

## ***Behind the Curtain***

Introduction & a Supernatural Reason for Hope

### ***Impossible Hope Series – Part 1***

Eze 1:26–28

January 13-14, 2024

#### **Introduction**

- **The year of OPPORTUNITY** – Welcome to 2024 the *Year of Opportunity*. All year we are going to learn how to see things differently, how to track on the Lord's voice and movements. Our eyes are going to be opened to the fresh reality that God is always moving around us and giving us opportunities to join Him in great things. There is no such thing as a normal day. Every day is filled with divine appointments, doors of opportunity, and chances to do something eternal.
- **The “Impossible Hope” series (Ezekiel)** – We are kicking off the year of OPPORTUNITY with a study in the book of Ezekiel. I have never taught this book at Bridgeway in the 26 ½ years I have taught here. Today is the day! I entitled this series, ‘The Impossible Hope’ series. **It's going to address the power of God to enter ANY situation, no matter how desperate and dark, and flood it with HOPE.**
- **Context First** - But before we can get discern what God has for us today, we need to do some homework and learn the CONTEXT of the Book of Ezekiel, because **it's going to inform how we read it.**
  - **The Book of Ezekiel** – The book of Ezekiel is **long**. He's called a **major prophet** because of the length of his recorded prophecies. The book stretches over **48 chapters**<sup>1</sup> and it's **very repetitive** (which makes it almost impossible to teach line-by-line, expository). The **first 35 chapters is predominantly judgment** against Israel and surrounding nations for their rebellion and unfaithfulness. But the book takes **a significant turn** toward the end to one of incredible hope.
  - **Ezekiel lived in a dark and turbulent time**<sup>2</sup> – he lived during **Israel's darkest days in their history as a nation.**
    - **Assyrians Out, Babylonians In** - The Assyrian Empire had been dominant for a long time, but the Babylonian Empire was waiting in the wings to take over. Their new powerful leader **Nabopolassar** led a strike against them and defeated them in **605BC** and the **Assyrians were ended**. Nabopolassar's **son Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar II** (605-562), **the general** of Babylonian forces took over the throne to **lead this new Babylonian Era.**
    - **Back in Israel** – The **North** of Israel had **already been wiped out** completely **117 years prior**. The **South (Judah) was a mess**. Perhaps the worst Israelite king in history, **Manasseh** (687-642) had **ruined it about 50 years earlier** and it never recovered. **Even the great reforms of the wonderful king Josiah couldn't save it.**

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<sup>1</sup> “With over 830 words, ch. 16 alone is longer than six of the twelve Minor Prophets, and two-thirds the lengths of Ruth and Canticles.” He uses a lot of ‘Aramaisms’ and integrates Babylonian concepts as well.” NICOT Commentary, Daniel Block

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel was born into a turbulent world. The major players on the ancient Near Eastern stage were switching roles and smaller nations were disappearing from the scene altogether. For centuries the neo-Assyrians had maintained their imperial grip on the region, at times reaching as far as Egypt.” NICOT, Daniel Block

- **Deportations & Famous Captives** –The nation of Judah kept irritating it's dominating Babylonian ruler and each time they were beat down and more captives were taken.<sup>3</sup> Nebuchadnezzar didn't put up with rebellion. The first deportation wave grabbed the noble boys (likely 14-15) Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego in 605BC. The 2<sup>nd</sup> deportation happened about 7 years later in 597BC. It was also during this first deportation that Ezekiel was taken, but he was not put in the palace like the nobility Daniel & Co. He, as a priest, was put in the lower area of Tel-Abib (a Jewish colony near Nippur) near the Chebar Canal.<sup>4</sup>
- **Ezekiel's Life and Ministry** – Ezekiel was a Jewish priest, who operated in the prophetic in the southern kingdom of Israel called Judah. As mentioned above, he was part of the first deportation of Jews from Judah to Babylon. He was likely 30 when he was taken, and when he began his prophetic ministry.
  - **23 year recorded ministry (2 eras, 13 years apart)** - His prophecies date throughout a 23 year period (the first seems to have been spoken in 593BC). He had two major eras of prophesying. The first era was all doom and gloom and promising judgment for a rebellious Jewish people (chapters 1-32 or 35 depending).<sup>5</sup> 13 years after his last judgment message he was called back to the scene by God to prophesy the redemption of the people and deliver a message of hope even though everything seemed lost (chapters 33-48).
  - **Most bizarre ministry** - His prophetic ministry was more bizarre than perhaps any other prophet as God called him to do outlandish things for the sake of getting people's attention and demonstrating the prophecy into action. Oddly enough, he is not mentioned outside of his book even though his visions are extremely similar in nature to Revelation.
- **The Jewish Depression (lost land & Temple)** – Ezekiel primarily ministered to the Jewish people in Babylon with him. The Jews were treated surprisingly well for being captives,<sup>6</sup> yet their hearts were initially devastated from being taken out of their Promised Land.

<sup>3</sup> The second deportation happened when Nebuchadnezzar had enough and wiped out the city and burned the temple in 587-586BC. The third and final deportation was when a rebellion rose up again from those few still left in Judah in 582-581BC. We know on this side of history that God was humbling Israel significantly but always wanted to restore them. God let them be absent from their land for 70 years but then let them slowly go back (Cyrus' decree).

*"According to the [Book of Jeremiah](#) (52:28-30), 3,023 Jews were deported in the first wave, 832 in the second, and 745 in the third, making 4,600 in all. However, it is likely that only the men were counted. Including women and children it is estimated that 14,000 to 18,000 people would be the full number. A larger estimate is given in 2 Kings 24:14-16, which refers only to the first deportation 597 B.C.E. Verse 14 gives the numbers as 10,000 men, while verse 16 puts the number at 8,000, an estimate roughly double that of Jeremiah's for all three deportations. Scholars tend to accept Jeremiah's figures as more accurate. In either case, since scholars estimate the total population of the [Kingdom of Judah](#) during this time at between 120,000 and 150,000, less than one quarter of the population was actually taken into exile. However, since this included a high percentage of court officials, the priesthood, skilled craftsmen, and other wealthy citizens, the exiles constituted the majority of the cultural elite of nation." [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Babylonian\\_Exile](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Babylonian_Exile)*

<sup>4</sup> *"Geographic Context. Hebrew nēhar kēbār is the equivalent of Akk. nār kabari/u, "Kabar canal," which occurs several times in the 5th-century-B.C. archives of the Murashu family of bankers in Babylon. Located in the vicinity of Nippur, the Chebar conduit was but one of many branches of an elaborate canal system that distributed water from the Tigris and the Euphrates throughout the city and its environs. In general, Nippur's residents had historically favored the Assyrians over the Babylonians, and were among the last in the region to submit to Nabopolassar. After he destroyed the city, the Babylonian king repopulated the region with deportees from many parts of the empire, among whom were Ezekiel and his fellow Judeans. It is unclear whether by the Chebar Canal means that Ezekiel was personally beside the waterway at the time of the vision, or if the expression serves simply as a general designation for the region where the Judean exiles were settled. In any case, to draw any significance from the former possibility must be dismissed as speculation."<sup>34</sup> In both cases this is simply a geographic note." NICOT*

<sup>5</sup> He prophesied and promised the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple 11 years before it actually happened.

<sup>6</sup> Jews were allowed to get involved in business and banking. They also set up rather significant agricultural sites. They were doing so well that later in 539bc when they were allowed to return home (via Cyrus) most didn't want to go.

Ezekiel was speaking to a people who felt they had not only lost everything, but that God had turned His back on them and they had no hope of any recovery of any kind. When they were taken from their land AND the Temple was destroyed, they were broken completely. Those were their signs that they were Chosen people. Now they wrestled with confusion, betrayal, and despair. They were disillusioned, cynical, bitter, and angry.

- **Impossible Hope** – After all that had happened, especially the devastation of the Holy Temple, all hope had been lost. It wasn't just lost, it was demolished. Any coming back from this was IMPOSSIBLE. There was nothing that anyone could do, including God, in their minds to restore them. The Jews were done as the Chosen people and that's all there was to it. There was only room for pain, misery, depression, and darkness.
- **But God** – It's in that context that God comes to Ezekiel. No normal encouragement would do. God was going to explain the situation initially and then shock them with hope.
  - **Bad News First** - We always want to run to the end of the story and find out the good parts, but there was a lot of explaining to His people about why they were in the situation they were in. They weren't victims. They were perpetrators. They weren't accidentally taken over, it was pre-planned. It wasn't difficulty, it was judgment and discipline.<sup>7</sup>
  - **The Awe of Heaven (this message)** – We are going to begin the way that Ezekiel saw it laid out to him. Before any explanation is made about why the Jews had been conquered, God revealed a portion of Himself and His heavenly reality so that Ezekiel would know the awe of God's majesty and take everything in his ministry seriously.
- **What This Study Means for Us** - Many of us feel stuck or hopeless simply because our problems are bigger than our view of God. There are times when we need to be reminded that what's facing us is not greater than our Lord. The book of Ezekiel pulls back the curtain so that we can see there are great and mighty and awesome things happening in a separate yet parallel reality that means we are secure and hopeful as Children of God.

### HEAVENLY Reality Changes EVERYTHING

#### Lesson

- **The King of Kings**
  - **A Vision of God**
    - **Ezekiel's Vision of God's Throne Room (chariot)** - Eze 1:1-3; 26–28 - *"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. <sup>2</sup> On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), <sup>3</sup> the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there... [and He sees these massive bizarre heavenly creatures, that we will explain in a moment] And above the*

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<sup>7</sup> Judgement is for enemies of God. Discipline is for children of God. There was a mixed bag in Judah.

expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like [blue] sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.<sup>27</sup> And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.<sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of the [rain]bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”

- **Moses and the Elders see God in His throne room** - Ex 24:9–11 – “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up,<sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement<sup>8</sup> of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.<sup>11</sup> And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.”
- **John the Revelator’s Visions of God’s Throne Room** – John, the Apostle, had many visions of heavenly things and multiple visions of a throne room. They seemed to be different views or at least he described things differently in each vision. It’s likely that God tailored the scenery to narrow in his focus on what needed to be conveyed.
  - **Jesus in the Throne Room** - Re 1:12–20 – “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,<sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.<sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,<sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last,<sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.<sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.<sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”
  - **The 24 Elders Worship in the Throne Room** - Re 4:1–6, 9-11 - “After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”<sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.<sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.<sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.<sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,<sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal...<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,<sup>11</sup> “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”
  - **The Scroll and the Lamb (specific to end times) is found in Revelation chapter 5.**

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<sup>8</sup> “*qerah* denotes principally “ice, frost.” Cf. Gen. 41:40; Job 6:16; 37:10; 38:39 (parallel to *kēpōr*, “hoarfrost”); Ps. 147:17; Jer. 36:30. Cf. Akk. *qarāhu*, “to freeze,” and *qarhu*, “ice” (AHW, pp. 902, 903). LXX translates κρυστάλλου.”  
NICOT

- **Vision of the multitude of saints before the throne (Tribulation martyrs) is found in Revelation 7:9ff.**
- **Daniel's Vision of the throne room of God** - Da 7:9–14 – *“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. <sup>11</sup> “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup> As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. <sup>13</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”*
  - **A Similar vision by John the Revelator** - Re 20:11–15 – *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*
  - **Isaiah's Vision of the Throne Room** - Is 6:1–4 – *“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.”*
- **The Summary of findings about the Throne Room (chariot)<sup>9</sup> from Ezekiel – What Ezekiel saw is difficult to discern from his messy recounting.** The original language that Ezekiel was communicating in, is filled with confusing, almost impossibly complicated phrases. What we are reading today is a VERY cleaned up guess as to what he was saying. It reads like he's writing it in the moment and doesn't have a clue what he's saying. He's repeating himself, he's using words that we don't know fully, he's using analogies that we can't really track. It's a mess. But it seems that **we can discern a few things** about it.
  1. **It's more likely God's chariot** – Ezekiel mentions throne and we immediately think of a fixed throne in a throne room. This may not be the case and likely isn't. What Ezekiel sees, as it is revealed slowly, is that God is on a throne of a chariot on a platform, that is being lifted up and carried by cherubim heavenly creatures. Other

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<sup>9</sup> “The picture described in vv. 22–28a is as difficult to visualize as the earlier phases had been. But one must imagine four sphinxlike winged creatures holding up a glorious crystal platform on which stood a magnificent throne of lapis lazuli. And seated on the throne was Yahweh, in human form. Scenes of animals bearing deities in human form are common in ancient Near Eastern art. But the wheels add a new dimension: this is a divine chariot. While they differ in detail, Ezekiel's chariot recalls ancient seals depicting the storm god first on a four-wheeled chariot, then on a two-wheeled vehicle.” NICOT

prophets and those who have visions of heaven describe the throne room slightly differently. **The platform or bottom of the chariot was like transparent blue.**

2. **God was on the seat** – Ezekiel is very clear to mention that **he LOOKED human, not that He was human. God being on a chariot suggests that He can and does go places. He is not fixed and limited. He is active and present in His creation.** What person of God is this? Father, Son, Holy Spirit? Usually manifestations are the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the trinity although, like Daniel's vision there was the Ancient of Days (presumably the Father) and the Lamb/Son of Man was brought before Him (Jesus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person). So perhaps this is a representation (not full view, no one can see God in His fullness and live) of the Father on the chariot. Not sure. It may be another representation altogether to make a point.
  3. **God shimmers** – Ezekiel says that from the **waist up** he looked like **gleaming metal** and from the **waist down** looked like he was **on fire. All around him were what looked like bright flames of glory.** The glory almost looked like an **overpowering rainbow** encompassing Him.
  4. **It was too much** – When **Ezekiel** sees a manifestation of God, he **falls down** on his face. He simply can't stand in the presence of such staggering glory.
- **Additional info from other viewers** – Ezekiel is not the only one in the Bible that saw visions of heaven and supernatural God stuff. Perhaps the most famous and articulate viewers were men like Daniel, Isaiah & John who wrote Revelation. If we briefly look at what they saw, we learn the following additional information about God's majesty in heaven:
    - **Moses & Elders** of Israel saw the transparent blue platform too.
    - **Daniel's Vision of the Ancient of Days** – **brilliant white clothing and hair. His throne and wheels were burning fire. Fire licked out continually from the throne. Thousand-thousands served Him.**
    - **John's vision of the throne room for judgment** – massive white throne with someone sitting on it that was terrifyingly powerful. Books were opened.
    - **John sees the throne room of God** – there's a throne and the one sitting on it skin looked like jasper (deep red-brownish with beige) & carnelian (reddish brown). Surrounding the throne was an Emerald (green) rainbow. **Coming from the throne were deafening sounds of peals of thunder and flashes of lightning.** Laid out in front of the throne was a pavement like a sea of glass. On the transparent blue surface were 7 burning lampstands. Surrounding the main throne were **24 other thrones** which held elders who wore white robes and golden crowns. Every time heavenly praise is lifted up toward God, the elders fall down face first before God and cast their crowns down in submission, and add their praise.
    - **John sees Jesus in the throne room (and falls down)** – looked human, long white robe, golden sash, brilliant white hair, his face was as bright as the sun, eyes of flaming fire, body looked like burnished bronze (deep smooth brown). His voice was like the roar of many waters (think crashing of waves or massive waterfall). In his hand He held 7 stars, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his

mouth. John passed out (Jesus was his best friend on earth, but this was a whole new ballgame).

- **Isaiah's vision of the throne room** – God was seated on a tall and massive throne. The room was filled with smoke (like a haze machine). The voices of the Seraphim flying above Him were booming. God's robe train (back end portion) was so long it wrapped around the room spilling over the floor (filled the temple).
- **How does this vision make you feel?** – there are spectacular visuals exploding all around Ezekiel. He can't even describe most of it. He uses words like, 'it was kind of like...' as he stumbles though trying to explain it. The visuals and emotional impact is the point here. It's not so much the accuracy of the description or trying to discern the scientific elements of it. It's about feeling something. **What do you feel? What do you think Ezekiel felt?**
  - **Fear?** – this is terrifying, right? You have the God of the universe looking at you. You are too afraid to even pee yourself. You don't know whether this is the end for you. **Is this a moment of destruction and judgment? You don't belong here. Why are you seeing this?** What does it mean? The confusion alone with freak you out. We haven't even got to the other freaky beings in the room, and you have to imagine that Ezekiel is about to faint.
  - **Small? Inadequate?** – there is a TON happening and Ezekiel doesn't have the first clue how to interact with it. He is just a guy. He is in the presence of flashing this, and roaring that, stunning this and freaky that. **Who is he? What can he do?** He is only able to experience it. He can't affect it. He can't do anything.
  - **Why those feelings matter so much**<sup>10</sup> - So much of the visions were for the emotional impact. When the details and designs fade in his mind over time, the

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<sup>10</sup> First, the vision proclaims the transcendent glory of God. Everything about the apparition proclaims his glory: the dazzling brilliance of the entire image, the gleam of the creatures' bronze legs, the jewels on the wheels, the crystalline platform, the lapis lazuli throne, the amberous and fiery form of the "man." Everything about the vision cries "Glory!" (cf. Ps. 29:9!), even the prophet's frustrating search for adequate forms of expression. Unlike the gods of the nations depicted on ancient seals and carvings, the glory of Yahweh defies human description, verbally or visually. And unlike the images of the heathen, which require constant attention and polishing, Yahweh's radiance emanates from his very being. Second, the vision proclaims the transcendent holiness of Yahweh. Unlike Isaiah, Ezekiel hears no seraphim calling out "Holy! Holy! Holy!" (Isa. 6:3), but the absolute distinction between Yahweh and all of creation is clearly recognized. Surely this is why the creatures cover their bodies with their second pair of wings (v. 11). But this is also one of the functions of the platform. Unlike the pagan gods, who mix freely with lesser beings and are often indistinguishable from them, Yahweh sits alone on his throne, separated from all inferior creatures. Divine and created spheres are not to be confused. Third, the vision proclaims the sovereignty of Yahweh. All his attendants are noble creatures, but he is enthroned, the King over all! The universality of his reign is reflected in the prominence of the number four (for the four winds), and especially in the absolute freedom with which his heavenly chariot moves; but it is demonstrated in his invasion of Babylon, the heartland of Marduk's realm, to appear to Ezekiel. Furthermore, although the prophet does not yet realize it, Yahweh has served notice that regardless of the fate of Jerusalem, he will remain in full control. Fourth, the vision proclaims Yahweh's interest in his people. His condescending appearance in human form undoubtedly finds its basis in Gen. 1:26–27, which describes humankind as created as the "image" (šelem) and "likeness" (dēmūt) of God. But in this remarkable role reversal, God appears in the likeness of humankind (dēmūt kēmar 'ēh 'ādām). Although the terms šelem and dēmūt may be used as virtual synonyms, Ezekiel's preference for the latter seems deliberate. Etymologically šelem suggests the notion of "carved image," and may have been too closely associated with the kind of idolatry Ezekiel witnessed all around him in Babylon. dēmūt may also be used of idols (cf. Exod. 20:4), but it is more abstract. What Ezekiel sees is not an actual representation but a reflection of deity. Nevertheless, the redundancy of "a likeness like the appearance of a man" guards the prophet from even contemplating any idolatrous notions. While extra-Israelite motifs have been incorporated into the vision, this strategy does not represent capitulation to pagan thought. On the contrary, the vision challenges pagan conceptions at every turn. The glory of Yahweh cannot be reduced to human definition or plastic art. Everything about the vision is in the superlative mode. God is alone above the platform, removed from all creatures, and stunning in his radiance. There is none other beside(s) him. But this does not prevent him from communicating with mortals. Whereas Yahweh had chosen "the language [lit. 'lip'] of Canaan" (Isa. 19:18) as the vehicle of verbal intercourse in an earlier revelatory moment, now he adopts the art of Mesopotamia as his method of ocular communication. Fifth, as a corollary, the vision proclaims the presence of Yahweh among the exiles. God is with his people, who, however, are not defined in terms of residence within his land. Contrary to prevailing Jerusalemite opinion (11:15), God's people are in Babylon, far from their native land. More particularly, God is with

feeling won't. Ezekiel will always feel small and overwhelmed. But that's the point. God was going to have him do a very difficult ministry where he will be rejected at almost every point. It will be a painful calling, a dangerous calling, a devastating calling, and God wanted him to never doubt heavenly reality. For us the truth is the same. We need to see God high and lifted up. We need to feel insignificant in front of Him. Why?

- **The benefit of fearing God** – I love this quote (version of the real one – my paraphrase) – “When you fear God rightly, you fear little else.” So much scares us in this life because we think it's a big deal. But compared to God it isn't. We need God magnified in our mind so that our problems are diminished in comparison.
- **The benefit of Awe** – We are emotional beings. We need to feel awe and respect for God. Sometimes God has to freak us out to remind us how massive and mysterious He is. This allows us to take comfort that He is our protector and provider. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What can mankind or this world do to us that He cannot overcome?
- **Terrifying Power**
  - **A Vision of Heavenly Cherubim**
    - Eze 1:4–14, 22-25 - “As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. <sup>5</sup> And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, <sup>6</sup> but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: <sup>9</sup> their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. <sup>10</sup> As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. <sup>11</sup> Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. <sup>12</sup> And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. <sup>13</sup> As for the

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*Ezekiel. Where other call narratives portray Yahweh responding to hesitant servants with a verbal “I will be with you,” this vision declares the same truth more forcefully than words ever could. For the exilic prophet, robbed of the opportunity to perform divine service in the temple, this message will have been particularly satisfying. Sixth, the vision hints at the impending judgment of Yahweh. Although the account contains no formal announcement of the disasters ahead, several features of the vision have an ominous ring. For the moment the heavenly chariot serves a positive goal, to reassure the prophet of Yahweh's presence, but the prophet cannot know yet that in thirteen months it will return to transport the glory of Yahweh out of the temple and out of Jerusalem. Yahweh's departure will remove the last hindrance to Nebuchadnezzar's razing of the city. Furthermore, Ezekiel must have puzzled over the fire motif, particularly the reference to the burning coals in the midst of the creatures (v. 13), whose function is not obvious from the context. But when the vision returns, the prophet will witness a man taking these coals and spreading them over Jerusalem (10:2). Accordingly, as a portent of future events, this vision not only serves as a means for calling Ezekiel to the prophetic ministry; it also provides an orientation to his message. Seventh, on a practical and professional note, this vision serves notice that whoever would enter into divine service must have a clear vision of the one into whose service he or she is called. The ministry is a vocation like no other; it represents conscription into the service of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who sits on his glorious throne, unrivaled in majesty and power. God's kingdom will be built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and his servants go forth on its behalf.” NICOT*

likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. <sup>14</sup> And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning... <sup>22</sup> Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. <sup>23</sup> And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. <sup>24</sup> And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. <sup>25</sup> And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings."

- **More of Ezekiel's Description** – Eze 10:6–8, 15-17, 20-22 - *"And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he went in and stood beside a wheel. <sup>7</sup> And a cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. <sup>8</sup> The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings... <sup>15</sup> And the cherubim mounted up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the Chebar canal. <sup>16</sup> And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them. And when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels did not turn from beside them. <sup>17</sup> When they stood still, these stood still, and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in them... <sup>20</sup> These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Chebar canal; and I knew that they were cherubim. <sup>21</sup> Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands. <sup>22</sup> And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal. Each one of them went straight forward."*
- **The gold cherubim on top of the ark of the covenant** - Ex 25:17–22 - *"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. <sup>18</sup> And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. <sup>20</sup> The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. <sup>21</sup> And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. <sup>22</sup> There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel."*
- **King David's poetic vision of God riding on a cherubim in power** – 2 Samuel 22:8-16<sup>11</sup> – I don't think that God rides on cherubim any more than He rides on actual clouds. The vision in Ezekiel is that of a chariot being CARRIED by Cherubim, not actually riding them on their backs. But still, I think that it's metaphorical and symbolic of His power to be fast and high and lifted up. It's about power and perspective.
- **The Temple golden cherubim statues (in the inner sanctuary)** – They were 15 ft tall<sup>12</sup> and with a 15 ft wingspan. There were two with outstretched wings, the inner ones touching in the middle of the room and the outer touching the walls – 1 Ki 6:23–30<sup>13</sup> - *"In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olivewood, each ten cubits high. <sup>24</sup> Five cubits was the length of one wing of the*

<sup>11</sup> He also says it in Psalm 18

<sup>12</sup> A historic cubit is 18 inches long.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 2 Chronicles 3

cherub, and five cubits the length of the other wing of the cherub; it was ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. <sup>25</sup> The other cherub also measured ten cubits; both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. <sup>26</sup> The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was that of the other cherub. <sup>27</sup> He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house. And the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one touched the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; their other wings touched each other in the middle of the house. <sup>28</sup> And he overlaid the cherubim with gold. <sup>29</sup> Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms. <sup>30</sup> The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms.”<sup>14</sup>

- **Cherubim Guarding the Garden of Eden** - Ge 3:23–24 – “...therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”
- **Summary of the vision of Cherubim**<sup>15</sup> - We learn quickly that these beings are called cherub (singular) and cherubim (plural). They are heavenly creatures, and they are mysterious.
  - **Their Aura/Atmosphere** (glory) – Ezekiel sees them arrive in a brilliant fiery cloud with flashes of lightning in it. That’s a dramatic arrival. The point seems to be the **awesome power and dramatic glory of beings like this.**
  - **The number 4** – over and over we see the number four represented. There are four beings. They have four faces. They have four wings. So, what’s with that? The number four tends to represent holistic balance in the Bible in my estimation. It talks about the four corners of the world, the four winds, etc. It means encompassing. The point here seems to be that they are fully able to do all that is required and they are equipped with everything necessary. They are multi-faceted.
  - **They are nearest to God and integrated in the throne room** – In this vision the Seraphim are not present (we’ll talk about them in a moment), so it’s only the cherubim. They are underneath and active in the throne room. They present both interaction with God and proclaiming of His glory. They are central to His work. They in a sense lifting and moving the chariot throne.
  - **Living humanoids** – they are described as having human likeness. That doesn’t mean they are human. It means that they have human features such as limbs, body, head, etc. It describes them as ‘living’ which in Greek<sup>16</sup> there are two words for animals: *Zoon* (this word) and *therion* (wild beast). It’s not that they are ‘domesticated’ but that they are intelligent and purposeful. They are living beings, not objects. That means they can think, process, reason, interact, etc.
  - **Bizarre looking** – they not only have 4 heads, four wings, but their legs are straight (meaning they don’t seem to bend) and they have hooves. Their skin,

<sup>14</sup> There were a lot of representations of cherubim in the temple – see Ezekiel 41:18ff as an example.

<sup>15</sup> “Nothing is said here of a locomotive function. In vv. 24–25 Ezekiel notes that whenever the vehicle stopped, the creatures’ wings would drop, but he does not state explicitly that the flapping of their wings propelled the vehicle. Nor was this the function of the legs. In fact, when Ezekiel describes the creatures’ propulsion (v. 12), both legs and wings are out of the picture altogether. The locomotive power is provided by *the spirit (hārûah)*.” NICOT

<sup>16</sup> The New Testament mentions them as well, thus the Greek reference. The Old Testament references are Hebrew but the word is more ambiguous there.

like God's was shimmering brown (burnished bronze looking). Underneath the four wings were human hands.

- **Connection and Community** – they seem to work in concert with one another smoothly and beautifully. Their wings are mentioned to be touching each other a lot (in the Temple, cherubim were represented in multiple ways and many times their wings are touching). This seems to indicate communal purpose, unity, and shared focus.
- **4 faces<sup>17</sup>** – one of their most bizarre features is their four faces. The more you study them along with their wheels (which we'll get into in a moment) the more confusing it gets. It mentions 2 sets of 4 faces and sometimes it seems that each one has 4 different ones and sometimes it seems like each cherubim has the same 4 faces. One list says the four faces are **human/eagle/ox-bull/lion**. But then the other list is **CHERUB/Human/Lion/Eagle** (Ezek 10:14). The Ox/bull is replaced by a cherub. But isn't that a bit redundant that a cherub has a cherub face? And what's different between a cherub face and a human face since they are normally rather synonymous? There is a possible reading that suggest that the first list is the cherubim, and the second list is the wheel's that have faces too. It seems to make more sense to just realize that at different times the faces shifted and morphed so Ezekiel was seeing something different. I don't believe the cherubim have to have four faces, I think they are **visuals for metaphorical reasons. So, what do the four faces represent?**
  - **Lion = royalty, courage, ferocity, strength**
  - **Eagle = swift/fast; most stately/regal bird**
  - **Ox/Bull = fertility, divinity, strength and value**
  - **Human = most dignified, image of God**
  - **God's representation or theirs?** – does their look reflect on their nature or collectively are they representing the nature of God? Although it's likely that they are reflecting God, the answer can be both. God puts His nature in His creation (like He did with us).

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<sup>17</sup> <sup>17</sup> "v. 12 is particularly confusing, as images of wheels seem to merge with images of cherubim. The problem is not helped by the retrospective pronouns on "their bodies, their backs," etc. Whose bodies? Whose backs? Are the wheels of the previous paragraph now transformed into some type of angelic figures with four faces and body parts? Are the wheels transformed into a special class of angels, a motif that becomes important in later Jewish merkabâ mysticism? Whereas 1:18 had restricted the "eyes" to the wheels of the throne-chariot, now they cover gabbêhen, "their rims," and gabbêhem, "their backs." The image seems bizarre to the modern reader, but one must remember that this is a visionary experience, and surrealistic features may overwhelm realism. Nonetheless, it seems more natural to apply the bodies, backs, heads, hands, and wings to the cherubim mentioned previously in v. 9, which is grammatically possible. Furthermore, analogues to these cherubim covered with eyes from head to toe are found in some Egyptian Bes figures whose entire bodies were decorated with gemstones. Even if vv. 9–17 represent an originally independent piece of midrashic exegesis, and if the independent piece had applied the faces to the wheels, the editorial comment in v. 21 clarifies the issue by ascribing the heads, hands, and wings to the cherubim. **14** Second, the description of the cherubim's faces differs significantly from the earlier account. Whereas 1:10 had ascribed four different faces to each of the cherubim, the plain reading of the Hebrew here points to four identical faces for each cherub, with each cherub having a different set. Whereas 1:10 had followed a human-lion-bull-eagle sequence, 10:14 lists them as cherub-human-lion-eagle. This reordering raises two questions. Why was the bull face displaced, and how is the cherubic face to be perceived? Any answer to the first is speculative. A Babylonian talmudic tradition theorizes that since the bull was associated with the golden calf incident at Sinai (Exod. 32), hence a symbol of Israelite sin, Ezekiel implored Yahweh for mercy, to which God responded by changing the bull into a cherub. But this does not answer the second question." NICOT

- **4 wings** – Why do they have four wings? Interestingly enough there is no mention that the wings are for flying. Their wings aren't propelling their movement, the power/breath/wind/spirit in the wheels are (whatever that means). It says that two wings are outstretched for one purpose while the lower wings are for covering their bodies below. It seems the covering is for honoring God and humility and modesty of some sort. Perhaps at other times, not under the chariot, they could use their wings to fly. It does say that when they stop moving their wings come down to their sides. Yet it does seem that their 'whirling wheels' are usually with them, but perhaps they are only chariot purposed. The sound of their wings are described as booming like the voice of God (waterfalls, waves crashing, etc.).
- **Always straight** – why does it mention that they always go straight? Practically it means that since they have a face facing all four directions, they don't NEED to turn. But I think the tone is that they are purposeful, intentional, and undistracted.
- **They followed the Spirit** – in verse 12 we read that, 'wherever the Spirit would go, they went, without turning...' We learn that their 'spirit' was in their wheels (see below). The confusing point I think its making is that they were obedient and directed. They weren't doing their own thing, they were directed by the Holy Spirit at all times and empowered by the Holy Spirit at all times.
- **On Fire & Fast** – notice that it says their appearance was like 'burning coals of fire' and like 'torches' or lightning bolts flashing back and forth. They are bright with glory and shot forth lightning. They were brilliant and FAST. The meaning behind this seems to suggest that they were incredibly capable or anything at any time. They were not hindered by any limitation. They were filled with the shimmering glory of being in God's presence and supersonic in carrying out His will.
- **Their wheels** – look at the next portion to realize a major element of their work with the chariot throne of God. The wheels are below them and seem to be their locomotion.
- **Additional Descriptions** – oddly enough cherubim are mentioned quite a bit in scripture. They were represented all over the Holy Temple. There was not only the two-winged cherubim on the lid of the ark of the covenant (over top of the mercy seat), but there were HUGE (15 ft tall) wooden and overlaid with gold, cherubim statues in the Holy of Holies (Solomon's temple). Additionally there were embroidered cherubim images on the curtain that shielded the ark. Also there were images of cherubim (and palm trees & pomegranates oddly enough) all over the temple in the walls and pillars. So, they are a big deal. A cherubim used a flashing sword of fire to block the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve.
  - **The possibility of Lucifer being a cherub** – Many scholars believe that Ezekiel 28 clearly indicates that Lucifer was a cherub by design, the closest heavenly being to the throne and to the Lord. Donald Grey Barnhouse does a great job explaining this in the book, The

Invisible War. I mostly agree with him. I don't have time to go into all that entails and the ramifications of that but it's important.

- **What do we make of the Cherubim?**<sup>18</sup> – they are awesome beings. There are some indicators that they are the highest form of being that God has ever made. It's believed that Lucifer was/is a cherub. They are the closest servants to God and behold him continually. Although their image changes from passage to passage (number of wings, multiple vs. one face, etc.) there are a few consistent images: 1.) closeness to God; 2.) covering and shielding; 3.) Service to God.
- **Mind-Boggling Wheels**
  - **A Vision of The Wheels within Wheels**
    - **Eze 1:15–21** - *“Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. <sup>16</sup> As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl [yellowish/gold]. <sup>19</sup> And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. <sup>17</sup> When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. <sup>18</sup> And their rims were tall and awesome, <sup>20</sup> and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. <sup>19</sup> And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. <sup>20</sup> Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. <sup>21</sup> When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.”*
    - **More of Ezekiel's description** – Eze 10:9–14, 18–22 - *“And I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl. <sup>10</sup> And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel. <sup>11</sup> When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went, but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without turning as they went. <sup>12</sup> And their whole body, their rims, and their spokes, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around—the wheels that the four of them had. <sup>13</sup> As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing “the whirling wheels.” <sup>14</sup> And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the*

<sup>18</sup> “The selection of these animals may seem arbitrary to a modern reader, but they were perfectly natural for Ezekiel's world. Not only do they appear frequently on ancient iconographic and glyptic art; they also had symbolic significance for the Israelites. The lion was renowned for its strength, ferocity, and courage (Judg. 14:18; 2 Sam. 1:23; 17:10), and served as a symbol of royalty. The eagle was the swiftest and most stately of birds (Deut. 28:49; Isa. 40:31; Jer. 48:40). The ox (or “cattle”—šôr does not specify sex) was not only the most valuable domestic animal (Prov. 14:4) but also functioned as a symbol of both fertility and divinity (cf. Ps. 106:19–20). The human, being created as the image of God and invested with divine majesty (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8), is the most dignified and noble of all. But the significance of these creatures exceeds the sum of the parts. In the absence of abstract philosophical tools these images expressed the transcendent divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience. Carrying the divine throne, the four-headed cherubim declare that Yahweh has the strength and majesty of the lion, the swiftness and mobility of the eagle, the procreative power of the bull, and the wisdom and reason of humankind.” NICOT

<sup>19</sup> Beryl – “תְּרִשְׁטִי <sup>8658, 8659</sup> תְּרִשְׁטִי <sup>2546, 2547</sup> גַּבְרִי <sup>9576, 9577, 9578</sup> *n.m.* a precious stone, perhaps yellow jasper, or other gold-coloured stone.” Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew/English lexicon

<sup>20</sup> “MT wēgabbēhen wēgōbah lāhem wēyir'â lāhem, “As for their rims, they had height and they had fear,” has long been considered corrupt, and many explanations have been attempted. The word *gab* seems to have been used of any convex or curved object. In Nabatean and Palmyrene texts the root is used of a “cistern, crater” (*DISO*, p. 46). Cf. also Akk. *kapāpum*, “to bend” (*CAD*, 8:175–75; *AHW*, p. 442). Perhaps the wheels were disks. Cf. 1 K. 7:33. In Ezek. 10:14 the entire wheels are full of eyes. *gōbah* normally means “height” (*BDB*, p. 147), but it is used in the derived figurative sense of “majesty” in Job 40:10 (parallel to *gā'ôn*, *hōd*, *hādār*; cf. Isa. 2:10, 19, 21). Sandwiched between *gabbēhen* and *gabbōtām*, the choice of this term for “majesty” gives the statement a fine alliterative quality. *yir'â* is the common word for “fear, awe.” The numinous quality of both terms reflects the imagery of Akk. *melammu/pulḥu*, “radiance, majesty/fearsomeness.” For further discussion see N. M. Waldman, “A Note on Ezekiel 1:18,” *JBL* 103 (1984) 614–18.” NICOT

*cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle...<sup>18</sup> Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim.<sup>19</sup> And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.<sup>20</sup> These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Chebar canal; and I knew that they were cherubim.<sup>21</sup> Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands.<sup>22</sup> And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal. Each one of them went straight forward.”*

- **Summary of Information on the Whirling Wheels - [COMPLETE]**

- **Each cherubim has one** – it’s slightly confusing because one passage indicates that the cherubim each have a set of four wheels, but I think the clearest meaning is that they each have one wheel. When the cherubim are going to move and especially move the throne-chariot of God, they rise up above the wheels, which stay under them, and they move in perfect unison.
- **What they look like** – they seem to be wheels within wheels, or what I would guess looks a bit like a **gyroscope** where the outside wheel may be static and the inside wheel rotating, or both are rotating at the same time (concentric wheels rotating).
  - **Crystalline** - They are gleaming/shining crystalline looking. The color is unknown but possibly teal.
  - **Rims with eyes** - The outside ring, called a rim, which was massive, is covered by eyes. Whether those are living eyes or they are shimmering gemstone placements is unclear. It looked like eyes to Ezekiel.
- **spirit containers** – perhaps the most odd description of the interworking of the ‘Whirling Wheels’ and the cherubim is the phrase, “the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.” It says it multiple times. What does this mean? It may mean that they are connected in a living way and fused in not just intention but in life. The challenge I have is that all other representations in the Bible of cherubim don’t include the wheels, so they don’t seem necessary.
- **Do they have faces?**<sup>21</sup> – I don’t want to spend a lot of time on this since I mentioned it above, but there is some indicator that the wheels too have faces,

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<sup>21</sup> “v. 12 is particularly confusing, as images of wheels seem to merge with images of cherubim. The problem is not helped by the retrospective pronouns on “their bodies, their backs,” etc. Whose bodies? Whose backs? Are the wheels of the previous paragraph now transformed into some type of angelic figures with four faces and body parts? Are the wheels transformed into a special class of angels, a motif that becomes important in later Jewish merkabâ mysticism? Whereas 1:18 had restricted the “eyes” to the wheels of the throne-chariot, now they cover gabbêhem, “their rims,” and gabbêhem, “their backs.” The image seems bizarre to the modern reader, but one must remember that this is a visionary experience, and surrealistic features may overwhelm realism. Nonetheless, it seems more natural to apply the bodies, backs, heads, hands, and wings to the cherubim mentioned previously in v. 9, which is grammatically possible. Furthermore, analogues to these cherubim covered with eyes from head to toe are found in some Egyptian Bes figures whose entire bodies were decorated with gemstones. Even if vv. 9–17 represent an originally independent piece of midrashic exegesis, and if the independent piece had applied the faces to the wheels, the editorial comment in v. 21 clarifies the issue by ascribing the heads, hands, and wings to the cherubim. **14** Second, the description of the cherubim’s faces differs significantly from the earlier account. Whereas 1:10 had ascribed four different faces to each of the cherubim, the plain reading of the Hebrew here points to four identical faces for each cherub, with each cherub having a different set. Whereas 1:10 had followed a human-lion-bull-eagle sequence, 10:14 lists them as cherub-human-lion-eagle. This reordering raises two questions. Why was the bull face displaced, and how is the cherubic face to be perceived? Any answer to the first is speculative. A Babylonian talmudic tradition theorizes that since the bull was associated with the golden calf incident at Sinai (Exod. 32), hence a symbol of Israelite sin, Ezekiel implored Yahweh for mercy, to which God responded by changing the bull into a cherub. But this does not answer the second question.” NICOT

but I think that it's more likely that they are just wheels with eyes and operate in conjunction with the cherubim.

- **What do we make of the Whirling Wheels?** – to be honest, this mystery is a bit beyond me. I can't seem to make much of the meaning of them. They seem to be a fact that Ezekiel saw and they seem to indicate unity, same-mindedness, connection and locomotion, but beyond that, I don't know what they mean or what they are for.
- **Incomprehensible Worship**
  - **One more heavenly creature to add** – Although we know that angels and fallen angels have access to heaven (including archangels, warrior angels, messenger angels, etc.), there is one other creature that I want to mention since they fit very well with our descriptions here. Both the prophet Isaiah and John the Revelator saw them in the throne room.
  - **Isaiah's Vision of Seraphim**
    - **Isaiah's Vision - Is 6:1–7** - *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*
    - **John the Revelator's Vision of Seraphim - Re 4:6–8** – *"And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*
    - **Summary of findings about Seraphim** – the name seraph or its plural seraphim means 'burning ones.' They seem associated with fire, worship and praise.
      - **6 wings** – unlike the cherubim who have four wings, these beings have 6. Two they use to cover their faces, two they cover their feet, and two they use for locomotion of flying.
        - **They have hands** – it's not clear if they have hands under their wings like the Cherubim, or if their arms extend out independent of their wings. Regardless they interact with Isaiah by using their hands.
      - **Worship/Praise** – they call out to one another and praise God continually with words like, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" Their voices are so booming that it shakes the foundations of heaven when they worship.
      - **Altar work** – unlike the Cherubim who seem to be under the throne and used for support and locomotion of God's chariot, the Seraphim seem to have access and interaction with the altar of God. One of them got a coal from the altar with

tongs and touched Isaiah's lips for purification. The altar is likely the reason they are called, 'the burning ones'. It may not just be appearance but also purpose.

- **What John saw** – when John saw the seraphim they were on the **side of the throne like an attendant**. He records that they were **full of eyes all over**. **Each of the four seraphim had a different face**. One had the face of a **lion**, the second like an **ox/bull**, the third like a **man**, and the fourth like an **eagle**. This is identical to the cherubim in representation, which lends support that they are reflecting the nature of God more than their personal nature. He heard them praise God by saying, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." When they worship the 24 elders falls down before God and join in. **Worship and praise seems to be their primary role. They factor a lot in Revelation**. They are the ones narrating the Lamb's breaking of the seals. They also delivered the golden bowls of God's wrath.
- **What do we make of the Seraphim?** – They seem to be even more commented on as active in the Bible than the cherubim, not to say they are more important. They are worship leaders and attendants of God.
- **Why This Matters**
  - **The pulling back of the curtain** – making the invisible, visible.
  - **Understanding the Spiritual reality** - [COMPLETE]
  - **Understanding visions and prophecies** – [COMPLETE]
    - **Do those things/beings really look like that?** - we know that these visions are not strict in physical description because some of those same visions describe things and people we DO KNOW. For example, the Book of Revelation describes the Lamb of God, who is Jesus, as having seven horns and seven eyes. We know that Jesus doesn't have 7 horns and 7 eyes. Right afterward it explains that those are symbolic of the 7 spirits of God that were sent into all the earth. **That doesn't mean that some beings may look like that but it means the symbolic meaning is far more important.**
    - **Understanding why God is not clearly seen** – **any image or picture would reduce Him**. He is *otherly*. He isn't like anything or anyone we know. **The mystery and incomprehensibility of God is critical to our hope and peace.**

## Conclusion

- **Our OPPORTUNITY - Why seeing behind the curtain brings us so much hope** – If God is on the throne and we are attached to Him, then everything will work out. We must not allow our circumstances to dictate our theology. From God's perspective He can see it all. From His throne He can control it all. Knowing there is someone greater, somewhere greater, that is interacting with our world is comforting. What we face and suffer from is not the end of the conversation, only the beginning.
- **5 words that change everything** – "The Lord is at Hand". In Philippians, chapter 4, Paul lays out a life-changing paradigm. He is talking about difficult challenges and the worry that comes along with those struggles. It begins half way through verse 5. The first five words are the key. It says...

- **Php 4:5–7** – *“The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*
- **Jesus Changes Everything** – God is not telling us to stuff our emotions or try to ignore reality in our fear and pain. He is telling us to look at the bigger picture. Our situations would be one thing if God wasn’t there, it’s a completely different scenario if He IS. We are first of all Christians. That means we are children of God. Jesus promised His followers that He would never leave them nor forsake them.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 13:5-6 (Cf. Matt 28:20)



The animated version - <https://rapzilla.com/2023-06-artist-animates-frightening-biblically-accurate-cherubim-seraphim-angels/>



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