

From Captivity to Calling: Ezekiel 1's Glimpse of God's Glory Scriptures for Today: Ezekiel 1:1-14

Ezekiel 1:1-14 *Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, 3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him. 4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. 5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. 6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. 7 And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. 8 And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. 9 Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. 10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. 12 And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. 13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. 14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.*

Introduction:

The book of Ezekiel is the 26th Book of the Bible. It has 48 chapters. It takes a little over 3 hours to read through the entire book. Think about it. You can choose to watch 3 hours of tv or read the book of Ezekiel.

On Thursday, we were in the book of **Lamentations**, where Jeremiah stood among the ashes of Jerusalem and wept. The city once called "the perfection of beauty" was now desolate. The temple was destroyed, the people were scattered, and the streets that once echoed with worship now echoed with weeping.

Why? Because the people continued to sin and rebel against the Lord. They were given many chances to get things right, but they refused to listen to the warnings and Words of their Creator.

Now, as we turn to the book of **Ezekiel**, the story continues—but from a different angle. We're actually going back in time slightly, to the years **just before the destruction of the temple** in Jerusalem. While **Jeremiah** was still in the city, warning the people of God's coming judgment, **Ezekiel** was already among the captives in Babylon. We have two prophets, same period, different perspectives.

Before God calls Ezekiel to preach, He shows him His glory. Ezekiel 1 gives us an incredible description of the Glory of God — a vision of God's power, holiness, and majesty.

It reminds us that **God's glory is not limited by place or circumstance**. His glory is not confined to a church building or a temple. He reveals Himself in many different circumstances so that His people can know who He is, so they can fear Him, and serve Him with defined purpose.

This morning, we're going to look at **three truths about God's glory** that we find in these opening verses — These are truths that not only shaped Ezekiel's calling, but also shape our own lives and calling as believers today:

1. **God's Glory Breaks Through Captivity**
2. **God's Glory Reveals His Character**
3. **God's Glory Empowers His Servants**

1. God's Glory Breaks Through Captivity (Ezekiel 1:1–4)

Ezekiel 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 1:2 In the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,

Ezekiel 1:3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

From these first verses we see that Ezekiel was a priest. What does that mean? He was from the tribe of Levi and was set apart for the service of the temple. The problem was that even though he was a priest, he was currently a captive. A prisoner of war. He was forcibly confined and taken away from his home along with others from Jerusalem.

Ezekiel no longer had a temple that he could serve in. He was carried away into a foreign land. Away from the comforts. Away from the normalcies of his everyday life.

Imagine being trained for the temple service, I'm sure He had plans and expectations for his life to serve God in the temple in Jerusalem. But he probably never thought he would find himself in such a situation as this; being in a foreign land in bondage.

In our own lives, often we have plans and expectations for how we think our life is going to go. We can plan to live in a particular place, or have a specific job, or make a certain amount of money.

We have our own plans, but what is God's plan for us? Often times, it's way different than what we think it is. God's plan usually takes us down a path that is undesirable for our flesh.

Our flesh wants things to be easy, comfortable, smooth-sailing. That's why in the moment it's very easy to stay in bed, it's easy to take short cuts, it's easy to compromise and take the path of least resistance to your flesh. But when you keep taking that easy-route to keep your flesh comfortable, eventually it comes back to bite you. Then life gets really hard because of the choices that we made to satisfy ourselves in the moment.

But when we go along with God's plan, it shakes us up, it gets us out of our comfort zone, it makes us go against our sinful nature, it prepares us to be used by God in a big way.

Look again at verse 3

Ezekiel 1:3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

Even though Ezekiel was in this hard place, in an undesirable situation, God's hand was still upon him.

Imagine if a foreign nation conquered the United States. (And don't think that can't happen) What if you were carried away into another country as a captive. Away from everything that you know and hold dear to you in this life. You would probably feel alone...

But understand who you have on your side. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the Lord God Almighty with you! So Ezekiel was in this very situation and the hand of the Lord was upon him.

The heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 1:4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

So this is a repeated pattern throughout scripture. People are in hardship, going through tribulation, affliction, great trials, then God shows up.

In the book of Judges, The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon when Israel was oppressed by the Midianites.

In Exodus, God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush when Israel was afflicted in Egypt.

In 1 Kings, God passed by Elijah with strong winds, an earthquake, and fire; God spoke to him when He was at his lowest moment.

Here in Ezekiel verse 4, God reveals himself through this vision. His glory breaks through captivity. We see a whirlwind... a great cloud... a fire infolding itself... and a brightness about it.

It wasn't calm, it wasn't comfortable—it was intense and overwhelming. But that's how God often shows up in our lives. He comes in ways that shake us, in ways that get our attention, in ways that remind us He's still in control even when everything around us feels uncertain.

Remember that next time you're experiencing hardship. Maybe you're going through something right now in your life... Stay faithful to God. The Bible says "continue in the faith, and that we MUST through MUCH tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Continue to worship and obey the Lord and wait patiently for Him to show up. He will.

So before Ezekiel could see what God was about to do, he first had to see **who God was**. And that's what this next part of the vision shows us. God begins to reveal His nature—His power, His holiness, and His majesty—through a scene that no human being could ever forget.

1. God's Glory Breaks through Captivity

2. God's Glory Reveals His Character. (Ezekiel 1:5–10)

Ezekiel 1:5-10 Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. **6** And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. **7** And their feet *were* straight feet; and the sole of their feet *was* like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. **8** And *they had* the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. **9** Their wings *were* joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. **10** As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

Here we see this incredible description of these four living creatures that Ezekiel sees in this vision.

Notice some of their features:

- They had the likeness of a man (in form or appearance)
- Each one had 4 faces and 4 wings.
- Their feet were straight (always pointing forward) Sole of foot was like the sole of a calf's foot.
- They sparkled like burnished brass.
- Hands of a man under their wings.
- When they moved, they did not turn to the right or to the left. They went straight forward.
- The likeness of their four faces was of a man, lion, ox, and an eagle.

Imagine seeing these creatures with your own eyes. It would be frightening. Words probably can't describe the awe and wonder. Later in Ezekiel chapter 10 we see that these creatures are described as Cherubims.

Ezekiel 10:15 And the cherubims were lifted up. This *is* the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar.

These four living creatures were Cherubims, and one thing we know about Cherubims is that God sits between them on His throne in Heaven. If you remember in the book of Exodus, God gave the Israelites a pattern to follow to create an earthly tabernacle. And God would dwell in that tabernacle among the people.

He commanded them to make a mercy seat out of gold, and two cherubims of gold to stretch forth their wings over the mercy seat.

Exodus 25:20 And the cherubims shall stretch forth *their* wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces *shall look* one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.

Exodus 25:22 And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

Psalms 99:1 The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved.

So we know that Cherubims are associated with the throne of God. During Ezekiel's vision we see a description of a throne at the end of chapter 1...

Ezekiel 1:26-28 And above the firmament that *was* over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne *was* the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. **27** And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. **28** As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so *was* the appearance of the brightness round about. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

Ezekiel says this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. He was getting a glimpse of the throne of God. It's an absolutely incredible sight. He fell on his face. Take a look at Rev 4. I want you to see the similarities between Ezekiel's vision and what John saw when he was called up to heaven in the spirit.

Revelation 4:2-3 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. **3** And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

Revelation 4:6-8 And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind. **7** And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle. **8** And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

So we see there are a lot of similarities between Ezekiel's vision and what John saw in heaven.

These two visions — one by Ezekiel beside a river in captivity, and the other by John on the Isle of Patmos — are separated by over 600 years, yet they both point to the same reality: **God's glory never changes.** Whether seen in Babylon or in Heaven, it is the same throne, the same presence, the same holiness, and the same God reigning above all creation.

The four living creatures that Ezekiel saw, he wasn't just seeing heavenly beings —he was seeing a living reflection of God's power and order.

Ezekiel 1:11-12 Thus *were* their faces: and their wings *were* stretched upward; two *wings* of every one *were* joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. **12** And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; *and* they turned not when they went.

Notice—they didn't turn when they went. They weren't wandering or guessing which way to move. They were directed by the Spirit.

That tells us that **God's work always moves with purpose. God never drifts. God never gets lost.**

That's the opposite of how the world operates. We live in a world filled with confusion, indecision, and instability. People drift from one idea to another, one relationship to another, one church to another—never grounded, never directed by God's Spirit. Being tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

If you want stability in your life, seek the glory of God. It's stable, it's perfectly ordered, it's unmoving and unchanging.

That's what Ezekiel was seeing. In the middle of captivity, in the middle of chaos, God was showing that **He still reigns in perfect control.**

The description of these cherubim is a reflection of the handywork of God. It's a reflection of His character, His omnipotent power.

Further down in this chapter in the future we will learn about the wheels within wheels that follow the cherubim everywhere they go. They are full of eyes which I believe reflects God's omnipresent and all-seeing nature.

1. God's glory breaks through captivity
2. God's glory reveals His character

3. God's Glory Empowers His Servants (Ezekiel 1:13–14)

Ezekiel 1:13-14 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, *and* like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. **14** And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

The appearance of these living creatures was like burning coals of fire.

We see this pure energy and power radiating from the presence of God. These living creatures weren't sluggish, they weren't hesitant, they weren't lazy. The Bible says they "*ran and returned like the appearance of lightning.*"

That's speed. That's purpose. That's power.

When the glory of God fills something, it doesn't stay still—it moves. It acts. It accomplishes. That's what happens when God's Spirit empowers His servants.

Throughout the Bible, whenever God revealed His glory, **something incredible always followed.**

When Moses saw the burning bush, he went from being a shepherd in the desert to being a deliverer in Egypt.

When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on the throne and God said whom shall I send, Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me."

When Saul met the glory of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, the brightness of that light blinded him, humbled him, and changed him from a persecutor to a preacher. That same man who once tried to destroy the church became one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever known.

Every time God's glory is revealed, **change happens.**

Captives are called. The fearful become fearless. The weak are made strong. The disobedient are turned into disciples.

That's what's happening here in Ezekiel chapter 1. God's glory breaks through the captivity, reveals His character, and now empowers His servant for the mission ahead.

Ezekiel was going to need that fire. He was about to face rejection, loneliness, and opposition—but the power of God’s glory would sustain him through it all.

And that same glory that called Ezekiel by the river of Chebar, that called Moses from the bush, that called Isaiah from the temple, that called Saul from the road—**that same glory now shines through Jesus Christ**. If you believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, you have seen that glory. Now it’s time to respond. Let’s not waste the calling that God has given to us all...

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It’s our job to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

You and I may never see what Ezekiel saw while we are still on this earth in our flesh, but when we go out and preach the gospel, God’s glory is shining out from us through the power of Jesus Christ.

And just like Ezekiel, when God’s glory shines into your life, it’s not so you can just sit still and admire it—it’s so you can get up and move with purpose.

Conclusion

The book Ezekiel starts with him sitting by a river in captivity, and the chapter ends with him face down before the glory of God. God didn’t remove Ezekiel from captivity; He revealed His glory *IN* captivity.

He called him to speak His words to a rebellious nation. And that’s exactly what Ezekiel did.

Every time God reveals His glory, He’s preparing someone to do His work.

That same glory that shone through the whirlwind now shines through Jesus Christ

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **2** Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **3** Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

So the question is: Will you stay sitting by the river, or will you rise up and answer the call? You’ve seen His glory in His Word—now let His glory shine through your life.

Isaiah 60:1-2 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. **2** For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.