

WHO IS THIS GOD?

Who am I?

The search for identity, purpose, and meaning has become an obsession for many people. It seems that in today's world, there is a need to be noticed, to "be somebody." The social media boom has created a new position of power called an *influencer*, and every young adult—and a huge number of not-so-young ones—dreams of being able to influence the actions of others. Or at least to be listened to. Or maybe just to matter.

Genealogy companies like Ancestry and MyHeritage have exploded because everyone wants to have roots. If we can't find meaning in our daily lives, maybe we can find it in our past. Maybe discovering that we are the direct descendant of someone important can vicariously confer some sort of importance on ourselves. "I'm the eleventh great-granddaughter of King Henry VIII, so...yeah." But that turns into a dead-end road, too, as the March 2025 bankruptcy of 23andMe proved. It may feel great to have important ancestors, but when we come back to real life, we are confronted with the realization that we're still just Ima Jean living in a duplex in Pocatello, Idaho.

Who are you? And, let's add one more question: Why does it

matter? There is one group of people with whom the answer to the first question makes all the difference. In fact, the entire book of Ezekiel answers that question. The people of God had forgotten who they were, or, maybe better put, they had forgotten what being the people of God meant. The Lord was about to change all that. Ezekiel was there to tell them, “This is what is about to happen, and this is why it’s about to happen.” Jerusalem and the country of Israel were about to be leveled, and their sin was the reason. God had picked Israel out from all the other nations to be His special people. They needed a serious refresher course on the privilege that status held, and the important responsibility that accompanied it.

But Ezekiel’s book isn’t just about reminding the people who they were. Israel and the world had forgotten their Creator. They had shunted Him to the side like an old-fashioned, has-been God. That was about to change. When the Lord had finished everything He promised in this book, all would know “that He is the Lord.”

So You’re an Israelite

If you were to ask an everyday Jerusalemite during Ezekiel’s era about their identity, they could likely recite to you the Bible stories they had heard from birth. Much like the fantastic epics you’d hear today from many indigenous tribes, Israel’s origin tale was a link that bound the people together. But it was not one that most deep down believed or, at the very least, cared about. They were just tales of the ancient times when the great Creator God, who lived on the fiery mountain, thundered out a bunch of rules and brought His people into the land.

It’s likely that embellished tales of Noah and the flood and the plagues of Egypt were passed down to the generations around after-dinner campfires. But what about the creation story, Cain killing Abel, the sons of God and the daughters of men, the faithfulness of Abraham, and the trickery of Rebekah? Did people still talk about these

things? And how many would have a clue as to the long night when a man wrestled with God? That bout went back and forth until the theophany, God in human form, finally defeated the man, Jacob, by putting his hip out of socket. Yet when God moved to go, He found that Jacob was still hanging on with all his strength.

He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So He said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called

Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:26-28).

That is the christening story of the nation of Israel. However, most Israelites of Ezekiel's day had likely only heard it occasionally amongst the evening songs of the Babylonian gods Marduk and Bel and Tammuz. And even if they did know the story by heart, it would likely only serve as wishful thinking at best, or biting irony at worst. Israel, the people who have struggled with God and men and have what? Prevailed? Looking around the Promised Land in the era of the Babylonian Empire, the last description anyone would have assigned to the Israelites was that they were a prevailing people.

But as cynical as Israel's name sounded under the given circumstances, it was a God-given name. Therefore, it was accurate. What the people didn't understand was that their sinful actions and those of generations of their ancestors had shifted them from an era of victory back into a time of struggle. In his prophetic book, Ezekiel made it clear that this rebellious battle between the descendants of Jacob and their Creator and Chooser was once again back in full swing. Yes, the Israelites could look to their temple and understand they had a rich history with God. But in their actions, the people

were intent on showing that they wanted to reject the rules of the God of Jacob, while still keeping His overall protection. The classic cake-and-eat-it scenario.

The Lord, for His part, regularly reminded the people that no matter what their actions, He wasn't going anywhere. In fact, like a Father disciplining His wayward child, He was determined to stay in it until His progeny's stubborn will was finally broken. He still is today. A time will come in the not-distant future when God's chosen people will once and for all time recognize that He truly is the Lord, a goal found throughout Ezekiel's book.

You Don't Choose Your Father

Of all the people in the world, why did God choose the Jews? There were so many other options out there, so many people groups who were blindly loyal to a god or a nation or an ideology. He could have gone to East Asia with its Hinduism. The Hindu's goal of *moksha*, in which a soul unconsciously merges back into Brahman, the universal god, lessens the importance of the individual here on earth. To their thinking, all descended from the universal soul and to the universal soul all will one day return, so why is there any need for individualism or personal will during this life? Someone without an individual will is very easy to control. Or what about the Islamic militias and jihadists who commit suicide based on false promises and outright lies? You can't find a more dedicated disciple than one who is ready to blow himself up for what he believes to be true. Really, if God was looking for a people who were ready and willing to be His obedient minions, He could have done much better than the people of Israel.

Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, wasn't looking for easy or mindless or blindly obedient when it came to choosing His people. He wanted folks who would give Him a challenge. He needed a nation that would allow Him to show the world who He was through the display of His merciful attributes of grace, long-suffering, and forgiveness.

Israel had the option of living the easy way or the hard way, but God always knew His people would choose the hard way. That was why He spoke the following words to Moses, giving the prophet a final song to teach the people:

Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them (Deuteronomy 31:19-21).

From the very beginning, the people struggled against God. Abraham twice lied about his relationship with his wife. His son Isaac followed suit. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was a deceiver of the first class. After the people came out of Egypt, it was just a short time before they were worshipping a golden calf. Then there was grumbling and rebellion and stealing devoted things, then more idolatry. The Bible is replete with stories of Israel's failures. Yet God never once let the people's sin change His mind about His choice.

Sure, in the occasional pique of His anger, God was ready to wipe the whole lot out. During the golden calf incident, He said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them

and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (Exodus 32:9-10). But even as He threatened to wipe out the nation, He was already planning to rebuild the nation with a member of that same nation. The Jews had been chosen by God, and He would always keep a remnant. Why? Once again, it’s because He wants people to know Him.

And it’s not just in the past that God proved Himself through the nation of Israel. In chapters 36–39, we’ll see that Ezekiel promised a time in which Israel will gather once again as a reestablished nation and prosper greatly economically, although spiritually it will still be distant from its Creator. Once the country is settled and peaceful, it will be attacked by an overwhelming army. But God will supernaturally intervene, protecting His still-rebellious people. The world will recognize this divine involvement, prompting God to once again declare, “Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 38:23).

Could God have made a better choice than Israel? Using our human peabrains, we might find reasons to say yes. However, because of the perfect wisdom possessed by the All-Knowing, we can be sure that the true answer is undoubtedly no. The Jewish people are not perfect, yet they are the perfect people for God’s plan.

A Historical Grounding

“Amir, this is Ezekiel! When are we going to get to the war? I want to read about Gog and Magog and military alliances and all that kind of stuff!” I hear you, and I get it. Chapters 36 and beyond of Ezekiel excite me too. However, we need to lay a foundation. After all, that’s what God did. If He thought it best just to jump right into a massive horde marching down from the far north, He wouldn’t have included 30-plus chapters of very important prophetic material first. But it is these early prophecies that lay the groundwork for what is to come, because we’ll see many similarities as we go between what Jerusalem was facing in Ezekiel’s day and what Israel and the rest of

the world will have to endure in the end times. So, stick with me. This early business is more important and a whole lot more interesting than you may think.

As I already mentioned, by the time of Ezekiel, Israel's days of wine and roses had passed. After becoming a kingdom under Saul, the nation had flourished through the leadership of Kings David and Solomon. In fact, when Solomon ruled, envoys from countries across the globe journeyed to see the wealth of Jerusalem and to hear the unmatched words of wisdom from its ruler. But, toward the end of that great king's life, cracks were already being seen in Israel's commitment to God, and they were coming from the top down. Although he knew God's law through and through, Solomon either ignored it or felt like parts didn't apply to him. Or at least *a* part didn't apply to him. Through Moses, God said this to the people when they entered the Promised Land:

You shall make no covenant with [the people] nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly (Deuteronomy 7:2-4).

Don't marry those foreign women! They'll turn your hearts toward their gods! Solomon read those words and thought, *Yeah, that's true for all those dummies. But I've got wisdom from God, so I'd never fall into that trap. Now, where are those cuties from Ammon?* The king dove in headfirst to the level that only kings can, and 700 wives and 300 concubines later, it happened exactly as God had said it would.

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not

loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kings 11:4-8).

That began the downward cycle for Israel. With Solomon's son Rehoboam, the kingdom was split in two, with the south calling itself Judah and the north keeping the name of Israel. From that time on, the northern kingdom found itself continuously on the wrong side of God. Not one king followed Him, even up through their destruction and deportation by Assyria in 722 BC.

In the south, it was hit-and-miss with the kings, with more misses than hits. When this book's timeline begins, we are just into the sixth century BC. Ezekiel is a priest who was ripped out of his comfort zone in 597 BC when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had invaded Jerusalem for the second time. This time when the king left, he took 10,000 of its citizens with him to Babylon. Ezekiel was one of these exiles.

For those of you who may be trying to line up the timing of Ezekiel's deportation with that of Daniel, let me lend a hand. Daniel was taken as a teenager to Babylon in the first exile in 605 BC. He was of the royal line and was groomed to serve in the palace. Eight years later, Nebuchadnezzar came back and instituted a much larger deportation. Ezekiel, in his twenties at the time, was just one of the mass of people who made the long journey to start a new life in a foreign land. He settled around Tel-abib, along the Chebar River, about 100 miles

or so south of the capital city of Babylon. Four years passed, and he was just starting his life as an exiled priest when God appeared. The Lord called him to be a prophet, and when He did so it was with an amazing flourish, as we'll see in the next chapter.

With the calling of Ezekiel, we now have three prophets at work. Jeremiah is still back in Jerusalem trying to convince the stubborn Israelites to repent and save themselves. It is a futile work. Daniel, likely in his early twenties, has already shown himself as a standout to King Nebuchadnezzar and is on the fast track to Babylonian leadership. Then there's Ezekiel, the common man's prophet. His primary audience was the exiles, but his ministry reached back to Jerusalem and to foreign nations.

Both Ezekiel and Daniel would have known of the great prophet Jeremiah, and Daniel, at least, had probably met him just because of his royal ties. There is no reason to think that an everyday Levite who was too young to be a priest, as was Ezekiel, would have had any interaction with the old prophet. As for Ezekiel and Daniel, undoubtedly Ezekiel would have known of Daniel, who had probably become a hero to all of Israel's exiles in Babylon. Did they ever meet? It's likely, especially once Ezekiel began building his own prophetic reputation. Daniel's position would have afforded him a great amount of independence and movement, and it's hard to imagine him not traveling to Tel-abib or inviting Ezekiel up to the capital city. I wonder what that meeting would have looked like as these two prophets sat down over a cup of tea and some baklava.

CHAPTER 1

EXPERIENCING GOD'S OTHERNESS

EZEKIEL 1-3

The year was 1955 and my writing partner, Rick Yohn, was trying to figure out what to do with his life. Never much of a student, he had somehow allowed himself to get wrangled into teaching at a college group meeting. As he was lying in bed one night, he began thumbing through the lesson material. Out of the blue, the thought came to him, *I'd sure love to teach the Bible the rest of my life.* He bolted upright. Never before had that consideration entered his mind. Now that it had, it felt so right. He didn't know much about a "call to ministry," but from the little he did understand, he figured he may have just had one.

Rick bolted down the stairs and found his mom in the kitchen. He blurted out his news, causing a surprisingly unsurprised smile to spread across her face. "You need to go see Grandma Brown," she said.

It was a short drive, and after being received with a hug, he took a seat across from his great-grandmother's rocking chair. His excitement lengthened his story a bit, and the dear saint listened quietly. When he was done, she said, "Ricky, when my boy was born, I asked

God for a son to go into the ministry. God said, ‘No.’ Years later, when my first grandchild was born, I asked God for a grandson to go into the ministry. Again, God said, ‘No.’ Even more years later, when my first great-grandchild was born, I once again asked God for a great-grandson to go into the ministry. Today, God has said, ‘Yes.’” Undoubtedly, the decades of prayer from that dear woman, his grandparents on both sides of the family, along with his mother and father, had a strong hand in Dr. Rick’s call to service, and that call has produced more than 70 years of ministry.

A call is a powerful experience. When you bring it down to its essence, it is an invitation to the natural to participate in the realm of the supernatural. It is God saying, “My child, I’m going to let you cross the temporal line and do some eternal work.” I get that this may sound a little hyperbolic. “Amir, I’m just taking over the second grade Sunday school class because I have a love for kids. It’s not like I’m Billy Graham.” My response to you, however, is that no, I am not being hyperbolic, and yes, you are like Billy Graham—at least you are to those sticky-fingered little kids as you love them and bless them using the gifts with which God has blessed you.

I’m not denigrating the great Billy Graham in any way. Instead, I am seeking to extol the virtues of your service to the King. Reverend Graham would be the first to tell you that there was nothing special about him. He was just a guy who determined to tirelessly follow the calling given to him. Because of that, he was able to constantly live, serve, and make a powerful impact in the two worlds of the natural and the supernatural.

When Dr. Rick accepted his calling, he also lived that dual residency. I, too, had the same sort of experience when it was clear that serving the Lord was what I wanted to do with my life. As you’ll read later in the book, my upbringing was difficult, and I was probably the last kid that most people would expect to stand in front of huge groups of people and talk about God. But that just shows how

incredible the Lord is. He took me from a place of despair and gave me hope. He took me from feeling like I had no meaning to giving me a wonderful purpose.

When you say yes to the Holy Spirit's lead, you will find your calling. And, yes, you do have a calling! The apostle Paul made it clear that every believer is gifted and charged by the Holy Spirit "for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). He emphasized that point even more to the church in Ephesus, when he wrote that we all have been created to serve God, carrying out the "good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Each of us can, and should, carry out our earthly and heavenly dual citizenship every day as we "set [our minds] on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Said another way, we live our lives with a ministry mindset, always looking for opportunities to be used by God.

Why am I making such a big deal of this natural/supernatural nature of a call? Because that is exactly what God demonstrated in the first three chapters of Ezekiel. In fact, in a Bible full of dramatic first encounters with God, I don't know that anyone's was more dramatic than Ezekiel's. Paul saw a bright light. Jacob wrestled with a guy. Isaiah had a somewhat less-spectacular throne room experience, if any throne room experience can be considered less spectacular.

Ezekiel, however, was alongside the Chebar River, minding his own beeswax, when suddenly everything went crazy. He saw amazing sights, heard incredible words, and received a divine commissioning. And by the time it was all over, there was no doubt in his mind that the ministry he would be carrying out amongst his fellow natural humans was at the behest of an all-powerful, totally "other," supernatural God.

Setting the Time and Place

This vision is not an allegory! I thought it would be good to get that out right away. It was very important to Ezekiel that his readers knew

he wasn't just sitting at his desk making stuff up. He wasn't brainstorming a "this" that could represent a "that" and some "thing" that actually signified some other "thing." The visions he experienced came to him at a certain moment and place in history's timeline. His movements and actions really did take place, as did those of the beings he saw.

It was so important to this prophet that he wouldn't end up in some book entitled *The Allegorical Ethos of the Old Testament Latter Prophets' Myth* that he went overboard time-stamping his book. In at least 13 places within his work, Ezekiel tied his visions and events to specific days in history. The opening words of his book comprise the first example:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

The fourth month was Tammuz, which was the Babylonian name given to honor the Mesopotamian god of fertility. The Hebrews called it Nisan. The thirtieth year most likely was referring to Ezekiel, marking the age when one in the priestly line could begin his service. Knowing that we would need a more definite temporal anchor than his personal timeline, Ezekiel also told his readers that it was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. That was a date that every Israelite could place.

King Jehoiachin, also known in some Bible translations as Coniah, was the second-to-last monarch of Israel. Grandson to the last good

king, Josiah, and son of Jehoiakim, he came to power after his father rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Some translations have Jehoiachin at age eight and some at 18 when he ascended to the throne. Most likely the latter is true, because three months later, when Nebuchadnezzar exiled him to Babylon, he brought with him his mother and his wives, among others.

As we mentioned earlier, this was the same exile that took Ezekiel and 10,000 others to Babylon. The last king in the Davidic line, Jehoiachin's godless legacy is one that fits the history of the Jewish people. Of this failed monarch, Jeremiah wrote, "Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah'" (22:30).

Again, most Israelites would recognize the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's reign. However, that particular event doesn't show up on most of our wall calendars today. So, let's interpret up, placing the date as July 31, 593 BC. A real day on a real timeline. Not the timeline Ezekiel and the exiles used, since Pope Gregory XIII was still more than two millennia away from giving us the Gregorian calendar. But, still, an actual day in a format that we modern folks can understand.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Ezekiel had settled in Tel-abib, along the Chebar River. It was a good 100-mile journey north to visit the capital city of Babylon, which was about as close as an exile really wanted to get to the empire's temperamental monarch—just ask Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Ezekiel was an Israelite who lived amongst other Israelites, but we need to remember who those other exiles were. They were IINOs (Israelites in Name Only). They were worshippers of Bel and Marduk and Tammuz and all the other Mesopotamian deities. Sure, they threw the Lord a bone every now and then when they were feeling threatened, but it certainly didn't seem lately like He was obeying their orders like a good little God should. Case in point: They were in Tel-abib, Babylon, instead

of Jerusalem. This was still the beginning of the exile, and it was going to take a few decades before we came to the God-fearing refugees who were ready to make the trek back home.

Ezekiel said that at the time of his vision he was “among the captives by the River Chebar” (verse 1). This could simply be referring to his location in the town of Tel-abib, which was near the waterway. However, as the scenario plays out, it becomes evident that to fully take in the grandeur of the events, he needed some wide-open spaces. This would place him alongside the banks of the river when he saw the action take place.

Setting Expectations

What you are about to read has had theologians puzzled and confounded for two-and-a-half millennia. Lucky for you, I’m here to give you all the answers! Oy vavoy, if only! Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that the visions in these first chapters are arbitrary and open to a wide range of interpretations. Again, this is not an allegory. There are no lines between which we are compelled to read. I’m also not saying that what Ezekiel witnessed was just a huge, supernatural light show with no meaning. Every creature we meet and every wheel that speeds past has an explanation and a purpose. Unfortunately, those explanations and purposes are not always easy to come by.

One of the great blessings of the book of Daniel is that there always seemed to be someone standing near the prophet ready to explain what he was seeing. Daniel saw four great beasts coming out of the sea, one like a lion, one like a bear, one like a leopard, and one unique one with nasty teeth and a bunch of horns (Daniel 7). The prophet had no idea what he was witnessing, but as he looked around, there just happened to be a guy nearby. He asked the man, who turned out to be an angel, for some answers, and the angel replied, “Sure thing. The beasts you are seeing all represent kings.” Then he went on to explain the coming kingdoms and the reign of terror of the antichrist.

When Ezekiel looked around for some explanation of the grand display that lit up the sky in front of him, he, too, found someone willing to talk to him. But it wasn't one of God's servants; it was God Himself. And the Lord wasn't bothering with words of explanation. His purpose there was to give a commissioning. So, by the time this vignette ended, Ezekiel had received his marching orders, and we're left wondering what exactly we just beheld. But that's okay. God's primary purpose with Ezekiel's appointing ceremony was different than that of the vision He gave to Daniel. To Daniel, God wanted to give insight into the future. To Ezekiel, God wanted to give a glimpse of Himself.

This brings us back to the "otherness" of God that we touched on in the beginning of this chapter. As we witness the calling of this prophet, there is no doubt that the One who called him is wholly different than we are. He is not a supersized, multi-gifted, humanlike creature, similar to what you typically find in mythology. God is more than just a glorified man, as you find in Mormonism. And His intention, communication, and relationship set Him far beyond the impersonal god-force of Hinduism and Buddhism. In this throne-room theophany, we see a God who is giving us a glimpse behind the supernatural curtain. What we quickly realize, however, is that this is only a peek at the heavenly realm, and, even then, it has been significantly dumbed down so we have somewhat of a chance at grasping it.

Look What the Wind Blew In

If you have ever seen a massive tornado tearing through the central United States, you quite possibly have an idea of what Ezekiel saw coming his way. A huge cloud of Middle Eastern dust, swirling like a whirlwind, rushed toward him as he stood alongside the River Chebar. In the midst of the swirling sand there was a glow, a fire that burst out of the darkness. But that wasn't all that burst out:

Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward (Ezekiel 1:5-9).

Picture Ezekiel as he witnessed these creatures bursting out of the storm. His jaw must have dropped as the air rushed from his lungs. This was a sight unlike any he had ever seen before.

Now, imagine him later sitting down to try to write a description of his indescribable vision. It's no wonder the words *like* and *likeness* are employed 95 times in his book, 23 in this first chapter alone. The prophet attempted to use natural comparisons to communicate supernatural sights. But as we read through these descriptions, we have to remember that what Ezekiel witnessed was far more amazing and "other" than what his limited vocabulary could define.

As Ezekiel continued his narrative, he attempted to give a more detailed explanation of the four creatures who had appeared:

As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. And each one went straight forward; they went

wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went (Ezekiel 1:10-12).

A man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. If you've read my book *Revealing Revelation*, you're probably thinking, *Amir, haven't we met this quartet before?* Yes, you most certainly have. In the last book of the Bible, John gave a look into the Lord's throne room, only with a much wider view than our present prophet's. The disciple was ushered before a sea of glass, beyond which was the seat of God. Hovering around the throne "were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle" (Revelation 4:6-7). Just like in Ezekiel, we see a lion, a bovine, a man, and an eagle, all present and accounted for.

What were these beings? It'd be nice to give them a better name than "creature" so that we can picture something more heavenly and beautiful and less black-lagoonish. Good hermeneutics interprets scripture with scripture, so let's briefly jump forward in Ezekiel to when the glory is leaving the temple of God. In the preparation for this tragic event, the prophet saw that "the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar" (10:15). A brief language tip: *im* is the Hebrew signifier for the plural—that is, one cherub, two cherubim.

What Ezekiel, and later John, saw surrounding the throne of God were angels. However, they were very different than the cute, little, diapered Valentine cherubs who live on Hallmark cards. Aren't angels supposed to be beautiful and ethereal, rather than cow-faced or eagle-beaked? Sometimes they are.

Most infamous amongst the cherubim is Lucifer, of whom the Lord said through Ezekiel,

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you (Ezekiel 28:12, 14-15, 17).

While beauty is certainly in the eye of the beholder, it is difficult to picture this passage describing a creature that's a man-lion-cow-eagle mash-up.

The confusion surrounding these cherubim increases even more when we read about their circular companions:

Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them (Ezekiel 1:15-18).

Enormous eye-covered wheels! I don't know if I should be in awe or feeling a little queasy. This makes me think of Job after God had recited to him just a few of His divine works. He said to the Lord, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

Ezekiel saw, Job heard, and both were thunderstruck by the awesome majesty of the Creator God.

Often, it is easy for us to take God for granted. We can sometimes lose sight of His otherness and let Him slip from all-powerful deity to all-loving pal. To battle against that, we must ensure that we include worship in our daily times with the Lord. We must give Him His due as the Almighty who has created and sustains all things, and as the all-merciful giver of the only salvation and hope that has the power to extend beyond this life.

So, what exactly are these wheels in which are contained the spirits of the four cherubim (Ezekiel 1:20-21)? This is one more area where the veil that separates the natural from the supernatural is particularly thick. It would be nice to know how many types of cherubim there are and how they function. That goes for the seraphim also who are mentioned in Isaiah 6. Are there other types of angels out there as well? Just because the Bible mentions only two doesn't mean that there isn't a myriad of other spiritual beings that God has created for His service. Remember, the Bible includes only what God has determined we need to know, not all that there truly is to know.

And back to the cherubim: What's up with the different faces? I have tried many times to close my eyes and picture these beings, and every time, they seem to show up different. Some say that the four faces represent four aspects of Christ. Others that they are the four Gospel writers, which seems a little out of the chronological order of the Bible. Still others that they are four parts of God's creation, or four qualities of good leadership, or four divisions of the Babylonian zodiac. Again, this is one of those times when it would be very nice to have one of Daniel's guides standing nearby to say, "Oh, the faces? That's easy."

The Lord has told us all we need to know, but He certainly hasn't told us all there is. As Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know

just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). I look forward to the day when the veil is pulled back completely and I can finally know in full. In the meantime, for this book, I am content to avoid speculation, as strong as some of it may be, and keep our focus on the amazing scenario of the big picture.

The Throne of God

As wild and crazy as the cherubim looked with their wheels, they were just the opening act. What Ezekiel was now about to witness is the very vision that all of us look forward to seeing one day in person. Above the heads of the angelic beings was an open space. The NKJV Bible calls it a “firmament,” the ESV an “expanse,” and the NIV a “vault.” The Hebrew word itself, רָקִיעַ (*raqia*), means “to beat out, to spread out,” and was used in Genesis 1:6 of the divider God created to separate the waters below from the waters above. Thus, it is something substantial and tangible upon which the seat of God could be set.

Above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

I have to admit that, as a writer, I feel for Ezekiel. Look at his words—“...the likeness...in appearance like...a likeness with the

appearance...as it were...with the appearance...” There were no words adequate to describe the beautiful, majestic otherness of what the prophet was viewing. He knew that he was falling far short of his literary goal, but I’ve got to give him huge props for doing his best. At least we can get a tiny taste of the wonder that this man witnessed.

When you read Daniel’s description of his encounter with the Ancient of Days, there is little doubt that you are in the same throne room as Ezekiel. Each uses different precious stones to try to depict the beauty of the colors surrounding the One on the throne. However, both describe the blazing nature of the throne, with Daniel calling it a “fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire” (Daniel 7:9-10). Combining the two descriptions, one gets the sense of a hallowed God of purity, prepared to judge all that is sinful and unholy. The rainbow Ezekiel spoke of surrounding the throne was later echoed by the apostle John’s description of God’s inner sanctum, when he wrote, “And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald” (Revelation 4:3).

After witnessing all the overwhelming and indescribable sights, Ezekiel presented a perfectly descriptive, humble conclusion. “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking” (Ezekiel 1:28-29). The prophet didn’t stand around analyzing cherub faces or trying to figure out where all the eyes on the wheels were looking. He didn’t get bogged down trying to discern hidden meanings or ancient allusions. When confronted with the absolute otherness of the glory of God, Ezekiel responded the only way possible. He fell on his face.

The Call

There is likely no better place to hear the voice of God than when you are laid out prostrate before Him. No agendas. No distractions. No

pride. It is just you, face down, ready to receive the word of the Lord. What would be wonderful to hear when you are in that vulnerable, ready-to-be-used position is God saying, “I am commissioning you to an easy ministry of great success. Through your words people will come to Me, and your service will lead to the revival of many amongst the masses.” That, unfortunately, was not what Ezekiel heard when a voice spoke to him from the manifestation of God’s glory. He was commanded to get on his feet, a process that was aided by the Holy Spirit entering the prophet. Once Ezekiel was upright, God spoke.

Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD.” As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them (2:3-5).

The tone we get from God’s words is, “You’re going to talk to them until you’re blue in the face, but they’re not going to listen to you. They are rebellious children who come from a long line of rebellious children.” It’s easy to infer from this passage and the rest of chapters 2 and 3 that Ezekiel’s mission is doomed to failure. But is it really?

Look again at Ezekiel’s calling. He is told to speak to the children of Israel, but nowhere is he told to convert them. Changing minds and lives is beyond Ezekiel’s pay grade. The prophet’s goal is found in the last line of verse 5—“...yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.” That would be the measure of Ezekiel’s success. His responsibility was to be faithful and speak the words of the Lord, while leaving the results up to God.

Some may look at my last sentence and see it as a cop-out, but

that is far from the truth. It simply means that Ezekiel can focus on what his part of the process is. It's like being a salesman without having to worry about closing the deal. People don't like what you have to say? That's okay. Step on a few toes and turn some people off? So be it. Ezekiel was expected to give his whole life to his calling, but his job was to tell it like it was without having to worry about spinning his message or making it palatable to the masses. The car salesman is everybody's friend, or at least he tries to be. Nobody likes the prophet, especially not those who are enjoying their rebellion.

You, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you (verses 6-8).

These are not a people who are ready to hear what God wants to say to them. In Ezekiel's book, the word "rebellious" is used 17 times, almost always to describe Israel. Four of these occurrences are in these three verses alone. But God told his prophet to not be afraid of the people. Ezekiel would be speaking God's words. His job was to talk, and the Lord would take care of the rest. But from where would the prophet receive his divine message?

A Tasty Scroll

Let's reorient ourselves in the scene. Ezekiel was down by the Chebar River. Suddenly, a huge whirlwind began to roll toward him, and out of the maelstrom came four amazingly other-looking

cherubim along with their four eye-filled wheels. Then, above the cherubim, a throne appeared with an enormous figure on it. Ezekiel knew right away that this was a manifestation of the glory of the Lord. The soon-to-be prophet dropped to the ground, but was hefted back up to his feet by an infusion of the Holy Spirit. Then the figure on the throne told Ezekiel that He was sending him to prophesy to his own people, who would likely not listen to him because of their rebelliousness.

Ezekiel had received a vision of the Lord and his calling from the Lord. Now he was about to receive into himself the Lord's message.

Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 2:9–3:1).

The prophet was quick to obey, taking the scroll and ingesting it. Despite the words on the scroll being extremely sour, the flavor was "like honey in sweetness" (3:3). It's possible that this is because God's justice seems harsh to the unrighteous, but is pure and proper to the righteous.

This is one of three biblical examples of God's Word being eaten by His spokesmen. In Revelation, John is told by a heavenly voice to eat a little book held by a massive angel.

I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." Then I took the little book out of the

angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings" (Revelation 10:9-11).

The angel's words indicated that it was a book of judgment against the unrighteous still alive at that point in the tribulation. Unlike Ezekiel's scroll, John's book did not sit well with his insides.

There was one more incident of a prophet eating the words of God, and it happened not too many years before Ezekiel's consumption of a scroll. Jeremiah had also been tasked to fruitlessly preach to the rebellious people of Israel. Unfortunately for him, he had to do so from Jerusalem, with its idolatrous leadership and culture, and the eventual deprivation and destruction brought about by the Babylonian siege and conquest. At one moment, when Jeremiah was bemoaning the weight of the task God had given to him, he said, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). We don't know what words God had written on what was likely another scroll, but when Jeremiah swallowed it, they gave him what he needed to keep pushing through with the enormous task given to him.

This eating of the Word of God is a poignant activity. It emphasizes to the prophets that the message they were carrying to the masses was from Him. It was a tactile experience to point out what they already knew mentally. For each of them, when the pushback may have been at its greatest, they had that scroll-swallowing moment to remind themselves that these difficult words they were speaking were from God and were 100 percent accurate.

After Ezekiel ate the scroll, God affirmed the greatness and importance of the task ahead of him. The Lord also reminded His new prophet that He had equipped him with everything needed to accomplish

his assignment, even emphasizing that as hard as the Israelites' heads were, God had made Ezekiel's head even harder.

When the Lord finished speaking, another powerful voice cried out, "Blessed is the glory of the LORD from His place!" (3:12). As the praise was called out, Ezekiel was carried away by the Holy Spirit. The rustling of the cherubs' wings, the whirring of the wheels, and a deafening noise of some sort accompanied his departure. As the Spirit carried him, Ezekiel was greatly disturbed, which is completely understandable. What he had just witnessed would shake up anyone. Add to that the life-altering commission he had received to be a prophet—a calling that rarely ended well for the callee.

Was this transportation back to the River Chebar a physical transfer, like Philip later experienced with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39)? Or was this merely a vision, during which Ezekiel had never physically moved from his location? We can't know for sure, but because the passage never indicates Ezekiel's physical departure from the riverside, I would lean toward him having remained there in a visionary state.

Once Ezekiel returned to his fellow exiles, he sat greatly distressed for seven days. It was gracious of God to give him that time to recover, because when that week was over, it was time to hit the ground running.