old (~600 b.c.),

\* Ezekiel, along with his wife was taken captive to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin (Ezekiel 1:2; 33:21) during the second wave of deportations in 597 b.c. at the age of 26. 2 Kings 24:12–16 describes the conquest that led to Ezekiel’s captivity. Most likely he never returned to Judah.

\* Ezekiel would have been in captivity in Babylon for about 4 years before God called him to be a prophet at age 30.

\* The last dated prophecy of his book (Ezekiel 29:17) is that of the year 571, when Ezekiel would have been fifty-six. Therefore he was prophesying for approximately 26 years (compare Ezekiel 1:2 and 29:17).

\* Ezekiel lost his wife when he was thirty-seven and was commanded not to remarry (Ezekiel 24:16-18).

\* “Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry began when Judah still stood as independent kingdom (though under Babylon’s powerful domination) and the temple still stood and functioned in Jerusalem. During this time, before Judah’s complete conquest, there were many false prophets in Jerusalem and Babylonia who claimed God would rescue Judah and those already taken captive (like Ezekiel) would soon return (Jeremiah 28:1–4; 29:15–28). Ezekiel’s message rebuked the sinful wish to escape the deserved judgment the Babylonians would soon bring, and to give God’s people *real* hope, instead of the empty hope of the false prophets.” (David Guzik)

\* The name **Ezekiel** “Signifies either, the strength of God, or, strengthened by God.” (Poole)

\* He served in Babylon during the same time as Jeremiah and Daniel, making no mention of Jeremiah but three mentions of Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14; 14:20; 28:3)

v 1 **Among the captives:** “He was a victim of a common ancient Near Eastern policy toward conquered peoples: the mass deportation of entire populations designed to break down national resistance at home by removing political and spiritual leadership, and to bolster the economy and military machine of the conqueror’s homeland.” (Block)

v 1 **I was among the captives by the River Chebar:** Ezekiel was a captive of the Babylonian empire, whose king was Nebuchadnezzar. The downfall or destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah happened over a period of about 19 years.

(look at handout—*Kings of Israel Chart*, briefly explain history of the nation of Israel)

In a series of attacks, the Babylonian Empire overwhelmed the Kingdom of Judah and they carried away captives in three waves:		
1st Wave	605 b.c.	Jerusalem was attacked and Daniel and other captives were taken to Babylon.
2nd Wave	597 b.c.	Jerusalem was attacked, treasure taken from the temple, and more captives taken to Babylon (including Ezekiel).
3rd Wave	587 b.c.	Jerusalem falls and almost everyone remaining in the kingdom was exiled.

Jon Courson describes the situation well:

*In the year 605 b.c., the Babylonians came from the north to besiege Jerusalem. They didn't destroy the city at that time, but they did carry away a number of young men who were considered to be the cream of the crop—including a young man named Daniel, along with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego—back to Babylon. In doing this, Nebuchadnezzar was serving notice to Jerusalem that she had better keep in line.*

*Jerusalem, however, didn't get the message. In 597 b.c., the Jews showed signs of rebellion. So Nebuchadnezzar came down a second time. This time, he took 10,000 people to Babylon, one of whom was a young priest in training named Ezekiel. The captives were not treated cruelly or brutally because, unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonian style was not to destroy them but to impress them. Babylon was surrounded by walls approximately thirty-five stories tall and eighty-seven feet wide with a hundred towers. Inside the city were numerous temples to the Babylonian god, Marduk. Throughout the city, there were over three hundred hanging gardens considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. With flowering plants imported from all over the world, their beauty was unparalleled. In addition, Babylonian garments were highly treasured throughout the known world. So when the Babylonians brought the Jews into the city, they didn't destroy them with brutality. Instead, they seduced them with carnality. And the Jews grew so comfortable in Babylon that, when they were allowed to go home seventy years later, only a handful chose to leave.*

*Ezekiel ministered to people who were carried into Babylon, who, at that time, still had hard hearts toward the Lord. Meanwhile, Jerusalem still showed signs of rebellion. So in 586 b.c., Nebuchadnezzar came down a third time and this time destroyed the city, burned the temple, and wiped out the populace.*

v 1 **The River Chebar:** This is where God revealed Himself to Ezekiel. "The river Chebar, a navigable canal, flowed southeast from the city of Babylon." (Alexander)

v 1 **I saw visions of God:** A vision is like a dream, but you are awake when it happens.

v 1 **The heavens were opened:** This has happened on a number of occasions including Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:16, a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. Also there was the time when Stephen, the first martyr, was being stoned to death (Acts 6)—he looked up and saw Jesus standing, ready to receive Him. Then there was Peter in Acts 10 praying on the rooftop and seeing the vision of the sheet with all the different animals and God telling him to eat them. All of these were significant occasions and here is no different—God will reveal much to Ezekiel.

## God Calls Ezekiel

### Ezekiel 1:2-3 NKJV

On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, <sup>3</sup> the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

v 2 **Which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity:** This would be 5 years before the third wave of deportations and total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Ezekiel would be competing for the hearts of the people against the many false prophets who were constantly giving the people false hope by saying that the Babylonians would not conquer Jerusalem and all the people and treasures would be returned home. Of course, when what Ezekiel said would happen did happen, he was proven to be a true prophet of God; however, for many of those in Jerusalem who were deceived by the false prophets the deception and their wrong choice would cost them their lives.

v 3 **The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest:** **expressly** means explicitly, clearly, or deliberately (Compare 1 Samuel 20:21).

v 3 **In the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar:** Ezekiel likely lived with other Jewish captives in this city or town on the river.

v 3 **Chaldeans** is another name for the Babylonians.

v 3 **The hand of the Lord was upon him there:** “ ‘The hand of the Lord was upon him’ connotes the idea of God's strength on behalf of the person involved (3:14; cf. Isa 25:10; 41:10, 20), a concept inherent in the name ‘Ezekiel’ (*yehezqel*), which means ‘God strengthens.’ ” (Alexander)

This is how God worked in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit would come *upon* people and they would speak, lead, act, etc by the power of God. This empowerment or coming upon would usually only be for kings and prophets or other leaders and could come and go. This Spirit coming upon select people in the Old Testament is very similar to how the Spirit comes upon all believers today but with one very important difference—the difference being that today we *also* have the New Covenant promise of the Spirit *in* us which is permanent—it is the mark or seal of the true believer (2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30). So the New Testament or New Covenant believer has both the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, plus, we also have the Spirit come upon us to empower us to be witnesses for Christ. Like in the Old Testament, we can receive this filling or coming upon or empowering multiple times (Acts 2:4, Acts 4:8, 4:31).

### Acts 1:8, 2:4, 4:31 NKJV

1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

2:4 **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

4:31 [some time later] And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; **and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

## Ezekiel's Vision of God

### Ezekiel 1:4-28 NKJV

<sup>4</sup> 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 colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

<sup>5</sup> Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. <sup>6</sup> Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the colour of burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. <sup>9</sup> Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. <sup>12</sup> And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

<sup>15</sup> Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. <sup>16</sup> The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the colour 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. <sup>17</sup> When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. <sup>18</sup> As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the colour of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.

<sup>26</sup> And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. <sup>27</sup> Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the colour of amber with the appearance of

**fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. <sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.**

Ezekiel's description here might be the most unusual and detailed vision of God in the Scriptures. Also, taking Ezekiel 1–3 as a unit, it is also the longest and most in-depth description of a prophet's calling in the Scriptures. It had a profound effect on him.

“The vision Ezekiel had at the time of his call never left him but influenced his thought continually. It was the knowledge of God: holy, glorious and sovereign.” (Feinberg)

## **The glory of God**

### **Ezekiel 1:4 NKJV**

**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 colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.**

v 1 **A whirlwind was coming out of the north:** Imagine a tornado or whirlwind coming at you, but it wasn't any whirlwind, it was a very bright and great cloud of raging fire spinning around and around.

v 1 **coming out of the north:** This is significant as the north is often associated with God's judgement through Israel's enemies (Jeremiah 1:14–15) and Israel's captivity (Jeremiah 3:18). It was a way of saying that the coming judgements or calamities were from God or directed by God.

v 4 **A great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself:** This is not the first time that God has revealed Himself by a pillar or cloud of fire. Back in the days of Moses leading the children of Israel through the wilderness God appeared to Israel as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21–22). The **raging fire engulfing itself** also reminds us of the burning bush that Moses saw, which burned but was not consumed (Exodus 3:2).

### ***Why did God reveal Himself to Ezekiel in such a dramatic way?***

One great effect of this vision was to assure Ezekiel that Yahweh was in fact the sovereign God of all creation—no matter how great Babylon and her gods seemed to be. (David Guzik)

“The multiplicity of temples, the incredible prosperity of the city, the hive of industry and culture, all this would have made any Hebrew captive feel how small his home country was and how great were the all-conquering gods of Nebuchadnezzar.” (Taylor)

v 4 **Brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst:** The brightness radiating from the inside of the fire cloud is an expression of the glory of God.

“If the message of Isaiah centres about the salvation of the Lord, that of Jeremiah about the judgment of the Lord, and that of Daniel about the kingdom of the Lord, then that of Ezekiel is concerned with the glory of the Lord.” (Feinberg)

## The four living creatures (Cherubim)

### Ezekiel 1:5-9 NKJV

Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. <sup>6</sup> Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the colour of burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. <sup>9</sup> Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

v 5 **From within it came the likeness of four living creatures:** This raging fire tornado or whirlwind surrounded four remarkable beings. Ezekiel later identified these unique **creatures** as *cherubim* (Ezekiel 10:8–15). Cherubim are angels of unique power and glory and are usually found in the presence of God. These powerful angels are similar to, or if not the same as, those found in Revelation 4:6-8. Their first mention is in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). The lid of the ark of the covenant or mercy seat had cherubim figures on it (Exodus 25:18–20), and the inside of the tabernacle and later the temple were decorated with designs of cherubim (Exodus 26:1, 1 Kings 6:23-35). Interestingly, Satan before his fall was also among the cherubim covering God's throne (Ezekiel 28:14-16).

v 4 **They had the likeness of a man:** These cherubim were not men but in general form and structure they looked like men.

v 6 **Each one had four faces:** I can't wait to see these amazing angels. Ezekiel describes the four faces in verse 10.

v 6 **Each one had four wings:** This is one of the few places that angels are associated with wings. This doesn't necessarily mean that all angels have wings, but these powerful ones definitely do.

In Isaiah 6:1–4, the prophet described his heavenly vision where he saw beings he called *seraphim* who had six wings. It is likely that *cherubim* and *seraphim* are the same beings described from slightly different perspectives or noting different details. The name *seraphim* means *burning ones*, which seems to fit with these cherubim as described in Ezekiel 1:13. (David Guzik).

v 7 **Their legs were straight:** Their legs were straight like human legs but their feet were **the soles of calves' feet**.

v 7 **They sparkled like the colour of burnished bronze:** The legs of these four cherubim sparkled and were shone or glowed the colour of bronze. Jesus' feet are also described as being like fine brass in Revelation 1:15. Bronze represents purity and judgement in the scriptures. The altar in front of the temple was made of bronze.

“This speaks of purity. There's no other way to be purified than through fiery problems and difficulties. Our faith is more precious than gold purified by fire, Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:7). How did the smelter know when the gold was truly pure? When he could look into the molten gold and see the reflection of his own face, he would know the gold was pure. So too, the Lord takes us through hot times and fiery trials. It's a long process but, if we hang in there, we'll begin to see something of Jesus reflected in us.” (Jon Courson)

v 8 **The hands of a man were under their wings:** They had human looking hands.

v 9 **Their wings touched one another:** This shows that the four cherubim were close together, close enough for their wings to be touching. This could be a picture of unity as they worked and travelled together and went in the same direction.

v 9 **Each one went straight forward:** It seems that they all continued to face the same way as each other, moving forward together as one. Again, possibly a picture of unity.

### **Ezekiel 1:10-14 NKJV**

**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. <sup>11</sup> Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. <sup>12</sup> And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.**

**<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.**

v 10 **As for the likeness of their faces:** “Each of the cherubim had the face of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. In John’s vision of heaven he seems to describe four creatures with each one having one of these four faces (Revelation 4:6–8). Most think that John simply described the particular face that was turned towards his line of sight.” (David Guzik)

Why the four different faces? We can think of the Lion as being the king of the wild beasts, the ox as being the strongest of all the domesticated animals, the eagle as being the king of all the birds, and man being the highest of all of God’s creation. Most importantly, above them all is God’s throne, a clear picture that all creation is subordinate or submitted to God.

v 11 **Two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies:** “This is different, though not contradictory, to what Isaiah recorded in Isaiah 6:2. There he saw seraphim (burning ones) with six wings: two for flight, two to cover the face, and two for covering the feet. Ezekiel seems to record the two used for flight and the two used to cover the feet. We have no explanation as for why the faces were covered in Isaiah’s vision but not in Ezekiel’s.” (David Guzik)

v 12 **Each one went straight forward:** With God there is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17). God never changes and He will accomplish His purposes.

v 12 **They went wherever the spirit wanted to go:** This is the goal for us, to become more and more responsive to the Holy Spirit’s leading and guiding in our lives.

v 13 **Their appearance was like burning coals of fire... Out of the fire went lightning:** What a great way to describe the power and awe associated with these majestic creatures.

“Angels are all on a light fire, as it were, with zeal for God and indignation against sin; let us be similarly affected.” (Trapp)

“This speaks of intensity. The living creatures weren’t just flickering. They were burning, ignited, on fire. One evangelist of old was asked how he attracted so many people to come and hear him preach. “It’s very simple,” he answered. “I pray in my closet until I’m ignited. And then I come out and people come to see me burn.”” (Jon Courson)

v 14 **The creatures ran back and forth... like a flash of lightning:** “Here, we see activity. The living creatures moved like lightning. It has been said that God never uses a lazy man. If you want to be used by the Lord, you must be wholehearted, energetic, and enthusiastic in your service for Him. You must be ready to lay aside anything that slows you down (Hebrews 12:1).” (Jon Courson)

Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. <sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God’s throne.

**Ezekiel 1:15-21 NKJV**

**Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. <sup>16</sup> The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the colour 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. <sup>17</sup> When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. <sup>18</sup> As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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 wheels associated with the living creatures***

v 15 **A wheel was on the earth beside each living creature:** Since there were four living creatures, there are also four of these wheels. It seems to be some kind of massive and glorious four-wheeled chariot bearing the throne of God.

v 16 **The colour of beryl:** This is most like the emerald which is a green colour. The wheels glowed with a beautiful emerald green colour.

v 16 **A wheel in the middle of a wheel:** “Each wheel is composed of two wheels apparently at right angles to each other. This is impossible in reality, but in the vision it enables the chariot to run instantly in any direction without turning.” (Wright)

v 17 **When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went:** It seems to be that the wheels and their workings could move in any direction. “Like a ball-bearing they could move in any direction without any steering mechanism.” (Smith) Something that a normal chariot can’t do is turn quickly, but God’s chariot doesn’t have this problem.

v 18 **As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes:** These wheels were huge and therefore the angels or cherubim are huge.

v 18 **and their rims were full of eyes:** The eyes are most likely not literal. In Revelation 4:6, John describes the cherubim themselves as being “full of eyes, front and back.” Most understand the eyes to be a way of describing great knowledge and intelligence.

“The wheels symbolise the omnipresence of God, while the eyes on their rims suggest the omniscience of God, seeing and knowing everything.” (Wiersbe)

v 19-21 **When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them:** When the four cherubim moved, so did the four wheels and their workings. The cherubim and the wheels were so closely connected that Ezekiel could write, **the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.**

We will see this glorious chariot twice more in the book of Ezekiel. Sadly, in Ezekiel chapters 9 and 10 we see the heavenly chariot return and the glory of God will depart from the temple and Jerusalem in only 13 months time. However, the glory of God will return to the Millennial temple in Ezekiel 43:1-5—this would bring much hope for those Jews in exile who were mourning the destruction of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem.

### **Ezekiel 1:22-25 NKJV**

**The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the colour of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.**

### ***Looking above: the firmament and the wings of the living creatures***

v 22 **The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures... like the colour of an awesome crystal:** This crystal is clear. Taylor regarding the Hebrew word *raqia* translated **firmament**: “The Hebrew meaning of something ‘made firm’ by beating or stamping, e.g. a hammered piece of metalwork. ... in Ezekiel it has the sense of a firm, level surface or platform. In the book of Revelation this same phrase becomes ‘a sea of glass, like crystal’ before the throne of God (Rev. 4:6).”

v 24 **I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty:** This seems to describe the noise of a loud and majestic waterfall. John used this phrase to describe the voice of the ascended Jesus (Revelation 1:15), the voice of God (Revelation 14:2), and the voice of a great multitude (Revelation 19:6).

v 25 **A voice came from above the firmament:** Whose voice is this? God's voice.

### **Ezekiel 1:26-28 NKJV**

**And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. <sup>27</sup> Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the colour of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. <sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.**

### ***Above all things: the throne and He who sat upon the throne***

v 26 **Above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne:** Basically, below the firmament or platform were the four cherubim with their associated wheels, while above the platform there is the throne of God with God (Jesus) sitting on it.

v 26 **In appearance like a sapphire stone:** Ezekiel describes the throne as being a resplendent or beautiful blue colour.

v 26 **On the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it:** The repetition of the word **likeness** shows that Ezekiel was using objects and colours that we understand and are familiar with to describe something that is beyond this world, something that we have never seen. John use the same kind of language when describing heavenly scenes in the book of Revelation.

v 26 **With the appearance of a man:** "If God is to be portrayed in concrete form, the highest symbol man can use is the human form. When God wanted to reveal Himself in the supreme revelation of His person, He did so in the form of the Man Christ Jesus." (Feinberg)

"The description suggests that Ezekiel did not see a face and a body that he could have drawn, but rather a fiery brightness that had a human shape and that he knew to be living and personal." (Wright)

v 26 **A likeness with the appearance of a man:** This is most likely a theophany or christophany of Jesus Christ, Jesus appearing in human form, here glorified, before His incarnation (being born on the earth).

v 27 **The colour of amber:** This is the fourth description of colour in this vision. Remember, the wheels were beryl or emerald green (Ezekiel 1:16), the firmament or platform above the cherubim was clear like crystal (Ezekiel 1:22), the throne was sapphire blue (Ezekiel 1:26), and now the top half of the LORD is described as golden brown **amber**, like the colour of a glowing metal.

v 27 **From the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around:** "Flashing red and yellow light came downward from this representation of God. The suggestion is of His power and radiance going from heaven down to earth." (David Guzik)

v 28 **Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it:** You can imagine all the colours blending into a glorious rainbow type effect, made up of blue, burnt orange and green, **all around** the throne.

John's heavenly vision in Revelation 4:3 is very similar, he saw God's throne surrounded by a rainbow.

***Application—God is in control and He loves us***

The throne represents God's complete and total authority over everyone and everything—God has all sovereignty, power, authority and glory. However, surrounding the throne is a rainbow—a reminder of His promise to never destroy the earth again with water (Genesis 9:13–16)—this is a symbol of God's mercy. Praise God that when we come before Him in humble repentance we will find mercy.

Hebrews 4:14-16 NLT

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. <sup>15</sup> This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Hebrews 13:5-6 NKJV

Let your conduct be without covetousness; *be content with such things as you have.* For He Himself has said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" <sup>6</sup> So we may boldly say:

*"The Lord is my helper;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?"*

v 28 **This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord:** This is the climax. Ezekiel has been building to this declaration, where he reveals that the radiant being he described is in fact Yahweh, the God of Israel Himself, above all things and in total control.

Remember that Ezekiel is not claiming to see God directly, but only the **appearance of the likeness of the glory** of Yahweh (or Jehovah).

v 28 **Glory:** "The term *kabod* derives from a root meaning 'to be heavy,' but when applied to royalty and divinity it denotes the sheer weight of that person's majesty, that quality which evokes a response of awe in the observer." (Block)

***Application—We must come to God in complete surrender, only then will God speak to us.***

v 28 **So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking:** The only response to the weight of glory and the sheer awe of being in the presence of God is to fall on our faces. It was only when Ezekiel fell down before the throne that God began to speak to Him. It is the same for us. God will not speak to us if we are proud and self-sufficient.

***Application—Our perspective will change when we have a revelation of God’s glory and power over our earthly situation***

Consider that prior to this vision of the throne of God, Ezekiel would have been quite sad. He has been taken from his homeland and is captive in Babylon. He was probably wondering, “What is God doing here? Is there any hope for us? What does my future hold? I was training to be a priest, but what do I do now?”

We may have similar feelings and be in similar situations, but I encourage you to seek to understand that God is in control and is on the throne. Meditate on this wonderful picture of Jesus on the throne. We can trust God’s promise in Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28 NKJV

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

“No matter what message God gave him to preach, or what opposition arose from the people, Ezekiel would be encouraged and strengthened because he had seen the mighty throne of God in the midst of the fiery trial. He had seen the glory of God.”  
(Wiersbe)

The book of Ezekiel will show us that, although times may be tough, and our sin may have brought us low, we still have a glorious future ahead of us, and we serve a risen Saviour who is seated on the throne, far above all power and principalities and of whose glory there is no end. Considering this, let us make every effort to respond to God’s promises so that we can partake of the divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires (from 2 Peter 1:4-5).