

Ezekiel Introduction and Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. What does one do when the whole world around them is falling apart?
 - a) The first thing one should do is turn to God and get the eternal perspective.
 - b) Ezekiel was written during a time the Jewish people were in "exile" in Babylon. I'll explain that more in a minute. For now, know that they were "kicked out" of the Land of Israel and resettled 700 miles away.
 - c) Why would God punish His "chosen people" and why punish the innocent with the guilty among that nation? In other words, why make the innocent suffer?
 - d) Further, how does this relate to us? There are times when we go through economic or physical peril in some form. The underlying message of Ezekiel is that God is "still there" during such times. He still wants the best for our lives and He is still watching over us!
2. At the time I was writing this message, the United States along with most of the world is on the verge of a recession. Such things occur every so often and it is never fun to go through when it happens. There may be individuals reading this who are suffering financially or physically for some reason. That reason usually has nothing to do with what they did personally. With all of that said, Ezekiel is a good book to study in such times.
 - a) The main thing to get out of the book is not a history lesson on Israel, but a guide book as to how to live through tough times and understanding God's eternal purpose.
 - b) The book explains why Israel is being punished as a nation (disobedience) and in the latter chapters God explains His plans to ultimately restore the nation. We'll discuss through the book what that means for us as Christians and what is God's "game plan" for our lives as well as the lives of the Jewish people.
 - c) One has to remember that "salvation" is always an individual thing. That means other people cannot be saved just because we are saved, and vice-versa. At the same time, God also has a concept of "group judgment". That means that God can and does judge our behavior based on what "group" we belong to: That means that God can judge our individual church, our denomination, our city and our country. If our group is supposed to be a good witness for Christ, and we are failing to be such a witness, our "group" can be punished by God. We can suffer as members of that group even though we may or may not be personally responsible for the actions.
 - d) Getting back to tough economic times, does this mean that God "ordains" bad times? We are not privileged to answer that question. We do know that God knows all things and therefore He knows everything that is going to happen. God is well aware of whatever hardships we are going through and "God is in charge" before it happened, while it is happening and after it happens. If one can think about that eternal perspective, it can help one get through whatever is the problem of the moment.
 - i) Does thinking about God make the problems go away? Usually no. God never promises us life will be easy or there will not be problems. God promises to be with us through whatever we are going through. God also promises us ultimate victory over this life. Are we going to have problems during this lifetime? Of course. They don't instantly go away just because we want them to! Our dependence is on God to comfort us through such trials and trust Him to lead us through and eventually out of such trials.
3. This leads us back to Ezekiel. The book was written by a Jewish priest living in exile in Babylon.
 - a) The book was originally written to the Jews living in exile.
 - b) The application is to believers about the "eternal perspective" during difficult times.
 - c) The book quotes God extensively. God explains to Ezekiel why the Jews are being punished, and predicts the Jews eventual restoration as a nation.

4. I always like to give the "who, what, when and whys" in the first lesson of every book:
- a) The "who" is Ezekiel. He was a young priest in training in Jerusalem when he was taken captive to Babylon. The nation of Israel was taken captive in "three phases". The first group of captives included Daniel. Some years later, there was more rebellion by Israel against Babylon and the bible says another 10,000 were taken captive in the second phase, including Ezekiel. (See 2nd Kings 24:14). Israel continued to rebel. The king of Babylon finally had enough of Israel and completely wiped out the country including tearing down the temple. (2nd Kings 25: 8-21).
 - b) The "what and where" is God's message to the nation of Israel during this time of rebellion. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel and Jeremiah. Daniel was taken captive earlier and worked his life in the king's palace. Daniel's messages were from the "king's perspective" while Ezekiel was "on the streets" and was more geared for the "everyday Israelite". Jeremiah was a little older. He wrote mostly from Israel and described the downfall of the nation "from Israel". Ezekiel was taken captive before Jeremiah and was preaching to the Jewish people from Babylon.
 - c) It is important to remember that Israel was divided into two nations. After King Solomon (a few hundred years prior), Israel split into a northern kingdom (called Israel) and a southern kingdom (called Judah). Roughly a hundred years prior to the Babylonian captivity, the northern kingdom of Israel was captured by the Assyrian Empire. The Jews living in the northern kingdom were scattered all over the Assyrian empire.
 - i) The Babylonians not only conquered the southern kingdom of "Judah", but also conquered the Assyrians. The Israelites who were captured a hundred years earlier, are now living (for the most part) in the Babylonian empire. The three "deportations" of Israel are actually those of the southern kingdom of "Judah".
 - d) This leads us back to Ezekiel himself. A Jewish priest started his training at the age of 20. (See 1st Chronicles 23:24). One "officially" becomes a priest when one was thirty. (See Numbers Chapter 4). At the age of twenty five, Ezekiel was taken captive as part of the "second wave". He was then taken 700 miles away to what-is-today Iraq.
 - i) Ezekiel probably thought at this point that his training was wasted. He was a 25 year old man taken away from Jerusalem and the temple to Babylon. (Ezekiel 1:2). He probably doubted God could ever use him in any sort of capacity, let alone be a prophet for God being relocated in a Jewish "settlement camp" in Babylon.
 - ii) This leads to the "when" question. As best we can tell, Ezekiel was taken captive in the year (598/597 BC) and began his ministry five years later.
 - e) Next, a quick word on the "how" issue: How does God speak to Ezekiel?
 - i) One thing one will gather from studying this book is God works in "visions".
 - ii) Ezekiel is full of strange visions and visual illustrations.
 - a) God does this, as our brains remember visual pictures much better than it remembers facts and figures.
 - b) Next, remember that Ezekiel was trained as a priest. Many of the visions make much more sense if we give some "priestly training" issues as we describe some of the visions. Those visions start in Chapter 1, so we'll get into some of those in this lesson.
 - iii) How do we know these visions are from God and not due to eating too much pizza before Ezekiel went to bed? ☺
 - a) The answer is Ezekiel is full of predictions. Some of them came true during Ezekiel's lifetime. Some of them have come true in the time frame between Ezekiel and "now". Some are still future to us.
 - b) The way God validates his prophets is He gives them predictions. Some of which come true in a short time span to validate the speaker as a prophet.

- f) Finally, let's discuss the "why" question: God wanted His chosen people to understand that despite the captivity, and despite their sins, they were still the chosen people.
 - i) God had Jeremiah preaching to those still living in the Southern kingdom of Judah during the final days when Israel was still a nation.
 - ii) God had Daniel in the "courts" of the King of Babylon to give the "kingly" perspective of what is happening in leadership.
 - iii) God needed someone to speak to those "everyday" Israelites already taken captive to Babylon and what is the future for them and for their nation.
 - iv) The message of Ezekiel is one of hope, especially when one is going through a difficult time in one's life.
- 5. With all of that said, I can now discuss Chapters 1 and 2.
 - a) My plan for this book is to work at a pace of several chapters per lesson. It's a long book with 48 chapters, so I want to pick up the pace a little.
 - b) Since I'm on page three and just now finished the introduction, "two chapters" is all we can handle in the first lesson.
 - c) With that said, my title for this lesson is "Understanding God's purpose for Ezekiel". This is important as it lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. It also teaches how God communicates with people. While you and won't get all of the visions that Ezekiel received, we are still called to preach about God's plan for redemption to those around us as well as work to encourage others in their faith in God.
 - i) What Ezekiel learns in the early chapters is that "God still exists" and "God is still working in our lives today". That message is just as timely today as it was then.
 - ii) With all of that said, it's probably best to start the text and we'll come back to this theme through the lesson and at the conclusion of this lesson.
- 6. Chapter 1, Verse 1: In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
 - a) Ezekiel gives the exact date these visions begin. Scholars debate about what Ezekiel meant by the "30th year". It does not appear to tie to any point in the reign of the kings of Israel or the Babylon king. What it most likely refers to is Ezekiel's age.
 - i) That would make the most sense, in that Ezekiel was a priest. A Jewish priest does not begin service until one is 30 years old. If our timing is right, this also means that Ezekiel was in Babylon 5 years and some days when this vision began.
 - b) The verse also states where Ezekiel was at the time of this vision: He was "among the exiles by the Kebar River". This is a minor river (more like a canal) in what is today: Iraq. The point is Ezekiel was in Babylon and not in Jerusalem when this vision occurred.
 - c) Again, the logical question is, "How did Ezekiel know this was a vision of God, and not the result of eating bad food and having nightmares?" The answer came through history in that a lot of what Ezekiel predicts has already come true.
- 7. Verse 2: On the fifth of the month--it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin--³ the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.
 - a) I stated earlier that Ezekiel was in exile for five years when he saw this vision. The proof of that statement is Verse 2.
 - b) Some suspect the "thirty year" reference has something to do with the reign of King Jehoiachin, but he was not on the throne for 30 years when this vision occurred.
 - c) Verse 3 also mentions that Ezekiel was the "son of Buzi". While the meaning of the name is insignificant for you and me, it was proof to the Israelites of that time that Ezekiel was of a priestly line and was trained to be a priest like his father.
 - d) The last part of Verse 3 and the last part of Verse 1 both indicate this is a vision of God. The actual vision itself begins in Verse 4, and covers the remainder of the chapter.

8. Verse 4: I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north--an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,⁵ and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man,⁶ but each of them had four faces and four wings.
- a) Let's start with a warning: From Verse 4 to the end of the chapter, "things get weird". Getting back to my joke about "nightmares after eating late night pizza", ☺ one would think this after reading Chapter 1. He sees a strange vision of a cloud, lightening, brilliant light and four creatures coming out of this "cloud thing".
 - b) Before I break down this vision "piece by piece", let's try to understand why God choose this strange method of communicating with Ezekiel:
 - i) Part of it was to "scare" Ezekiel into understanding this is "God speaking" as opposed to a man's voice just giving Ezekiel instructions.
 - ii) Part of it was so that Ezekiel could understand that "God is everywhere" and not just in Jerusalem. It is God reminding Ezekiel that He is still in charge and He is still "working" in the world despite all the bad things that are happening.
 - iii) Along the same line of thinking, it is the idea that God is "moving" for the benefit of those who believe in Him, despite all the problems back "home" in Israel.
 - iv) Finally, God is using figurative language that a "trained priest" could relate to. We will develop that idea more as we move along.
 - c) The first thing Ezekiel sees is a "windstorm coming out of the north".
 - i) The idea of a windstorm is something big and "moving". It is a force of nature that cannot be controlled. Whenever the direction of "north" is mentioned in the bible, it is often associated with judgment. There appears to be a theme through the bible that whenever judgment comes, it comes down "from the north".
 - a) See Jeremiah 13:20 as an example of such!
 - d) The next statement is the windstorm has an "immense cloud" with flashing lightening and brilliant light.
 - i) Whenever there is a appearance of God in the Old Testament, He is usually described as coming "within clouds". That is because we cannot fully comprehend God as if we are seeing in a foggy cloud. When Moses went up on the mountain, there were descriptions of clouds covering the mountain. (See Exodus 24:15). When God the Father spoke to Jesus verbally saying (This is my son in whom I am well pleased), such references are sometimes coupled with a reference to clouds in the sky. (E.g., Matthew 17:5).
 - ii) The idea of lightening and "brilliant light" is for us to understand that this is no "normal" cloud and it represents the idea of God "moving" in our lives.
 - e) The last sentence of Verse 4 says, "The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,⁵ and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures."
 - i) Ezekiel says there was "four living creatures" in the center of the fire. Before we discuss those four creatures, notice that Ezekiel says there was a "fire" in the middle of this cloudy vision. He just states the fire's presence as a matter of fact.
 - ii) "Fire" in the bible is associated with judgment. A "priest" would get that. (See Isaiah 66:16 and Jeremiah 21:12). The picture being painting for us is the idea that God is currently "moving" in the world and there is a sense of judgment coming. That judgment is on Israel for their disbelief (that's why they were taken captive to Babylon) and we'll read later in the book of judgment on other nations as well.
 - a) There is a biblical concept of "judgment begins in the house of God". The idea is God first focuses on the guilt of those who should know better and then later discusses the judgment of other nations that didn't know better. We'll develop this theme a lot more in later chapters. For right now, understand that this vision has an underlying tone of "judgment".

- f) Onto the "four living creatures" in these verses. The last sentence says, "In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. "
 - i) Let's start by saying these creatures are not human. Since they are not "God" and not "human", they must be some sort of angelic creature. The description of these creatures covers the rest Chapter 1. The description is too "strange" to ever be human, so again, the logical conclusion is that they are some sort of angelic being.
 - ii) The end of Verse 5 says that "their form was that of a man", but each of them had four faces and four wings.
 - a) Therefore, these creatures stood upright like humans, but their resemblance to humans ended at that point.
 - b) Each had four faces and four wings. We'll discuss their physical features in the next few verses.
- 9. Verse 7: Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, ⁹ and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.
 - a) We are continuing to describe these strange "creatures" that Ezekiel saw.
 - b) Verse 7 said they have "straight legs" assume they can stand up straight,
 - c) Next, Verse 7 says "their feet were like those of a calf". We're not positive what that means, other than the fact they don't have "normal" human feet. Some suggest that "calves" are domesticated animals that are used for service. It may symbolize the idea that these "creatures" serve God. It is a "priestly" way of looking at the calves' feet and somehow understanding they represent servant hood.
 - d) Finally, verse 7 says these creatures "gleamed like burnished bronze". This is similar to the "fire" reference a few verses back. The idea of "burning bronze" represents judgment. In order to work with bronze, one has to heat it to high temperature to mold it. In the bible, judgment is occasionally compared to burning metal for that reason.
 - e) Verse 8 (warning, this doesn't get any less strange!) the four creatures had wings on their four sides and had man-like hands under their wings. All four of these creatures had faces and wings.
 - i) So why were these creatures "four sided"? The most likely answer is to say they can go anywhere at anytime. The idea is they could go north, south, east and west as they were "four-sided".
 - ii) The idea is also that they had "wings" is so they could fly as well.
 - iii) Why did they have human-like hands? Don't know. Maybe it serves some sort of functional purpose, but we don't know. Maybe it is so the four creatures could "join hands" as they work together as a unit! ☺
 - f) Verse 9 says their wings "touches one another" and as each one went straight ahead, they did not turn as they moved.
 - i) The idea of "touching one another" means they worked in unison.
 - ii) If each creature was "four sided", then they could go in any direction and still not "turn" as they move. Imagine a car that could parallel park by itself without turning the steering wheel. That's sort of the idea of "not turning" as the four creatures moved.
 - g) Time to stop and catch our breath for a moment: Let's face it, if God wanted to communicate His "presence" to Ezekiel, God could have chosen lots of different methods to show Ezekiel that He (God) was present with Ezekiel at that moment in time.
 - i) God choose to give Ezekiel this strange vision of four creatures. Each had four faces, wings, and other strange features. They worked in "unison", but at the same time, each was distinct. So why have four of these creatures? Let's face it one of them would be enough to scare anyone. ☺ Why this vision in the first place?

- ii) The idea of "four" creatures are a repetition of "four". I believe God wanted Ezekiel to catch that fact. Just as each creature was "four-faced", so there were four of these creatures. The idea is God is "moving" in the world and God is "moving" in all four directions (north, east, west and south) at the same time.
 - iii) What God wanted Ezekiel to figure out is that God is "moving" at this time!
 - iv) Do I believe these creatures are literal? Yes. Similar creatures were described by Isaiah (Chapter 6) and by John in the Book of Revelation (Chapter 4). Both Isaiah and John had some variations in the descriptions. The repetition of this vision leads me to believe in the literalness of these creatures.
 - v) OK, back to the strangeness. ☺
10. Verse 10: Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Such were their faces.
- a) Ezekiel mentioned earlier that each creature had four faces. Now in Verse 10, Ezekiel describes each of the four faces. One face was that of a man, one was that of a lion, one was that of an ox and the fourth was that of an eagle. Now I'm sure Ezekiel ate some bad pizza before going to bed. ☺
 - b) It's time to think like an "Old Testament Priest" in order to understand the four faces and what they mean:
 - i) The "man" represents humanity. It is the idea that God desires that humans obey God and follow Him. Of all the creatures that exist, including angels, God picked "humans" as the ones God wishes to redeem. In that sense these angelic creatures bear some resemblance to humans and have one human face, and God desires to work in the life of human beings.
 - ii) The "lion" has always been associated as the king of the beasts. It represents leadership in the animal kingdom. A promise given in Genesis is that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah and that tribe is associated with a lion's head to represent leadership. (See Genesis 49:9).
 - iii) The "ox" is the greatest (biggest) of all the domesticated animals. It represents servant hood. Just as oxen serve human needs as they are domesticated, these angelic creatures "serve" humans in that they show us the way to God.
 - iv) The "eagle" is the greatest of all the creatures flying in the sky. The idea is we "look up toward the heavens" to see God. The "greatest in the sky" is the idea of looking up toward God.
 - v) Let me now take this analogy a step further to consider:
 - a) Some associate the Gospel of Luke with a "man's head". More than the other three Gospels, Luke's Gospel focused on how Jesus "felt". Luke emphasizes Jesus humanity more than the other three Gospel writers.
 - b) Some associate the Gospel of Matthew with the "lion's head". This is because Matthew's Gospel, more than the other three, focus on Jesus as the promised Messiah to Israel. He is the promised "lion" leader.
 - c) Some associate the Gospel of Mark with the "ox". Mark's gospel emphasizes Jesus as a "servant" of mankind. It is the most "action-oriented" Gospel of the four. It emphasized what Jesus "did".
 - d) Finally, some associate the Gospel of John with the "eagle". John focuses on Jesus as God more than the other three. Just as one looks up in the sky to focus toward God, so the "eagle" is the greatest creature up in the sky.
 - e) So am I saying these four creatures are Jesus? No. I'm just saying these four creatures bear the symbolism of "Jesus". It would be like a soldier wearing the flag of his country on his or her uniform.

11. Verse 11 (cont.): Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body.
- a) The rest of Verse 11 focuses on the creatures' wings. Each of the four creatures had four wings. Two of them were spread out "upward" and the other two covered their bodies.
 - b) So why does it mention that two wings were spread "upward". I would suggest the idea is that their focus is on God in that these four creatures serve God.
 - c) So why do the other two wings cover their body? Don't know. It may be symbolically to "hide" what they were doing from those who don't want to know God is working. It may be as simple as God created these creatures this way and that God wanted them to have two wings to cover their body. Maybe their wings kept them warm. ☺
12. Verse 12: Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.
- a) Verse 12 hints of the idea that the Holy Spirit controlled where these "four" went.
 - b) The idea is that God is working in the lives of people, not these four creatures "independently" of what God desires for our lives!
 - c) While we don't fully understand the purpose of these four creatures, we do know that God is "moving" in the lives of people and God is "judging" people. It is also the idea that one cannot run from the presence of God as these four creatures can move anywhere.
 - d) All of this is leading up to a point where God "introduces" Himself to Ezekiel. I'm pretty positive Ezekiel must have been scared seeing this vision, all prior to God speaking to Him. The idea is to teach Ezekiel and us that God is "moving" the world and God is "judging" the world. At the same time God is in charge and His "spirit" is in control of angelic creatures who are working behind the scenes as the world moves!
13. Verse 13: The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. ¹⁴ The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.
- a) In these verses, we get back to the image of fire and lightening. The idea is that of "judgment" coming from these creatures. Remember that Ezekiel was a priest, and a priest would know that fire is associated with God's judgment.
 - b) In Verse 14, the idea is the creatures moved like "flashes of lightning". I suspect that means that they were fast and could move as instantaneously as lightening. The idea for you and me is that we cannot outrun these creatures. The symbolic idea is that God is "moving" around the world to serve His purpose through people!
14. Verse 15: As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. ¹⁶ This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. ¹⁷ As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went.
- a) As you can tell, this is not getting any easier! ☺
 - b) When we think of "wheels", we think of the methods by which, cars, trucks and bicycles get from point A to point B. In Verse 14, the "wheel" is describing the "efficiency" by which these creatures can move quickly from one point to another point.
 - c) What Ezekiel is trying to get across is that these four creatures were "fast" and can quickly go from one place to another.
 - d) The wheels sparkled like "chrysolite". That is a strange term for us, but the idea would be like shiny metal (shiny silver and shiny gold). The idea is the wheels moved easily and "sparkled" as they moved so well.
 - e) These creatures could go in any direction and the wheels didn't have to turn. Ezekiel is doing his best in ancient terminology to describe how easily these creatures could move!

15. Verse 18: Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.
 - a) If this isn't strange enough, Verse 18 is worse: It states that the rims of the wheels were "high and awesome".
 - b) Verse 18 also states the rims were "full of eyes". Backing up a little, it's hard enough to picture a creature with four faces and four wings. It's hard enough to describe wheels and "wheels within wheels" that don't turn as these creatures moved. Even if we can visually picture all of that so far, now we have the fact the rims of the wheels were full of eyes.
 - c) Before you throw away this lesson in disgust, know that this is about as bad as gets. The rest of Ezekiel also has a lot of visions, but none nearly as tough as Chapter 1 in terms of stretching our imagination in order to visualize it.
 - i) Remember that God works in "word pictures". As strange as this is, we as humans remember word pictures better than facts and figures. Strange visual pictures are even easier to remember. I'll say this about Chapter 1: Once you study these creatures, you'll never forget about them.
 - d) OK, back to the eyes: The idea is probably that these creatures had the ability to "see all" in that they study human beings and their behavior and are "qualified" to carry out God's judgment, whatever that should be.
 - e) In summary, whatever these creatures are, I don't want to mess with them. They can move anywhere and move quickly and can see all. Further, they are controlled by the Spirit of God to do God's will at any moment.
 - f) In the meantime, we still have nine more verses about these creatures!
16. Verse 19: When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. ²⁰ Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. ²¹ When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.
 - a) The main idea to get out of these verses is that just because these creatures have wheels, does not mean the creatures were limited to ground-only movement. Think of an airplane: It has the ability to move on the ground, but it can also fly in the area.
 - b) A related idea is just because the creatures have wheels, does not mean they are always moving. They had the ability to be "still" at times as well.
 - c) The other idea was that the "Spirit" controlled these creatures' wheels and all! The idea of Verse 21 is that the "Spirit" was in the wheels, in that the Spirit of God was the one that makes the decisions where these creatures go. These creatures are not "limited" by the fact they have wheels. They are not "stuck" on the ground because they have wheels.
 - d) Again, the purpose of these creatures is only implied in this chapter: They are somehow involved in God's judgment of people. Most of the chapter focuses on what these creatures looked like, as opposed to their purpose for existence. It is as if God wants us to comprehend that despite the strange appearance of these creatures, they are literal and they have tremendous power given by God to be "used" by Him.
17. Verse 22: Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. ²³ Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. ²⁴ When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.
 - a) The description of these creatures continues: Verse 22 says that above their heads was an "expanse". The idea is that above their head was not just air or space. Somehow, the "air" right above them sparkled like ice. Again, we don't know the purpose of this statement, but based on some other references, it may be something to do with "judgment". (See Exodus 24:10 and its reference to "clear sky" and Revelation 4:6 and "clear as crystal".)

- b) Verse 23 repeats the point made earlier that each had two "spread out" wings and each had two wings that cover the body. Why is this point repeated from Verse 11? I suspect because Verses 22-24 describe their movement. Ezekiel was emphasizing the fact that despite the fact they moved around, two wings still were spread out and two were still covering their bodies. Verse 24 also states that when they stood still, they lowered the two wings that were spread out. Apparently those two wings helped them "move".
 - c) Verse 24 also describes the sound of the creatures when they moved. The sound was loud like (1) the roar of rushing waters, (2) like the voice of the Almighty, and (3) like the tumult of an army". Ezekiel's simple point is that these four were not quiet as they moved, but it made a lot a noise.
 - i) If they are real and they make a lot of noise, how come nobody else can see them either in Ezekiel's time or our time? The same reason we can't see angels. God allows what we can or cannot see of the heavenly world at any time. Once one is exposed to the "heavenly realm", the idea is not that all is quiet. There are sounds that one can hear, including the loud sounds of these creatures moving!
 - d) OK, John, these four bizarre creatures exist and they make noise as they move. Why should I care about any of this stuff, other than the fact they exist? I believe the "why" question is answered in Chapter 2. The idea is that God is "moving" in ways we cannot always comprehend in the world. Remember Ezekiel was 700 miles away from "home" as an exiled priest. God is demonstrating to Ezekiel and us that God is always there, He is always "working" in our lives despite our location and circumstances. We cannot run from the presence of God. We're way to slow to escape His presence, as dramatically described by these angelic creatures here in Chapter 1.
 - i) The other "reason" becomes clearer in the next few verses.
18. Verse 25: Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. ²⁶ Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.
- a) So what is the "other" purpose of these creatures? They lead us to the presence of God. In these verses, we have God speaking. These four "creatures" remind us that we can't casually "mess" with God. He has forces that stand guard between Him and us and we just can't casually approach God without dealing with the "sin" issue first.
 - b) I say all of this because Verse 25 describes a voice that comes "over" the expanse that is above the heads of these four angelic creatures. Does this mean God only speaks through or "above" these four creatures? No. The purpose of this angelic vision is to show Ezekiel that he is in the "Presence of God" and not to mess with that presence!
 - c) In Verse 25, we have a "throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man".
 - i) I suspect that this is an Old Testament "appearance" of Jesus in that it was a "figure of a man". Some argue that this voice speaking is God the Father, but I'll argue it is God the Son in a "pre-incarnate" appearance of His existence.
 - ii) The "throne" was made of (looked like) sapphire. That stone is usually "blue" in color. I'm not sure what it means, other than the "Glory of God" and His throne.
 - d) Above the "throne" was the figure like that of a man. Verse 27 says, "(From) his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.
 - i) Again we are back to the "fire" image. One can read of similar images in Revelation Chapter 4. In other words, it speaks of God's judgment.

- e) The description of this man continues in Verse 28, "Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him."
 - i) To a "Jewish Priest", a rainbow speaks of God's promise never to destroy the world again with a flood. (See Genesis 9:11). The idea here is that God is "judging", but the judgment is fair. While God will not destroy the whole earth again until first the saved are redeemed, this is a reminder a judgment is to come!
 - ii) The verse also speaks of "radiance around him". The idea of the rainbow is to show the radiance around this man! Again, the key idea is that this "man of judgment" is a picture of the throne of God. God in His perfection is judging the sin of mankind.
 - iii) Revelation Chapter 4, Verse 3 also speaks of a rainbow around the throne.
 - f) Verse 28 says, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD".
 - i) How did Ezekiel know what the "glory of the Lord" looked like? He didn't. He just saw this vision of angelic creatures and the throne of God and "figured it out".
 - g) The final sentence says, "When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking." In other words, nothing in this vision frightened Ezekiel other than the fact he now understood he was standing face to face in the presence of God.
 - h) Before I move on to Chapter 2, let me comfort you at this time and say: "If you can handle Chapter 1 of Ezekiel, you can handle the rest of the book!" It's not all like this chapter! ☺
19. Chapter 2, Verse 1: He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." ² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.
- a) Now we have the "voice" of the man over the throne speaking to Ezekiel. Remember at the end of Chapter 1, Ezekiel fell on his face before the speaking man.
 - b) At that point "The Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet".
 - i) One thing to understand is that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit could come and go from one person to another. David prayed, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:11, NIV).
 - ii) In the New Testament, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit dwells within all believers. (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13 and 16:15).
 - iii) Back to Ezekiel, he fell faint at the side of God. The Holy Spirit "prepared" Ezekiel so that he could hear God speak to him! The Spirit literally put Ezekiel on his feet.
20. Verse 3: He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day.
- a) It is only "now" in Verse 3 of Chapter 2, that we find out why Ezekiel gets this vision. So far, we only have a description of what Ezekiel sees and has seen.
 - b) Now beginning in Verse 3, we find out why this vision was given to Ezekiel. It is at this point that Ezekiel is told of his missionary "assignment" for the rest of his life.
 - c) Remember that Ezekiel was living in Babylon, 700 miles from Jerusalem. Living with Ezekiel is at least 10,000 other Israelites taken captive in the 2nd "wave" of captivity. There will soon be a third wave where the rest of the nation will be taken captive. What Ezekiel didn't know yet, is that he will speak to the Israelites, not by going home, but by God "brining" the Israelite people to Babylon so Ezekiel could preach to them!
 - d) God calls Ezekiel "Son of man". This title is used often in this book. The idea is that Ezekiel is a "Son of Adam" and God picked a man to preach His message of repentance to the nation of Israel.
 - i) One title Jesus used of Himself is "Son of Man". The idea is that Jesus came in the form of a man was "was a man". Another title of Jesus is "Son of God" which shows his deity. My point is that Jesus is not claiming to be equal with Ezekiel. The point is when God calls Ezekiel "son of man", the point is that Ezekiel is "a" son of Adam being sent on a mission, while Jesus is "the" Son of Man in that he was the one man capable of paying the price for our sins!

- e) Next, we find who Ezekiel is being sent to preach to, "I am sending you to the Israelites".
 - i) In summary, Ezekiel is being told that he will be a preacher to the Israelites. At this point in Ezekiel's life, I doubt he suspected that, given his exile.
 - ii) Further, Ezekiel was trained as a "priest", not a preacher of repentance!
 - iii) The other point of this verse is that the nation of Israel is in rebellion against God.
- 21. Verse 4: The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen--for they are a rebellious house--they will know that a prophet has been among them.
 - a) God is warning Ezekiel that even though he is being called to be a prophet, the nation of Israel as a whole, will not accept Ezekiel's message.
 - b) The point is the nation of Israel will eventually realize Ezekiel was called to be a prophet of God whether they accept the message or not.
 - c) Another point is that Ezekiel is not rewarded based on how many people he "saves". God called Ezekiel (and God calls us) to be His witnesses. That means it is up to the Holy Spirit to save people, not us. We don't get a notch in our bible for every person we lead to Christ. Our job is to be effective witnesses for Christ, but it is the Holy Spirit's job to actually convert people.
- 22. Verse 6: And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you."
 - a) In terms of "job success", these verses do not sound promising to Ezekiel. It does not read like Ezekiel is just "waiting" to here Israelites repent.
 - b) Think of it this way: If you walked into a group of people who have spent their lives rebelling against God and you told them to repent, odds are, they will not. That is what is "ahead" for Ezekiel's life. In a lot of ways, that is what Christians have to deal with who preach the Gospel message as most people reject it.
 - c) God then says in effect, "Do what I tell you to do. I (God) will not reward you based on how many people get saved. Your job, Ezekiel is just to preach the truth and you let Me worry about the results."
 - d) The final verse refers to eating what God is about to give him. Let me add the last two verses of this chapter and then I'll come back to what Ezekiel "ate".
- 23. Verse 9: Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.
 - a) Remember that this is a "vision" that Ezekiel saw. Therefore, I doubt Ezekiel actually ate something, but who knows, maybe it is literal.
 - b) What Ezekiel "ate" was a scroll written on both sides. The exact words of the scroll are not given. All it says is that the scroll contained words of "lament and mourning and woe".
 - c) What I suspect it means is that the scroll contained God's laws, or some of the "promised punishments" if the Israelites failed to obey those laws. Let's face it, the nation of Israel would not have gone into captivity if it were not guilty of disobeying God!
 - d) Going back to Verse 8, God told Ezekiel to actually "eat" the scroll. Whether it was literal or not is not-known. The main idea is that Ezekiel is to digest what was written.
 - e) A discussion of the scroll continues in Chapter 3, but I'm going to cut it off at this point.
- 24. With that said, let me get back to my introductory comments about these two chapters.
 - a) I stated that Ezekiel is a good book to study during difficult times. Sometimes, God dishes out punishments to groups. Such punishments are not "hell related" in the literal sense. There are "group" punishments for failing to be obedient to God. Individual Jews or Christians may be personally innocent or guilty, but they are still associated with that group and must accept the punishment of that group!

- b) So if we are going through some sort of rough time, are we being punished by God?
 - i) There is no way to know and don't believe anyone that tells you otherwise.
 - ii) That is one of those things we will not know until we get until heaven.
 - iii) I do know that all things that happen to us is "God Ordained" in that God knows we are going through these situations. God wants us to be dependant upon Him to get us through such times. I look at difficult situations as an opportunity for us to be even more dependant upon God and trust in Him for the results.
 - iv) So, does that mean if we are in physical pain, we should not go to a hospital, or if we are financially hurting, we shouldn't go look for a job? Of course not. The point is we don't know how God is going to work in our life. God promises to guide us if we keep moving. Of course regular prayer is part of the solution, but so is taking the footsteps so God can guide us. (See Proverbs 3:5-6).
 - c) We don't get a lot into the "punishments" in the first two chapters, but we can sense it is coming by all the references to "fire" as judgment. A big part of Ezekiel's prophetic missionary job is to explain to the Israelites just what they have done to deserve this judgment on them.
 - i) The first "half" (actually more than half the chapters) focus on what Israel did wrong as a nation as well as the sins of the surrounding nations.
 - ii) The second "half" of this book describes the positive destiny for the nation of Israel despite their sins. God made unconditional promises to the nation and they can't lose those promises based on the sins of the nation.
 - d) What about dealing with "hardship" as mentioned in the introduction?
 - i) You think you have troubles Ezekiel was taken prisoner as twenty five year old away from his home and relocated 700 miles away. Further, the job he was in training to do (a temple priest) could not be done 700 miles away from the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel had no idea what was in store for his life. Still, when he "least expected it", God made Himself known to Ezekiel and called him on a great missionary journey.
 - ii) Here's the lesson for you and me. God still calls people to be living witnesses for Him. He may not call us to move say, 700 miles away, but for some people, God does call us to relocate. Further, one may be going through a crisis or problem and have no idea why one is going through it. Sometimes God has plans for us that as of "today" we have no idea what are those plans.
 - iii) Does this mean we could have strange visions of four angelic creatures and the voice of God? Possibly, but not likely. God likes to work on "our level" and in ways that we can relate to. All God asks is that we make ourselves available to be used by Him. He takes care of the rest!
25. Let's pray: Father, thank you for what we have and what we are going to learn in this book. Help us not to just see Ezekiel as a history lesson, or a set of prophecy lessons, but to understand the principals of how You work in our lives and how we can apply this book to our life and our ability to be used by You. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.