

Introduction To Ezekiel

Tonight, we begin our study of the book of Ezekiel. Before we jump into the book itself, it would benefit us to remind ourselves of a bit of history, and set the stage for chapter one.

As we just saw in the book of Chronicles, Israel had been torn apart by civil war after the death of King Solomon, and was divided into two nations: the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom was more consistently corrupt and apostate, and was finally killed off by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom had some high points and revivals, under a handful of kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, but for the most part, they too were far from God and in pursuit of idolatry and immorality.

As we saw in our study of the final chapter of 2Chronicles, the Babylonians came in and attacked a total of three times, each time taking some of the Jews captive, and stealing their treasures.

The first time, was in the year 605BC, when Yeh-ho-yaw-KEEM was king of Judah.

2Chr. 36:6-7 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze chains to take him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also brought some of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

The second attack took place in 597BC. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again. King Yeh-ho-yaw-KEEN was taken captive, as well as the rest of the temple treasures. But this time,

2Kings 24:14-16 ...he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thou-

sand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.

The third attack was in 586BC. And this time,

2Kings 25:9-11 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Neb-oo-zar-ad-AWN the captain of the guard carried away into exile.

Ezekiel was the son of a Levitical priest. He was among those who were carried off into captivity in the second attack.

His prophetic ministry begins in Babylon, and we will see his commission to the ministry in chapters two and three. Ezekiel's vision of God which leads to his commission to the ministry is seen here in chapter one.

1:1-3 Among The Exiles

Ezekiel was living among the Jewish exiles where they had been put by the Babylonians. This "refugee camp" of sorts was beside of the River Keb-AWR at Tale Aw-BEEB. He was thirty years old when he had this vision. This would have been the year that he began his service as a Levitical priest (Nu. 4:3-4) if he were still living in Jerusalem.

The Heavens Were Opened

Ezekiel saw the heavens open. Now, I don't know what it looks like when the heavens are opened, but I know it's visible. When Jesus was baptized,

Mark 1:10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him

Jesus also told Nathanael,

John 1:51 ..."Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

And John wrote in Revelation that he...

Rev. 19:11 ...saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it...

Visions Of God

When the heavens were opened, Ezekiel saw visions of God.

People often ask me about visions from the Lord. I can't say that I am the expert on them, but certainly we see in Scripture that the Word of the Lord comes to people (Gen. 15:1) in them. However, it is in a far more mysterious manner than simply having a conversation. The Lord told Aaron and Miriam,

Num. 12:6 ..."Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD."

So visions seem to be a darker, less clear form of communication than simply talking with God face to face.

The Word Of The Lord Came Expressly

In Ezekiel's vision of God, "the word of the Lord came expressly" to him. "Came expressly" is a single word in Hebrew that means, "came, became, or happened." There is no good way to translate this statement. It is as if the Word of God "happened" to Ezekiel, or like it "suddenly existed" for him.

The Hand Of The Lord Came Upon Him

God placed His hand upon Ezekiel. In biblical terms, when someone places their hand on you, it is to impart something - be it a blessing, authority, etc.

When God places His hand upon someone, He imparts blessing, authority, and empowerment as well. In various examples throughout the Bible, we see that they can speak forth His direction (2Kings 3:15-19), and circumstances miraculously work out in the world for their benefit (Ezra 7:6, 9; 8:18). When His hand is upon you, you are strengthened to do his work (Ezra 7:28) and He prepares you for it (Ezek. 33:22; Acts 13:11).

1:4 The Wind, Cloud, Fire, And Metal?

Although I have read many commentaries try to describe in earthly terms what Ezekiel saw, it is clear to me that without video, it is beyond comprehension.

We have seen many thunderheads in the skies over Cheyenne, and have been in awe at their size and flashes of lightning coming from within. But the flashing forth from this cloud isn't lightning - it's fire. The cloud also has "a bright light around it," which is speaking of its circumference, the light is surrounding it.

And inside of it, in the midst of the fire flashing forth, is "something like glowing metal." Actually, there are a lot of different ideas about this. Look at some various Bible translations of this statement:

Ezek. 1:4(NAS) ...and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

Ezek. 1:4(NRSV) ...and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber.

Ezek. 1:4(NIV) ...The center of the fire looked like glowing metal

Ezek. 1:4(NLT) ...The fire inside the cloud glowed like gleaming amber.

Ezek. 1:4(KJV) ...and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

Ezek. 1:4(NKJV) ...and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

The difficulty of translation is because of a Hebrew word whose

meaning is unclear, and only shows up in the Bible three times - all three in Ezekiel (1:4; 12:27; 8:2).

Some scholars think the word refers to amber, which is the fossilized resin of ancient trees. It comes in lots of colors, and varies in transparency.

Others think that the word speaks of electrum, which is a naturally-occurring alloy made up of gold and silver. It looks pale yellow or yellowish-white.

Since we don't know what it looks like, can we know what it is? Well, we're going to see that inside of this cloud are four living beings, with a wheel beside each of them, an expanse above them, and God on His throne over the expanse. I don't know if this "something like glowing metal" was all of this from a distance, or one of these things individually.

1:5-12 Four Living Beings

Like Ezekiel's description of the cloud, it seems an impossibility to describe exactly what these living beings looked like without video. As a matter of fact, every time I read verses five through twelve, my brain conjures up a different picture.

Each of these four living beings have four sides with a wing on each side, and a hand under each wing. Each of their four sides also has a face. When they move, they don't turn, they just go in the direction of one of their faces.

Each of these faces is different - one like a man, one like a lion, one like a bull, one like an eagle.

As we continue reading the book of Ezekiel, we will discover in chapter ten that these turn out to be cherubim. The apostle John saw these cherubim when he was caught up to heaven and saw the throne of God (Rev 4:6-9). And when God had Moses make the mercy seat, which was the lid of the ark of the covenant and a model of God's throne, two of these creatures were modeled out of the gold forming the mercy seat (Exo. 25:18-20).

Over the mercy seat, the wings of the cherubim

Ex. 25:20 ...have their wings spread upward, covering the mer-

cy seat with their wings...

It is interesting to me that satan used to be a cherub. Later in Ezekiel, we will hear God say to satan after his fall,

Ezek. 28:14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there..."

It is quite likely that satan was one of the original four whose wings covered God's throne.

1:13 Fire Darting Back And Forth

Going back and forth between the four cherubim is something that looks like coals of fire, or torches. When we were kids, every Fourth of July we'd get to hold the "punks," which are used for lighting the fire-crackers. They have a burning coal on the end, and you can swish them around in the dark to make your eyes see orange trailers of the movement. Spin them in a circle, zig zag them, or try and write your name. This is what I envision Ezekiel seeing dashing back and forth between the cherubim. Only these are much brighter, with lightning coming out of them.

Ezekiel doesn't tell us what these are just yet. However, in chapter ten, we will find out that these are coals of fire which will be used to judge the city of Jerusalem (Ezek. 10:2).

1:14 Ran To And Fro

These cherubim move at lightning speed.

1:15-21 The Wheels Beside Each

Each of the cherubim had a wheel that was joined to them, or close in proximity to them (Heb: "AY-tsel," meaning, "joined, in proximity, beside, near."). The spirit of each cherub was in its wheel.

The wheels looked like beryl. Beryl is a mineral that can occur in various colors. (The green ones are emeralds.)

The rim describes a mound or brow in the wheel. If you picture a hub cap or a pie plate turned over with the wheel around the outside, and a tall mound in the middle, that may be an accurate thought.

The rims are also described as "lofty and awesome." That could be translated more literally as "having height and instilling fear." Maybe the fear comes from the fact that they are covered with eyes!

Lastly, each wheel's movement was the same as the cherubim - down to the earth, up from the earth, changing direction without turning, and all at lightning speed.

Unidentified Flying Objects?

People have used this passage to say, "See, UFO's are in the Bible." But these aren't Unidentified Flying Objects. They have been identified as the cherubim, or at least the part of the cherubim that contain their spirits.

But let's say for a moment that they do look just like UFO's. Since we've already seen that satan was a cherub, wouldn't it stand to reason that the appearance of UFO's is not because of visitors from another planet, but from another dimension? The spiritual dimension.

The Bible warns us,

1Tim. 4:1 ...the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

Since we are in the last days, where are the deceitful spirits? It seems to me that they are quite busy, actually. You see, the majority of people who claim to have been abducted by UFOs and communicated to by aliens are returning with surprisingly similar messages: not the technical specifications and scientific advances that we might expect from races with inter-planetary and inter-dimensional travel ability, but religious and philosophical dogma.

These "extraterrestrials" are giving one unified message: That what mankind has perceived as God is "not one being at all, but a combination of very powerful, extraterrestrial light-being energies." That we must realize our godhood. That all the religions of the world will become one. That the true god deserving our worship is our goddess, Mother Earth. That Jesus was simply an enlightened human that evolved into humanity's next step before others did, and thus we have misunderstood His

teachings.

My personal belief is that when someone genuinely sees a UFO (not one of the many hoaxes), they are not seeing an intergalactic spacecraft, but in fact an interdimensional being. And these "close encounters" are demonically meant to deceive people into disbelieving Christ and the Bible.

More and more Bible teachers today are becoming convinced that the "lie" of the end-times will center around this. You see, when the antichrist rises to power, he will manage to deceive most of the world with his story and his abilities.

2Th. 2:11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false

He will manage to exalt himself above all that is called god or worshipped (2Thes. 2:4). How will he manage to get people from all different religions, regions, and nations to believe him? It will be some incredible, super-size lie.

And it is quite possible that this is it: As much as the world today believes in the theory of evolution, it simply doesn't hold water when held up to scientific scrutiny. You can't create DNA out of nothing, and life can't happen on its own. Evidence of intelligent design throws a monkey wrench in evolution.

But more and more of people who claim to have been abducted by aliens are coming back with the story that these "technologically-superior beings from another planet" planted the seed of human evolution millions of years ago.

They will be looked at as our creators. And the alien/UFO lie will also be a convenient explanation for the disappearance of millions of born-again Christians from the face of the earth. "Their closed-minded thinking was holding mankind back from the next huge leap of human evolution."

So, those are my thoughts on UFO's, and their similarity to the appearance of the cherubim.

Next Thursday night, we will see the throne of God, as well as God Himself appear in Ezekiel's vision.