

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 4-9, Ezekiel describes the original vision God used to call him to the prophetic ministry

4 This is 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 intend to convince the candidate that God is real and powerful beyond anything he ever imagined or hoped, but also confronted with God's glory or splendor, the theophany should also leave him awed and submissive. As it turned out, when Ezekiel saw it, he "fell face down on the ground" (1:28). The formula, "**I looked and beheld**," translated here as, "**I looked and I saw**," only appears in the writings of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. Trying to capture something of its wonder, they describe what happened to them in such a way that we may share their experience as well as what they saw. Unable to repeat the actual vision for us, Ezekiel does everything he can to recreate the stunning event with carefully selected words, and relies on the power of the spirit to help us grasp that momentous scene.

Apparently, Ezekiel saw "**a great storm** [system or, tempest] **coming from the north**." Translated "**whirlwind**" in the KJV from the violence associated with it, such a gale agitates and scatters everything in its path—a fit emblem to represent divine judgment. Some mistake its direction, here because they think the geography is based on where the prophet sees the vision, by the Chebar Canal. But God shows Ezekiel what will happen to Jerusalem and Judah rather than the exiles. So, instead of coming from the direction of pagan gods whom Mesopotamians imagined lived on Mt. Zaphon in the north as some suggest, the storm flows from the country of Babylon, following the fertile crescent north of Judah, swooping south to execute divine indignation on the Jews—much the same way Isaiah saw Assyrian armies like waters overflowing the banks of the Euphrates to flood, or surround Jerusalem (Isa. 8:7-8). Like a storm, God's wrath against Israel drives enemies, symbolized by the cloud, toward Judah. And the cloud probably represents the hostile power traveling the same path always taken by Canaanite armies from the east who attacked Judah.

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 the supernatural, it begins with a thunder cloud, silhouetted against the desert sky, gilded by the sun along its edges. At first, Ezekiel describes it like any other storm cloud, "**that flashed with lightning**." Then, breaking with convention, he adds "**and shone with brilliant light**," a peculiar observation for what should have been dark and threatening.

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**." Ignoring its association with the word "**fire**", the translators apparently opted to make the term fit a customary storm scenario; but this is anything but a normal

storm. Rather than mere bolts of discharging energy, Ezekiel saw a fire that snatches whatever surrounds it, draws it into its flames, and devours it. He then explains the brilliant light that shined from the cloud. As the LORD came to Moses and the refugees from Egypt in a cloud (Num. 11:25), so He is at the center of this cloud, using it to shield Ezekiel from His full radiance and to add to the imagery. In spite of that, His blinding presence has an incandescent effect, causing the storm cloud that should be black—to glow with His glory. Ezekiel attributes this phenomenon to “**a fire inside the cloud,**” illuminating it, the way millions of stars inside the Great Nebula of the constellation Orion cause its gases to glow.

The fire, though, is not the source of radiation, because he adds, “**and in the middle of the fire glowed something like gleaming amber.**” To enhance the nature of the fire, the new prophet describes what is at its core: something so bright it stood out from the surrounding flames. Against the fiery background, he saw what resembled molten metal heated white hot in a furnace. Translated anywhere from “**amber**” to “**polished bronze,**” Ezekiel uses a word that normally 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 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, as clouds carry out the intentions of a storm, so the Babylonian army will be the LORD’s instrument of judgment against Judah.

As while

I looked, I, Ezekiel watched

I saw a great storm I noticed a hurricane

coming from the north, swooping southward

driving before it a huge cloud a front of thunderheads ahead of it

that flashed with lightning (a fire that snatches whatever surrounds it, draws it into its flames, and devours it)
an inescapable fire inside of it

and also

shone with brilliant light. Illuminated by the fire

There was fire inside the cloud,

and plus

in the middle of the fire embedded in its flames

glowed something shined something

like resembling

gleaming amber. Polished bronze (an alloy of silver and gold heated white hot to the point of melting)

5-6 To keep the rest of the vision in perspective, you must remember that this verse is purely ideal and not about something that occurred naturally. So, when Ezekiel says he sees 4 creatures emerging “**from the center of the cloud...that looked human,**” He isn’t speaking literally. First of all, the number four refers to the visible creation so that 4 creatures represent a cross-section of everything God ever made. Second, the NLT identifies them as “**living beings,**” creatures that are alive, with physical power and energy, alert and capable of motion. Third, the verse traces them to the center of the cloud where Ezekiel saw God’s presence. Thus, they are connected with God in some special way, revealed later in verses 15-28: they supported, transported, and escorted God on His portable chariot-throne. Fourth, they are neither, male or female because Ezekiel alternates between masculine and feminine words to describe them.

Finally, the living creatures resemble humans because they stand erect, the only way they can resemble a human being, considering “**each had four faces and four wings.**” “**Four faces,**” matching the four points of the compass, gave each creature a panoramic view of the world symbolizing the ability to see in any direction. At the

same time, “four wings” supplied them with the ability to travel wherever they wanted to go. Consistent with the role they play in verses 15-28, they serve as the wheels of the LORD’S chariot-throne (cf. v.17), giving it mobility in any and all directions. The Assyrian palaces in Nimrud and Nineveh also sported images of winged creatures with this one difference: they were all quadrupeds, intended to celebrate the service of everyone in the empire to their kings by reducing them to submissive beasts. The living beings, on the other hand, are humanlike to show God’s dominance over the full range of creatures on earth—from Adam to the animals under his dominion. No one and nothing will ever overthrow the One at the center of the cloud or seek His status.

From the center of the cloud At the core, or the middle of the thunder cloud (zooming in on the center of the cloud, Ezekiel can see what was lost in God’s glare)

came four living beings were four beings representing the willing creation that voluntarily served God (Ps. 22:3, God inhabits, or sits enthroned on the praises of Israel)

that looked human, that stood erect like people (like Adam who ruled every living thing on the planet)

except that with the exception of

each had four faces each living being had a quartet of faces

and plus

four wings two pair of feathery attachments that gave them the ability to fly

7 Animals have four legs—two straight ones in front, and two that are bent in the rear. So when Ezekiel says, “**Their legs were straight**,” he tells us they had only two legs, in the front, omitting hind ones. Besides, had they four, he would have said so, just as he freely used that number in v.6 to describe other features. This confirms our conclusion from v.6 that the living beings stood erect like humans who alone stand upright on straight legs.

At the same time, “**their feet had hooves like those of a calf**.” Representing more of the creation than humanity and called to carry God’s chariot-throne, the living beings walked on hooves like beasts of burden, able to support heavier weight than human feet. Hooves spread but do not bend, affirming the description “straight,” applied to the beings’ legs. The word translated “legs” is the Hebrew word for “feet.” Aware that the word applies to all the lower parts of the body, not just the feet, the NLT translated it, “legs” and labeled them “straight” because hooves would continue the legs on a straight line. The term, “burnished, [or polished] bronze,” is the counterpart of “**gleaming amber**.” Just as the LORD’S presence outshined the fire—glowing white hot, so the living beings’ legs also reflected His glory. They remind us of the time Moses came down from Sinai with a face that glowed and delivered the Tables of the Law to Israel (Exod. 34:28-35). Commenting on these verses, the Life Application Study Bible says: “*Moses’ face was radiant after he spent time with God. The people could clearly see God’s presence in him.*” So, Daniel says that a being sent from God’s presence to him had “arms and legs that resembled polished bronze” (10:6). In both cases, the beings glow from exposure to God’s immeasurable splendor.

Their legs were straight, Their lower extremities were unbent (like an animal’s hind legs)

and plus,

their feet had hooves they had split feet (better than human feet for carrying loads)

like resembling

those of a calf the hooves of a beast of burden

and in addition

shone (their lower extremities = legs, or feet, or both) glowed

like as if they were

burnished bronze. Polished metal (reflecting God’s glory)

8 While wings symbolize mobility in the air, the capacity to fly, or travel large distances at great speed, the hand symbolizes the power to carry out thoughts, the chief way of expressing the will on the ground. Wings make the beings capable of moving the LORD's chariot throne wherever He needs to go; but the reason for hands will take some explaining. If wings had been enough for the living beings to complete their task, they wouldn't need hands. According to the book of Daniel, unlike Babylon armed with a pair of eagle's wings for elegant or sophisticated flight in Chapter 7, the leopard representing Greece in Dan. 7 has four wings. Not as regal as Babylon, Greece nevertheless overwhelmed royal rivals with its blinding speed. In a similar way, the beings leave majesty to the LORD, but need speed to transport Him in such a way that He can outmaneuver and defeat His enemies, or deliver blessings without delay.

But speed is only one aspect of their work. Like the seraphim in the Temple, they need hands to carry out God's will, their responsibilities—when they land. So, for example, one of those six-winged creatures: *"flew to [Isaiah] with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'"* (Isa. 6:6-7). God sent one of the seraphim to quickly bring forgiveness and healing to Isaiah in response to his repentance. Having dealt with the way God equipped them to serve Him in the air and on the ground, Ezekiel turns our attention to their faces and wings. The NLT translates the last line of v.8, **"So each of the four beings had four faces and four wings,"** as if the first line made the case for concluding the living beings had four of each. But it's better to follow the NET, NASB and CJB, and instead of summing up what Ezekiel already said in verses 5-8, see it setting the stage for v.9. We would translate it, **"And [or, Now] all four of them had faces and wings..."**, the word **"now"** indicating a shift in focus as Ezekiel continues to describe the four living beings.

Under each of their four wings Beneath every one of their four feathery attachments

I could see human hands. I, Ezekiel detected five-fingered palms like Adam

So Now, or as for (to draw attention to a particular statement or point in the narrative that follows)

each of the four beings had four faces the four front parts of heads

and plus

four wings. Feathery attachments they all had

9 Verse 9 deals with a question most readers probably have at this point: if each of the creatures moved independently, using their wings to go in the four directions of their faces, wouldn't the LORD'S chariot-throne be pulled this way and that, unable to proceed on any course with full speed and determination? The answer comes from a deeper understanding of the living beings' faces and wings. So, he explains, to utilize the complete capability of the creatures, **"The wings of each living being touched the wings of the beings beside it."** A symbol of unity and synchronization, joined wings would utilize the combined power and speed of all the creatures as a single, concentrated unit. In order for **"each one [to] move straight forward in any direction without turning around,"** two things have to be true. First, each must have had the same four faces, in the same order. And second, each creature had to face the same direction. Four in number, the creatures had a face aimed at each of the four points of the compass and did not have to turn in order to move ahead. They simply proceeded wherever God wanted them to go, together.

The wings of each living being Every living representative of the creation's feathery attachments

touched the wings of the beings beside it. Were bound to the feathery attachments of the representatives next to it [synchronizing them with each other]

Each one moved straight forward Each representative went straight ahead [with all the others at the same time, operating as one unit (Adam/creation vs. the Tower of Babel crowd)]

in any direction in the same direction

without turning around. Because they were already facing the direction they wanted to go.



Now
Serving

The Brew

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

In **today's passage**, verses 10-14, Ezekiel finishes describing the living creatures. So, please open your Bibles to Ezekiel Chapter 1, and let me pour you a hot CuppaJesus from today's brew, starting with v.10.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR TODAY

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

	Verse 10	Verse 11	Verse 12	Verse 13	Verse 14
Links	And	Either, and	Whatever, and, any	Like, or, and 2x	And 2x, like
Persons	Each	Each	They 2x	The (living beings), them	The (living beings)
Places	In (the front), on (the right side), on (the left side), at (the back)	On (either side of it)	In (whatever direction), in (any direction)	Among (them)	
Things	Each, a human face, the front, the face of a lion, the right side, the face of an ox, the left side, the face of an eagle, the back	Each, two pairs of outstretched wings, one pair, the wings of, the living beings, side of, it, the other pair, its body	They 2x, direction 2x	(The) living beings, bright coals of fire, brilliant torches, lightning	Flashes of lightning, (the) living beings
Words	Had	Had, stretched out to touch, covered	Went, chose, moved straight forward, without turning around	Looked, seemed to flash back (and) forth	Darted to (and) fro

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

10 Each had a human face in the front, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the back.

11 Each had two pairs of outstretched wings—one pair stretched out to touch the wings of the living beings on either side of it, and the other pair covered its body.

12 They went in whatever direction the spirit chose, and they moved straight forward in any direction without turning around.

13 The living beings looked like bright coals of fire or brilliant torches, and lightning seemed to flash back and forth among them.

14 And the living beings darted to and fro like flashes of lightning.

TODAY'S DEVOTIONAL

10 Ezekiel goes on describing the living beings without pause. In the absence of a linking word, verse 10 simply continues in the new direction that began in the second part of v.8. He now proceeds to detail the four faces mentioned first in v.6 and repeated in v.8. All the creatures had four faces representing the titans of creation: man, the divinely appointed ruler of the planet; a lion, the legendary king of wild animals; an ox, the strongest of domesticated beasts, and an eagle, the recognized king of the air. Together, a cross-section of God's most majestic creatures, they represent the whole of creation, working in harmony with man, as God intended. Ezekiel mentions man first, placing him ahead of the others as the one in charge. With a face pointing in each of the four directions of the compass, each creature has a panoramic view of heaven and earth. This feature also gives God both universal mobility plus awareness of whatever is happening, anywhere on earth. Their combined powers or attributes magnify God's omnipotence. Overall, Ezekiel's imagery reminds us of John's similar vision in Revelation 4.

Each had All of the living beings without exception were blessed, or provided with

a human face in the front, a front part of the head like Adam, facing forward

the face of a lion on the right side, a front part of the head like the king of beasts, in the position of honor

the face of an ox on the left side, a front part of the head like the strongest beast, facing the opposite side

and plus

the face of an eagle at the back. a front part of the head like the king of birds, facing the rear

11 Verse 11 picks up where v.10 left off, switching from faces to the wings of the living beings as predicted in v.8. Instead of "four" wings, Ezekiel says that each being "**had two pairs of outstretched wings.**" As you might expect after reading v.9, "**one pair stretched out to touch the wings of the living beings on either side of it**" Then, Ezekiel adds something unexpected: "**and the other pair covered its body.**" Whereas the first pair is devoted to mobile unity among the beings, the second is dedicated to both decency and humility in God's perfect presence. Reminding us of the seraphim in Isa. 6:2, this feature also represents the absence of spiritual decay and immorality where God resides, among those who serve Him.

Each had All of the living beings without exception were blessed, or provided with

two pairs of outstretched wings a couple of matching sets of extended feathery attachments

—one pair stretched out to touch the wings of the living beings on either side of it, one matching set extended to make contact with the feathery attachments of the other representatives of creation both left and right of it

and plus

the other pair covered its body. The other matching set spread over its entire anatomy

12 Ezekiel gets a supernatural impression of the natural storm. As the whirlwind invisibly drove the thunderclouds before it, so God's invisible Spirit, or wind directs the living beings where they should go. To further relieve any concerns about conflict between the beings, Ezekiel says that the spirit, rather than they choose which way to go. As a result of the Spirit's guidance, the beings "**moved straight** [without hesitation or deviation] **forward in any direction**," that is, without restriction. Already looking in every direction with four faces staring at the four points of the compass eliminated any need for them to turn around, or change direction. Perfectly mobile, whenever the Spirit prompted them to move, they instantly set out in that direction, or changed direction in the blink of an eye.

They went in whatever direction the spirit chose, The four living creatures like clouds driven by a storm traveled whichever way God's wind-like spirit carried them

and also

they moved straight forward the creatures proceeded straight ahead

in any direction regardless of the bearing they took

without turning around. Because they were already facing that way

13 Ancient manuscripts paint conflicting pictures of what Ezekiel saw. According to the NET Bible, “**The MT reads** [ascribing what follows to the living beings] **“and the form of the creatures – their appearance was like burning coals of fire,”** [while] **the LXX reads** [imputing what follows to something other than the living beings], **“in the midst of the creatures was a sight like burning coals of fire.”** As a result, modern translations divide themselves between the two versions. While the NLT, for example, opts for the first sense: **“The living beings looked like bright coals of fire or brilliant torches, and lightning seemed to flash back and forth among them,”** the NET, on the other hand, renders it: **“In the middle of the living beings was something like burning coals of fire or like torches. It moved back and forth among the living beings. It was bright, and lightning was flashing out of the fire.”** The KJV sides with those who see a further description of the living beings, wording the first part of v.13: **“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps.”** Then, supporting those of the other opinion, it describes something else that **“went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.”**

The living beings All the representatives of creation

looked like resembled

bright coals of fire glowing embers burning in a fire

or brilliant torches, or shining flames

and plus

lightning seemed to flash, gleams of light apparently shimmered

back and forth among them. in one direction away, then retraced its steps back again (to God) in the midst of the creatures

The KJV, expressing the literal text, repeats the same idea, twice, only with different words. After referring to the form, or **“the likeness of the living creatures,”** it calls attention to the way they looked, pointing to **“their appearance.”** The NLT joins the KJV to describe the living beings’ appearance from two points of view. First, Ezekiel says they resembled **“burning coals of fire,”** but straining to express his supernatural impressions of the natural elements of the vision, he then offers an alternative, equivalent to **“burning coals,”** saying they reminded him of **“torches.”** It seemed to him that the living beings were like coals in the fire that surrounded God’s presence, blazing with light like torches. This parallels the description of God’s presence as both **“a smoking firepot and a flaming torch”** at the covenant-making ceremony with Abram in Gen. 15:17. Seeing more than a mere thundercloud, the living beings appeared to be surrounded by bursts of lightning.

14 The word translated **“and”** at the beginning of the verse, introduces and adds information omitted from the main storyline in v.13. So, we translate it, **“now”** to show that Ezekiel wants to draw attention to what he is about to say. It inserts an explanation into the passage to compare **the movement of the living beings**—transporting a wrathful God who emits flames of fiery judgment that draw in and devour the targets of His wrath at will—to **lightning flashing from the cloud.** Imitating streaks of bolts, the beings **“darted to and fro.”** **“Darted”** nicely represents the thought of velocity meant here, while the words **“to and fro”** express the idea of movement, though they translate better as **“back and forth.”** Ezekiel chose Hebrew words that describe the beings going first in one direction, and then retracing their steps to return where they started—a pattern of regular rather than the usually haphazard motion of natural lightning. So, instead of chaos, the beings remain under God’s control—methodically moving at His command, returning to him instead of wandering off. Keep in mind that the reference to lightning is for illustrative purposes, only. God is using natural phenomena here to communicate a supernatural

