

Cuppa Cafe

Daily devotions
from God's Word...



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The Grind

Savor the taste of our previous brew



Since everything in the Bible leads into and prepares the way for what comes after it, refresh yesterday's Brew to let the previous passage get you ready for today's verses. Though you should have already explored the passage, personally with Jesus, here is the heart of what we saw, together.

In the previous passage, verses 1-3, the prophet introduces himself, starting with the first person in v.1 and ending with the third person in verse 3.

1 In the first person, Ezekiel (his name means, "May God Strengthen" in Hebrew) announces when the book begins, "[On July 31 of my thirtieth year](#)," using a time and date from a secular perspective. Then, transitioning to a more spiritual viewpoint, he describes what was happening on that date: "[I was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon](#)." Scholars associate the river Kebar with the *naru kabari*, or 'great river' referred to in two cuneiform texts from Nippur, the ancient Sumerian center for the worship of the god, Enlil whom they considered ruler of the cosmos. Actually an irrigation canal, it brought water from the Euphrates along a south-eastwards loop from Babylon and back to the main river near Uruk (the biblical Erech). Two significant events occurred at the time and that place. First, "[the heavens were opened](#)," allowing him, next, to see "[visions of](#) [or, belonging to] [God](#)." Thus, Ezekiel commemorates the occasion as his own call to the ministry.

[On July 31 of my thirtieth year](#), On my 30th birthday

[while](#) during the time that

[I was with the Judean exiles](#) I, Ezekiel was among my fellow captives from Judea

[beside the Kebar River in Babylon](#), on the banks of the irrigation canal Kebar in Babylon

[the heavens were opened](#) the skies parted, allowing access beyond it

[and](#) as a result, or, so

[I saw visions of God](#). I, Ezekiel could see mental images belonging to the true Creator, Israel's God

2 Still in the first person, Ezekiel redates the introduction to his prophecies with a more identifiable reference to history to explain when the more obscure thirtieth year occurred. It seems that the thirtieth year of Ezekiel's life coincided with the "[fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity](#)," namely 593 BC. Since 30 was the age when a priest began serving at the temple, Ezekiel considered his call to prophesy the fulfillment of the priestly ministry denied him in captivity. Unable to serve like his fathers at the temple in Jerusalem, God summoned him to another more appropriate ministry at this crucial time in his life. God commissioned the priest to be a prophet.

As for the reference to King Jehoiachin's captivity, the wheels of history began rolling in that direction with the collapse of Assyria. Ancient Near Eastern kings forced their victims to worship their gods and to pay them tribute plus other dues. So, Israel's earlier kings set up local worship of Assyrian deities in submission to Assyrian

authority. As Assyrian influence weakened, Josiah (640-609 BC) carried out religious reforms as both a sign of spiritual awakening and a declaration of political independence. Babylon announced its superiority over Assyria with Nineveh's fall in 612 BC, and sealed its supremacy over the world by defeating the Egyptian army at Carchemish seven years later in 605 BC.

In a misguided act of loyalty to Babylon, Josiah lost his life trying to stop Pharaoh Necho II from aiding the doomed Assyrians. In an effort to solidify his hold on the region, the retreating Pharaoh forced Jerusalem to surrender, King Jehoahaz, Josiah's son and replaced him with his brother Eliakim whom he renamed Jehoiakim and laid a heavy tribute on him (2Kgs. 23:31-33). A real loser, he allowed Josiah's reforms to lapse and reintroduced idolatrous practices to the land. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar after Babylon and Egypt fought to a draw in 601 BC. In December, 598 BC, Babylon moved against Jerusalem about the time Jehoiakim died, possibly by assassination, and his 18 year old son, Jehoiachin succeeded him.

When Egyptian help failed to materialize (2Kgs. 24:7) after three months of siege, the young king surrendered on the 2nd day of Adar, March 16, 597 BC. Carried off to Babylon along with the Queen mother, the palace staff, Israel's leading citizens and Ezekiel, Jehoiachin (also called Coniah or Jeconiah) lived the rest of his life in Babylon (2Kgs. 24:14). Five years later, during Ezekiel's 30th year, God called the young priest to prophesy to the exiles, while Jeremiah spoke to the people still in Judah.

This What Ezekiel said in v.1, namely his call to the prophetic ministry

happened occurred

during at the same time as

the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. King Jehoiachin's fifth year of exile

3 Ezekiel shifts to the 3rd person, inserting a much needed explanation here to supply the reader with several important facts. In full prophetic gear, Ezekiel leaves all secularism behind and identifies himself: "**(The LORD gave this message to Ezekiel.**" At the same time, he disavows any connection with the astral gods of Babylon by naming, the LORD, the God of Israel, as the source of what he is about to say. The Eternal and Holy One of Israel personally handed the message to him that he is about to deliver to the exiles. The word "**this**" points to the nearby words in the next verse. He describes himself as "**son of Buzi, a priest,**" underscoring the significance of the reference to his 30th year, so that instead of a coincidence, the LORD entrusted him with a message on purpose—calling him to prophetic ministry at the very time he would have started serving as a priest had he remained in Jerusalem. Though scholars cannot decide whether the words, "**a priest**" refer to him or his father, at any event, Ezekiel would certainly have followed in his father's footsteps.

In v.1, Ezekiel claimed that he 'saw' visions from God, the usual role of a prophet as a 'seer.' Here he adds the related idea of a 'messenger,' who is expected to tell others what God has revealed to him. Instead of keeping to himself what the LORD has shown him, Ezekiel accepts the responsibility of sharing with others what he has learned from God. In case anyone might dispute his claim because he hadn't said anything about a divine calling before, Ezekiel repeats that God did not speak to him until that time in Babylon. That the LORD could operate outside of Palestine, in Babylon reinforced prophetic claims that He was a universal God, at work in foreign lands and superior to any Babylonian deity. Ezekiel adds his own testimony to this fact, saying: "**and he felt the hand of the LORD take hold of him.**" More than a claim to a divine call, the prophet affirms that he was under divine influence from his own personal experience. Instead of words out of nowhere, he came in contact with the one who spoke to him. Throughout the book, Ezekiel repeats the phrase, 'hand of the LORD' to affirm that he was moved—provoked or stirred—by the Eternal One, Himself to speak or act on His behalf. He deliberately detaches himself with the 3rd person to repel any charges of being too emotional and therefore less credible about what he says. The LORD animates him rather than any personal feelings or instability.

(The LORD the Eternal One

gave this message to Ezekiel personally passed on to Ezekiel the words he is about to deliver to the exiles

son of Buzi, a priest, a direct descendant of Buzi, part of a priestly family

beside the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians, on the banks of the irrigation canal Kebar in the territory populated by the Chaldeans, or Babylonians

and plus, or, on top of that

he felt the hand of the LORD take hold of him.) Ezekiel experienced personal contact with the Eternal One (the one whose name means, "May God Strengthen" actually felt divine power surging through him)



Now Serving The Brew

Let us pour you a fresh cup, ground verse-by-verse from today's passage

In today's passage, verses 4-9, Ezekiel describes his first vision that God used to call him to the prophetic ministry. So, please open your Bibles to Ezekiel Chapter 1, and let me pour you a hot CuppaJesus from today's brew, starting with v.4.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR TODAY

Here are the main items in the text that will lead you to its understanding.

	Verse 4	Verse 5	Verse 6	Verse 7	Verse 8	Verse 9
Links	As, and 2x, like					
Persons	1 2x (Ezekiel)					
Places	From (the north), before (it), inside (the cloud), in the middle of (the fire), there					
Things	A great storm, the north, it, a huge cloud that, lightning, brilliant light, fire, the cloud, the fire, something, gleaming amber					
Words	Looked, saw, coming, driving, flashed with, shone with, was, glowed					

Pay careful attention to every item as you follow today's devotional in your study Bible. We have already grouped them by colors in "Today's Text," so you can follow the writer's flow of thought for yourself. Capture and grasp what he is trying to tell you with matching color pencils to draw lines connecting items to others in the same color-family, and a black pencil to cross-link items from different color-families that still have something to do with one another. Use circles, boxes, triangles, etc. to identify topics and themes (triangles, for instance, might represent the Trinity). Also mark with asterisks, etc., the ones you need to look up later for more information or greater details.

TODAY'S TEXT

4 As I looked, I saw a great storm coming from the north, driving before it a huge cloud that flashed with lightning and shone with brilliant light. There was fire inside the cloud, and in the middle of the fire glowed something like gleaming amber.

5 From the center of the cloud came four living beings that looked human,

6 except that each had four faces and four wings.

7 Their legs were straight, and their feet had hooves like those of a calf and shone like burnished bronze.

8 Under each of their four wings I could see human hands. So each of the four beings had four faces and four wings.

9 The wings of each living being touched the wings of the beings beside it. Each one moved straight forward in any direction without turning around.

TODAY'S DEVOTIONAL

4 This a theophany, an appearance of or, visitation by God meant to call Ezekiel to service just as previous ones summoned other prophets like Moses in Exod. 3, and Isaiah in Isa. 6. Not only does it convince the candidate that God is real, but confronted with God's glory or splendor, the theophany leaves him awed and submissive. The formula, "I looked and behold," translated here as, "I looked and I saw," only appears in the writings of the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. They indicate that the prophet tries to describe what he sees so we can picture what he saw. Unable to share the actual vision, we must rely on his words and the power of the spirit to grasp that earth-shaking scene.

Apparently, Ezekiel saw "a great storm [or, tempest] coming from the north." Also translated "whirlwind" from the violence associated with it as it plows ahead, such a hurricane agitates and scatters everything in its path — a fit emblem to represent divine judgment.

As Peter Craigie says in his Daily Study Bible commentary: "The vision begins in physical reality and then transcends the immediate environment" (Ezekiel, p.11). Moving from the normal to supranormal, it starts with a thunder cloud, black and threatening, silhouetted against the desert sky, gilded by the sun along its edges and flashing lightning bolts. Some mistake its direction because they think the geography is based on where the prophet is, by the Chebar Canal. But Ezekiel sees what will happen to Jerusalem and Judah rather than the exiles. Therefore, instead of coming from the direction of pagan gods whom Mesopotamians imagined lived on Mt. Zaphon in the north, the storm flows from the country of Babylon, following the fertile crescent and swooping south to execute divine indignation on the Jews — much the same way Isaiah saw Assyrian armies like waters overflowing banks of the Tigris to flood Jerusalem. So, Ezekiel probably refers to the hostile power that would take the same path both Assyrian and Babylonian troops always traveled when they attacked Judah.

Ezekiel then explains the brilliant light that shined from the cloud. As the LORD came to Moses and the refugees in a cloud (Num. 11:25), so He is at the center of this cloud, using it to shield Ezekiel and the earth from His full radiance. Yet, His presence has an incandescent effect, causing the cloud to glow with His glory. Ezekiel compares it to a "a fire inside the cloud," illuminating it, "and in the middle of the fire [something brighter still] glowing like gleaming amber." The NLT replaces the expression "infolding itself" from the KJV that normally translates, "to take, capture, or seize," with the phrase, "that flashed with lightning." Rather than mere bolts of discharging energy, Ezekiel saw a fire that snatches whatever surrounds it, draws it into its flames, and devours it. To enhance the nature of the fire, the new prophet describes what is at the core of the blaze, something so bright it looks like molten metal heated white hot in a furnace. Translated anywhere from "amber" to "polished brass," Ezekiel uses a word that represents an alloy of silver and gold meant to symbolize excessive splendor. Here, as in v.27 and 8:2, it refers to the dazzling magnificence of the LORD's presence as the source of light radiating through what should have been a dark cloud. By inserting God's glory in a storm cloud, Ezekiel marries the divine presence to the hostile forces on their way to destroy Jerusalem. In other words, the Babylonian army will be the LORD's instrument of judgment against Judah.

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5. This is purely ideal and not about something that occurred naturally. Ezekiel sees 4 creatures supporting the platform or firmament that supported the LORD's chariot-throne. He is voluntarily inseparable from His creation. The living creatures resemble humans because they stand erect. The number four refers to the creation so that they represent all of creation. That they serve God shows his supremacy over everything He has made.

6. Four creatures, each with four faces = 16, total (see v.10). Thus, they and the LORD's chariot-throne that utilizes them for mobility can travel in any direction. So, the creatures serve as the wheels of the chariot-throne (cf. v.17). Wings provide the LORD's chariot-throne with portability. They differ from the winged creatures with human faces found in Assyrian palaces in Nimrud and Nineveh that were all quadrupeds. These are humanlike to show God's dominance over the wisest and most powerful creatures on earth rather than brute beasts to discourage humans from seeking divine status.

7. Each had two feet like humans (cp. Dan 10:6), though the feet were straight continuations of their legs.

8. The hand symbolizes the power to carry out thoughts, denoting the chief way of exerting the will on the ground = active energy. Verses 5-6 are feminine, while 7 and 8 are masculine implying that gender is not an issue.

9. Four in number, the creatures had a face aimed at the four quarters of the heavens and did not have to turn in order to move forward. That the four wings were joined symbolizes unity and synchronization so that the four creatures operated as a unit.



A Tastier CuppaJ

Let Jesus pour you a fuller bodied, more flavorful CuppaJ from today's brew

Well, we hope you enjoyed this morning's CuppaJ for the Day, brewed verse-by-verse to bring out the full-flavor of the text. Now it's your turn to explore the passage for yourself—to make this study good to the last drop. Remember, you haven't really studied the Bible, God's *Written Word*—until it connects you with Jesus, God's *Living Word*. Then Jesus, the true Teacher can customize the text, so every word comes across written just for you. This morning's CuppaJ is just a taste of what's in the text—the starting point for a deeper learning experience with Jesus. So, go ahead; spend time alone with Him to go over this passage together. Let Jesus pour a tastier CuppaJ from the same brew, for you, today. Use the following form to jot down whatever Jesus shares with you.



Bible Study

1. Open your Bible to today's passage and **review** today's brew.
2. **Savor** the passage, one verse at a time, **listening** for God's still small voice.
3. **Follow** the trail you marked in each verse, **pause** to look up the terms you flagged for further consideration, and **write** whatever the Spirit brings to mind.

v.22
