



Perplexing Passages (Week 1/2) Ezekiel's Wheels

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *How have you been strengthened by the gospel, through the letter to the Romans?*

Warm-Up

1. When you read a part of the Bible that perplexes you, how do you respond?
2. What do you find most helpful when reading parts of the Bible that are confusing?
3. Is the authority of God's Word dependent on our understanding? Why or why not?

Read Ezekiel 1:5-28

4. How old was Ezekiel (or soon to be) when he received this vision? *What is the significance of this age?*
5. What should he have been expecting to do as he turned 30? Why was that not going to happen?
6. What had happened to some of the people in Israel? What questions might they have been asking?
7. Do you ever feel like God has abandoned you? How is this a reminder that God is always with us?

Read Ezekiel 1:5-28

8. Step through Ezekiel's vision and identify all of the main elements. Do you find this hard to imagine?
9. What parts of this vision do you find most strange? What do you think it would have been like for Ezekiel to experience? How would you feel if you experienced something like this?
10. How many times does Ezekiel describe things as 'like' something else? How is this a clue that Ezekiel is struggling to put his experience into words? *Have you ever struggled to describe something with words?*
11. What is the 'key' to understanding the 'big picture' of what Ezekiel is seeing? (cf. verse 28)
12. What does the word 'glory' mean? What points to the Lord's glory in this passage?
13. What do these three 'omni' words mean? Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent.
14. How does Ezekiel's vision point to these three aspects of who God is?
15. Can we fully comprehend God? Does that also mean that God is unknowable? (Why or why not?)
16. What is the ultimate cause of the gap between us and God?
17. Why can't we stand in God's glory unveiled and live? What are examples in the Old Testament?
18. What was Ezekiel's response to seeing the glory of God? What should be our response?
19. How has Jesus 'bridged' the gap? What is our future with regard to God's glory?

Apply *What does it look like each day to live in light of the glory of God?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you that you have chosen to reveal yourself to us through your Word, in your Son, and by the power of your Holy Spirit. Help us to humbly and faithfully receive your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen*

GOING DEEPER

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Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Pray for the children and team at Holiday Kids Club, for discipleship opportunities, fun, and energy for everyone.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* "The Glory of God" by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-glory-of-god/>
- *Listen (sermon):* "God's Watchman" by Vaughn Roberts:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/gods-watchman/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* "God arrives in Babylon" by Chris Wright:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=49775&show_file=58223
- *Watch (video):* "Ezekiel 1-33 Overview" by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/ezekiel-1-33/>

Series Resources

- *Book:* "A Doubter's Guide to the Bible" by John Dickson. 
- *Book:* "Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons" by Graham Cole.
- *Book:* "The Message of Ezekiel" by Christopher Wright.
- *Book:* "Reading the Bible for All It's Worth" by Gordon Fee. 

 Available to borrow from the St Bart's Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

PERPLEXING PASSAGES

*Week 1/2 “Ezekiel’s Wheels and a Mobile Throne”
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (20/09/2026, Toowoomba)*

에스겔의 바퀴와 움직이는 보좌? | 以西结-轮子与移动宝?
எசேக்கியேலின் சக்கரங்களும், ஓடும் சிங்காசனமும்

Bible Passage: Ezekiel 1

Heart of Sermon: *The glory of God is like nothing we can imagine, something we long for, but also too much for us to bear. Faced with the glory of God the only response that makes sense is to worship him in gratitude that he has bridged the gap.*

Gracious Father, thank you that you have chosen to reveal yourself to us through your Word, in your Son, and by the power of your Spirit. Please help us to humbly and faithfully receive your Word. In Jesus’ Name, Amen

Over the next two weeks, we’re returning to an occasional series, looking at some particularly perplexing parts of the Bible.

- Not just as some intellectual exercise, or to give our brains a bit of a workout.
- This isn’t a riddle to be solved, nor a curiosity for our entertainment. / No. /
- This is us taking the entirety of the Bible seriously — *the whole Bible is God’s Word*.
And then in response, with great humility, *seeking to understand and receive it faithfully*.
- *Humbly: because we recognise our limits, not stepping beyond what God has chosen to reveal to us.*
Faithfully: because we yearn to understand and obey God’s Word in accordance with his intention.
- Next week we’re looking at angels. *This week the vision God revealed to Ezekiel.*
- / And I reckon this 100% qualifies as a perplexing passage! If you’re not convinced, we’re going to step it through! But the best place to start is to have our Bibles open and pray...

Often when we read the Bible, *perhaps especially when we encounter passages like this*, it’s so tempting to rush to ask — what does this mean!

- And that’s a great question. That’s a *very* good question! But I want to hold us back.
- Because passages like this remind us that we’ve first got to immerse ourselves in the text.
- We’ve got to soak it in! We must not skip that step.
- In Ezekiel’s 30th year, what did he *look up and see* whilst he sat by the river in exile?
He saw...

- **An immense windstorm (verse 4).** [STAGE A]
From the north — with flashing lightning and brilliant light, the centre was like glowing metal.
- **Four living creatures (verse 5),** who are humanish in form and dashing around. [STAGE B]
*BUT, they each had four faces: that of a human, lion, an ox, and an eagle.
They each had four wings. They had straight legs, feet like a calf, gleaming like bronze.
And under their wings they had human hands.*
- **Then, beside each creature is a wheel (verse 15).** [STAGE C]
*BUT of course these are no ordinary wheels. They sparkle like topaz.
Each wheel appears to have another intersecting wheel inside of it.
They move in any of the four directions that the creatures face.
Oh, and the rims are not only high and awesome, but FULL of eyes all around.*
- **Spread above the creatures, verse 22, is something like a vault, a ceiling.** [STAGE D]
Awesomely sparkling like ice or crystal.
- **Above the vault — verse 26 — was a spectacular throne.** [STAGE E]
- **And upon the throne was a figure like that of a man.** [STAGE F]
*Glowing like metal, as if full of fire, brilliant light surrounded him.
His radiance was like a rainbow in the clouds. // Ezekiel must have felt like he was
floundering, as he grasped to put into words — to express — what he had witnessed.*
- And — remember — this isn't just vivid imagery with rapid movement, but it's noisy.

- **There is a windstorm;** [SOUND STAGE A]
Lightning; [SOUND STAGE B] **The sound of the creature's wings;** [SOUND STAGE C]
like the roar of rushing waters; [SOUND STAGE D] / Like the voice of the Almighty;
like the tumult of an army. [SOUND STAGE E] What is this all about? [PAUSE then NEXT
SLIDE - *silent*]... It's tempting to try and unpick each and every element as some sort of
coded symbol, but Ezekiel gives the headline in... verse 28: what is this about?
- *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord! //*

Ezekiel was amongst the first to be dragged in exile under the oppression of the Babylonians.
Ezekiel is in his 30th year — the very year he'd be expecting to go into fully priestly service.

- His whole life has been preparing for that trajectory. But now, in exile, he's nowhere near the Temple. *In fact, the Temple's days — with Jerusalem's — seem numbered.*
- God's people were displaced, divided, and disillusioned.
Many have turned their back on God and assumed that God had abandoned them.
- And it is right into the thick of this reality,
that the Lord doesn't call Ezekiel into priestly service in the Temple,
but the Lord comes to Ezekiel and calls him to be his prophet./
- Among the exiles. By the river in exile. *God reveals his glory. /*
- If you are bewildered by the vision — that is part of the point! *Ezekiel's glimpse of God's glory shows us: **The Otherness of God; The Gap Between Us and God; and How to Respond.***

THE OTHERNESS OF GOD | VERSE

하나님의 거룩하심 | 神的超越性 | எட்டமுடியாத உயர்ந்த தேவனின் தனித்துவம்

First, *this glimpse of glory* shows us **the otherness of God**.

Note that as Ezekiel *tries to describe* the vision which has been revealed to him, *words fail him*.

The centre looked **LIKE** *glowing metal*. (v.4) / What looked **LIKE** four living creatures. (v.5)

Feet **LIKE** those of a calf. Gleaming **LIKE** burnished bronze. (v.7)

Appearing **LIKE** burning coals or **LIKE** torches. Movement **LIKE** flashes of lightning. (v.13)

Wheels sparkling **LIKE** topaz. **LIKE** a wheel intersecting a wheel. (v.16)

Above them something **LIKE** a vault. Sparkling **LIKE** crystal (v.22)

Sounds **LIKE** the roar of rushing waters. **LIKE** the voice of the Almighty. **LIKE** the tumult of an army. (v.24)

What looked **LIKE** a throne. (v.26)

A figure **LIKE** that of a man. **LIKE** glowing metal. **AS IF** full of FIRE. **LIKE** fire. (v.27)

LIKE an appearance of a rainbow. (v.28) - he doesn't have the vocab to express what he's seeing!

- This isn't just sensory overload but there's no precedent for what Ezekiel is seeing, because what he is experiencing is out of the typical human experience.
- It's like the veil of a curtain has been pulled back to reveal something usually out of sight. *Which means there's no language at Ezekiel's disposal to help him fully convey what he's witnessing.*
- It's a bit like when you witness something beautiful and it's impossible to put into words.
- Or you experience something extraordinary and we say, "*you just had to be there!*". []

- We're meant to take the weightiness — that's what 'glory' means — of it in. Because when we do, we're getting a sense of weightiness of who God is.
- We can so easily get stuck on every element of what Ezekiel describes and miss the point! Part of the point is that God's glory is indescribable because God is *not like us*.
- God is not simply an eternal, morally perfect, superintelligent, improved version of us. Yes, God's Son became a human for us, but don't make the mistake of thinking, that *that* means that God is simply like humanity 2.0. Or the OG and every copy since has faded in glory! No... He is the creator and we are the created. God is altogether different.

So we take the weight of that in. And then, and only then — as we approach God with awe, the various elements of the vision can help us to appreciate aspects of who God is.

- Colin Buchanan has a great kids song called, "Big Words that End in Shun". *He sings about words like revelation, substitution, salvation, propitiation, etc...*
Big words that end in SHUN...
- For Ezekiel's vision, we need a song called "BIG WORDS that begin with Omni!"
- God is *omniscient*, *omnipotent*, and *omnipresent*. //
The eyes on the wheels remind us that God is *omniscient*:
God sees everything and knows everything — past, present, and future.
- The lightning, the radiance, and the storm remind us that God is *omnipotent*:
that he is all-powerful — he can do everything that he wills, nothing is too hard for him.

- And that even though the people are away from the Temple in exile,
The winds blow, and the wheels move *for God is omnipresent*.
God is fully present everywhere all-at-once.
- **Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent.** //
- We can't expect to fully comprehend a vision like this, this *glimpse* of God's glory,
for God by his very nature is beyond our comprehension.
- *We can as much fully understand God as we can squeeze all of the world's oceans into a thimble!*
- Let me be clear: that doesn't mean that we can't know anything about God.
Or that God is not knowable. We know that he is — because he has revealed himself to us. /

God *wants us* to know him.

- But we must not make the mistake of thinking that we are the same.
- A god that is containable. Who is domesticated. Who we can approach on our own terms.
- *What sort of God would that be? That would be a god of our imagination. Not the God of the Bible.*
- In C S Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia when Lucy asks if Aslan the Lion is safe,
Mr Beaver rightly says.... "Safe" Who said anything about 'safe'?
Course, he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King. //
- *The god of our age is kind of like whoever you want god to be. That might be attractive because that fake god won't place any demands on you. But you know what a fake god also won't do:
want or be capable of a relationship with you.*

THE GAP BETWEEN US | VERSES 25-27

하나님과 우리 사이의 간격 | 人神之间的鸿沟 | நமக்கும், தேவனுக்குமுள்ள இடைவெளி

The only way to begin to grapple with approaching God, is with an honest assessment of who he is.

But when we glimpse his glory, it reveals a problem: **the gap between us and God.** Verse 25...

²⁵ Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. ²⁶ Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him

There's been some pretty wild interpretations of *this part* of Ezekiel's vision,
with one person trying to make the case that the vault was actually a UFO encounter,
but we're really to be left without a doubt that this is a glimpse of the throneroom of God!

- I mean — there is a pretty special throne. And a figure upon the throne!
- So much of this imagery reappears in the early chapters of John's vision in revelation!
- And whilst the expanse above the heads of the creatures is like a ceiling to them,
it serves as a floor to the one who is seated above! /
- As Ezekiel describes the materials used — crystal, lapis lazuli (which is like a blue sapphire) — or at least the type of gemstones of the day which these resemble,

we're meant to understand that these gemstones are precious, valuable, and royal.

- In fact, Nebuchadnezzar's Ishtar gate, built during Ezekiel's lifetime, was covered in glazed bricks to look exactly like this stone!
- *The temples in Mesopotamia were often guarded by stone creatures like this featured here.*
- *Do you see the point? Whilst they are surrounded by oppressed by another power? Do not be mistaken about who is TRULY in charge. Do not be mistaken about who is TRULY judge.*
- The true King of Kings has drawn near. The King of Kings in his splendor has come close.
- Can you just imagine — at one level — how encouraging this would have been to a people who were exiled? Who felt far from the Temple and far from God's presence.
- Perhaps you have felt distant from God at times.
Maybe when you leave a particular place. Or perhaps when you feel anxious.
- But the presence of the glory of God is not bound in a Temple at distance, but here the Lord is — mobile, present, not needing the Temple!
- It's normal that we would long to be in God's presence, as Augustine put it in his confessions: for our heart is restless until it rests in you...

Behind every human longing for beauty is a longing for God's glory.

- But there's a problem — that as much as we long for God's glory, the gap between his beauty and our brokenness,

his glory and our shame, his holiness and our sin, is so vast, that it is simply too much for us to bear.

- That's obvious, right? / *How would you feel if you were encountering what Ezekiel experienced?*
- Astonished by the beauty! Yes! / Awestruck by the power! Yes! / Undone by the gap. //

Centuries earlier, when Moses asks the Lord to "show me your glory" (33:18),

God says 'yes', but with a caveat: *you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*

- This isn't some sort of toxic relationship when one person withholds from another.
- *God isn't saying, "gee, Moses, I'm not sure, it might be a bit much". He's saying, "it will kill you".*
- God isn't being cruel.
- We're like a moth encountering the sun.
- The gap is not because we don't need God.
The gap is not because God does not care.
The gap is not because God is physically distant.
- The real gap is holiness meeting sin.
- That's exactly the stark reality that Israel find themselves in.
They're not just exiled from a building or a city,
They're exiled because of what they've done.
- But many have walked away from God and his promises.

- Christ Wright says, actually you can observe four different types of reactions from God's people at this time, which he categorises as four B's:
- Backsliding — *they turned away from God + thought they were better off serving other gods.*
Bravado — they kept the faith but arrogantly denied the seriousness of the judgment.
Bitterness — they accepted that God had done it but accused him of injustice.
Brokenness — they simply accepted it and gave up hope.
- And, of course, this isn't just true for them,
this is the condition and the pattern of all of humanity.
- We're not only different from God,
but because of our sin we're divided from God.

HOW TO RESPOND | VERSE 28

우리는 어떻게 반응해야 하는가 | 该如何回应 | நமது பதில் எப்படி இருக்கவேண்டும்

So how are we **to respond**? Ezekiel shows us... Verse 28...

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Ezekiel falls to the ground!

- In fact, that's not just the example of Ezekiel. That's the consistent pattern throughout the Old Testament whenever people encounter God's glory.
- But why? / Why might you fall to the ground when you encounter someone? Maybe...
As an act of humility: showing honour to someone who is greater than you.
As an act of surrender: even as an act of self-protection in recognition of their power;
As an act of worship: you're recognising who they are and submitting to their authority.
You're making them the centre of your life, and depending on them for all you need. /
- Maybe Ezekiel is doing all three. /
Having glimpsed the weight of the Lord's glory, he's giving the Lord his all.
- He's recognising that nothing matters more, than the one *before* whom he falls.

Tim Keller helpfully put it like this:

- People who've grasped the glory of God,
live in humility, they do their duty and they love his beauty.
- More than anything else.
- Easy to say yes to that — much harder to put into practice.
- If we make anything matter more to us than God,
be it money, or relationships, or our pride, or our reputation,
then it will crush us because those things cannot provide what we ultimately need.
- They might even be good things, but they're only faint echoes of what we truly need. //

I'm not sure if you've noticed, but it's really interesting that:

the brilliant light which surrounds the figure on the throne, is like the appearance of a rainbow.

- Remember, the rainbow was God's sign to Noah and reminder to the world:
that he would never flood the world again. It's a sign of grace.
- *When we think of a rainbow we of course think of the full spectrum of colours arched in the sky.
And we should—that's right. / But the word in the original language is also the same as a warbow.*
- It's why after the flood, God says: *I have set my rainbow (or my warbow) in the clouds,
and will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth... Never again will the waters
become a flood to destroy all life.* (cf. Genesis 9).

- It's an amazing sign of God's grace. /
- But have you ever noticed which way a rainbow points?
Charles Spurgeon famously said that we should, because it's significant.
- The bow which God has hung in the sky,
doesn't put downwards at us,
but it has pointed upward towards himself.
- That doesn't mean we won't face judgement.
Ezekiel's role as a prophet was to warn Israel of the judgement they would face. //
- And in revelation, as we read of another throne,
Drenched in imagery very similar to Ezekiel 1,
we're reminded that there is another judgement yet to come as well.
- Four living creatures, around that throne,
day and night, never stop saying:
*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.* (Revelation 4:8)
- Words we echo when we celebrate the Lord's supper! / *Do you understand why?*
- Because the way that the gap between our sin and God's holiness has been bridged.
The only reason that we can face judgement with confidence,
is because on the cross Jesus took the arrows of judgement for us.

- He not only faced the judgement we deserve,
he was stripped of his glory.
so that we can be clothed with the glory that is his,
and delight in God's glory forever.
-

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

- If you want to see glory?
And look forward to being able to live in God's glory forever...
- Then you just need to look to the face of Jesus Christ.

Almighty Lord, thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in the face of Jesus Christ and that you took the arrows of judgement on the cross so that we might be able to see your face and live. Please forgive us for the times in which we turn away from you and seek glory from things that do not last. Grow our hunger for you and help us to give you our everything. In Jesus' Name, Amen.
