

Ezekiel 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.

Analysis

The 'four living creatures' (arba chayyot) introduce the cherubim who bear God's throne-chariot, though they're not identified as cherubim until Ezekiel 10:20. The phrase 'likeness of four living creatures' employs demut (likeness/resemblance), emphasizing that what Ezekiel sees approximates reality beyond human categories. The repeated use of 'likeness' throughout chapter 1 (appearing 10 times) indicates the inadequacy of language to capture transcendent glory. These beings combine features of humanity ('likeness of a man'), lions (royalty/strength), oxen (service/strength), and eagles (swiftness/transcendence), representing all animate creation worshiping the Creator. Their composite nature appears in Revelation 4:6-8, where the four living creatures continually worship God. The human form indicates intelligence and moral capacity, pointing to humanity's unique creation in God's image while acknowledging that even the highest creatures serve as throne-bearers for the Almighty.

Historical Context

Cherubim appear throughout biblical theology as guardians of God's holiness: barring Eden's entrance (Genesis 3:24), flanking the mercy seat (Exodus 25:18-22), and adorning the temple's inner sanctuary (1 Kings 6:23-28). Ancient Near Eastern art frequently depicted composite creatures—sphinx-like beings combining human heads with lion bodies and wings—guarding temples and palaces. Ezekiel's cherubim surpass these pagan counterparts in complexity and

theological significance, emphasizing that all creation exists to glorify God. For the exiles, seeing cherubim in Babylon confirmed that God's presence had not abandoned them to Babylonian deities.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the composite nature of the cherubim illustrate that all creation exists to serve and glorify God?
2. What does the inadequacy of Ezekiel's language ('likeness,' 'appearance') teach us about the limits of human understanding when encountering divine glory?

Interlinear Text

וְמִתּוֹךְ הַ	דָמָ וְתָ	אֶרֶב עַ	מִי וְתָ	וְיַ
Also out of the midst	had the likeness	of four	living creatures	H2088
H8432	H1823	H702	H2416	
מְرָאִים	דָמָ וְתָ	אֶל מְ	לְמִתּוֹךְ:	
And this was their appearance	had the likeness	of a man	they	
H4758	H1823	H120	H2007	

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org