

The Chariot of
His Presence!

John 14:9 - All chariot riders
see the chariot driver not
the chariot dispatcher.

According to the rabbis, there is one chapter in the Bible that is so dangerous, it is forbidden to be taught to groups of disciples. It could be taught to no more than one student at a time, and only if he is a mature student. This chapter is so dangerous, it is forbidden to be read in the regular synagogue service. It led some of Israel's most famous rabbis to engage in strange mystical practices that killed one of them, made another crazy, and led another to heresy. For hundreds of years, even the name of this chapter caused knowledgeable Jews to shudder. What chapter is this? They call it Merkabah: The Chariot.

The chariot was a powerful religious symbol for ancient Israel: not the ordinary chariots used for war, but what the Bible calls "chariots of fire." The first mention of chariots of fire is in 2 Kings 2:11. This is the story of Elijah being caught up into heaven. Although tradition imagines it was the chariot that carried him away ("Swing low, sweet chariot"), the Bible says a fiery chariot and its horses separated Elijah from Elisha, his disciple, while a strong storm-wind snatched Elijah away. Who was driving the chariot? It doesn't say very mysterious. *We know it was*

Tahshog. V-12 The driver disappeared.

The next mention of chariots of fire is in 2 Kings 6:17. Elisha, now a famous prophet in his own right, was trapped in the small town of Dothan at the edge of Galilee by the army of the Arameans. They were the enemy of Israel, ruling from Damascus as the Syrians do today. They had come to Dothan to capture Elisha because he was constantly defeating their secret war plans by revealing them to the king of Israel. The sight of the vast enemy army frightened Elisha's servant. So Elisha calmly prayed for the servant's spiritual eyes to be opened. When they were, he saw the mountain on which the city was built covered with horses and chariots of fire. *Saw*

Tahseh's Chariots.

The book of Psalms mentions chariots of fire in a poetic declaration of God's overwhelming power: "The chariots of God are tens of thousands thousands of times over. The Lord is with them, as at Sinai in holiness" (Psa. 68:17). *When chariots appear so does Tahshog*

But perhaps the strangest mention of a chariot in the Bible is in 1 Chronicles 28:18. This section gives the details of David's plans for the construction of the Temple, later realized by his son, Solomon. In the plans for the innermost chamber of the Temple, along with the ark of the

covenant, is a golden chariot (merkabah). What is a chariot doing in the holiest part of the Temple? A careful reading of the verse shows that it has something to do with the two large angels (cherubim) that Solomon placed in the Holy of Holies, whose wings, from the wingtips of one to the wingtips of the other, stretched across that innermost chamber. But why a chariot?

The answer was discovered a few years ago by an archaeologist, Leen Ritmeyer, flying at 30,000 feet to Israel from the U.S. He got bored with the movie, and took out his plans of the ancient Temple Mount in Jerusalem. He had been studying the large piece of stone under the Dome of the Rock, the gold-domed Muslim shrine that stands in the middle of the ancient Temple site. Many have speculated that this rock was once the location of the Holy of Holies. But no one had ever been able to prove it until now. On the basis of natural rock contours and marks in the rock, he had already been able to locate the walls of an ancient room once built there. The measurements of this room were exactly the same as the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon. But now, as he looked at a photo of the rock, he noticed a small depression, exactly in the center of this ancient room. No one had paid much attention to it before, because of all the other cuts and marks in the rock. But when he measured it, he was shocked to find this depression had the same dimensions as the ark of the covenant! Perhaps this was the very "place" that Solomon had prepared in which to set the ark (2 Chron. 5:7).

There was only one problem: the depression was facing the wrong way. We usually picture the ark with its side facing out, and the two small golden angels (the cherubim) that are attached to its cover visible on either side. But the depression was going the other way: with the narrow end facing out. Now that was really odd! Why would the narrow end of the ark face outward? And then it hit him. Of course! That was the way the ark of the covenant faced when it was carried out before the people in the time of Moses and Joshua. They would naturally have put the ark in the Temple facing the same way to show God leading the way before his people. In fact, this is the only way to make sense of the fact that when they first put the ark in the Temple, the poles used to carry it stuck out from the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8:8).

But what does all this have to do with a chariot? As we said, Solomon built two huge angels standing at the sides of the ark of the covenant. These angels were not beautiful women with wings, as we usually picture them. Lady angels are a pagan idea picked up much later by the

covenant, is a golden chariot (merkabah). What is a chariot doing in the holiest part of the Temple? A careful reading of the verse shows that it has something to do with the two large angels (cherubim) that Solomon placed in the Holy of Holies, whose wings, from the wingtips of one to the wingtips of the other, stretched across that innermost chamber. But why a chariot?

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But what does all this have to do with a chariot? As we said, Solomon built two huge angels standing at the sides of the ark of the covenant. These angels were not beautiful women with wings, as we usually picture them. Lady angels are a pagan idea picked up much later by the church. In the Bible, angels appear either as men or as ferocious beasts part lion, part bull, etc. strange and frightening mixtures of different animals. This view was not unique to ancient Israel, but was shared by all the surrounding nations. Many, many pieces of ancient art have been discovered showing this frightening type of cherub. With the ark facing out, and one of these large animal-like cherubs on either side, it would look not just like they were standing next to the ark, but that they were pulling it like a chariot! This idea is not strange to the Bible. One of the oft-repeated descriptions of God is that he sits on the cherubs, or rides on them (2 Kin. 19:15, Ps. 80:1, Ps. 99:1, 2 Sam. 22:11, Psa. 18:10). The ark flanked by animal-like cherubs is the chariot of God mentioned in 1 Chronicles! *So the chariot is the Ark of his*

So now you are ready for the chapter on the Chariot the dangerous chapter I warned you about earlier. It can be found in Ezekiel chapter 1. This is the first vision of Ezekiel, who was among the exiles in Babylon, 1,000 miles from home. One day, when he was outdoors by the river Chebar, he saw a "storm-wind" approaching (like the one that snatched Elijah away). The Hebrew words also carry the meaning "Spirit-storm": for this was clearly a storm of the Spirit. In the storm he sees four terrifying cherubim, the same number surrounding the ark of the covenant in the Temple.* And beside each was a spinning wheel (vs. 15), *the wheels of the Chariot of God.***
* Two small cherubs that were part of the covering of the ark itself (from the time of Moses; Ex. 25:18-20), plus the two large ones on either side of the ark (from the time of Solomon; 1 Kings 6:23-28).

** Though this Spirit-storm is not called a chariot in Eze. 1, the parallel image in Psalm 104 is: "He makes the clouds his chariot; who walks on the wings of the Spirit" (Psa. 104:3).

*Prevision - Ezekiel
1:1, 4-5
1:20
* Part 2
1 Kings
6:23-28*

Solomon adds 2 wheels. 4 total. Chariots like ^{10/25/02} clouds. Clouds are a metaphor for His presence.

Crystal

Above the heads of the cherubs was something like a glass ceiling (vs. 22). And above that was something like a throne made of precious stone (vs. 26). This detail should not be overlooked. Throughout the Bible, stone is associated with divinity: "My God, my rock, in whom I will trust." Over and over again the Bible identifies God the Father as the one seated on the throne, the invisible ruler of everything. But who is this figure that looks like a human being on the throne, with legs like glowing metal and a radiance all around him? (vs.26,27)

The appearance of this luminous being is clearly the purpose and the climax of the vision. When Ezekiel sees him, he falls to his face, humbling himself in an attitude of worship (vs. 28). But the figure on the throne commands him to rise. No sooner are these words spoken than the Holy Spirit enters Ezekiel and sets him on his feet (2:2). The mysterious man then begins to speak to the prophet in the name and with the authority of God: "I am sending you," he says without, like the angels, claiming to speak for another "and you will say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says'" (2:4). Who is this that dares to speak with the authority of God? It could not be God the Father himself, for the idea of the Father appearing in any particular form was unthinkable. God is Spirit, the Bible says, and so cannot be confined to any one time or place. So who is this? This is where it started to get dangerous for those rabbis.

The identity of this mysterious being is given in 1:28, though often obscured in translation. The original Hebrew says: "He is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God." Does that sound familiar? It's the source of Hebrews 1:3, which says, "And he is the radiance of (God's) glory and the exact representation of his nature." Hebrews identifies this radiant one as Jesus, the Messiah. By alluding or hinting to Ezekiel, Hebrews interprets Ezekiel's prophecy for us: Jesus is the one sitting on the throne who speaks as God and who is God. This is what made this chapter dangerous to those early rabbis because it is so clearly fulfilled in Jesus. The rabbi who became a "heretic" most likely realized that this was Jesus on the throne. Do you know anyone today that has trouble accepting the ~~trinity~~ unity of God? Tell them about the one sitting in the Chariot of God, who speaks as God, and is God!

In Ezekiel 1:27, it says this human figure appeared like glowing metal. This is a detail that should not be overlooked. A radiant man with legs like glowing metal also appears in Daniel 10:6, and again in Revelation 1:15. Who is it? The same person Jesus!, not as he appeared on earth in the humility of his humanity, but as he appears in heaven, filled with the power and the majesty of God. He is the appearance of the glory of God! This is how he appeared to his disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration: not as an ordinary man, but in the fiery power of God. His face was radiant as the sun, his garments white as light (Matt. 17:2). He is the appearance of the glory of God. No wonder Ezekiel fell down in worship!

The vision of the Chariot explains how the heavenly, timeless God, whom we cannot see (Ex. 33:20), is able to reveal himself to us: through his two "arms" (Isa. 51:5) the Son of God and the rushing storm-wind of the Spirit. They are sent from God, yet they are God himself. As Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." So many think of God as restricted to heaven, cut off from life on earth. But the message of the Bible is that God gets around, and he's coming in our direction. His storm-wind is approaching. His lightning bolts are crashing forth. His chariot wheels are grinding near. And when he arrives, what will happen? Will it drive you crazy, or even kill you, like those rabbis of old? Or will you, like Ezekiel, bow down before the radiant man, receive his instruction, and be filled with his Spirit?



Dan. 7: 9-14. 2 thrones. Read p. 424 in yellow.
Read p. 425. bottom-yellow

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you prosper."
Psa 122:6

Brah,
1:28

Abbs
Dried
The
Chariot
by his
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Crystal

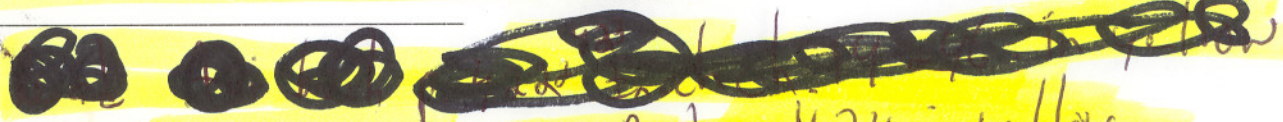
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