

# Heavenly Shopping Trolleys

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Almighty God of heaven, sovereign over the universe, open our ears to hear your voice tonight.

Speak to our hearts that we may trust you and obey you, that we may live for you. On earth, as we anticipate being with you in your heavenly kingdom.

We ask this for the sake and the glory of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept.

How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? Human history is seared by stories of exile, of people being forced out of their homelands for all sorts of different reasons, some willingly, some unwillingly.

Of refugees forced out of their lands by war. Just in the age this weekend, you may have seen the very inspiring, moving story of the boy from Sierra Leone, now working in green grocery somewhere and studying next year to do his VCE in Dandenong, I think, and how well he's adjusted.

[ 1 : 34 ]     People in exile from conquered peoples, taken off into exile as prisoners of war. Think of the Thai Burma railway prisoners, the Changi prisoners in the second war, Guantanamo more recently.

We think of those who marched so tragically and such long and epic marches to flee places of war, flee their own homelands.

One of the most moving books I've read in the last couple of years is of by a now Australian in his 70s, living in New South Wales, who was just, I think, 12 in 1942 when the Japanese invaded Burma and was one of the very few that survived a long trek in monsoons through the foothills of the Himalayas into India.

And he arrived there almost dead, 40 kilograms. You think of brutal regimes that evict their own citizens, Pol Pot's degradation of Cambodia.

Of course, now the Zimbabwe tragedy, Sudan. You think of boat people going into exile, trying to find a safe, secure, better life.

[ 2 : 46 ]     From Vietnam, for example. You think of stories like the Tampa, Christmas Island and Woomera. Beautiful fictional story by an Australian Vietnamese this year.

His first book, *Nam Li*, called *The Boat of Vietnamese Refugees*. We think of the exile of the stolen generations, black African slaves.

The people fleeing Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cambodia. The list goes on and on in the last hundred years. Perhaps the biggest and most gripping in recent times.

The epic exile of Jews from Europe during and after the Second War. It's hard for us, and most of us, I guess, maybe not all, to fathom the depths of dislocation, of disillusionment and bewilderment if we were in a similar exile.

Separated from family, from culture, from language, from jobs. Lacking a sense of belonging, losing roots, often in a place of abuse, verbal, physical, racial abuse.

[ 3 : 56 ] People who struggle to get low-grade work, well below their own qualifications. Becoming a minority in a new place. Having roots far away and no access to them.

Homes far away, no access to them. And for those of faith, where is God? Where is God in a foreign land, where perhaps your home or basic faith is now a very small minority?

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and went. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? That was the plaintive song in the Psalms of the Jews of the 6th century BC.

In Babylon. 1500 miles or thereabouts away from Jerusalem. In the early part of the 6th century. Many of them had been forcibly deported by Nebuchadnezzar.

The ferocious and powerful military leader, emperor in effect, of Babylon. When he invaded Judah, the people of the Jews, in 597 BC.

[ 5 : 15 ] And Jerusalem capitulated. And he took off the leadership, the priests, the wealthy, the influential people. Leaving behind people in a fairly dispirited sort of environment.

And they were resettled forcibly in Nippur, near Babylon. By the canal called the Cheba, which channeled water from the Tigris and Euphrates to bring irrigation to these settlements out of Babylon.

An ancient form of Woomera, perhaps. And there in this land. Overrun by pagans. Confronted by their temples and idolatry.

How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? Unable to go back to the Jerusalem temple, which still stood at this time. And offer their sacrifices.

Attend to their feasts. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? Because the Jewish practices were located in that promised land of God.

[ 6 : 20 ] With its capital city, Jerusalem, at the heart of which was the temple, and at the heart of which were the three annual pilgrimage feasts and the regular system of sacrifices. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land?

We don't have a temple to Yahweh here. We can't. We don't have priests who can operate and take our sacrifices and deal with them. We're not allowed to make a pilgrimage back to Jerusalem. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land?

Judah had been swallowed up by the expansionary military might of Babylon, led by Nebuchadnezzar, as I say. And at this time, the Jerusalem temple still stood.

It wasn't destroyed in 597. Jerusalem gave in, capitulated. Its king was taken off into exile, along with others. A puppet king put in his place back in Jerusalem. The temple operations were still continuing.

But in exile, these people could not be part of it. Five years later, or ten years later, I should say, five years after the opening of Ezekiel, Jerusalem did fall.

[ 7 : 28 ] A madcap resistance effort back in Jerusalem against the Babylonians that had no chance of success, was quashed quickly, brutally. And Jerusalem, the city, was thoroughly destroyed.

Its temple brought down to its foundations in 587, 586 BC. After ten years, really, of Babylonian authority over Judah. And then their plight was even worse.

Where now for the people of God at this time? For many of them, back in Jerusalem, they blithely thought the future will be fine. The temple is still standing after 597.

The king's gone. Others have gone. Priests and leaders and wealthy folk, they've gone. The people who might bring about an organised resistance, they've gone. But the temple's still there.

We can offer our sacrifices. And God will... We're safe because of the temple. And God's clearly sustaining us and blessing us. Of course, such hope was futile a few years later when the temple was destroyed.

[ 8 : 32 ] For many, there was a real anger at God. This is not fair. Our ancestors may have sinned, but not us. Our ancestors, they've eaten sour grapes, and it's our teeth that are set on edge.

That is, we're innocent victims here of this capitulation of Jerusalem and then later the fall of Jerusalem. God, this is not fair. And for others, those in exile, taken away ten years before the destruction of Jerusalem, there in Babylon, it was largely despair.

If they had hope, it was hope that somehow back in Jerusalem there might be a future. But there in Babylon, their future was grim. How shall we worship the Lord in a strange land?

They wrote and they sang. Ezekiel was probably 30 years old. When his ministry as a prophet began. That's probably what verse 1 is referring to in the 30th year.

We're not told the 30th year of what. And probably it's his own life. When he's called to be a prophet. Significantly, he's a priest. Son of a priest, therefore probably of the tribe of Levi.

[ 9 : 47 ] And Numbers, the book of Numbers tells us that priests came into service at the age of 30. Here is Ezekiel in exile. At this age, some commentators even suggest it might be his birthday.

He might be ordained into the active priesthood in the Jerusalem temple. But here he is 1500 miles away. In exile. In Babylon.

Access denied back to the Jerusalem temple. 593 BC. 31st of July. If we go by the dates of verses 2 in this opening chapter.

Ezekiel is part of this refugee or slave camp at Nippur. By the canal of the Chiba. And out of the blue.

In his 30th year. He has a vision of God. The heavens were opened. And I saw visions of God. Verse 1 concludes.

[ 10 : 51 ] Even before the vision is described. We are told that it's of God. So in the midst of all the detail and the confusion of how it all looks.

It's of God. Verse 3 begins. The word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel. So it's not only a vision of God.

But from God. God has revealed this vision to Ezekiel. Spoken it to him. The word. Word. In verse 3. Is a bit more general than our word.

Word. Davar means word or thing. So it may be words. As we would write them. But also a vision. Would be included. Under that category.

And at the end of verse 3. We're told that Ezekiel. By the river Chiba. In exile. Near Babylon. The Lord. The hand of the Lord. Was on him. There.

[ 11 : 55 ] In exile. There. The hand of the Lord was on him. Not back in Jerusalem alone. There in exile. The hand of the Lord was on Ezekiel.

How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? The Lord is there. The Lord is there. Is implied by those opening verses.

An introduction to the book. As I looked a stormy wind came out of the north. A great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually.

And in the middle of the fire something like gleaming amber. Fire. It's the prelude of the vision. It's the announcement of it.

A storm. Fire. Cloud. Where do we know these things from? They're symbols of God. At Mount Sinai. Way earlier in the Old Testament. When God spoke from the midst of the cloud and the fire on the top of Mount Sinai.

[ 12 : 55 ] That is it's announcing God in this opening verse of the vision. Verse 4. If anything.

These opening verses and the whole book of Ezekiel. Is telling us that even in exile. In a pagan land. Away from a temple. Away from the operation of the sacrifices.

Away from the promised land of Abraham. And all its heritage. Even in exile. God is there. He's not absent.

And he's not silent. And Ezekiel is in exile. 5.9.3. Before the fall or the destruction rather of Jerusalem. The temple still stands at this time.

For despairing Jews who say how can we worship the Lord in a strange land. At first there is this element of comfort. Assurance.

[ 13 : 54 ] The hand of the Lord was on Ezekiel there. The vision of God was there. The word of the Lord came to him there. In exile. How?

We'll see that later. I've often been tempted when I teach Old Testament in Bible colleges. And have to set exams.

To have as one of the questions. Draw Ezekiel 1. I've never quite been allowed to do that. Let me say. By moderators and examining bodies sadly.

But. It's quite a complicated thing. It's hard to picture. It's hard to imagine. Some of us might think. Well. Isn't it a shame that God hasn't passed down to us the picture.

Rather he's given us the words. But actually in the end the words matter. In some ways more than the picture. Because as we'll see through this vision. Ezekiel's description.

[ 14 : 55 ] Is in one sense inaccurate. Not inaccurate in a misleading way. But he can't quite describe the indescribable. This is like that. This is a bit like this. An appearance of that.

It's like this. It's like this. It's something like this. That is it's almost beyond words. And the picture wouldn't do it justice either. Even if we had the picture that Ezekiel sees.

It's also easy to be sidetracked by the detail. To try and think that. How would this connect to this. And that sort of thing. At the end of the vision.

As we'll see. Ezekiel falls down in worship of God. The impact matters. More than the particular detail. Of what it looks like.

How does it connect. How does this happen. Etc. The language in this. Is actually very awkward. Is actually very awkward. In Hebrew. Which is. Its original writing. It's as though Ezekiel was a bit overwhelmed.

[ 15 : 52 ] Emotionally. By the vision. As though he can't quite capture it. He's trying to write it down. Maybe in a hurry. The sentences don't all fit together neatly. The English has tried to make the best sense of it.

In one sense. Me saying that. Shouldn't lead you to a lack of confidence. In this text. It's in effect. Conveying the indescribable. And by in a sense.

Doing it with. Grammar that doesn't quite fit. Or sentences that are awkward. It's actually deliberately. I think. Conveying the indescribable to us. A vision of God.

Is not a simple thing. To describe. Let alone to see. And we're meant. I think. Like Ezekiel. To be moved in the same way.

That at the end of this description. Of the vision. We're not meant to say. I wonder how big the wings were. Or what colour. Or I wonder how fast it moved.

[ 16 : 48 ] Or I wonder how did these wheels really operate. That's not actually what we're meant to think. At the end. At the end of it all. We're meant to be like Ezekiel. And worship God.

And hear his voice. The almighty God of the universe. Is revealing himself. We ought to stand in awe.

Before him. There are three main parts of the vision. The living creatures. Verses 5 to 11. The motion.

Or movement. Verses 12 to 25. And then the throne itself. There are other aspects of it. And the vision does move forward.

And then move back. It's as though it's beginning to approach its climax. And then it just backs back a little bit. As though it's sort of building suspense. So it's not simple to say. There's just three parts of the vision.

[ 17 : 45 ] And these clearly are their verses. But that's the basic breakdown. Now if you go to ancient museums today. And see statues of ancient civilizations.

The Assyrians for example. There's lots of Assyrian architecture in museums in Europe. And Egyptian stuff. You'll often see statues or drawings or depictions. That combine human animal forms.

In different ways. It might be a human face with animal bodies. Or vice versa. And that's what we get here with the living creatures. Often they're associated with emperors. Or guarding the palaces of emperors.

Or guarding their thrones. And that's also what we see in these vision. In the first part of this vision here. There are four living creatures. All have human-like bodies.

That's what we're told in verse 5. It looks as though they're standing. Verse 7 says their legs were straight. Feet that suggests that they're standing. And the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot.

[ 18 : 48 ] We're not meant to therefore think that the feet must somehow be off the ground. Ezekiel is being given a vision here. And he's able to see. We're not meant to think are they floating above us.

So we can look under their feet and see their soles. Or are they lying down with their soles sticking up. It looks from what's happening here that they're standing. And that somehow Ezekiel can see even the soles of their feet.

They are shining and bright. At the end of verse 7. They sparkled like burnished bronze. And one of the things about this whole vision. All its parts. Is that it gleams and shines and is bright.

Typical sorts of descriptions of things that surround God. In the Old Testament. They have human hands at the beginning of verse 8. That are under their wings.

So not just wings. But even hands under the wings. And the hands are like human hands. Each of these four living creatures has four faces. So it's not that there are four living creatures.

[ 19 : 48 ] Each one slightly different. They're actually, it seems, all pretty much the same as each other. They have four faces. Verse 6 tells us that they each have four.

And then in verse 10 we're told what the four faces of each are. So in verse 10. The appearance of their faces. The four had the face of a human being.

The face of a lion on the right side. The face of an ox on the left side. And the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. So if you were looking towards the front.

Four human faces would stare at you. If you were looking from one side. Four lion faces. From the other for ox faces. And from the back presumably for eagle faces.

We may be pushing it too much to try and find precise symbolism for each. You've got wild and domesticated animals.

[ 20 : 45 ] Humans and things of the sky. Maybe it's suggesting an element of sovereignty over all the created things. Although there's nothing of the water there. Could be that the lion typically represents royalty and strength.

The ox maybe as a domesticated animal suggests maybe fertility. Maybe the eagle's swiftness or the skies or the heavens. Maybe forcing too much to be too dogmatic about particular symbolism of each.

Each of them has four wings as well. Two wings cover themselves. An element of modesty. But perhaps also an element of holiness.

Similar to Isaiah 6. Where his visions there of seraphim. Which each have six wings. These are different with four. And they're not seraphim. They're not burning like they are in Isaiah 6. But at the end of verse 11.

They had two wings. Each of which touched the wing of another. While two covered their bodies. Probably what's being suggested here. Is that there are two wings that are perhaps folded in front of them.

[ 21 : 52 ] Covering them. An element of holiness or protection from holy God. But also two wings that perhaps are outstretched. Touching the living creature that is next.

But the living creatures are probably in a square. So they're all facing in a sense each direction. Because they've got four faces. But the wings stretched and touching.

Would probably form a square. Is the way that. Or a circle. But in a sense it doesn't really matter. It seems to be how these wings work. That touch each other.

So that in a sense they form like a square or circle. Guarding a centre point. Which we'll come to in a minute. We're not told here what these creatures are called.

But in Ezekiel 10. Later in this book. Ezekiel goes back to this vision. And he names these living creatures cherubim. Now if I was to say to you.

[ 22 : 51 ] Can you draw me a cherub. You would probably think of Raphael's drawing. Of a cute baby face with little wings. You know the sort of kitsch stuff. That you can buy at Kurong and Word.

And so on. When they don't have books. That's the right. It's not a cherub. Cherubim in the Bible are ferocious. Cherubim in the Bible are fierce.

Cherubim the I am is simply the plural ending in Hebrew. They are fierce guards. They guard the Garden of Eden. They guard the Temple's Holy of Holies.

And guard the Ark of the Covenant. The symbolism continues here. This is a bit like guarding the throne of God. In a way.

The presence of God is symbolised by living creatures. By the fire, the lightning and so on. It's a vision of God we're told. And here are the creatures that are in a sense guarding.

[ 23 : 50 ] Access to God. At the centre of them. Their wings remember are touching to form a square or circle. In the centre of that. We're told in verse 13.

In the middle of the living creatures. There was something that looked like burning coals of fire. Like torches. Moving to and fro among the living creatures.

The fire was bright and lightning issued from the fire. It may suggest being an altar. But fire and burning stuff suggests also simply the presence of God.

It's not literally the presence of God as we'll see in a minute. But it's symbolic of God's presence. And of movement between the fire going. The lightning coming from it.

And so on. We're on holy ground here. With this vision. And verse 13. In a sense Ezekiel recognises that words fail him a bit.

[ 24 : 52 ] In the middle of the living creatures there was something like. Something that looked like. Burning coals of fire. Like torches.

Moving to or fro. That is it's not simply burning coals and burning torches. But it's something that looks like that. He can't quite capture it.

It's a visual symbol. Pointing to a heavenly reality in effect. Remember this is a vision of heaven.

The heavens are opened. For Ezekiel to see this as we saw back in verse 1. And this is the reality to which symbols on earth point.

So when he keeps saying something like something. In a sense it's an earthly analogy. To try and capture a heavenly reality. And so much of the symbolism.

[ 25 : 48 ] Which the Old Testament Jews would recognise. From their temple symbolism. Ark and so on. It's reminding us that all of that paraphernalia on earth.

which these Jews in exiles don't have access to now. Is actually pointing to a heavenly reality. To the heavenly sanctuary. As the New Testament makes so clear.

Well so far so good perhaps. The second main feature of this vision. Is quite surprising. Movement. Motion. Most of these things.

Where they occur in other bits of the Old Testament. Relatively stationary. The idea of a temple. Or the Holy of Holies. Or even the Ark to a degree. Although the Ark does move until the temple is built.

But from verse 12 onwards. The theme becomes motion. Or movement. Verse 12. Each moved straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go.

[ 26 : 51 ] They went. Without turning as they went. So this connection of four living creatures. With all the fire in the middle of it. The wings touching it.

All moves together. Like a little cart or chariot. That is. One living creature doesn't go off this direction. And another that direction. They all move in a perfect synergy.

In any direction. Without turning. Remember of course they've got four faces. So in one sense. Whichever direction they go. There's a face looking forward anyway. Verse 14.

Similarly. The living creatures darted to and fro. Like a flash of lightning. So don't think of this as a sort of slow moving thing. It's moving fast. In all sorts of different directions.

Like a flash of lightning. Not it is a flash of lightning. But like it. It's the best analogy that Ezekiel has. As he sees this vision. The vision. And it's led by the spirit.

[ 27 : 49 ] As verse 12 says. Associated with the movement. Are wheels. And it's from this vision. That we get the expression. Often used in all sorts of ways these days.

Wheels within wheels. It comes from Ezekiel 1. Even if of course people. Don't use it with any knowledge of Ezekiel 1. So verse 15 says. As I looked at the living creatures.

I saw a wheel on the earth. Beside the living creatures. One for each of the four of them. In one sense it explains their movement. And also then.

Note that they are gleaming and bright. Verse 16. As for the appearance of the wheels. And their construction. Their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl. A precious stone. And then in verse 18.

Their rims were tall and awesome. For the rims of all four wheels. Were full of eyes all round. The eyes. Some suggest might be.

[ 28 : 47 ] Eye stones. Stones that gleam like an eye. Again suggesting something precious. And these precious stones. Were often symbolic of the presence of God.

In Eden. Or in the temple. Or the high priest's vestments. As he would enter the temple. It goes with the burnished bronze. As we saw in verse 7. Of the living creatures themselves.

This whole thing. With fire in the middle. Is gleaming and glowing. And bright. Flashing like lightning. But they're not simply wheels. The end of verse 16 says.

Their appearance. Was like the gleaming of beryl. And the four had the same form. Their construction being something like. A wheel. Within a wheel. Now this is where I think.

It's a bit like a supermarket trolley. That is wheels that sort of go in any direction. Casters. I think they're called. The difference of course would be. This goes in the direction.

[ 29 : 45 ] That the spirit leads it. Where a supermarket trolley. Never goes in the direction. That you lead it. We're not meant to think therefore. Of chariot wheels.

Or car wheels. The idea is that. There's somehow. In a way that. Ezekiel can't explain. And we're not certain. The wheels could go in any direction. At any time.

Not quite randomly. Like a supermarket trolley. But the idea is that. This whole construction. Of living creatures. Surrounding this fiery throne. Or fire in the middle. Is able to move this way.

That way. Backwards. Whatever. Without having to stop. And turn. And veer. One way or the other. That is. It's got a complete freedom. To move whichever way it wants. And remember.

It's darting to and fro. It's quick. It's not a sort of slow moving. You know. Army tank or something. It's zipping all over the place. Like a manic shopper.

[ 30 : 39 ] The night before Christmas. Or something like that. These wheels though. Are not random as I say. They're automated by the spirit. Who returns to the description.

In verse 19 onwards. When the living creatures moved. The wheels move beside them. Clearly this is a suggestion. That somehow these living creatures. Are connected to the wheels.

But we're not told. They're simply beside them. And when the living creatures. Rose from the earth. The wheels rose. Maybe that's how he saw. The soles of the feet. Wherever the spirit would go.

They went. And the wheels rose. Along with them. For the spirit of the living creatures. Or literally the spirit of life. Was in the wheels. When they moved. The others moved.

When they stopped. The others stopped. When they rose from the earth. The wheels rose. Along with them. For the spirit of the living creatures. Was in the wheels. That is.

[ 31 : 36 ] The whole thing. Works together. In unison. In the same direction. Automated. Or energized. By the spirit of life.

It doesn't go in four different directions. Doesn't split up. And come back together. It stays together. All the time. So the living creatures. Never separate. Their wings are always touching.

As they dart. To and fro. They all go in the same direction. It's a little bit like a chariot. But it's got a movement freedom. Far beyond any chariot.

And they never need to turn. To face the front. Because they have four faces. So in a sense. They are always. There is always at least one face. Facing forwards. Well now.

Ezekiel's eyes turn upward. And above all of this. Is a crystal dome. The word is firmament. Which is a word used in Genesis 1. About God's creation.

[ 32 : 35 ] Of the skies and the earth. And the separation between them. When I think of this description. In the dome above it. I think of one of those little. Little souvenir things. That you shake. And it has snow falling down.



It's always a bit silly. Because you can buy them. In the middle of hot places. And deserts. Where it never snows. I remember one. In the Dead Sea area of Israel. I'm sure it never snows there. But you can buy the little thing. And shake it. And it'll snow. On the Dead Sea scrolls.

Or the Dead Sea. Or something silly like that. So I think of some sort of. Crystal dome. A see-through thing. It's crystal. So you can look through it. Separating something above. From what's been seen already.

Verse 22. Over the heads. Of the living creatures. There was something like a dome. It isn't a dome. And it's probably not simply crystal. But it's something like that.

Shining like crystal. Again get the sense of shining. Gleaming. Things are bright in this vision. Every aspect of it is bright. And glistening. Or gleaming. Or shining. And it's spread out above.

[ 33 : 35 ] Their heads. And then verse 23. Repeats a little bit. Again. It's as though we've advanced a step. And then we just come back a little bit. Building suspense towards the climax.

I suggest. Under the dome. Their wings were stretched out straight. One toward another. And each of the creatures. Had two wings covering its body. We already know that. But we're told it again. To remind us.

But then something additional. Noise. When they moved. I heard the sound of their wings. Noise. Now when we hear a bird.

And it's flapping wings. It's a gentle sound. Usually. Even if it's a flock of birds. Flying low overhead. It's not a particularly terrifying sound. Usually. But this sound of their wings.

Is. Well it's like the sound of mighty waters. If you stand by a raging waterfall. It's a loud sound. Or the mighty waters of a surf beach.

[ 34 : 33 ] Or something. That's loud. It's also like. The thunder of the almighty. Which may simply be a way of saying. A strong clap of thunder. And maybe if you've ever been.

In the middle of a thunderstorm. And been woken up. Terrified by this great smash of thunder. That seems to be about. Two feet above your bed. Or something. Well. You know. This is. This is a loud. And terrifying sound.

It's like that sound. You might think. Well how can. The sound of thunder. Be like the sound of mighty waters. But. It's not any one of these. It's. Ezekiel just trying to give us. Some earthly analogies.

To help us. Get a feel. For what this is. This is something. Quite ferocious. And powerful. And terrifying. The third analogy. Is that it's a sound of tumult. Like the sound of an army.

Marching into war. Or fighting in war. Again. The sense of. Fear. Almost. Of something. Very powerful. In the sound. Of all these wings. Of the movement.

[ 35 : 28 ] Of these living creatures. All together. A scary noise. A noise. Perhaps associated. With battle victory. As well. Maybe that's implicit. And then when it stops.

Presumably. There's an element. Of relative. Silence. And then. Ezekiel. Hears. So this is where he returns. Now above the dome. So to speak.

Beyond the crystal dome. Verse 25. There came a voice. From above the dome. Over their heads. When they stopped.

They let down their wings. That is. I heard it. When they stopped. When they travel. There's this vast noise. Of the movement of wings. But when they stopped.

I heard. A voice from above. The dome. Whose voice. We're not yet told. But of course.

[ 36 : 24 ] We know. There's only one voice. We would ever hear. From above the dome. Even. Remember. In exile. The third part.

Of this vision. The last couple of verses. Takes us. Above the dome. Ezekiel is looking through. This crystal dome. It seems. Hence. He can see. What's. In the heaven of heavens.

Perhaps. Already. This is heaven open. To see all this. And now. In a sense. He's going beyond. The open heaven. Into perhaps. The heaven of heavens. The very. Heart of heaven. And so.

We read. In verse 26. This. Above the dome. Over their heads. Was something like. A throne. Like a throne. I mean. In one sense. It is a throne. But it's. It's like a throne.

It's not quite. The sort of normal throne. You'd see. In appearance. Like sapphire. Blue stone. Or maybe even. Lapis lazuli. Very. Very precious. Expensive stone.

[ 37 : 21 ] In the ancient world. And seated. Above. The likeness. Of a throne. Was something. That seemed like. A human form.

Now. Now. Pay attention. To the language. Ezekiel is not saying. On the throne. Was a human being. He's saying. On what looked. Like a throne.

There was something. Like. A human being. It's as close. As he can get. In the description. Words fail. As he tries.

To describe. Almighty God. Himself. Little children. Will often ask. What does God look like? There's a little child. In church here. Maybe 10 years ago now.

When I was. Here. And ministering. Our morning service. And I think for. This little child. Was a bit shocked. He said to his grandmother. Who was a regular church attender.

[ 38 : 19 ] Is that. God. And he was pointing to me. I had a beard. In those days. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing.

I was wearing. I was wearing. I was wearing. And quickly. We assured him. That I was not God. What does God look like? This is one of the few. Descriptions. In the Bible.

Of what God. Looks like. It's about as close. As we get actually. In the whole Bible. Above the likeness.

Of a throne. Was something. That seemed like. A human form. Not human. But seemed like. A human form. Upward from what.

Appeared like. The loins. I saw. Something like. Gleaming. Amber. Something that. Looked like. Fire.

[ 39 : 14 ] Enclosed all around. And downward. From what looked. Like. The loins. I saw something. That looked. Like. Fire. And there was a splendor.

All around. Can you draw that? A bit hard. Isn't it? You can't really draw. What God looks like.

It's too odd. It bursts. The analogies. It's sort of. Got a human form. It looks like loins. It looks like. Gleaming amber. It looks like. It looks like.

But it's not. It's not. Simply that. It's as close. As we get. The gleaming amber. Was mentioned. In the. Opening verse.

Of the vision. In verse 4. As I looked. A stormy wind. Came out of the north. A great cloud. With brightness. Around it. And fire. Flashing forth. Continually. And in the middle. Of the fire. Something like.

[ 40 : 07 ] Gleaming amber. And here we've come. To the center. Of the vision. To the presence. Of almighty God. Himself. Of course. Humanity's made. In the likeness of God.

That doesn't mean. Necessarily. Physically. But it does seem. A suggestion. Of some physical. Analogy. Between the two. Between God. And between humanity. But notice how often.

Those words are appearing. By the end of this chapter. Something like this. Something like that. The appearance of this. And it appears like. Or it seems like. It appears like. Ezekiel is backing away. From saying. It is. It is.

It's just. Too. Too indescribable. In a sense. Not easy. To describe. The indescribable God. Language fails.

It's a sort of. Impressionistic thing. It's a bit like. A Monet. In words. Ezekiel 1. If you. End up too close to it. You just see. The dots of color. The whole point of this vision.

[ 41 : 06 ] Is to stand back. And recognize. This is a vision. Of almighty God. You're in exile. A strange land.

A land of the Babylonian gods. Bel. Marduk. Nebo. They've won over your God. Jerusalem capitulated. Five years before. You're in exile. A slave.

In Nippur. In a refugee type camp. What God is this? Like the bow.

In a cloud. On a rainy day. Such was the appearance. Of the splendor. All around. A rainbow. Rainbows need rain.

But rainbows are hope. A biblical symbol. Of an eternal covenant. This was the appearance.

[ 42 : 08 ] Of the likeness. Of the glory of. Notice how. Those words. Appearance. Likeness. Glory. It's sort of backing away. In a sense.

Because the analogy doesn't quite work in the end. This is something beyond description. This is the appearance. Of the likeness. Of the glory. Of Yahweh.

Yahweh. Not Bel, Nebo or Marduk. The God of the Babylonians. The God of the victorious nation. This is Yahweh. Now we know that.

We expect that. We're familiar with this. There's an element in which it's building up to a climax. From the living creatures. And what's in between them. And then what's above them. And what's above that. And it's a throne.

Or it's like a throne. And we see something like a human form. We know that this is a divine creature. But who is it. Here in this land of exile. Yahweh. The word Lord.

[ 43 : 02 ] In verse 28. In the middle. Capital letters. Is the name of the God of the Bible. Yahweh. And in response.

Ezekiel falls down prostrate. In awe and worship. So what's this all about. Yahweh. Jehovah. Yahweh is sovereign.

Even in exile. He's the one above the dome. He's the one who controls the universe. He's the one who is sovereign in rule. Even in exile.

He's the one over heaven and earth. And like Ezekiel. We believers. We Christians. We see behind the scenes. We've got it again in the Bible.

We know what's behind the scenes. Because of Jesus. Because of Jesus. Because of Jesus risen and ascended. Because of the visions of revelation. We like Ezekiel know who is on the throne of the universe.

[ 44 : 01 ] And even though like Ezekiel and his colleagues and cohort there in Nippur near Babylon. They're defeated. They're demoralized. They're dispirited. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land?

We know that despite appearances on earth. The Lord reigns. The Lord rules. He is sovereign. He is in charge. Even in exile. But secondly.

This is saying that God is not stationary. He's not locked up in a holy of holies back in Jerusalem. So that if you venture far willingly or unwillingly off to Babylon. That somehow you're cut off from God.

Not at all. Because it's there in exile that God speaks. That his hand is on Ezekiel. That his word comes to Ezekiel and to the exiles. And this picture of God on this sort of movable chariot throne.

Moving around. Darting forth. Is a picture of a mobile God. Who is sovereign over all places. And not limited to any one place. Far away. This vision remember takes place in exile.

[ 45 : 03 ] How different that is too. From the gods around them. The Babylonian gods. Who would be carried by beasts of burden. Or carried on backs of worshippers.

Statues of bronze or stone. Of Baal and Marduk. What a mockery the exilic prophets make of that. Ezekiel 46. You have to carry. And you get weary carrying your gods.

Bel stoops down. Nebo stoops low. But Yahweh carries. Same idea is implicit here. This is not a God whom we have to carry. This is the God who is sovereign.

Then thirdly. The focus of this vision is God himself. That's obvious. But needs to be stated. It's not a focus on a temple. It's not a focus on a land. It's a focus on God.

And when you're in trouble. When you're in exile. When things are wrong. The focus needs to be God. Not church. Songs. Hymns. Heritage.

[ 46 : 05 ] Homeland. Roots. But God. For God alone is our refuge. Our hope. None of those other bits of paraphernalia. No matter how important they are.

Often we replace God with false securities. Which may be secular. Wealth. Possessions. Family. Husband. Wife. Etc. Or they may be religious. Church buildings.

Church architecture. Songs. Hymns. Stars. And so on. God himself. Is to be the focus. And Ezekiel confronts us.

And his. People. With this vision of God himself. Implicitly. A God of judgment. As we'll see. As the fire so often symbolizes. Fourth point.

Is that this vision merely sets the scene. Verse 25. After the moving around. And that loud voice. Of the flapping of wings. For movement. He hears.

[ 47 : 02 ] A voice. And at the very end of the chapter. When I saw it. I fell on my face. And I heard. The voice. Of someone.

Speaking. The point of this vision. Is to validate the voice. The point of this vision. Is to underscore the authority. Of the words.

That follow. Thus. Says the Lord. Will Ezekiel say. Time and again. The God. Who is sovereign. Over the universe. The God of Israel.

And Judah. Is not confined. In Jerusalem. Or confined. To a temple. He's not defeated. By the Babylonian. Gods and armies. He still speaks. He's still sovereign.

He's still triumphant. He's still working. His purposes out. Even in exile. To a dispirited. Demoralized people. And when he speaks. Listen. Because he is.

[ 48 : 00 ] The sovereign God. What matters. In the end. Is not what he looks like. But what he says. This vision. Serves. The words that follow. Which are to be.

Heard. And heeded. Words of judgment. For the next five years. Of Ezekiel's ministry. And then after. It's reported. That Jerusalem.

Temples destroyed. Then come the words. Of hope. The sovereign Lord. Demands. Attentive ears. And this vision.

Serves that purpose. What he says. Matters. More than what he looks like. Our God. Is on about. Speaking words. Not about pictures.

And we worship him. By hearing. And heeding. His word. One day. We will see the Lord. Face to face. And then. And only then. In a sense. Will it matter. That we see him. For what he looks like.

[ 48 : 58 ] Enthroned in splendor. For now. We hear his voice. In exile or not. In the words of the scriptures.

And as Ezekiel fell down. In humble submission. Before this awesome vision. So should we humbly submit. To the word of God. In faithful hope.

The rainbow suggests. That hope. But in obedience as well. Even in exile. Even when appearances on earth. Suggest that God is silent.

Or absent. Or weak. By the waters of Babylon. We sat down and wept. How can we worship the Lord. In a strange land. We can.

Because that God. Still speaks. And we can still hear. And heed. And trust that despite appearances. He remains sovereign.

[ 49 : 57 ] Over all. that by water.

That ends up. Over all.