

Ezekiel 1 -What do you see?

By Holly Effiom

VV1-3 (Jer 25:11; 2 Kings 23:28-37; 24-25; Lev 21-22)

- What is meant by the “30th year”?
- According to the Jewish calendar, what is the 4th month?
- So, what is the date that Ezekiel is giving us?
- What is meant by being among “the captives”?
- What does it mean to be called “the priest”?
- Who was the king in Israel at the time of Ezekiel’s captivity?
- Where is the land of the Chaldeans?

LESSON: These first 3 verses of Ezekiel take us through hundreds of years of Israel’s history to provide context for what is about to be seen.

Ezekiel mentions the 30th year, but what isn’t clear is the 30th year of what? In Jeremiah 25:11, a prophecy is given that all the land will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. Usually, you find that time is marked by the king who was in place at the time. For example, verse 2 mentions the “5th year of Jehoiachin’s” captivity. Jehoiachin was the last king of Judah prior to its final fall. In our study of Daniel, we learn that Daniel was taken captive during the reign of Jehoiakim of Judah. This shows that captives were taken multiple times at the end. Second Kings chronicles these events in chapters 23-25.

What is also noteworthy is that Ezekiel is being called a priest. The priests were not only of the tribe of Levi but, more specifically, of the lineage of Aaron (Lev 21-22). The priest was the only one to personally serve and look upon God in the holy of holies.

The land of the Chaldeans, what does this mean?

According to Herodotus, the Chaldeans were a tribe, trained in the art divination by Egyptian priests, when Sesostrius governed the province. In Daniel 4, we understand that the Chaldeans were among the wisemen of Babylon; and Daniel 2 specifically associates Chaldeans with the skill of dream and vision interpretation. Herodotus describes the Chaldeans as having taken over the leadership of Babylon, to the point that the term “Chaldea” became synonymous with “Babylon” by the time the children of Israel were exiled there.

Interestingly, Abram left Ur of the Chaldees with his father, after the death of Abram’s brother, Haran (Gen 12) – Abram’s other brother, Nahor married Milcah and remained in Haran (Gen 22:22). What I find interesting is that Israel’s punishment for breaking its vow to God, in practicing idolatry, was to be exiled out of their homeland specifically to Babylon – the center of idolatry – the land of Abram’s nativity.

VV4-8

- What would a whirlwind look like?
- How is the image presented to Ezekiel different from a tornado?
- Why is the “brightness” and the color of the whirlwind significant?
- What was it that came out from the middle of the whirlwind?
- Are the living creatures human?
- What about them says “human”?
- What did the feet of the living creatures look like?
- Why does God want the reader to know that the living creatures had hands also?

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LESSON: I went back and looked at my studies on the Throne Room visions in Revelation 4, and this time when studying Ezekiel 1, I'm being shown a different aspect of understanding of this passage – not to say the other was wrong. The idea that we are being allowed to see how God moves has captured my attention.

VV9-12

- Are the living creatures stationary? How do you know?
- How did the living creatures move? In 4 different directions?
- What did the living creatures look like? How many faces did they have? Do men have 4 faces?
- What is the meaning to the wings of the living creatures being joined together? Wouldn't that defeat the purpose of the wings?
- Is it possible that the translation of the word "joined" is lacking?
- In what direction did the living creatures move?
- Who was directing them?
- Did the living creatures divert from the direction in which they were being led?

LESSON: Trying to understand in what way the living creatures had the "likeness of a man" is challenging. So much of what Ezekiel is seeing is very UN-like a man. It is amazing that God is allowing Ezekiel so much time to just look upon Him. Remember, as far as we know, man cannot look upon God and live, and yet here Ezekiel is looking upon God, and he's not dead, in fact, he's taking in and trying to understand the images he's being given. Only *priests* served in the holy of holies and *saw* God.

It is noteworthy that the scripture points out that the Spirit is leading the living creatures, and that they move in a straight forward fashion, wherever the Spirit leads. Are we being shown the nature of God in these few verses, and is this the purpose for allowing Ezekiel the liberty of viewing God and documenting what he is seeing?

VV13-21

- In what way were the living creatures like burning coals of fire?
- In what way were the living creatures like lamps?
- How did they seem to appear?
- Is Ezekiel describing the same "living creatures of VV9-12?"
- What is meant by the living creatures appearing like a "flash of lightning"?
- Where did the wheels come from?
- How are the wheels associated with the living creatures with the 4 faces?
- Does this mean that the living creatures in verse 13 might be different from those in VV9-12?
- What is significant about wheels? What function do they serve?
- Is V17 similar to V9 description?
- Are the living creatures mentioned here and in Rev 4:6, 8 and Isaiah 6:2-7 all the same creatures?
 - How is each different? How are they similar?
- What is consistent about the 4 living creatures?

LESSON: What is Ezekiel describing? Wow, this is confusing! But I think I am understanding a small part of the message being conveyed in this section of scripture:

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1. God wanted Ezekiel to see Him. God allowed Ezekiel to make this deep examination and write this description of what he saw. To me, this means that God wants *us* to see Him.
2. God wants *us* to understand how He moves. God allowed Ezekiel to describe on some level, as much as possible, that He is *constantly* in motion; and every *component* of His vehicle of motion is comprised of *living souls* that submit themselves to the leadership of His Spirit – they are “in sync” with His Spirit.
3. Perhaps the “likeness to man”, mentioned earlier, is man’s ability to *think* and *choose* to serve God. This makes me view all the other creatures on the earth differently – Are they *truly* ruled by instinct? Maybe they live as they live in submission to God’s will. We just attribute their behavior to instinct.

VV22-28

What is the “firmament”?

What is the “terrible crystal”? Is it the same “crystal sea” mentioned in Rev 4:6?

Are the 4 living creatures bearing up the firmament, according to this section of scripture?

According to Rev 4:6, what was located on this crystal?

Could this be what is being described when Ezekiel said that the wings of the 4 living creatures were joined?

What does this “vehicle” sound like when it moves?

What is the color of the throne, or was the “man above it” literally sitting on something made of a big stone?

What did the Man sitting on the throne look like?

What was Ezekiel’s response when he understood Who he was seeing?

LESSON: What an interesting section of scripture! Notice the uniqueness of Ezekiel’s response in the presence of God – Isaiah was made aware of his own, and his people’s corruption, and needed cleansing; Daniel became weak merely in the presence of one who had been in the presence of God, and required strengthening; John fainted straight away and required a personal touch from Jesus, the Alpha and Omega. Ezekiel, upon understanding before Whom he stood, immediately bowed, and he was conscious. Is Ezekiel’s experience different because he was a “priest” and God Himself sanctifies him? Lev 21:15

Another fascinating thing to note is that God is showing us His throne – here in Ezekiel, it is from beneath; in Revelation 4:6, it is from above. While we cannot say that we know exactly what Ezekiel is describing in his vision, we can glean aspects of the nature of God from his description:

1. God’s purpose and His Spirit are ever moving forward;
2. Every component by which He travels is alive and submitted to His Spirit, not by force, but rather because they *want* to be there;
3. The throne of God sees and knows all things and moves swiftly;
4. He that sat upon the throne appeared to Ezekiel like a bright, all-consuming fire, surrounded by a rainbow – *glorious* – such that Ezekiel couldn’t help but bow down!
5. Having studied Revelation, we understand that the prophets are showing us the origins and where we are going. *God’s purpose and His Spirit are ever moving forward!*

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