

Ezekiel 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Ezekiel chapter 10 And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, take fire from between the whirling wheels from between the cherubim, he went in and stood beside a wheel. And a cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out.

The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings. And I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was like sparkling beryl.

And as for their appearance, the four had the same likeness, as if a wheel were within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went, but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without turning as they went.

And their whole body, their rims and their spokes, their wings and the wheels, were full of eyes all around, the wheels that the four of them had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing the whirling wheels.

[1 : 5 8] And every one had four faces. The first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

And the cherubim mounted up, these were the living creatures that I saw by the Kibar canal. And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them. And when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels did not turn from beside them.

When they stood still, these stood still. And when they mounted up, these mounted up with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in them. Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim.

And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Kibar canal, and I knew that they were cherubim. Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands.

[3 : 0 8] And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Kibar canal. Each of them went straight forward. At the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel witnessed the divine throne chariot, described in the opening chapters of the book.

In chapter 10, the throne chariot is once again central to a vision, this time as it leaves the temple. Daniel Bloch suggests that the account of this chapter should be read as overlapping with the events of the preceding one, where we read in verse 3, In this chapter, the events mentioned there are expanded, viewing a single set of events from different perspectives, now foregrounding the Lord's departure from his house.

In the tabernacle and later the temple, the Lord was enthroned above the cherubim, a description we read in several books in the Old Testament. It was from the realm above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, between the two cherubim, that the Lord addressed Moses back in Numbers chapter 7 verse 89.

In Solomon's temple, two large statues of cherubim, in addition to the two cherubim upon the mercy seat, were placed in the Holy of Holies. Each of the two with their wings outstretched, touching the other's wing in the centre, and touching a wall on the other side.

In 1 Chronicles chapter 28 verse 18, these cherubim are described as belonging to In 2 Chronicles chapter 5 verses 7 to 8 we read, Then the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

[4 : 59] The cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the Ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the Ark and its poles. The throne chariot, then, was represented in the inner part of the temple, in the Holy of Holies.

We also encounter the divine throne chariot in Daniel chapter 7 verse 9. As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.

His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. Outside of the temple building, in the courtyard, there were also cherubim chariots, carrying water.

In the vision of the divine throne chariot leaving the temple, we should recognise that the temple is, in many respects, a horizontal model of the vertical reality of the throne chariot.

As you move in, within the temple, you are moving up the chariot. What we are seeing in this chapter is akin to a soul leaving a body. The temple building that remains, as the glory of the Lord departs it, is like a corpse.

[6 : 00] In chapter 9 verse 3, the glory of the Lord left the Holy of Holies, and moved to the entrance of the temple. Now it is about to leave, and to pour out fiery destruction upon Jerusalem.

As Ezekiel describes the throne chariot, he once more speaks of the firmament over the heads of the cherubim, and the sapphire throne, as in chapter 1 verses 25 to 26.

And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse over their heads, there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the likeness of a throne, was a likeness with a human appearance.

The temple and tabernacle both correspond to the chariot. The firmament over the cherubim should be associated with the blue curtains and veil of the tabernacle and temple. Seeing the divine chariot in the context of the temple in this chapter, the connection should be much more readily apparent to us.

It is possible that Ezekiel only realized the connection himself in the course of this vision. The temple is an architectural symbol of the divine throne chariot's reality, but also itself was filled with that reality as the Lord's dwelling.

[7 : 11] In the vision of chapter 1, the cherubim are referred to as living creatures throughout. Here, however, they are referred to as cherubim, but the connection with the living creatures of the original vision by the Kibbar Canal is made explicit in verse 15.

In verse 2, the linen-clothed man is instructed to take burning coals from between the cherubim, associating that realm properly with the altar. In chapter 1, verse 13, the area between the cherubim was described as a sort of living fire.

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

The cherubim might also be related to the four horns of the altar. Their wings are coverings, like blast shields for the fiery glory of the Lord, and also for covering their nakedness.

In Exodus chapter 20, verse 26, we see that there were no steps up to the altar, so that the nakedness of the priest should not be exposed upon it. The cherubim now stand on the south side of the house.

[8 : 18] The destroyers that have been sent out, and the image of jealousy, are to the north. The inner court is filled with a cloud, the glory of the Lord. In Exodus chapter 40, verses 34 to 35, and 1 Kings chapter 8, verses 10 to 11, there are descriptions of the glory of the Lord entering the tabernacle and the temple, respectively.

In the 1 Kings passage, for instance, Here, however, the reverse is happening.

The glory of the Lord is leaving his house. The linen clothed man, dressed, as we should recall, like a priestly angelic figure, is instructed to take burning coals from the altar and to scatter them over the city.

We might connect this with the seven altars with bowls that pour them out over Jerusalem in Revelation, or with the fire from the altar of incense that is poured to earth in Revelation chapter 8, verse 5.

Here, the linen clothed man is handed some of the fire by the hand-like thing beneath the wing of the cherubim. In verses 9 to 17, the chariot is described once again.

[9 : 30] As in the water chariots of the temple, the chariot has wheels. The wheels are animated by the cherubim, the living creatures of chapter 1. Indeed, the cherubim's faces seem to appear within the whirling wheels.

They move straight in one of the four cardinal directions. The tabernacle itself was ordered according to the cardinal coordinates. We should probably, as James Jordan suggests, connect the cherubim, or living creatures, with the tribes of Israel ordered around the tabernacle, three tribes to each of its four sides, in Numbers chapter 2.

The leading tribes on each of the sides can likely be connected with the four faces of the cherubim. Judah, the lion on the east, Reuben, the man on the south, Ephraim, the ox on the west, and Dan, the eagle on the north.

They might even also be symbolically connected with signs of the zodiac. The tabernacle is an earthly model of the divine throne chariot, which is a theophanic manifestation of the Lord's heavenly throne, which is itself a representation of the Lord's sovereignty, not just within creation, but prior to and above all created things.

Back in chapter 1, the four faces of the four living creatures were described. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

[10 : 53] Here again, they each have four faces, although the face of the ox is replaced by the face of the cherub. The order in which the faces are listed has changed from human, lion, ox, eagle, to cherub, human, lion, eagle.

However, as Bloch argues, the change is more apparent than real. If we were to draw a diagram of the situation of each of the orders of faces, and presume that they are listed in clockwise order in chapter 10 verse 14, the order remains the same.

However, whereas the man's face was facing Ezekiel in chapter 1, now it is seemingly the cherub's face, which is described in the place of the ox's face. Perhaps the cherub's face is spoken of instead of the ox's face, because this is the ox's face of the cherubim that faces him.

In verse 22, it seems that the faces are explicitly identified with those of the living creatures of the earlier vision, so this seems to be the most likely explanation to me. The second great vision of the divine throne chariot continues as the glory of the Lord rises up from the threshold of the temple, mounts the cherubim's chariot, the cherubim lift up their wings, mount up into the air, and hover over the entrance of the east gate with the glory of the Lord above them.

A question to consider, where else do we find cherubim imagery associated with the tabernacle, temple, and other sanctuaries in scripture?

[12:19]

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