

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Ezekiel 1”

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With

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Ezekiel 1

The vision of Ezekiel 1 (also described in Ezekiel 10) is one of the more famous passages in the Bible. It's also one of the most misunderstood. In this episode Dr. Heiser explains what we're looking at in Ezekiel 1 and what it means. Along the way, it will be clear that Ezekiel isn't describing a flying saucer or anything that would have been unfamiliar to an Israelite. We can know what Ezekiel saw because of the iconography (artwork) of the day that has survived and also because of its close connections to other Old Testament passages.

paper referenced:

[**Ezekiel 1 PDF**](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 112, Ezekiel 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

MSH: Very good, I hope you're doing well Trey.

TS: I'm doing pretty good. It's been a bust week but I'm looking forward to finally getting into the book of Ezekiel.

MSH: Yup, and it starts with a bang. Anybody who thinks of Ezekiel, this is typically the chapter they think of. Either that or Gog and Magog, but you're going to have to wait awhile for that.

TS: Here we go.

MSH: We are going to cover all of Ezekiel 1 today and in the process we're going to be doing essentially Ezekiel 10 because Ezekiel 10 is the same vision, or basically the same. So we'll be interacting with chapter 10 a little bit. Later on when we hit chapter 10 in a sequence, we're going to be making it a part of other chapters so we'll be returning real briefly to chapter 10. Chapter 10 is largely the same vision with a few differences, and we'll note the ones that are important as we go. So my goal today is to cover this chapter, the whole chapter. It's part of Ezekiel's call, which is actually really the first 3 chapters, verse 1 of the book up until about Ezekiel chapter 3:15 is really the fuller call of Ezekiel as a prophet. We're only going to take this one chapter in isolation and we'll hit the other chapters when we get to them. But my goals are pretty simple for today. I want to talk about what's being described and what's not being described.

In Ezekiel 1, you always get into this UFO talk, which is nonsense. So what is it, what is he seeing or not seeing, and what did it mean to the original readers, and by extension to us? So let's jump in here. We're essentially going to read through the whole chapter in portions as we go. I should preface this also by saying we're going to be doing a lot of reading of certain chapters, not just in Ezekiel, during this episode. So you might want to have a Bible ready if you can. If you're in the car or something like that, it's okay to listen. But I will also be referring to a PDF that you can download from the website so either after you're done listening to it in the car or if you're listening to it in a place where you can be looking at the PDF, that'll help you in places. We're going to be talking about what in the world Ezekiel is seeing. There is iconographic material that you can look at and see the elements of Ezekiel's vision. So let's just jump in here with the first 3 verses because there's an issue here that we want to say something about here. So in terms of the book chapter 1, let's just jump in right where it starts.

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. ²On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), ³the 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.

MSH: We commented in the last episode introducing the book that here you have a switch between first and third person, and it's evidence of editorial activity. We're not going to rehearse that. But as I also mentioned last time in our introduction, Ezekiel's known for giving lots of dates. There are 15 of them actually given in the book and there is an important date here, at least one that people wonder about right here in the first three verses. The text states that Ezekiel had visions of God in the 30th year. What is that because later he says On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, what 30th year is he talking about? It is frankly just not clear. It's sort of a mystery and commentators have wondered what the 30th year refers to and what is its relationship to the fifth year that comes in the very next verse? So the options are, are they both references to the same event, maybe from a different perspective, or is the 30th year an indication of Ezekiel's words were written down many years later, after the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile? Is that what it means? Is the 30th year mean that the prophet was 30 years old at the time he was exiled, which in that case it would have been about 622 BC for a birth of Ezekiel then 30 years old?

We're in the 590s as we talked about in the introductory episode. The other option, the 30th year, is the meaning of that since some other important event we're not told about and we're supposed to know? Some scholars who opt for this solution suggest that maybe Ezekiel is referring to the finding of the law in the temple by Josiah's people, his reformers. That would've been around 622 as well according to 2 Kings 22:8. All these are things you'll see about in the literature. Dan Block, I'll be referring to his Ezekiel commentary a couple times here and I'm sure occasionally in other episodes. Block prefers the option that he thinks the 30th year is Ezekiel's birthday and this is actually an interpretive option that arose with Origen, the famous patristic father. And he thinks it makes sense because of the first person language in 1:1 then it switched in the third person later on, which allows for a change of perspective, somebody else writing about the fifth year and all that stuff. Personally, I think that makes good sense. I'm not going to really say too much more about it. It's certainly workable. All the options are going to have their defenders but in case you were wondering because I mentioned last time there was this one outlier date. That's it. That's sort of where I land.

What we really want to do in this episode is not quibble about dates and this thing. We want to get into the actual vision and this is really the rest of the chapter. So we're going to be reading through the chapter, and there's a PDF on the episode website that you can open and look at. I'll sort of give you a heads-up when you might want to look at it. That is useful. Ezekiel as we'll find out, this is part of the PDF that you'll actually be able to see the rationale for this. Ezekiel was borrowing divine imagery that would've been familiar to the Babylonians and the Jews are exiled in Babylon, so the Jews are no doubt going to see these kinds of images and this kind of imagery. So they would've been familiar with it as well. So he's borrowing divine imagery that the Babylonians are going to understand, that the Jews in Babylon are going to understand. I would say the Jews even wider because some of this is going to get into what we call divine throne chariot imagery and Jews in their own home would have been familiar with that. And even more particularly we're going to talk about as we talk about the vision, its relationship to the temple decorations and the accoutrements, the furniture. We're going to see that what Ezekiel sees is really directly drawn from the temple because he's describing a heavenly temple. Jews would've been familiar with this as well but people in Babylon would've understood it equally.

So he's doing this to inform his audience that the God of Israel was the true God and still acting, even though they're in Babylon. And so the use of ancient Near Eastern imagery and some of the iconography from the temple, this is going to become important for understanding what Ezekiel is describing and conversely what he's not talking about at all, what the vision has no relationship to, some of these modern myths like he's looking at a UFO. The imagery that he uses is well known to both Babylonians and Jews. The images that I'll be talking about come from a specific source and this is noted in the PDF as well. The famous German scholar, Othmar Keel, this is his specialty, iconography of the ancient Near Eastern world and specifically, as it relates to the Bible. Unfortunately, the book's in German. So visions of Yahweh and seal art is the English translation. A new interpretation of the Majestic portrayals in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, 10 and Zechariah 4. I'm appealing to a specialist here for the imagery you see in the PDF. Let's just jump into the text and I'll give you a heads up when you might want to look at. So verse 4, Ezekiel writes,

⁴ 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.

MSH: This is your first clue as to what he's actually looking at, stormy wind, great cloud. This is stock vocabulary of what biblical scholars called the storm theophany motif. God often comes, whether in human form ultimately or you never get to do that kind description, but God often comes in and encounters people in a storm cloud. You get a lot of this imagery in Job, the Psalms, the Torah. This is not unfamiliar. This has nothing to do with smoke coming out of a combustion engine. Stormy wind great cloud, this is stock vocabulary for a storm theophany. The gleaming metal, it doesn't say that he's looking at an object made of gleaming metal. He's looking at a cloud and the cloud has some sort of fiery luminescence in the middle of it in the manner of gleaming metal, as it were gleaming metal. And this gleaming appearance is going to be referred to in verse 27 later on as we'll see. It's also in chapter 8:2 if want to go look up other instances of it. Verse 5,

⁵ And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, ⁶ but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹ their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. ¹³ As for the

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.¹⁴ And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.

MSH: We'll stop there. We'll end with verse 14 here. Lightning was a stock element of a storm theophany. This is a vision of God and the vision of God is associated here with these creatures. The creatures are identified in chapter 10 when this vision is repeated. There they are called cherubim. So we have this vision of God. He is associated with the presence of cherubim, which should not shock anyone because back in the Torah, the place where God's presence was, the lid of the ark had cherubim on it. This is not going to be unfamiliar. In the temple, not only did you have the Ark of the Covenant with the two cherubim, but you had the two giant cherubim on either side of the throne. Guess what, two and two equals four. You got four cherubim in the temple. Lo and behold, you have four cherubim here, too. What a coincidence. It's not a coincidence. We're going to go through this material and I think in some instances you're going to be kind of shocked at what you can actually find said about the temple that you find in Ezekiel 1. We often don't think of it this way. We think of it as this sort of isolated kind of event and vision with no context to it but it is not that case at all. We have a situation here where the writer is referencing something that's familiar to his Jewish audience. Now just in terms of a list, here's what we've seen so far.

We got four living creatures, cherubim. They are human in appearance, at least in part and they're creaturely in part. They have animal features and human features, a combination. Each had human hands, for instance. They had four faces. One of those faces was human. They each had four wings and their legs are straight and their legs and feet are both sort of bovine like calves legs and calves feet. At this point, if you have access to the PDF, you should start taking a look at it because every one of these features is known in the same kind of context from the Babylonian iconography or, as we just mentioned a few minutes ago, or the temple. So in the temple we got the cherubim. They're partly human in appearance. They have the wings, though. There are four of them in the temple. You don't have the four faces in those cherubim but you have a mixture of human and animal features. Their wings are touching in the temple. They're also touching on the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle. They are also partly bovine because we know this from the iconography. Now *cherub* is a term that comes from Akkadian. There's your Babylonian context. And everybody in Babylon and any Jew in Babylon or any Jew who has seen a Babylonian throne or a Babylon idol that was associated with an enthroned deity or a king would've known what this was. They would've known or been familiar with all these features, what a cherub looked like, and consequently, what a cherubim looked like. This is an Akkadian term that refers to a quasi-divine figure that guarded a divine throne or a king's throne.

The context is perfectly consistent here. This is an image of God and as we're going to see, out of the cloud or in the cloud is the enthroned deity, Yahweh of Israel. His throne is going to be described. This language or description is actually going to be found elsewhere, either in temple descriptions or other passages like Daniel 7, where you have the seated deity, the ancient of days in that case on the throne. That throne is going to have wheels and fire and the whole bit.

This is not foreign imagery. An ancient Jew or ancient Babylonian would not have read this and thought I don't know what this is because they've never seen a flying saucer. This kind of thinking that this is a UFO or flying saucer is absurd. Nobody would've wondered what he was describing. They wouldn't have been clueless. They would've known it immediately what this was, both in terms of texts that describe the features and iconography of the day. So let's go on in verse 15,

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl. And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. ¹⁷ When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. ¹⁸ And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. ¹⁹ And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.

MSH: We'll stop there. That's the end of verse 21. Now you notice that the "propulsion" of this thing is not the fire and it's not the radiance. It's the four creatures. Why, because chariot thrones, and that's what this is as we're going to find out and as any Babylonian would know from the description of the cherubim. Cherubim throne iconography, you can look at the PDF, was very well known. Cherubim pulled or carried chair divine thrones. They were the propulsion of the divine chariot, a chariot that they would use on Earth to pull around an idol or king who, depending on the culture, would've been conceived of as divine. A heavenly version of this, you need heavenly creatures as well, cherubim. But this time they are alive. They are animated and not just the part of the statuary.

Everybody would've known what this was. So the propulsion would have been viewed as for the heavenly chariot these creatures. So we don't have a rocket engine. We don't have some sort of propulsion system that the light of the radiant appearance is indicative of. We don't have that. The text is quite clear. The "propulsion" has nothing to do with fire or the radiance. Everybody would've known what this was. I am throwing this in here because I get this kind of question all the time. You see it on the Internet. You see it on ancient aliens. Supposedly, we have UFOs in the Bible. This is sort of the go to chapter. We don't. This wasn't a UFO with internal combustion engines or any other kind of radiant power source. That is not what's being described in the text. The mode of propulsion is the "spirit", which is in the creatures. It has nothing to do with some sort of fiery propulsion. So heavenly throne chariot being pulled by cherubim, because we have the pictures. Think of the iconography that you see in the PDF as the Polaroids of the day or the digital photo of the day. We know what Ezekiel was describing. We

know what he saw for two reasons, one, the pictures or iconography and two, this language is drawn directly from the temple as we'll see in a moment. So there's no mystery here. There's no mystery. Now let's just jump back in with verse 22 and keep going.

²² Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads.

²³ And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body.

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings.

²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne,

MSH: There you go. Point blank, this is a chariot cherubim throne. Everyone in the ancient world, Babylon and the Jews, knew precisely what this was. Since we don't see those things all the time, we have this propensity, at least some people do, of imposing something modern into the text, namely, like what ancient aliens does is impose a UFO here. Nobody reading this text or hearing it or frankly composing it, that is not what they were seeing. We know what they were seeing. We have pictures. We have the texts. This is not a flying saucer. So back to verse 26,

²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire

MSH: Mike, what about the sapphire experience here? We'll stop here a moment. Guess what, the same description is rendered in Exodus 24:10. What happens in Exodus 24:10, verses 9 or so? That's when Moses and Aaron and other people went up into the mountain at Sinai and they "saw the God of Israel", and they have a meal with him. So it's a mountain. It's Sinai. Ancient people know what mountains are. They're not describing some kind of circular silver craft or whatever, a UFO they're climbing into. It's a mountain and it's the same mountain that is referred to throughout the book of Exodus, same geography, same location. I hate to belabor what seems like really obvious points but to the people whose worldview is framed by shows like ancient aliens, you can never beat the obvious drum too often to hopefully get people to actually look at the material and data. You have the same description in Exodus 24:10 when they are in God's house, so to speak, to have a meal as you do right here in Ezekiel 1. So back to verse 26,

²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ²⁷ 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.²⁸ Like the appearance of the 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.

MSH: We have an embodied deity here. We have God as a man on this throne. It really frankly couldn't be clearer. It's just not clear to us who are culturally removed and, frankly, to people who just don't want it to be clear. They want it to be about something bizarre like ancient aliens. Verse 27,

²⁷ 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.²⁸ Like the appearance of the 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.

MSH: That's the end of the chapter. Now a couple of observations linked to this. Three observations to be specific before we move on and we talk about the meaning and interpretation of all this. We need to build some context for the meaning and interpretation, so three observations here. Number one is just what I mentioned here at the end of the chapter. Ezekiel 1:22-28, the focus is the glory of the Lord. We've talked about this before in an older podcast episode about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15. There's this thing about the "spiritual" body, celestial glory, and we talked in that episode about how this language is drawn from Ezekiel and some of the passages. Ezekiel calls the figure on the throne the glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1:28. We just read it. In the Ezekiel 9:3 though, it's referred to as the glory of the God of Israel and also the divine name, Yahweh. To make the point even more clearly, if you compare Ezekiel 1:22 and 28, these references to the cherubim who are in Ezekiel 1, they are under the glory. If you look at the same description in Ezekiel 10:20, the cherubim are under the God of Israel. There's no ambiguity here. This is not just some luminous formalist array of light. This is God in human form.

This is the God of Israel. The glory of the Lord in this passage is this humanoid appearance of Yahweh of Israel. You just have to compare a few passages with each other and you get to the point. Yahweh is the glory and the glory has form here. There's a body there. It is a body so this language it going to work itself out in other passages including the New Testament. If you want to go listen to that earlier podcast episode, please do, when we talked about Paul and the spiritual body and that whole concept. The source of the shining, radiant and the gleaming language was not an inanimate object. It's not a craft. It's not the platform that the throne is on.

It's not even a throne itself. The source of the shining radiant light is the deity. It's the enthroned deity who happens to be in the cloud, and does that sound familiar? Does that sound familiar to who Moses talks to? The whole thing about Moses going into the cloud, the cloud comes down over the tent of meeting. Moses goes into the cloud to talk to the God of Israel, to Yahweh. We've already referenced Exodus 24 where they see the God of Israel. In that case, it's more than just Moses. But this is language that any Jew who would've been familiar with the Temple or the tabernacle descriptions in the Torah, and even these episodes in the Torah where God in human form is encountered, there would have been no mystery here as to what is being described.

That's the first observation I want to reinforce. Secondly, if we go to Ezekiel 10, we need to say a little bit something about the cherubim. What I'm doing with these three observations is setting up what the meaning of all this is, how to interpret it. The second item is the cherubim in Ezekiel 10, there are a few differences in the description there with what we have here in chapter 1. I'm going to quote from Dan Block's Ezekiel commentary in the New International commentary in the Old Testament series. So he has here, and this is his commentary on verse 12 and following. He writes,

“First, verse 12 is particularly confusing, as images of wheels seem to merge with the images of cherubim. The problem is not helped by the retrospective pronouns on “their bodies, their backs.” Whose bodies? Whose backs? Are the wheels in the previous paragraph now transformed into some type of angelic figures with four faces and body part parts? Are the wheels transformed in a special class of angels, a motif that becomes important in later Jewish mysticism?”

MSH: This is known as *merkaba* mysticism. There was a whole school of Jewish thought and writing, mystical Judaism, that wrote about this vision and assigned mystical meaning to it, kind of like Kabbala, sort of the mystical Jewish school of thought so to speak. A lot of that centered around this vision. And in that later literature you actually have angels, creatures called wheels so you get the mixture in that later literature. So Block is raising the question here. Back to Block, he says,

“It seems more natural to apply the bodies, backs, heads, hands, and wings to the cherubim mentioned previously in verse 9, which is grammatically possible.”

MSH: What block is saying is even though this sounds different, chapter 10, grammatically, you can look at it and analyze the grammar and say he's basically describing the same thing back in chapter 1. We don't have an emerging of these things here. Continuing with Block on verse 14,

“Second, the description of the cherubim's faces differs significantly from the earlier account. Whereas Ezekiel 1:10 has 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 difference set. Whereas 1:10 had followed a human-lion-bull-eagle sequence, Ezekiel 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? While we cannot be sure how the ancients perceived true cherubic faces, some evidence suggests that they were not human.

According to a seventh century BC Akkadian text called Namtartu, he had the head of a *kurbu* but human hands and feet. I would also add that since the bodies of cherubim were predominantly bovine, having the term *kurbu* instead of ox or bull from chapter 1 is a distinction without a difference.”

MSH: I would agree with that. This is me talking now. Since this is the way cherubim predominately were, they had all these bovine features, it really doesn't make much difference if you use *cherub* in chapter 10 as opposed to the word for ox or bull in chapter 1. It is a distinction without a difference. It's basically the same thing. So Block says,

“On the other hand the contradiction at least the order of faces is more apparent than real. Since the inaugural vision came to the prophet from the north, the frontal (south) view would have a human face, with the other three being arranged as follows.

MSH: If you're looking at the PDF, you're going to get this arrangement that Block talks about, where you have north is eagle, east is bull, west is lion, south is human. So you're going to get this arrangement that is a little bit different than what you get in chapter 1. Here's what Block says.

“If the faces in chapter 10:14 are also listed in clockwise order, the sequence is identical, and the cherub's is identified with the bull. Why the present enumeration commences with the cherub instead of the human face is unclear, but may reflect a vantage from which the prophet observed the chariot. In order to witness the *kabod* glory lifting from cherubim inside the temple, he must've been standing at the front of the building, perhaps the eastern gate of the inner court. From this viewpoint, he naturally began with the creature facing him. Beyond these changes, the description of the chariot agrees with the earlier account and requires no further comment.”

MSH: I would agree with Block that there's no contradiction between what chapter 10 says and what chapter 1 says. You just have to do the sort of thing that Block is doing and I've reproduced some of this text in PDF so you have it. You have to sort of ask yourself certain interpretive questions to be able to align Chapter 10 with Chapter 1, Thirdly, Daniel 7 has some of the same features as Ezekiel 1. And in Daniel 7, we have a Divine Council meeting. The Divine Council is meeting for the purpose of dealing with world empires of the present and future. That's the first eight verses of chapter 7. The message that's going to be put to the audience or reader is that God is in charge of these empires. The council participates in God's decision about the fate of those empires. So Daniel 7 is pretty familiar and you get this image of the four beasts in the first eight verses so we need to have a Council meeting to decide what's going to happen with these beasts. You get to verses 9-10, we read this. These are very familiar if you've followed my content for any amount of time. Daniel 7:9-10,

⁹“As I looked,
thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;

MSH: That’s a reference to a seated Council, not the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man because the Son of Man is never described as taking a seat. Jewish interpretation likes limit it to two, to both deny the Council idea and also to try to link this to the son of David. It’s unnecessary and frankly, it’s not good exegesis.

⁹“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.

MSH: So there you have thrones, flames and wheels in this vision that that no one would suggest is a UFO. And that’s the point. Everybody who wants to talk about the UFO in Ezekiel 1 never tell you about Daniel 7 where it’s clearly a throne in a meeting room or a board room to decide the fate of these four beasts. There’s no way to squeeze a UFO inside the board room. It doesn’t have at all any sort of context that would support a flying craft. It just doesn’t but the people who want to prop up this Ezekiel 1 UFO thing never take you Daniel 7 or any of the other stuff we’re going to be talking about in the time that remains.

⁹“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.

¹⁰ 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.

MSH: This is a very familiar Divine Council scene that helps us process Ezekiel 1 because of the references to the fire and the wheels, which are referred to many times in Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel

10. Now what do we do with all that? As far as interpretation and meaning, I've hinted at where we're going to go with this already. Ezekiel's vision is clearly a vision of God's throne, the enthroned glory, God in human form, the enthroned deity. It is no more a flying saucer than the Israelite temple was a flying saucer. Why say it that way, because of the high degree of correlation between this vision and, number one, Old Testament Temple descriptions and, number two, its correlation with the heavenly temple scene in the book of Revelation chapters 4 and 5. God's heavenly throne is a chariot throne, the Hebrew term is *merkaba*. It has wheels but it's still a throne.

Let's take both of these things, this correlation between Old Testament Temple descriptions and the correlation with the throne description or scene in Revelation 4-5. First off, the Old Testament Temple structure, believe it or not this might sound shocking, the Old Testament Temple structure, its furnishings, its accoutrements, the whole complex, the whole temple thing, had wheels, axles, cherubim, and most of the animal imagery from Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel 10's cherubim. You think I don't remember reading this stuff about the temple, wheels, and axles. I'll go a step further. Even the throne chariot idea is present in Solomon's temple. We just miss these things because, let's be honest, the passages about how the temple was built and decorated are boring. We just don't care about that stuff. If we read it, we scan it and typically we'll skip it. But I'm going to read and torture you a little bit here with reading some of these descriptions about the building of the temple and the decoration the temple, the objects in the temple, and you're going to see these things pop out at you that you just read about in Ezekiel 1. This is 1 Kings 6:23-28.

²³ In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olivewood, each ten cubits high. ²⁴ Five cubits was the length of one wing of the 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. ²⁵ The other cherub also measured ten cubits; both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. ²⁶ The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was that of the other cherub. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ And he overlaid the cherubim with gold.

MSH: That's the end of the passage. So here we have two cherubim, the wings touching. This part's familiar to most listeners, most readers. We also have two cherubim with the Ark of the Covenant in the same temple complex. The Ark serves as God's footstool as he's seated on this particular giant throne. If you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is familiar to you. So we have four cherubim inside the holy of holies where God sits, the divine throne. We have four cherubim in Ezekiel 1. Let's keep going with another passage, 1 Chronicles 28:11-18,

¹¹ Then David gave Solomon his son the plan of the vestibule of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the mercy seat; ¹² and the plan of all that he

had in mind for the courts of the house of the LORD, all the surrounding chambers, the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasuries for dedicated gifts; ¹³ for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of the LORD; for all the vessels for the service in the house of the LORD, ¹⁴ the weight of gold for all golden vessels for each service, the weight of silver vessels for each service, ¹⁵ the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand in the service, ¹⁶ the weight of gold for each table for the showbread, the silver for the silver tables, ¹⁷ and pure gold for the forks, the basins and the cups; for the golden bowls and the weight of each; for the silver bowls and the weight of each; ¹⁸ for the altar of incense made of refined gold, and its weight; also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 46:05

MSH: In the Hebrew text, the word for chariot in verse 18 there is, you guessed it, *merkaba*. The temple of Solomon had a throne chariot. I guarantee that nobody is trying to make Ezekiel 1 into a UFO will ever show you that verse because it destroys the whole idea. This is why I said at the beginning the vision of Ezekiel 1 is no more a UFO than the temple of Solomon was a UFO. It just wasn't. It was a building, inside, of which, there was a throne for God to sit on. This is not anything unusual. It's not anything shocking or revelatory in Ezekiel 1. Every blasted Jew who had ever seen the temple and had ever heard anything about what's inside the temple or ever saw it being built and saw the objects being built, everybody would know what this is. Let's go to another passage, 1 Kings 7:13,

¹³ And King Solomon sent and brought Hiram from Tyre. ¹⁴ He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in bronze. And he was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze. He came to King Solomon and did all his work.

¹⁵ He cast two pillars of bronze. Eighteen cubits was the height of one pillar, and a line of twelve cubits measured its circumference. It was hollow, and its thickness was four fingers. The second pillar was the same. ¹⁶ He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars. The height of the one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits. ¹⁷ There were lattices of checker work with wreaths of chain work for the capitals on the tops of the pillars, a lattice for the one capital and a lattice for the other capital.

²¹ He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple. He set up the pillar on the south and called its name Jachin, and he set up the pillar on the north and called its name Boaz. ²² And on the tops of the pillars was lily-work. Thus the work of the pillars was finished.

²³ Then he made the sea of cast metal. It was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference. ²⁴ Under its brim were gourds, for ten cubits, compassing the sea all around. The gourds were in two rows, cast with it when it was cast. ²⁵ It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east. The sea was set on them, and all their rear parts were inward. ²⁶ Its thickness was a handbreadth, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily. It held two thousand baths.

²⁷ He also made the ten stands of bronze. Each stand was four cubits long, four cubits wide, and three cubits high. ²⁸ This was the construction of the stands: they had panels, and the panels were set in the frames, ²⁹ and on the panels that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. On the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of beveled work. ³⁰ Moreover, each stand had four bronze wheels and axles of bronze, and at the four corners were supports for a basin. The supports were cast with wreaths at the side of each.

³² And the four wheels were underneath the panels. The axles of the wheels were of one piece with the stands, and the height of a wheel was a cubit and a half. ³³ The wheels were made like a chariot wheel; their axles, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs were all cast. ³⁴ There were four supports at the four corners of each stand. The supports were of one piece with the stands. ³⁵ And on the top of the stand there was a round band half a cubit high; and on the top of the stand its stays and its panels were of one piece with it. ³⁶ And on the surfaces of its stays and on its panels, he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, according to the space of each, with wreaths all around.

MSH: What's happening here, the point here is that Ezekiel's vision borrows basically every feature in it from Solomon's Temple and its furnishings, the whole temple complex. Ezekiel borrows all of all the elements and amalgamates them into one heavenly throne thing because the temple is not destroyed in Ezekiel 1. It's going to be destroyed while Ezekiel is in Babylon. The point is that God isn't isolated to Israel. He's not isolated to Jerusalem and this temple. God is still on the throne over all the heavens. This is why the vision of Ezekiel puts all of this temple imagery together into a heavenly throne and, we'll get to it a few moments, the four faces of the cherubim, many of you heard me say this before, in Ezekiel's vision point the cardinal points of the Zodiac. The whole messaging is that God is in charge. He is enthroned upon these creatures who are pointing and can move to all the corners of the earth so to speak. Every place on the earth that is encompassed by the whole heavens. God is over it all, not Marduk or some other flunky deity of the Babylonians.

Yes, we are in exile in Babylon and life is not good. It's bad but Yahweh is not isolated to this little spot in this temple in Jerusalem in the territory of Judah, the kingdom of Judah. He's just not. So Ezekiel wants the Jews to know that God is still ruling over everything no matter if

there is a temple or not because there's a heavenly temple. It's the whole cosmos as it were. It's everything that they know exists, heaven and earth, every direction. Nothing escapes the sovereignty of the God of Israel. This is the whole point. This is why the temple imagery is borrowed and it's why the faces are what they are. Look at what happens in Revelation 4-5. It's the same thing. You go to Revelation 4 it has a very strong correlation with Ezekiel, especially Ezekiel 10 when you get to the animal imagery. I'll read here in Revelation 4:1,

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."² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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,⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:⁷ 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.⁸ 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!"

MSH: Now that is clearly a throne. It's clearly imagery borrowed from Ezekiel. There was also a few elements borrowed from the throne room scene. Same kind of scene, throne room scene in Isaiah 6. And all of it can be found in temple descriptions in the Old Testament. The point is that God's rulership, his sovereign power is not limited to this little structure in Jerusalem, and even to Jerusalem itself, even to Judah. It is everything. The heavenly throne room image and imagery tries to convey the sense that God is sovereign everywhere, over the four corners of the earth, over everything, everyone, every empire. Now in terms of meaning, you can consult the PDF for this. I've made the point before. I have some selections in there, screenshots of books from Google books, maybe just one from a book. There are other books that are referenced there, though. The faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision correspond to the four cardinal points of the zodiac known to the Babylonians and, therefore, to other peoples, other literatures as well because Babylon was known for the astronomical imagery. It's not that Jews didn't have their own understanding of the zodiac. They do.

You get references to consolations within and without the zodiac in the Hebrew Bible. They know this stuff. They know what it is but here you are in Babylon. All of the Jews are in Babylon. They're going to get their month names from Babylonian names. There's a cross-

fertilization here in terminology. You get the same understanding. The Jews are going to have their own people who pay attention to the heavens just like Babylonians do but in terms of what the Jews believe about what's going up there and who's in charge of it, that's quite a bit different than what the Babylonians are thinking because the Babylonians have a polytheistic system and the Jews do not. The point here is that it's not a coincidence that the faces correspond to these four corners so to speak or these four cardinal points that are important to encompass all of the wheels of time that were related to the zodiac because astronomers watched the course of the zodiac constellations move through the sky during a given year. They used it to map time. If you're a Jew, you're thinking Genesis, the Torah says that God gave us these things for times and seasons and to map out the calendar, map out time. And when you have this imagery about the movement of time, it speaks of the movement of history. It speaks of what's happening through time, over time, in real time to the people here on earth. And the message of Ezekiel is very simple. It isn't Marduk on the throne even though we're sitting here by the river in Babylon. It's Yahweh of Israel.

Anyone, whether they're Jew or Babylonian, Babylonians probably would have been offended, but they're all going to know what this means. This is a vision pointing to who is sovereign over human history, who is sovereign over the events on earth and the course of time. It is not Marduk of Babylon. It is Yahweh of Israel, which would have been a tremendously significant thing for a Jew to hear. Look at where they're at just in terms of application to them and to us, because we need to remember these things, too. The Jews sitting by the river, this is the worst of times for them. We are God's people. What in God's name are we doing in exile in Babylon? How could this possibly have happened? Yeah, we know intellectually that the prophets told us it is because of our idolatry and sin. But how in the world, we have these covenants, how could this have happened to us? Well, it did and the prophets did tell you why and so it can't get much worse than this. But the message is God is still in control and it's temporary. Let's go to a passage in Jeremiah that would've driven this home. Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesying, their ministries overlap. The exiles are going to have heard this, too. Jeremiah 25,

⁹ behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.

MSH: The point is they're suffering because of their sin but they're not entirely forsaken. It was temporary. As bad as they had been, God wasn't giving up on them and God would repay evil as well. Evil's not getting away with anything either. So God knew their circumstances. He wants them to know I know you're here. I know why you're here. You know why you're here. But Ezekiel's call is about confirming the idea that this is not going to be forever. This is temporary. God is still in control. It's your God. It's not somebody else's god. It's your God. He's still in control. So whether your suffering is deserved or not, we need to think in these terms, too, whether our suffering's deserved or not, God is in control and we won't be forgotten. And evil will get what's coming to it. So it's really a significant kind of message that Ezekiel 1 communicates to us. If you're interested in some of the nitty-gritty stuff in the PDF, there's some links that excerpt about the imagery of the lion, eagle, bull, the human, how they correspond to the zodiac elements.

If you're interested in that, there is a lot you can read on that. There's links to somebody called Franz Boll who's famous for this in his astronomical, astrological approach to the book of Revelation. Please read the link because I would agree with the link's criticism of Boll. You've heard me say this is well. We're going to end with this. Boll was a German classical philologist scholar specialized in ancient astronomy and astrology and that sort of thing. But he goes too far in how he approaches Revelation and biblical prophecy and this sort of thing. But the opposite of that is also untrue. Boll and others might overstate the data for this approach but the people who deny that there's anything to it equally overstate their position. There is something to this. Ancient Near Eastern astronomy and Jewish astronomy has something to do with Ezekiel 1 and the book of Revelations and some of these other things I've talked about on the podcasts and on my website. There is something to this.

There something going on here and it does telegraph important theological ideas but those theological ideas are different when it comes to biblical writers in the art of the pagans. And if you're interested in this sort of thing, you get a few more resources in the PDF, but for our purposes here, we're focused on Ezekiel 1. This is the message of Ezekiel 1. He is not seeing a UFO. He's not seeing anything bizarre. A Jew, a Babylonian would've known what this was. A Jew would have known it's drawn from Torah. It's drawn from descriptions of the Temple. It's amalgamated together in a heavenly vision and, frankly, the New Testament authors, John writing the book of Revelation, he's a Jew. He knew it. It goes right into the book of Revelation in the same way, telegraph the same things in same context, Divine Council meeting, the whole 9 yards. God is on the throne. He controls every corner of the earth and he controls all the heavens. He controls everything, and that's the point.