

The LORD Is There

Session 1. The Throne on Wheels

The heavens opened in Babylon: God's throne has wheels, and it rolled into the one place his people were sure he could not be.

What We Found

Ezekiel was a priest, and many interpreters read the thirtieth year of 1:1 as his own age, the year priestly service would ordinarily have begun in Jerusalem. Instead he was a deportee sitting by an irrigation canal in Babylonia, and that is exactly where the heavens opened. The vision's most shocking detail is its address line: God's glory appeared in enemy territory, to a man in the one place his vocation seemed impossible.

The vision itself, four living creatures facing every direction, wheels within wheels full of eyes, a sapphire throne above it all, adds up to one discovery: this is a throne that travels. God was never a prisoner of his own temple, so no army could evict him and no exile can cut his people off from him. Ezekiel's careful, breaking grammar ('the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD') told us something too: God exceeds every word we have, and the honest response is Ezekiel's, face to the ground.

And it ended with the prophet face down. Ezekiel does not describe himself studying the vision; he describes himself flattened by it, hearing a voice begin to speak. The chapter stops mid-sentence on purpose. What the voice says is next week.

Voices of the Church

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

Gregory, preaching through this very chapter, teaches that the wheel within a wheel is the New Testament turning inside the Old: one revelation, moving together, so that the two advance as one. And he teaches that the divine words grow with the one who reads them; the same page gives milk to a beginner and fire to a saint. For Gregory the chariot is a picture of how God's word travels: alive, watchful, going wherever the Spirit goes, and never stuck.

Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 1. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This strange chapter has fed popes and beginners alike; it will meet you at your depth.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. c. 202

Irenaeus argues that the Gospel is rightly fourfold, and he finds its image in the four faces of the living creatures around God's throne: the lion speaking of royal power, the ox of priestly sacrifice, the man of Christ's coming in our flesh, the eagle of the Spirit hovering over the Church. The creatures that carry the throne end up, in Irenaeus's reading, carrying the good news of the one who sits on it.

Against Heresies 3.11.8. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The four faces have been read for eighteen centuries as a portrait of the four Gospels.

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407

On the eve of his banishment from Constantinople, Chrysostom told his people, in substance, that he feared nothing that could be done to him, because the Church does not consist in walls and roof but in faith and life. The storm was raging, he said, yet he stood upon the rock; the waves might rise, but they could not sink the ship of Jesus, and no sentence of any emperor could separate him from God.

Homily traditionally titled 'Before His Exile'. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. If you feel far from the place where your faith once made sense: the place changed; God did not.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Once this week, read Psalm 137 slowly and pray it on behalf of anyone you know who feels exiled from the life they expected.
2. Each day, name one 'Chebar' in your life, the most ordinary or godforsaken-feeling place in your routine, and pray one sentence there: 'Lord, open the heavens here.'
3. At Mass this Sunday, at the consecration, remember Ezekiel falling on his face before the glory, and let your posture, inside or out, answer the same Presence.
4. Memorize this week's verse; say it once each morning before you look at your phone.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 1:1

"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

Ezekiel 1:1

My Guess

Seal this and do not look at it again until we open it

Tonight Ezekiel saw the glory of God in Babylon, hundreds of miles from the temple. Write one sentence: by the end of this book, where do you think God will choose to dwell? Write your sentence below, then fold this sheet (or seal it in an envelope) and bring it back next week. Your leader will keep it unopened; the guesses will be opened together later in the study.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 300.** God is greater than all his works, yet present to his creatures everywhere
- **CCC 42.** God exceeds our language; that is why Ezekiel writes 'the appearance of the likeness'
- **CCC 104.** in Scripture the Father meets his children; the Church finds her nourishment there, like a prophet eating a scroll

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 2:1-3:15 before we meet again.