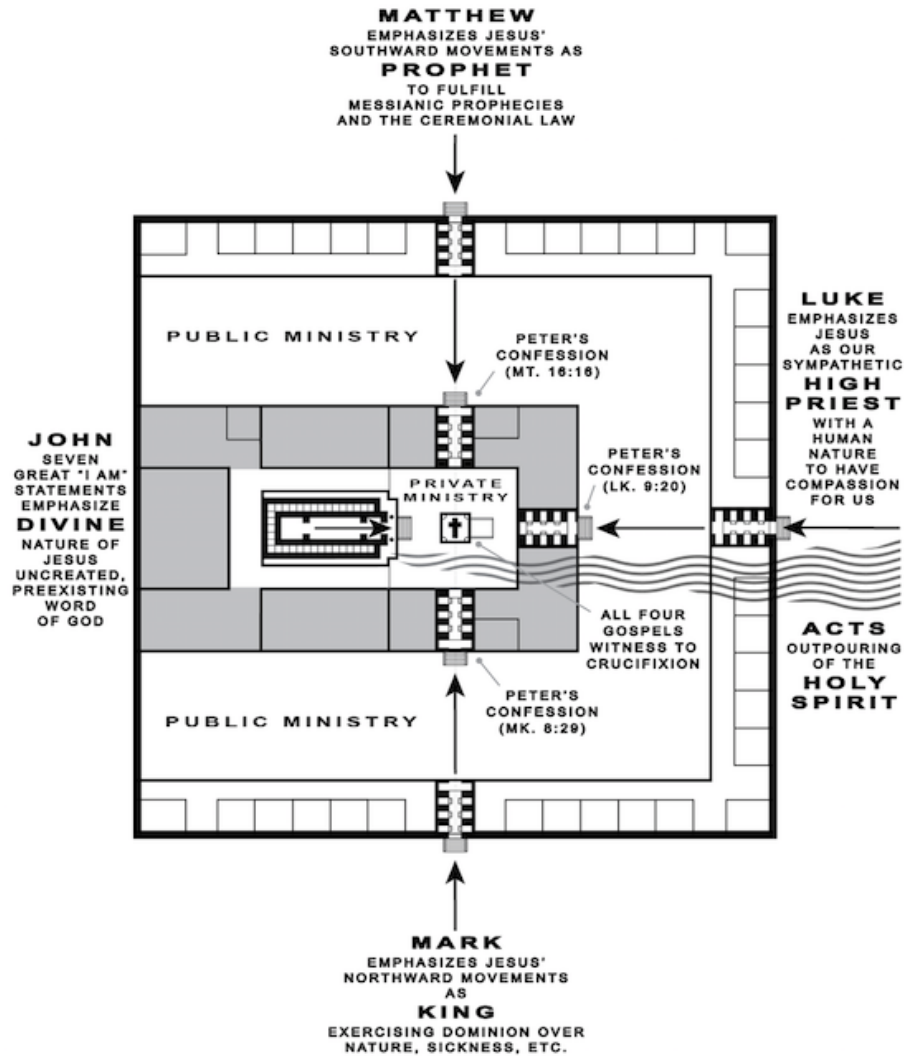


# EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

## *and the* CHRISTIAN GOSPELS



by

Emil Heller Henning III

THE WORD OF THE LORD *came expressly unto Ezekiel...And I [saw] a great cloud...And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures...And every one had four faces, and...four wings...[which] were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward...[Each] had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and...the face of an ox on the left side; they...also had the face of an eagle...And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go...And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creatures was as...crystal, stretched forth over their heads...I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the voice of an host [or “the din of an army”]...Over their heads was the likeness of a throne...[and the] appearance of a man above upon it...This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.*

— Ezekiel’s Chariot Vision (Ezek. 1:3-28)

AND DAVID MY SERVANT *shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd...I will make a covenant of peace with them; and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them...My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I WILL BE THEIR GOD, and THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.*

– from Ezekiel 37:24-27 (the Haftarah to Va-yiggash)

SON OF MAN, SHOW THE HOUSE *to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out [i.e., exits] thereof, and the comings in [or entrances] thereof...*

– the commission to share the Temple Vision (Ezek. 43:10-11, the Haftarah to Tetsavveh)

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# Ezekiel's Temple and the Christian Gospels

by Emil Heller Henning III

## INTRODUCTION

OTHER WRITINGS by the author have argued that the gospel of Jesus Christ was prefigured, over five centuries before His birth, in Ezekiel's Temple Vision. Whether or not that Temple is meant for construction some day, the Living Temple it proclaims is the pressing need of people—young, old, Jew, Gentile—this and every day. The author's earlier writings concerned the "gospel" with a small "g" (the story of Jesus' Person, life, and saving work.) This article shows how closely the organizational structure of the "capital G" Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John corresponds to the plan of Ezekiel's Temple, and how a compelling identification of the famous four "Gospel symbols" from his "chariot" vision (and Revelation's vision of God's heavenly throne) strengthens that correspondence.

Section 1 below summarizes some of the author's earlier writings, highlighting aspects of Ezekiel's Chariot Vision needed for Sections 2 and 3. Section 1 is therefore commended to all readers. Some may wish to view the additional diagrams in Parts 1 and 2 of the author's "Christian midrash" articles at [www.ezekielstemple.com/free-articles](http://www.ezekielstemple.com/free-articles).) Some familiarity with the book of Ezekiel is assumed below, but many Scripture references are provided.

## 1. EZEKIEL'S GOSPEL MESSAGE

IN THE MIDDLE OF A LONG VISION in the book of Ezekiel, God commissioned the prophet to give "*the house of Israel*" the plan of the complicated Temple He was in the process of showing him (43:10-11). How Ezekiel conveyed that highly detailed plan to his fellow exiles in Babylon is not recorded. He clearly wrote the vision down in what became his last nine chapters (40-48), using more words on this one vision than are in *over half* (37) of the 66 *full books* of the Christian Bible. Did he write it all down "*in their sight*" while the exiles watched, as most translations of 43:11 say to do? Did he teach it to them bit by bit in small classes, perhaps sketching on a clay tablet, as he did before in his chapter 4? One might think that would have been necessary for the exiles to understand even the most rudimentary aspects of the layout.

Whatever Ezekiel told or showed the exiles in Babylon, any understanding today of his chapter 40-48 Temple Vision—and again, these nine chapters are all just one continuous vision

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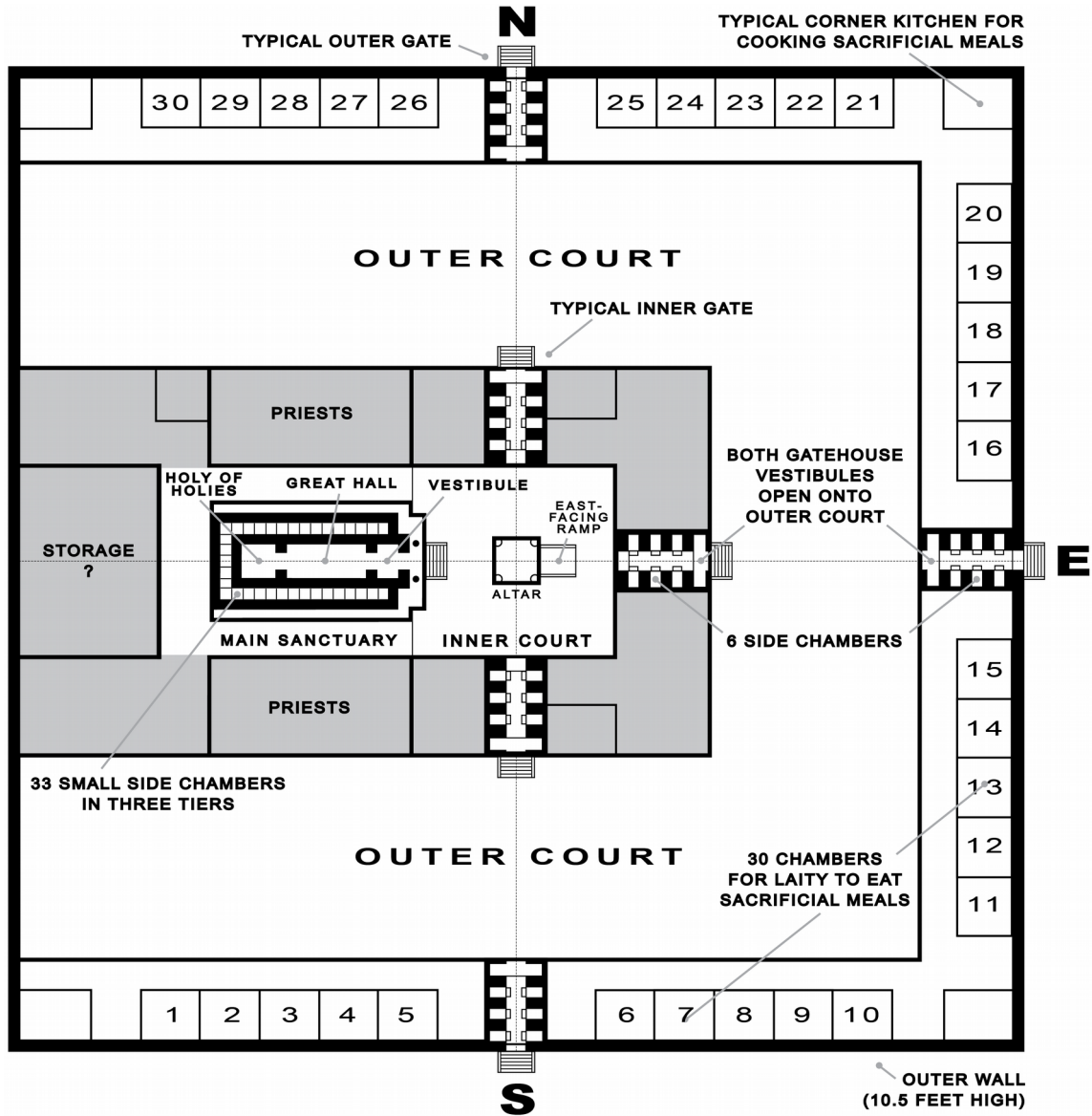
—should begin with the Glory of God. Just before he was told to describe his Temple, Ezekiel saw (within the vision) a manifestation of God's "Presence" or "Glory" (*kavod*) that he had reported seeing twice before in his book, most recently in chapters 8-11, but before that in his chapter 1 "chariot" vision. That introductory vision is of great importance not only to Ezekiel's Temple Vision, but to his whole book. The Orthodox *Yechezkel* (Ezekiel) commentary in the Mesorah ArtScroll Tanach Series (p. 668) says the initial vision and its return in chapters 8-11 and 43 "are the links which hold together the myriad parts of [Ezekiel's] prophetic edifice."

In his chapter 1, Ezekiel saw a visionary manifestation of God in human form on a throne, high atop a crystal "firmament" or "expanse" or "platform." Below this platform were four winged cherubs, each accompanied by a mysterious "wheel" that rose or fell with the "chariot" (*merkavah*) as the cherubim flew it above the earth. When Ezekiel next saw it in chapters 8-11, God's Glory was departing the idol-polluted First Temple in Jerusalem. When he last saw it in his Temple Vision (ch. 43), the Presence was approaching his visionary Temple, with the *earth lighting up* and a *roaring sound* like "many waters," or "God's voice," or "an army" that the ancient Aramaic translation likened to a *camp of heavenly angels*. God's Glory then entered and "filled" the Temple. Having pardoned His people's sins, God would now dwell among them forever (43:7). It will be seen in the following pages just how central Ezekiel's chariot is to understanding his Temple.

When God told Ezekiel to describe his Temple's plan to Israel, an aspect of it to which He particularly called his attention was its "*exits and entrances*" (43:11). They consist of three outer gates and three inner gates (**Figure 1**) that are connected on crossing North-South and East-West circulation spines, or *axes*, something like the principal crossing avenues of some towns and cities. The desert Tabernacle had nothing like this, nor did the First Temple, which was destroyed during the course of Ezekiel's ministry to the exiled Israelites in Babylon. Nor did the Second Temple that was built after the people returned home to Jerusalem.

Having been a priest in the First Temple before the exile—or at the very least the son of one, preparing to enter the priesthood at age 30—Ezekiel would quickly discern that the Temple he saw in God's vision was not a copy of the old one. Leading off with major differences, his first chapter about the vision (ch. 40) concerns the six novel gateways and their relationship to each other on the two new axes, with only a few verses about the Temple's outer and inner courts.

The *gospel message* in Ezekiel's plan is found (in the veiled manner of biblical visions) in a series of events on the axes in chapters 40-48 that are identified with the gates, and explicitly said in his text to have the North-South or East-West orientations of the axes. God's Glory approaches the *east* outer gate and fills the Temple from *east to west* (ch. 43). The river of God's blessing and grace flows out beside that same gate from *west to east* (ch. 47). God's worshipers enter through the *north* outer gate, skirt the priestly inner court, and exit through the



**FIGURE 1**

***THE LAYOUT OF EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE***

Shading indicates areas not clearly understood as to precise locations of walls and roofed-over areas. (In fact, although Ezekiel describes the three inner gates in detail, he does not mention a wall of any sort connecting them and separating the outer and inner courts.)

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*south* outer gate, or vice versa, entering *south* and exiting *north* (46:9). And Ezekiel's "Prince" (ch. 46) enters and leaves *north-south* through those outer gates along with the worshipers, but makes offerings on their behalf by moving *east-west* between the east outer and inner gates on the E-W axis. A whole theology unfolds on Ezekiel's axes and their "*exits and entrances*."

As noted above, some readers may wish to consult diagrams illustrating the material of this Section in Parts 1 and 2 of the author's "Christian midrash" at [ezekielstemple.com/free-articles](http://ezekielstemple.com/free-articles).

Whether or not God intends Ezekiel's Temple to be "built" some day, its "building blocks" are not of brick or stone—and Ezekiel's text never says or implies they are—but of Scriptural truth. Ezekiel erects above an essentially two-dimensional ground plan a *Scriptural edifice*, on the framework of his axes, with jewel-like facets that reveal new aspects to one who compares spiritual things with spiritual. It flares with scenes from the earlier Tabernacle or the destroyed First Temple, or with glimpses from outside space and time of God's Temple in heaven. But it shines most brilliantly with pictures of the future. This vision was for consoling the exiles in Babylon, and giving them hope. What is lined out on its axes looks ahead to events in a Second Temple to be built in Jerusalem by the generation after Ezekiel, and beyond. The vision is of a Temple, yes, but primarily a *living* one of the *living Word* transcending static description.

Ezekiel's plan in Fig. 1 has striking similarities to the geography of Israel, which has been called the "crossroads" and "*center*" (Hebrew: "*navel*") of the world, as in Ezek. 38:12, separated by just one chapter from his Temple Vision. On the east side is the sunrise, the source of light and the basis of geographic orientation (*oriens = the east*), reminding Israel its light and salvation come from God. (The "prophetic east" of the Bible is seen in Num. 24:17; Isa. 60:3; Mal. 4:2 [Hebrew 3:20]; Matt. 2:2, 24:27; Luke 1:78; 2 Pet.1:19; and Rev. 22:16.) The front sides of the biblical tabernacle and Temples *faced east*, and Ezekiel's most honored Temple gate—for God's use alone, and shut after His chapter 43 entry—is on its east side in this "Israel-centric" view. Across the Arabah (the deep rift valley of the Jordan River and Dead Sea) is a bleak desert, pointing to God *alone*, not any earthly thing, as Israel's salvation.

To the west in this microcosm of Israel is the "Great Sea," the Mediterranean, which Israel feared and largely turned its back on, as Ezekiel's Temple does to the west. Israel's coastal plain and low mountains are squeezed between the sea and the Arabah, establishing its north-south routes for trade and commerce, on which enemies also attacked from north or south. Similarly, the only "through route" in Ezekiel's Temple is north-south. Clearly both Israel and this Temple were designed by God as settings for something of world-shaking importance.

On Ezekiel's East-West axis, both God's supernatural *coming to* His Temple from the prophetic east and the supernatural river of grace *flowing out* eastward into the desert, bringing life to the Dead Sea, are His sovereign acts *on behalf of* His people (and the world) that they could never do for themselves. Conversely, the movements of God's worshipers on the North-

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South axis display His work *in His people* to make them His own. The two axes thus correspond to the two sides of the covenant promise formula, “*I will be their God, and they shall be My people,*” found through the Bible from Exodus to Revelation, and in Ezekiel at 36:28 and 37:27 just before the Temple Vision. “*I will be their God*” is the E-W axis of God’s acts *for* His people, and “*they shall be My people*” is the N-S axis of His work *in* them. Both sides are necessary for God to dwell with man—the stated *purpose* of Ezekiel’s Temple (43:7).

Israel’s Messiah, in whom God dwells *personally* with His people as *Immanuel*, “*God with us*” (Isa. 7:14), is prefigured in the roles of Ezekiel’s “Prince” (ch. 46) on portions of *both axes*, bringing offerings *for them* as a priestly intercessor on the E-W axis, but entering and exiting the Temple *with them* as a kingly leader on the N-S axis. Moses asked to be replaced as Israel’s leader by someone to “*lead them out*” and “*bring them in*” so they would not be “*as sheep who have no shepherd*” (Num. 27:17). God answered him with Joshua, David, and His promise of a future Messiah, foreshadowed by Ezekiel’s Prince as a *new* “David” (Ezek. 34:23, 37 and 37:24-25), to shepherd Israel as none other, exceeding the “Prince” in every way.

Readers can search all this out in their Bibles. But speaking as a gray-haired professional architect who has been fascinated by Ezekiel’s visionary Temple since his teenage years, the author says the plan’s *ultimate message* is the *gospel of Jesus Christ*. Whatever Ezekiel told the exiles, and they made of his message, the Apostle Peter raises the strong likelihood that God somehow let him know he was prophesying of Christ (1 Pet. 1:10-12; also Luke 24:25-27, Rev. 19:10). Whether or not this Temple is meant for construction some day, the gospel is a pressing need for *every day*, because nothing short of God’s *living* Temple can give a Jew or Gentile peace with God now, or eternally beyond the grave.

Jesus fulfilled the plan of Ezekiel’s Temple in the most amazing ways in the New Testament. The approach of the divine Presence with the supernatural light and sound that Ezekiel reported in chapter 43 are precisely what Luke chapter 2 records when Jesus (*Immanuel*, “*God with us*”) was born—the angels appearing to the shepherds in *dazzling light*, praising God in the roar of a *mighty chorus* of “*Glory to God in the highest,*” and then righteous Simeon standing by the Nicanor Steps at the western end of Herod’s Court of the Women and recognizing in the baby Jesus the prophesied “*light to the Gentiles*” and “*glory of [God’s] people Israel*” *coming into the Temple* in His mother’s arms (Luke 2:32, from Isa. 9:2, 42:6). Some time later, the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, having been led westward by the “star” they saw in the East (Matt. 2:2).

Jesus *filled* the Temple (43:5) with God’s Glory, making His *dwelling* with man in human flesh (John 1:14). In His three-year public ministry, in His trips on the N-S axis between Jerusalem and Galilee, He healed, taught, and *gathered* as the “*good Shepherd*” (John 10:14) the “*lost sheep*” of Israel (Matt.10:6, 15:24). As Ezekiel’s “David,” He symbolically joined (in a typically Ezekelian “sign act” or “acted parable”) the “*two sticks*” of Judah and Ephraim of Ezekiel 37:15-24 under His kingship into “*one fold*” (John 10:16, 11:52), hinting at the ulti-

mate inclusion of the Gentiles with them. Here are truths from the Tabernacle, First and Second Temples, and the heavenly Temple, erected in a higher dimension on top of Ezekiel's flat plan.

The climax of the filling of the Temple was the atoning death of the Lamb of God at the central altar where the E-W and N-S axes cross—on *His* cross—followed by His going even farther west into Ezekiel's empty Holy of Holies to present His atoning blood in God's *heavenly Temple* above (Heb. 9:11-12). This recapitulated Aaron on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) carrying the blood of the bull and goat sin offerings westward through the Tabernacle to its Holy of Holies, and sprinkling it on the east side of the Ark's cover, or mercy seat (16:14).

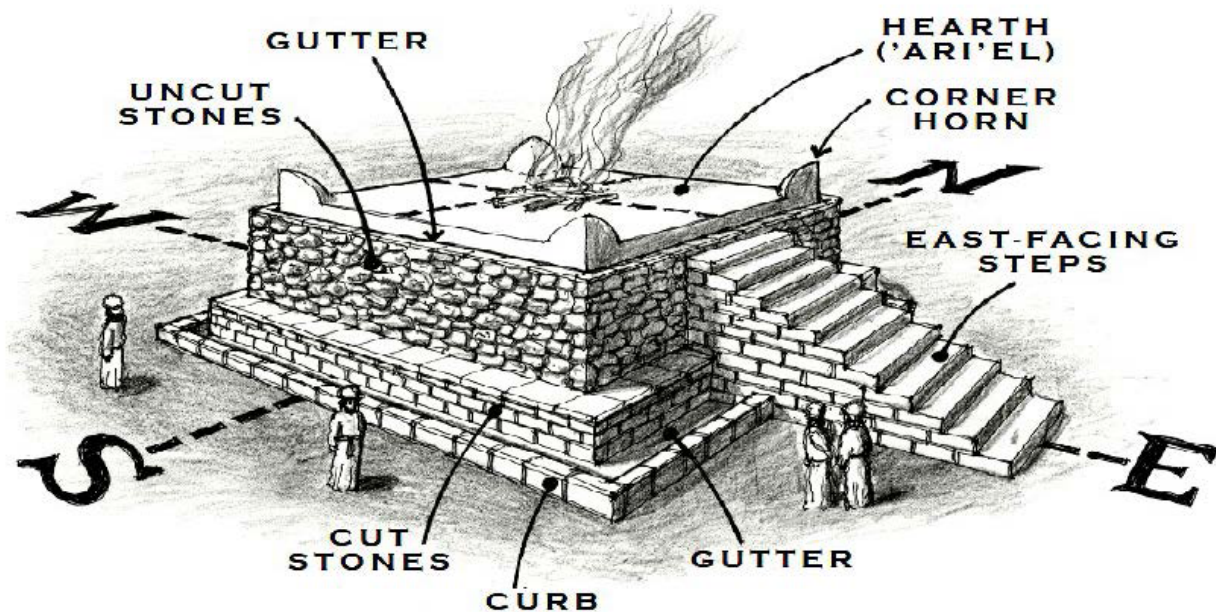
Jesus thus fulfilled the Messianic, priestly-kingly roles of Ezekiel's Prince on both axes, bringing as a priest the sacrificial offering of His blood for believers' *justification* on the E-W axis (Rom. 3:23-24, Titus 3:5-7) after His life of perfect Torah obedience, through which His righteousness is accounted to them while yet sinners. That righteous life is the basis also of believers' *sanctification* on the N-S axis (Rom. 5:10, Phil. 2:9-13), whereby they bear fruit worthy of God's name in the earth as they follow their King and Lord along that axis in the power of the indwelling Spirit, offering *spiritual sacrifices* back to God in gratitude (Rom. 12:1, Eph. 2:10, Heb. 13:15). Like Ezekiel's Prince, Jesus is the "door" of the sheep by whom they are "saved," and "go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

**Ezekiel's altar.** Ezekiel's square Temple, quartered by its two axes, is reflected in miniature in the square, *four-horned* altar at its center, where the axes cross. It receives the attention that the Holy of Holies and Ark did in the Tabernacle and First Temple of the old Sinai covenant that Israel "*broke*" (Jer. 31:31-32). Jeremiah 3:16-17 foretold a day when the Ark would no longer be the centerpiece of Israel, a day with Judah and Ephraim rejoined and Jerusalem "*the Throne of the LORD*"—the *very day* Ezekiel described (37:19, 43:7) for his Ark-less Temple. No 20 x 20 cubit Holy of Holies is his focus, but the four-horned, 20 x 20 cubit *altar* (counting its outside curbs) where the chariot brought God's Presence to a new Temple for the "*new covenant*" of Jeremiah 31. This was a covenant "*different from*" the old one, suited to the "*new spirit*" of Ezekiel 36-37, and anticipating the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21:22, which has *no* Temple—except for *God and the Lamb* being its Temple.

Ezekiel's four-horned altar, described in detail immediately after God's Glory arrived, also echoed the four-foldness of the chariot that faded from the vision (right there in the inner court) after delivering the Presence. The chariot had *four cherubim* below it, each with *four wings*—two covering its body and two extending to touch those of its two neighboring cherubs, much as the two gold cherubs in the First Temple spanned its Holy of Holies, wingtips touching in the center. And each of Ezekiel's *living* cherubs had *four faces*—a central detail in what follows.

The *Jewish Study Bible* (2004 ed., p.1047) notes the relationship of Ezekiel's four-fold altar to the chariot's four-fold cherubim, saying the "number four" that characterizes the cherubim "presupposes the four horns of the Temple altar," and by means of the "four winds" or cardinal





directions represents “God’s presence in the Temple at the center of creation.” Christians in fact use the *cross symbol* to express the universality of the gospel, suggesting the “four winds” *from which* believers are *drawn* by God (Ezek. 37:9-10, Luke 13:29, John 12:32), and *to which* they *take* the Good News. And they do view Jesus’ cross (at the earth’s “navel” and “crossroads”) as the “center of creation” from which the world’s reconciliation to God and ultimate *re-creation* come (Col. 1:20)—as it recalls the shame He publicly endured on it, bearing its curse (Deut. 21:22-3), *becoming a curse and sin for us* (Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus’ altar-cross of reconciliation is seen in Psalm 118:27—“*Bind the festal offering to the horns of the altar with cords*” (New JPS Tanakh, translated similarly in the ArtScroll and Koren Tanakhs, Robert Alter’s *The Hebrew Bible*, and many Christian Bible versions.) Ps.118: 27 comes just two verses before the end of the entire *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118) that is sung in Passover Seders. Jesus would have closed His “last supper” Passover meal (an early Seder or proto-Seder) the evening before He died by leading His disciples in that verse about the binding of the sacrifice to the horns at the end of the final Hallel psalm (Mark 14:12, 26). Shortly after that, He went to Gethsemane to pray about the coming morning, just hours away, when He as the Paschal Lamb of God would be “bound” as a “festal offering” to the *four horns* of Ezekiel’s altar, His *four extremities* bound to a wooden cross with the “cords” of Roman nails.

When Christians say Jesus’ death fulfilled Isaiah 53:10—the Suffering Servant becoming a *guilt offering* (*‘asham*) for Israel—some object that His blood would had to have been shed on a proper altar in accord with the book of Leviticus. But Ezekiel’s altar was such an altar, and His blood dripped from His two hands and two feet onto the “four horns” of that *spiritual—but*

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very real—altar, just as the Talmud (b. *Yevachim* 53a) says a priest sprinkled a finger's worth of blood on each of the four horns. (Technically that was for the "sin" [*hatta't*] offering, but the *Jewish Study Bible* [p.217] suggests the blood application for the '*asham* was the same.)

Consider then Psalm 22:17. After most translations say, "*evil doers enclose me,*" Christian Bibles then say (with the ancient Greek translation, the Septuagint), "*they pierce my hands and my feet*"—obviously suggesting the crucifixion. Jewish translations from the Hebrew Masoretic Text (NJPS, Living Nach, etc.) have, "*Like a lion [they maul] my hands and feet.*" To Christians, that also suggests Christ's sufferings, bound to a cross, with the lion's teeth or claws corresponding to the (maul-driven) Roman nails tearing into His hands and feet. The Living Nach quotes the 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator Malbin's paraphrase—"so that I can neither fight nor flee," suggesting one pinned by the lion's forceful attack. The Koren Tanakh translates 22:17, "they *seize* my hands and my feet like a lion" (italics added). Similarly, Alter translates, "a pack of the evil encircled me, they *bound* my hands and my feet" (italics added).

Psalms 118 and 22 recall another binding, the Akedah, or *binding of Isaac* in Genesis 22. Most Jewish translations say God asked Abraham to bind and offer "*your son, your only son, whom you love*" or "*your son, your only one...*" as a burnt offering. The *Jewish Study Bible* notes the "enormous power" the story gets from Isaac carrying the wood for the fire, noting how the *Genesis Rabbah* midrash likened that to one "who carries his cross on his own shoulder." Jesus started out carrying at least the beam of His cross to Calvary. If Maimonides was right that Ezekiel's altar had to be at the *very spot* of the Akedah, then Jesus carried His wooden cross-piece where Isaac carried *his* wooden pieces. God stopped Abraham from slaying his *only, beloved son*, providing a ram caught in a thicket as a substitute. But God *did not* stop the binding and sacrifice of His *only, beloved Son* on Ezekiel's central altar of burnt offering.

*Ezekiel himself* has been said to have been bound as an atonement in his chapter 4, where he was tied with ropes, and lay on his left side 390 days for the "punishment" of the northern kingdom of Israel, then 40 on his right side for that of Judah. The Talmud (b. *Sanh.* 39a) and the foremost commentator Rashi said this was to "atone" for the people's sins. Supposedly a "Zaddik" (righteous man) like Ezekiel could do that, but only one "Zaddik," the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), was truly righteous enough to pay for the sins not just of Israel, but of the world.

As Jesus settled with His Father in Gethsemane, there was no other way He could win His people forgiveness for their sins and eternal life than by being bound *and dying* on Ezekiel's altar at the spot where Isaac had been set free. There He won Christians, as *believer-priests*, the right to go *in Him* not only into the Temple's priestly inner court, but its holiest spaces (Hebrews chs. 4,6,10), knowing intimate fellowship with His Father in prayer and the Lord's Supper that He instituted in that Passover Seder before the cross. In Him, *with Him*, believers are heirs of all things, possessing the spiritual power of His resurrection (Rom. 8:32, Eph. 1:19-20).

Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives on Ezekiel's E-W axis immediately east

of Jerusalem, and reigns in heaven at His Father's right hand in our behalf. One day He will return on that same spiritual axis, like lightning from *east to west* (Matt. 24:27), as the "*Bright and Morning Star*" (Rev. 22:16). Every eye will see Him, and Jerusalem will "*mourn for him (that is slain) as one mourns for an only son...in bitterness for a firstborn*" (Zech.12:10 Koren).

That outlines the "Gospel according to Ezekiel." For more details, including how the axes underlie Ezekiel's chapter 48 plan for an ideal tribal layout in Israel, see Part 2 of the "Christian midrash" articles. Now the correspondence of the *four Gospels* to Ezekiel's plan will be shown.

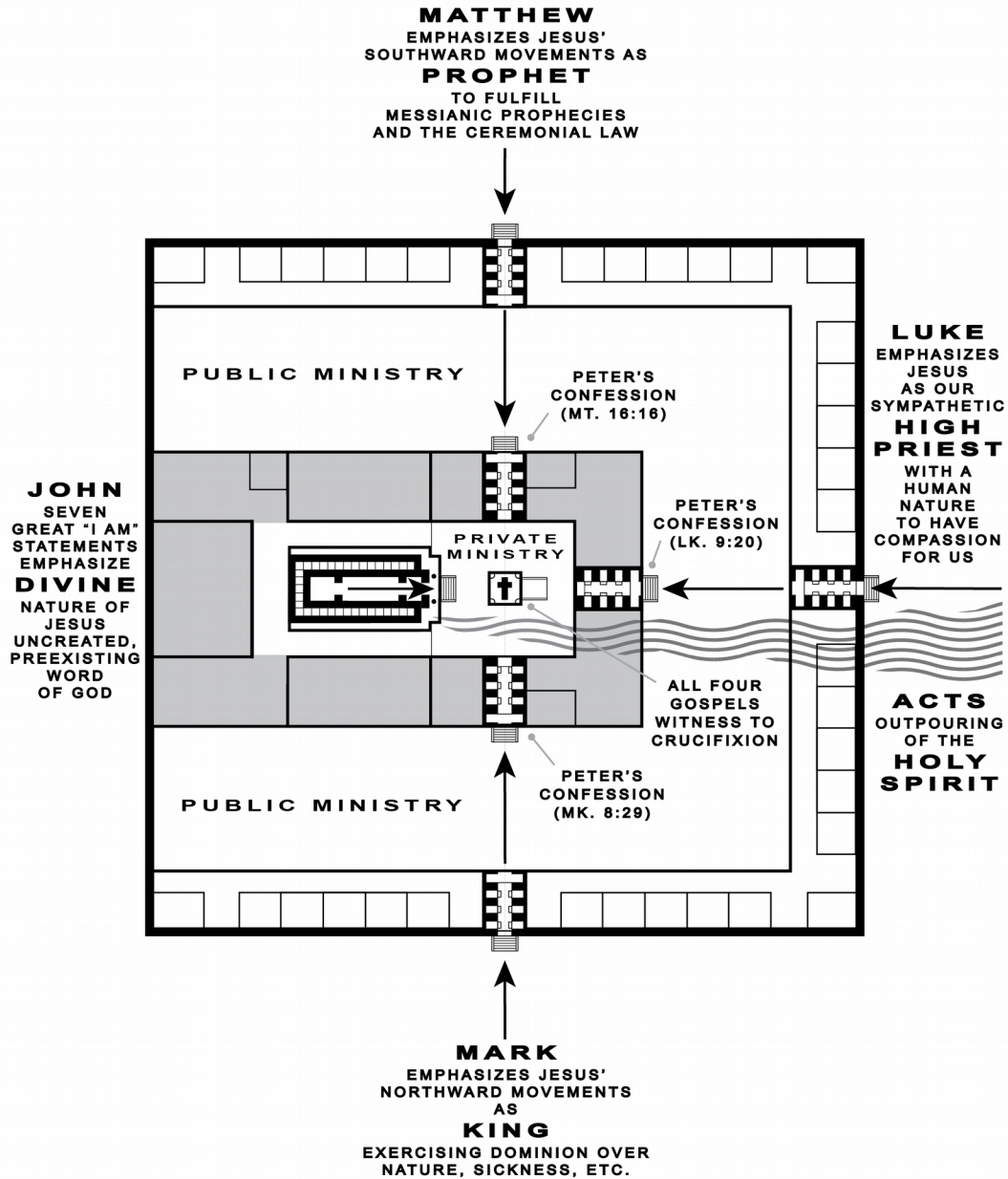
## 2. THE FOUR-FOLD GOSPEL, TEMPLE OF SAVING TRUTH

THE JEWISH SCHOLAR Robert Alter (*The Hebrew Bible*, vol. 3, p.467) and the *Jewish Study Bible* (on Num. 24:15-25) both note a common "3 plus 1" (or "3-4") pattern in the Hebrew Bible. The books of Proverbs and Amos have examples. In Job 1, after the *third messenger* told Job that *three groups* of raiders had stolen his camels, a *fourth messenger* brought worse news than the three messengers before him—a wind had collapsed the *four corners* of a house, killing all his children. Balaam's fourth oracle (Num. 24) was more universal in scope than three preceding ones. Three "beasts" in Daniel 7 were followed by a more dreadful *fourth*.

The Levites camped around the Tabernacle (Num. 3) with their three divisions (responsible for its furnishings, fabrics, and supports) on three of its sides, but the honored sons of Levi (Moses and the priests) were on the fourth (east) side. The three books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers with the Sinai covenant are followed in Deuteronomy with Moses' concluding discourses that shaped that covenant as the foundation for Israel's life in the Promised Land. Finally, in the four New Testament Gospels, the three *synoptic* ("seeing alike") Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are followed by John's special demonstration of the Deity of Christ.

Irenaeus in the second century, and A.W. Pink in the twentieth, said there had to be exactly four Gospels to testify to the Person and work of Christ. If Ezekiel's Temple is a standard of the *completeness* and *perfection* that Irenaeus and Pink saw in the four Gospels, then their idea may find support in **Figure 2**, showing how well a respected scheme for characterizing Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, and John overlays Ezekiel's plan (considering Acts a continuation of Luke, per Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-2). These Gospel characterizations are based on William Hendriksen's *Survey of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976, pp. 371-5, 380, 383, 423.)

The close fit in Fig. 2 results first from that "3 plus 1" pattern the Gospels share with Ezekiel's Temple—John distinguished from the synoptics, as the sanctuary is from the Temple gates. The three synoptic Gospels are identified here with the north, east, and south gates of the outer court of Jesus' three-year public ministry, begun at the age of 30. Remarkably, there are 30 small chambers ranged around the perimeter of the outer (public ministry) court, and the sanctuary is surrounded by 33 (= 30 + 3) smaller cells within the thickness of its outside walls.



**FIGURE 2**

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE FOUR GOSPELS**

Looking closer, all four Gospels front on the central altar of Christ's atoning sacrifice, climaxing His final week of private ministry to His disciples (the *inner court*.) In each synoptic Gospel, the transition from Jesus' public ministry in the outer court to His private ministry in the inner one is made by means of the "gate" of Peter's Confession of Jesus as the Christ (Matt.16:16, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20). Similarly, the Christian church built on that confession has an outer court (the "visible" church) of those who have been *baptized*, and an inner court (the "invisible" church) of those who have received the *new birth* that Jesus explains in John chapter 3—the "gate" between them being, again, Peter's Confession of personal faith.

**The East-West Axis (John and Luke/Acts).** On the East-West axis ("*I will be their God*") of God's mighty acts *on behalf of* His people, *John* on the west side has no gate communicating with the earthly creation, emphasizing Christ's *deity*. Jesus said, in this very Gospel, that He received glory from His Father (John 12:28, 17:1-5) but *not from men* (John 5:41). John has His seven great "I AM" statements issuing, as it were, from the Most Holy Place of God's Temple in heaven: "*I am the bread of life*," "*I am the light of the world*," "*I am the resurrection and the life*," etc., resounding with echoes of God's covenant name, YHWH.

At the opposite, east end of the E-W axis, and associated with the east gate, *Luke* emphasizes Christ's *humanity*, the complementary nature to His Deity, as the "God-man"—fully God and fully man. Jesus is the believer's intercessory High Priest (Heb. 8:1), able as true man to sympathize fully with human temptations and frailties. Luke includes the testimonies of Zacharias (1:78) and Simeon (2:27-32) at the Nicanor Steps at the far western destination of the E-W axis of the Second Temple's Court of the Women, highlighting Christ's Incarnation and coming to His Temple from the prophetic east (1:78). In Fig. 2, Luke *faces west* toward the central event of the cross, the primary thrust or impetus of his Gospel being *westward*.

Luke's continuation in *Acts* records Jesus' Ascension from the Mount of Olives immediately *east* of the city, and the life-giving stream of the Spirit flowing *eastward* from the Apostle's words and wonders, beginning in Solomon's Porch (Acts 5:12) on the *east side* of (Herod's) Temple, where Jesus often taught. This eastward outflow actually began in *John*, where Jesus foretold the giving of the Holy Spirit (John 16), and the river of grace first flowed from Jesus' pierced side (John 19:34)—two passages, found only in John, that empowered the growth of the early church chronicled in Acts. Luke and John thus work in tandem, the primary eastward movement in John coinciding with the secondary (rearward) direction of Luke.

Jews from today's Iraq and Iran were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Christ's Apostles Bartholomew, Thaddeus, and Thomas are said to have taken the gospel eastward to those lands, and India as well. Some churches in those regions today claim descent from their missionary work. But it was the will of the Spirit mainly to advance the gospel *westward* through the Apostle Paul into the Roman Empire, and then for its succes-

sor nations in Europe and the New World to send the gospel farther east to the Orient. Perhaps the bleak, salty waste of the Dead Sea—at over 1,400 feet below sea level, the lowest point of the earth on dry land—might be understood as the gospel's ultimate eastern destination (Ezek. 47:8-9) if viewed as a symbol of the *entire world* lying dead in sin.

That limitation of Ezekiel's plan is compensated by the east-west cleft through the Mount of Olives in Zechariah, its "*living waters*" flowing both *east and west* (14:4, 8). But in terms of Fig. 2, Ezekiel's sanctuary occupying the west end of the E-W axis limited the "tandem" action of Luke/Acts and John to *coming into* the Temple east to west, and *going out* west to east—as the biblical record shows, with Jesus nowhere said (at least in His three-year public ministry) to have gone anywhere to the west of Jerusalem. (A conjecture as to why will be given shortly.)

**The North-South Axis (Matthew and Mark).** On the North-South axis ("*They shall be My people*") of God's work in His people to make them His own, *Mark*, associated with the Temple's south gate—like Luke's association with the east one—faces inward (northward) toward the cross at Ezekiel's central altar, showing Mark's primary northward impetus. Mark features Jesus' northward mission beyond the Temple to "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" in dark Galilee and ultimately to Gentiles beyond. Mark, which is believed to have been written to Gentiles, reveals Jesus as a *universal Servant-King* exercising dominion over nature, sickness, hunger, demons, and death, with no fewer than eighteen miracles in its short length.

At the opposite north gate of the Temple, *Matthew* faces southward toward the cross, and emphasizes Christ's primary southward mission in His prophetic role as David's greater Son (Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24-25), the *Messiah-King* of the Jews. Matthew is generally seen as a Jewish Gospel, beginning in chapter 1 by identifying Jesus (after His death and resurrection) as the prophesied son of Abraham and son of David. Jesus in Matthew moved southward, after teaching as Divine Prophet the spiritual meaning of the Torah on the hills of Galilee, toward (Herod's) Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the law of Moses and pay its penalty for sin (Gen. 3:19, Ex. 24:8, Lev. 17:11, Ezek. 18:20).

Mark and Matthew, like John and Luke/Acts on the E-W "God-man" axis, *work in tandem* on the N-S "Jew-Gentile" one. Since Matthew and Mark in Fig. 2 are first of all *directions*, their gates are to some extent arbitrary, but Matthew is fittingly associated with the *north gate* because Christ was sent "*to the Jews first*" (Rom. 1:16), and Leviticus 1:11 and Ezekiel himself (8:5) associated the north Temple gate with the Jews' animal sacrifices that Jesus came as Lamb of God to fulfill. Fittingly, Ezekiel's ch. 48 layout of the twelve tribes has Judah bordering the Temple on its *north* side, not the original south (Joshua 15.) Mark's north-facing impetus leads in the northern missions; Matthew's south-facing one leads south to the crucifixion. This joint action shows God *dwelling* with men (John 1:14), working *in them in Christ*, up and back between Jerusalem and Galilee.

Biblical evidence seems lacking that Jesus ever traveled significantly south—or, as men-

tioned above, west—of Jerusalem in those three years, even to the key Judean city of Hebron. Perhaps as a young man He went there from Jerusalem at some annual feast to visit the tombs of the Patriarchs, but in His public ministry He may have wanted to avoid appearing to establish an *earthly* kingdom like David's, which first centered in Hebron and areas south and west of Jerusalem (1 Sam. 30:26-31; 2 Sam. 2:1-11, 5:1-3). Perhaps He also wanted to deny enemies any opportunity to accuse Him of *usurping* David's kingship as his son Absalom did there. (Just after the preceding sentences were added to this article in 2019, an official visit to Hebron by the Israeli Prime Minister was called in ultra-Orthodox circles “a precursor to reestablishing the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem”; one rabbi said, “If he connects to them, he can do what King David did.”)

The result in Fig. 2 is that, as with its limitation of the tandem movements of Luke/Acts and John to the east portion of the E-W axis, there is a similar restriction of the tandem actions of Matthew and Mark to the north portion of the N-S axis. If Jesus had traveled south as well as north to gather His lost sheep, and had come in Matthew north (as well as south) to the cross, that axis could not be characterized as Matthew working one way, Mark the other.

The central theme of this article is that the story of Jesus in the Gospels—coming into the Temple in His Incarnation and Passion, going back and forth to Galilee and outward into the thirsty world through His Spirit—is the apotheosis or capstone of the movements of Ezekiel's chariot. The four-fold chariot is mirrored in the four-fold Temple and its four-fold altar where the chariot arrived at the climax of the book that *began* with its description in chapter 1. If the chariot represents God's providential rule over all things, from sub-atomic particles to the four corners of creation, all that pales in importance before the four-fold gospel ordering of the life of God's eternal Son, coming to dwell with sinful men and die for them on that four-fold altar. The movements of the chariot are thus the *dynamics* of the Gospels reflected in the arrows in Fig. 2—the *comings in*, the *flowings out*, the *missionary thrusts*, the *impetus* of each Gospel.

### 3. FOUR FACES TO FOUR “GOSPEL SYMBOLS”

THE DYNAMICS OF THE GOSPEL CHARIOT might be further illuminated if the four faces of Ezekiel's cherubim could be identified with the four Gospels. This is the well-known problem of the four “Gospel symbols,” which have been used throughout Christendom in the insignias or emblems of churches, religious societies, hospitals, universities, and cities named after Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. (One survey of the symbol schemes is Robin M. Jensen, “Of Cherubim and Gospel Symbols,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/Aug 1995, pp.42ff.) People involved with such institutions can of course retain their symbols in any event as “traditional” symbols, but if Ezekiel's four faces can be linked convincingly to a characteriza-

tion of the content of the four Gospels (such as Hendriksen's adopted here) then the case for Fig. 2 might be strengthened.

Such a study must of course be viewed as tentative, requiring that numerous assumptions about what Ezekiel's difficult text says and means be identified and justified. With God's help, that will be attempted here, and a lesser-known solution to the Gospel symbols proposed by others (not this writer) will be advanced and applied to Figure 2.

Unlike his Temple, which Ezekiel described in terms of a 500 by 500 cubit physical object, the *chariot* was far less understandable physically, and its "size" indeterminate. On the one hand, just its "wheels" alone were "*so high that they are dreadful*" (1:18 Koren), yet everything Ezekiel saw in chapter 1 (including the wheels) could also be "small" enough to enter through the Temple's east gate in 43:4—indeed, as small as a Baby in His mother Mary's arms.

The two diagrams coming later in this Section are intended to illustrate in a schematic way *relationships* that are either explicitly stated by Ezekiel, or immediately implied by his text, and not attempts to "depict" what heavenly beings "looked like" or to imagine unrevealed details. If the explicit relationships in the text were meant by God to be understood, it might seem there should be some reverent way to do that symbolically without crossing the line into the "representation" of sacred things. Ideally such relationships should be understandable directly from the text without diagrams. While Ezekiel was told in his chapter 4 to make a drawing, its subject matter was mundane compared to the chariot vision. The reader gifted with the ability to follow what is written below without recourse to the diagrams is encouraged to do so.

There are details about the chariot that Ezekiel did not record, for instance whether the "platform" above the cherubim was square or round, or how the divine throne remained pointing forward (if it did) when the chariot changed direction. But other things *were* related (for all of Ezekiel's circumlocutions) *as if* describing material things. From what he said about the cherubs' wings touching their neighbors, it would seem to follow that the four cherubs were in a square formation below the platform, as suggested by the coming Figures. Again, each cherub had four wings—two covering its body and two extended to touch those of the adjacent cherubs (1:9,11). Each cherub had *four faces*, one on each of its head's four sides (1:6), resembling those of a MAN, LION, OX, and EAGLE (1:10). Chapters 1 and 10 hint that one *facial type* stood out for Ezekiel in a given sighting, so it will be assumed that if he saw two cherubs on one side of the square, they both had that same face.

An important assumption in what follows, based on 1:9 and 1:12, is that the chariot never *rotated*, but always moved "*straight ahead*" in its four directions. If the Spirit willed it to go ninety degrees to the left, the platform would not rotate, or "turn," but the faces that had been on the left sides of the four cherubs would presumably be looking *straight ahead* in the new movement. The primary picture is of "straight ahead" movements on two axes, front-back and left-right, though if the Spirit willed the chariot to go in a diagonal direction, presumably it could "tack" in alternating right-angle courses, or perhaps adjacent cherub-faces could some-



how share the lead in continuous diagonal or curving movements.

In that latter case, mathematical *vectors* that resolve continuous motion into orthogonal (right-angle) components may come to mind to readers who have taken an elementary physics course. The chariot's never rotating may also suggest a *gyroscope*, especially from Ezekiel's "*wheel within a wheel*" (ArtScroll, Living Nach) or "*two wheels cutting through each other*" (NJPS) below the chariot's four cherubs (1:16 and 10:10). Electronic inertial navigation systems give today's aerial drones the capability to hover and fly complex paths while facing in one fixed compass direction. (It may be, from 1:20, that the "wheels" somehow participated in guiding the chariot, but if they merely followed it passively, the ancient motif of a spherical "caster" formed by two perpendicular intersecting circular rims might suffice.)

Another assumption in the following diagrams is that the man-faces on all four of the chariot's cherubs faced in the same cardinal direction, and likewise for the other three faces. Though not accepted by all commentators, this would seem required by 10:22, saying that with respect to the faces, "*each one went straight ahead.*" If similar faces went in different directions, the chariot might spin, or not move at all if opposing faces canceled each other. (For the directions cherub faces looked, see the N-E-S-W compass roses.) If corresponding faces on each cherub's head all looked the same way, then the faces going around each cherub's head, clockwise or counter-clockwise, were also in the same order (e.g., *man-ox-eagle-lion*.)

Most importantly for what follows, it is assumed that the corresponding types of cherub-faces all pointed in the same compass direction in *each of the three visions* of chapters 1, 8-11, and 43. This would appear to follow from 1:9 and 1:12 in the first vision, and from 8:4, 10:15, 10:20, and 43:3, which insist the chariot was "*the same*" in each vision. Any idea that the cherub-faces might shift in relative position between the three appearances of the Presence (being fixed just within a specific vision) would need to overcome the 10:22 statement that the faces in chapter 10 were "*the same faces*" Ezekiel saw in chapter 1—and that "*each one went straight ahead.*" But lacking Ezekiel's explicit statement that the orientation of all cherub-faces was identical in each of the three visions, this must still be regarded as an assumption.

Before completing the drafting of this article, the author saw no commentary explicitly stating the preceding assumption. But then he discovered the Word Biblical Commentary to Ezekiel by William H. Brownlee (1986), where on page 151 he notes, with evident surprise, the "agreement of 10:14 with 1:10! In other words," Brownlee continues, "the living creatures have never turned in their travels between chap. 1 and chap. 10—all are in precise agreement with what Ezekiel has repeatedly said." Daniel I. Block's 1997 NICOT series Ezekiel commentary (highly recommended by this writer) appears to utilize this assumption without stating it. If the present author finds an observation like Brownlee's elsewhere, he will report it in a future edition. (Brownlee's and Block's assignments of the cherub-faces both differ from the solution

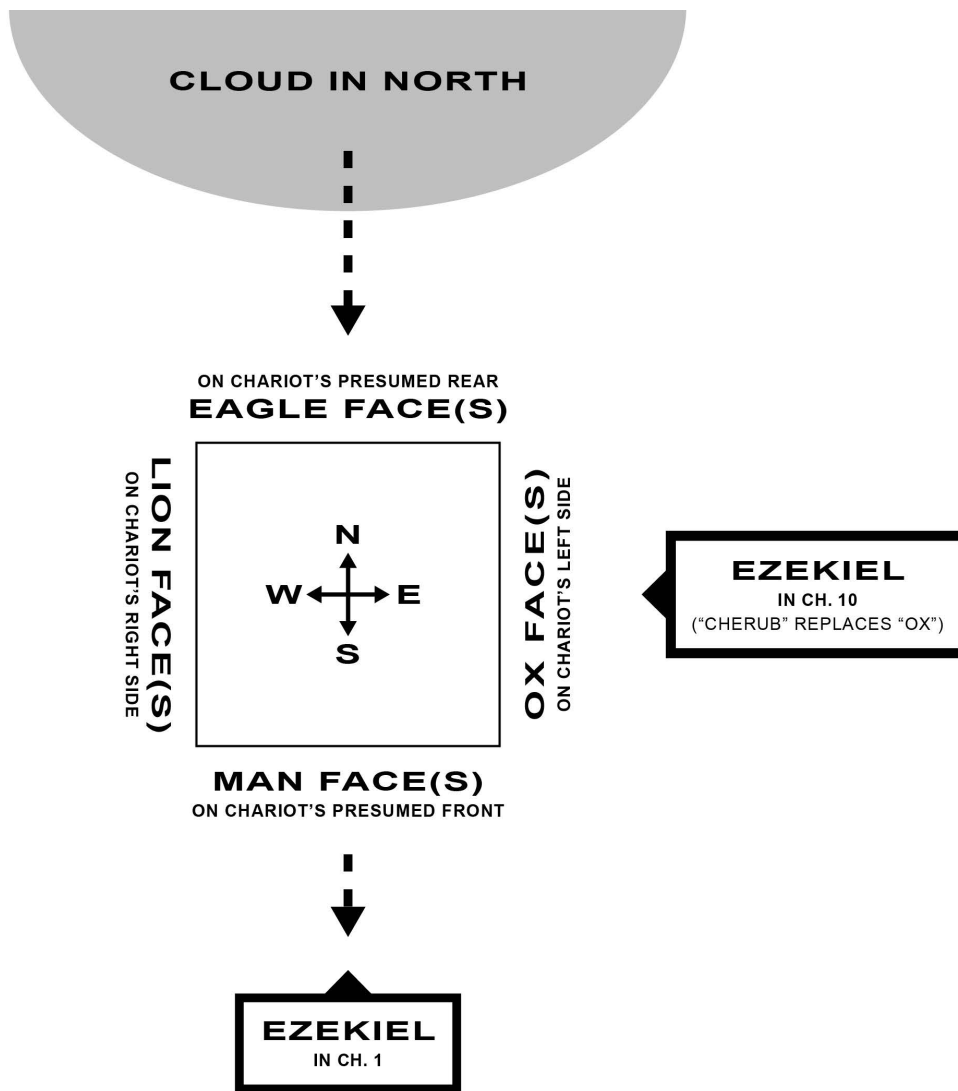
proposed below, owing to their different assumptions about how Ezekiel viewed the chariot.)

**The four faces.** Ezekiel said each of the cherubs had “*a face like a MAN, and one like a LION on the right side.*” Each had “*a face like an OX on the left side, and one like an EAGLE*” (1:10, capitals added). Ezekiel’s terms “right” and “left” require the lion- and ox-faces to have been on opposite sides of a cherub’s head, by elimination making that true also of the man- and eagle-faces. The man-face would seem to have been on the *front* of its head as Ezekiel saw it, and the eagle-face on its *rear*, since he would hardly mention a hidden rear face first, or the “front” one last, but his reticence on this point might warn against forming too hasty a picture of the arrangement. And did his words “right” or “left” mean from Ezekiel’s point of view, or the right or left sides *internally to the chariot* (as when speaking of someone’s “right” eye)?

Block (v.1, p.96) identifies the chariot’s man-faces with a south-facing side coming toward Ezekiel in 1:4, when the prophet first noticed a wind and dark cloud in the north, with the chariot becoming visible within it (or emerging from it) as it moved south (**Figure 3**). Block apparently assumes the man-face was discerned by Ezekiel when, or very shortly after the cloud appeared in the north, satisfying Block that it was visible to the prophet the whole time it led the chariot southward to his vicinity. Block then (ibid, p.325) follows the second approach above, taking the lion-faces to have been on the “right” side internally to the south-facing chariot (the *left* or westward side as *Ezekiel* viewed it) leaving the ox-faces on the chariot’s internal “left” side to be what the prophet saw on *his right* side.

A different theory of the chariot’s orientation is proposed here, namely that in 1:10, Ezekiel described the cherubs in the conventional east-facing “Israel-centric” orientation mentioned in Section 1—that is, *looking eastward* at the chariot, in which case the man-face Ezekiel discerned and reported in 1:10 would need to have looked west toward him, not south. It is not certain Ezekiel saw the chariot *only* coming from the north. He must have seen it from at least one other direction to know what the face on the fourth side was. And if (as many translations say) the chariot darted around freely as he watched (1:14), the eastward orientation might have outweighed the initial one as the most logical way to communicate what he saw.

However, there are hints of this eastward orientation in Ezekiel’s text itself. He did not ascribe directional or frontal meaning to the man-face in 1:10, but his Hebrew words for “right” (*yamin*) and “left” (*semo’wl*) for the *side* faces have connotations of “south” and “north”—the *warmth* of the south (the “right” for an east-facing observer) and *darkness* of the north (that person’s “left.”) All consulted translations of 1:10 say “on (or to) THE right” (or left), not “on (or to) ITS right” (or left.) None take Ezekiel’s description as internal to the chariot. The 1936 commentary by G.A. Cooke (p.14) says 1:10 is “from the point of view of the spectator.” If Ezekiel had simply made it clear that the man-face *faced south*, that would have trumped those geographic connotations (see, for instance, Gen. 13:14 or Josh. 15:2.) But setting the “right”



**FIGURE 3**

***DIAGRAM OF CHARIOT IN EZEK. 1 & 10  
IN NORTH-FACING ORIENTATION***

NOTE: This is by no means intended as a “depiction” of spiritual realities beyond human comprehension, but only as a symbolic diagram of relationships that are explicitly stated by Ezekiel or follow by good and necessary inference from his inspired text.

The square denotes some arrangement of four cherubs, not to be visualized in detail. The labels on each side indicate the cherub face(s) Ezekiel reports seeing at a given time, or which follow by necessary inference.

side of the chariot (as *Ezekiel* saw it) on the south, and his “left” side on the north, puts it in the east-facing orientation (**Figure 4**). Could the possibility of this other orientation explain Ezekiel’s vagueness about the chariot’s front and rear faces?

This east-facing relationship of Ezekiel to the chariot need not conflict with what he said about it coming from the cloud in the north. Would the details of the cherub-faces have been discernible from a distance? He does not say he saw those details the moment he sighted the cloud. His mentioning the cherubs’ “*human form*” in 1:5 may just mean he discerned their head and two straight legs—not a human *face*. If the lion-face, as proposed here, was actually pointing south all the time, it could have been impossible for him to make out initially due to the distance or the darkness of the cloud.

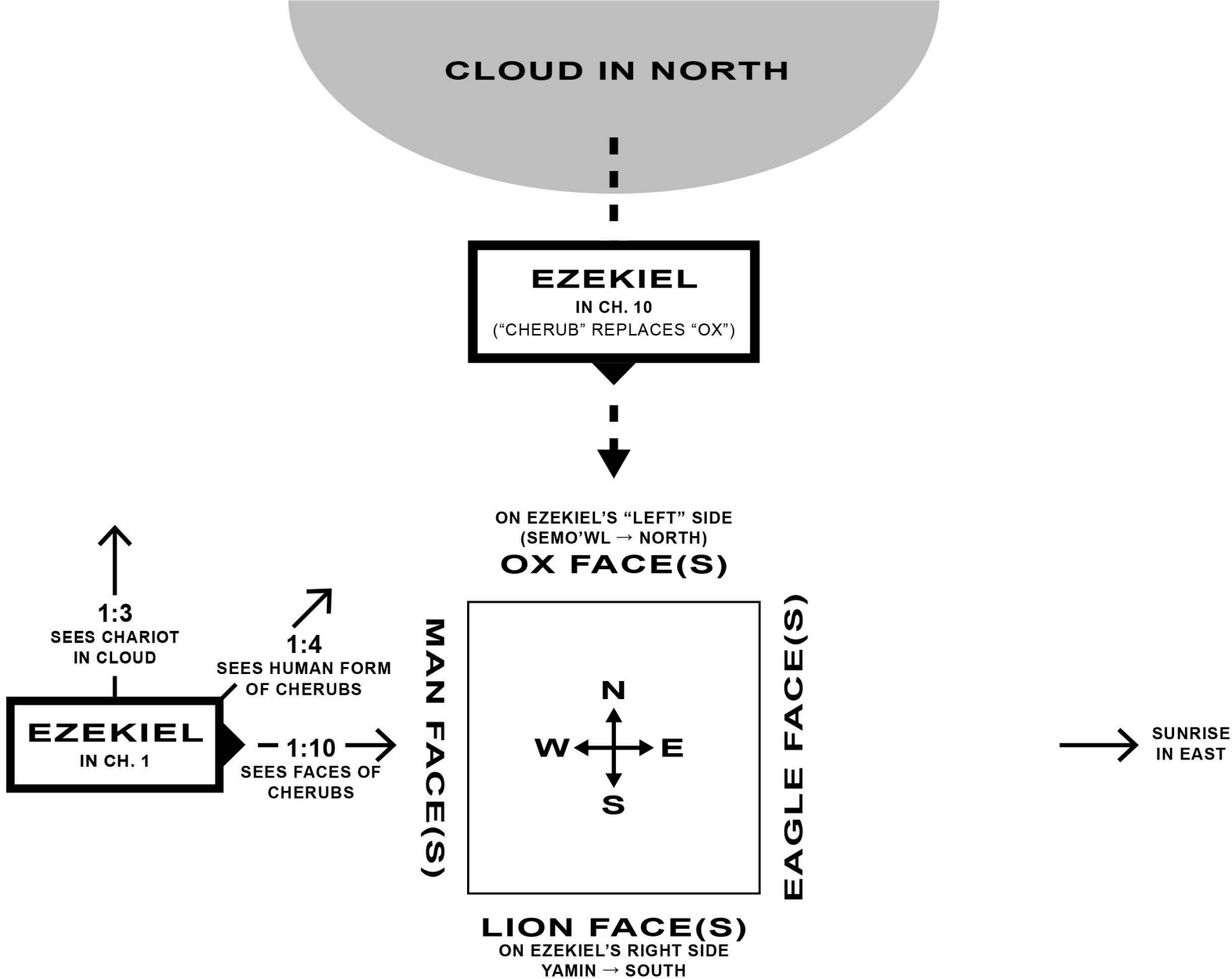
If the chariot later passed by Ezekiel to his east, he could then have seen a *westward*-looking man-face when the chariot was close enough to see details (see Figure 4). Block says that in Babylon the prevailing winds were from the northwest, so if the cloud swept southeasterly from the north, that could have carried it past Ezekiel just to his east. (A reason for the chariot being blown southeasterly in the cloud could be to retrace the route by which the exiles were carried to Babylon from Jerusalem, with its then still-standing Temple, from which God’s Presence was following them, with tidings not just of coming judgment in the form of Nebuchadnezzar’s armies, but ultimately of something most glorious.)

**The proposed scheme:** Though not mentioned in Robin Jensen’s historical survey of the Gospel symbols, the scheme that aligns most closely with the present study is that of the *New Open Bible Study Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990, p.1176), which clearly harmonizes with Hendriksen’s Gospel characterizations mentioned above. This Thomas Nelson scheme is:

LION = MATTHEW (Christ the Jews’ Messiah, Lion of the tribe of Judah)  
OX = MARK (Christ the Servant-King with universal power over Creation)  
MAN = LUKE (Christ’s humanity—birth, High Priesthood)  
EAGLE = JOHN (Christ’s Deity—seven “I AM” statements)

If this scheme is correct, then in **Figure 2** the MAN-faces should lead the chariot west into the Temple (i.e., in Luke), and the EAGLE-faces on the opposite sides of the cherubs’ heads should lead it eastward out of the Temple, corresponding to the outflowing river of grace and the progress of the Spirit in John and Acts. The OX-faces should lead the chariot north in Christ’s missionary trips toward dark and Gentile regions (Mark), and the opposite LION-faces should lead south toward Jerusalem for Jesus to suffer and die as Israel’s Messiah (Matthew).

If the chariot does not rotate between visions, the same arrangement of faces must hold in chapter 10, when the Presence was departing the idol-corrupted First Temple. In that vision, Ezekiel saw the chariot in the inner court, somewhere to the “south” (or “right”) side of the sanctuary (10:3), suggesting the court’s southwest corner, but possibly somewhere farther east



**FIGURE 4**

***DIAGRAM OF CHARIOT IN EZEK. 1 & 10  
IN CONVENTIONAL EAST-FACING ORIENTATION***

NOTE: This is by no means intended as a “depiction” of spiritual realities beyond human comprehension, but only as a symbolic diagram of relationships that are explicitly stated by Ezekiel or follow by good and necessary inference from his inspired text.

The square denotes some arrangement of four cherubs, not to be visualized in detail. The labels on each side indicate the cherub face(s) Ezekiel reports seeing at a given time, or which follow by necessary inference.

along the south side of the court. Block thinks Ezekiel's vantage point must have been (at least at that moment) on the court's East-West axis, in order to see the Glory coming out of the sanctuary's Holy of Holies. (If he saw that, this writer thinks Ezekiel should quickly have moved to a safer spot farther north in the court!) But as he looked (from wherever he was) generally southward toward the chariot, he unexpectedly reported in 10:3 a CHERUB-face looking back toward him—not any one of the four faces from Ezekiel's first chapter!

Ezekiel listed in ch.10 the cherub-faces as CHERUB, MAN, LION, and EAGLE, so by elimination the OX-faces of ch. 1 must somehow have become CHERUB-faces. But since he said (10:22) that the ch. 10 faces were the “*same faces*” as in ch. 1, the “cherub”-face may be a scribal error. The words “*cherub*” or “*cherubim*” occur thirteen times in the preceding thirteen verses, and a copyist might have repeated “cherub” a fourteenth time. If so, it was still the face of a “cherub”—just a cherub-face resembling an OX. (Some commentators have suggested that in ancient Near East iconography, an ox may have been a cherub's *default* face.)

In ch. 10, Ezekiel listed the cherub-faces “*first*” through “*fourth*,” presumably going clockwise or counter-clockwise around a cherub's head. When he looked south to the north-facing cherub/ox, that would logically (by the assumption that the chariot never rotated between visions) be “the first.” Then (from 1:10) the lion-faces would have to be on the opposite side—the “*third*,” whichever way Ezekiel listed them. (It is not critical here, but if the solution proposed below is correct, he started to his right, going counter-clockwise.)

Commentators struggle to reconcile many details between chapters 1 and 10, but the latter's saying all the chariot's “faces” were *exactly the same as before* suggests that anything unclear between those chapters comes from scribal errors in the difficult text. With regard to chapter 10, Block thinks Ezekiel was actually at the far eastern end of the E-W axis, near the east gate of the inner court (again a dangerous place to stand!) and looked more west than south to see east-facing ox/cherub faces (**Figure 3**). (Block's interpretation of the “right” and “left” sides in ch. 1 was seemingly made to harmonize with his theory of Ezekiel's vantage point in ch. 10.)

The best solution to the compass orientation for the faces in chapter 1—and now also in chapter 10—would in the author's opinion lie in adopting the eastern orienting convention. To explain a possible point of confusion, the directions in which the cherub-faces looked (**Figure 4**) correspond to the *arrows* in Figure 2, but are *opposite* to the *sides of the Temple* identified with the respective Gospel, due to the intrinsic difference between *fixed points* and *directions*. If, for instance, a northward moving chariot approached the north gate from the south, and went through it, that gate would go from being *north* of the chariot to *south* of it.

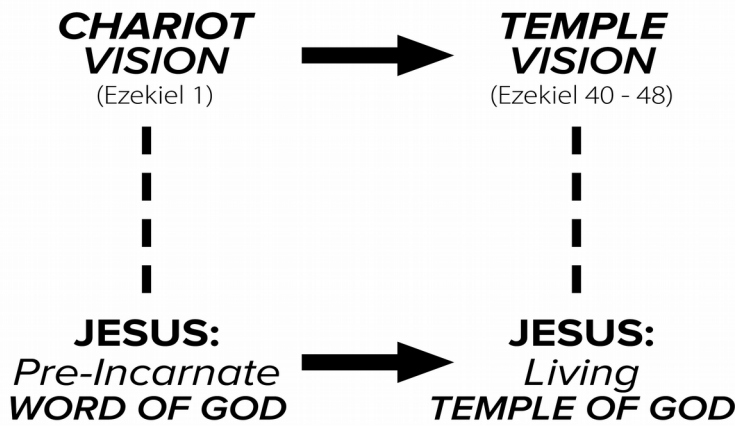
To review the relationships of the cherub-faces of the chariot and the Temple gates in Figure 2, as the chariot approached the Temple in ch. 43, the MAN-faces led it *westward* toward the EAST gate, and into the Temple. In Christ's trips to Galilee, the OX-faces led *northward* through the Temple, and out its north side. In Christ's trips from Galilee to Jerusalem, the

“... the word (LXX: Logos) of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel... and I looked, and [saw] a likeness of four living creatures... [and] the appearance of a man above” (Ezekiel 1:3, 5, 26).  
 “The Personification of the Word / Logos / Memra” (Jewish Encyclopedia)

“In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...” (John 1:1).

“And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters  
 (Targum: like the voice of those who praise [God’s] name):  
 and the earth shined with his glory...” (Ezekiel 43:2).

“... and the glory of the LORD filled the house... And he said unto me, ‘Son of man, the place of my throne, and... the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever...’” (Ezekiel 43:2, 5, 7)



“... in those days... they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant... neither shall that be done any more” (Jeremiah 3:16).

“... in this place is one greater than the temple” (Matthew 12:6).

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19).

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days... I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will

be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Hebrews 8:10, based on Jeremiah 31:33).

“... the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over the house where the young child was” (Matthew 2:9).

“... and the glory of the Lord shone round about them... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest...’” (Luke 2:9, 13).

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (“tabernacled”) among us...” (John 1:1, 14).

**FIGURE 5**

**THE COMING OF GOD’S PRESENCE TO HIS TEMPLE  
 fulfilled in  
 THE COMING OF THE WORD IN MORTAL FLESH**

LION-faces led *southward* to the Temple's NORTH gate, and then inside. In the outflow of the Spirit in Fig. 2, the EAGLE-faces led from the sanctuary on the WEST side, going *eastward* through the EAST gate and beyond. The Ox- and Lion-faces on the *north and south sides* of the cherubs' heads alternately led or followed in Christ's N-S trips, accounting for Matthew and Mark working "in tandem," and similarly for Luke's Man-faces and John's opposite Eagle-faces working in tandem on the E-W axis.

A final application of the assumption that the chariot does not rotate between visions would be to assert what was hinted above, that the arrangement of cherub-faces in ch. 43 of the Temple Vision is the same as in ch. 1 and ch. 10, completing what is diagrammed in Figure 2.

Chapter 43 says that the divine Presence entered the inner court and "filled" the Temple. The present author takes that to mean God's Glory subsumed and became one with its walls, gates, and courts—as opposed to going into, and being forever enclosed within a Holy of Holies that no one (even a high priest, whom Ezekiel never mentions) enters, even just once a year. This article was written to show the *out-working* of the mystical union of God and His Temple in the gospel, as the chariot of God's Presence traced out in Scripture Christ's saving life and work, up and down across the axes of His work *for* and *in* His people, first partially and figuratively in the original context of the Hebrew Scriptures, then fully and clearly in the New Testament.

**Figure 5** is repeated here from Part 2 of the author's "Christian midrash" articles (also at [www.ezekielstemple.com/free-articles](http://www.ezekielstemple.com/free-articles)) to highlight the parallels between the filling of the Temple with the divine Presence (seen by Ezekiel in chapter 1) and the coming of the eternal Word of God to the Temple in mortal flesh. The author cannot believe the similarity of Fig. 5 to the chariot, the four-fold form of the overall Temple, and to its central altar is coincidental.

The scheme for the Gospel symbols advanced here incidentally suggests a small application in regard to the decoration of Ezekiel's sanctuary, about which he says very little except for one detail, a decorative motif on interior surfaces—the motif of a palm tree alternating with a cherub with faces of a man on one side and a lion on the other (41:17-18). The cherub in this motif incorporates in its alternating man- and lion-faces the two "Gospel symbols" for Luke and Matthew, which contain Christ's final north-to-south return from Galilee to Jerusalem on the N-S axis (Matthew) and His triumphal east-to-west entry from the Mount of Olives to the crucifixion on the E-W axis (Luke)—these being the two final Gospel directions by which the divine chariot carried Jesus into Ezekiel's (*qua* Herod's) Temple to accomplish eternal salvation.

**John's four "living creatures."** A separate biblical source for the four Gospel symbols is Revelation 4, John's vision of God's heavenly throne. Following Ezekiel by six centuries, John's vision has several things in common with Ezekiel's chariot, including the crystalline "sea" in front of God's throne recalling the "firmament" or "expanse" above Ezekiel's cherubim, on which the divine throne sat. Both visions had "rainbow" effects. Significantly, John's heavenly throne was surrounded "*in the midst of, and around*" the throne by four "living crea-



tures” described by John as being like a *lion*, *ox* (or calf), *man*, and *eagle*—obviously corresponding to the faces on Ezekiel’s cherubs.

John listed the four living creatures with ordinal numbers—“*the first*” being like a LION, “*the second*” one (whatever its spatial relationship to the first creature was) like an OX, “*the third*” had the face of a MAN, and “*the fourth*” was like a flying EAGLE. If the Gospels that have been determined from Ezekiel to correspond to the living creatures of John’s vision are inserted, the result is the Gospels in their actual New Testament order:

“*the first*” (LION) = Matthew,

“*the second*” (OX) = Mark,

“*the third*” (MAN) = Luke

“*the fourth*” (EAGLE) = John.

Given that there are 24 distinct ways (4x3x2) those four symbols could be put in an ordered sequence from “*the first*” to “*the fourth*,” the author thinks that if this Matthew-Mark-Luke-John order coming out of this study of Ezekiel is a coincidence, it is a remarkable one indeed.

Ezekiel also listed the cherub-faces in chapter 10 with ordinal numbers, but gave clues about their spatial arrangement that are missing in Revelation. Not only did Ezekiel say the “cherub”-face pointed at him, but clues regarding the chariot’s “right” and “left” had already been given in 1:10. Revelation 4 not only lacks those clues, but John’s saying the living creatures were “in the midst of, and around” the throne suggests, at least to this writer, a much more fluid and perhaps incomprehensible picture (to pursue another modern scientific analogy, something more like the cloud of electrons surrounding an atomic nucleus than planets orbiting the sun.)

If it had to be surmised that the four living creatures were arranged in any way at all like Ezekiel’s Temple or chariot, then John’s order of listing them would work out to have been *north-south-east-west*—listing one “axis,” then the other—itself an obvious ordering scheme found, for example, in Genesis 13:29 and Luke 13:29. However, the author is uncertain the divine throne should be said to have “axes” like the Temple and chariot.

It is unclear whether the editors of the Thomas Nelson Study Bible noticed they were listing the Gospels in New Testament order, or if they did, whether they were perhaps not convinced it was anything more than a coincidence. However, the Gospel order is not just an accident of church history, but follows from biblical considerations other than the above. Matthew follows immediately the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 1:1) by identifying Jesus as the son of Abraham and David (see Hendriksen, op. cit., or David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* Grand Rapids, 1995, pp.31ff). The short Gospel of Mark then leans backward on Matthew and forward on Luke for details of Christ’s birth and resurrection, leaving John to come last, but its special role there has been previously noted.

It is not suggested that the four living creatures of Revelation 4 “are” the four Gospels, any

more than Ezekiel's Temple "is" a picture of them. These things are aspects of deeper spiritual realities that the Gospels and living creatures *embody*, as the earthly Temples are "copies" or "shadows" of God's heavenly one (Heb. 9:23). Jewish and Christian commentators have proposed slightly different characterizations for the symbols in Ezekiel and Rev. 4, generally suggesting they symbolize *noble power* (Christ's lion-like kingship = Matthew), *domesticated power* (as an ox used in farming = Mark), the *sky* (for priestly mediation with heaven = John), and *mankind* (= Luke). The terms differ, but the underlying ideas seem almost the same.

Just after the living creatures associated with the four Gospel symbols are presented in Revelation 4, the six seals of Revelation 6 are opened by the Lamb, and announced by the four living creatures of chapter 4 in order (6:1). The 2016 revised edition of the author's *Ezekiel's Temple: A Scriptural Framework Illustrating the Covenant of Grace* suggested an application of the scheme presented above to the interpretation of the six seals—namely that the first four seals are at least in part curses for rejecting what the corresponding Gospels represent:

1. The white horse and rider are the "*many antichrists*" going forth in punishment for the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, declared by Matthew = the LION, the "*first*" Gospel of Rev. 4, announced in Rev. 6 by "*one*" of the four creatures—necessarily "the first" one identified with Matthew, as follows by elimination from the below. (Evidence this rider is not Christ: Nimrod the "mighty hunter" of Gen. 10 and the "*four severe judgments*" of Ezek. 14 and Jer. 15; also see Matt. 24:5, 24; John 5:43, 14:30; 2 Cor. 11:14-15; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2:18, 4:1-2; Rev. 13:8).

2. The red horse and rider *take peace from the world*—peace which ultimately can only be the peace God creates between men of all races and nations who bow the knee to the universal King Jesus of Jews and Gentiles, as presented in Mark = the OX, the "*second*" Gospel in Rev. 4, identified with Mark above, as proclaimed by "*the second*" creature in Rev. 6.

3. The black horse and rider *bring famine and want* to those who reject the compassionate man Jesus, who sympathizes with human need and intercedes for men, as typified by Luke = the MAN, the "*third*" Gospel of Rev. 4, announced by "*the third*" living creature in Rev. 6.

4. The pale horse and its rider *bring eternal death* to those who reject eternal life in Christ (John = the EAGLE, the "*fourth*" Gospel in Rev. 4.) As with the above, John says this seal was announced in Rev. 6 by "*the fourth*" living creature.

Going beyond the fourth seal, the fifth seal depicting the course of Christian witness in the world corresponds to Luke's continuation in Acts (with the Apostolic letters following in its train.) Then the the sixth seal, the end of all things, corresponds appropriately to Revelation, the final New Testament book.

## 4. CONCLUSION

SUBJECT TO THE ASSUMPTIONS of the preceding pages, this article has demonstrated that the Thomas Nelson Study Bible's scheme for the four "Gospel symbols" and the four Gospel characterizations based on Hendriksen's *Survey of the Gospel* are not only consistent with each other, but also with the disposition of the cherub-faces outlined in Ezekiel 1 and 10. The scheme of the "Structure of the four Gospels" diagram in Figure 2 was based on those premises. This scheme has also been shown to lead to the actual Bible order of the four Gospels in John's vision of God's heavenly throne in Revelation chapter 4, if one accepts John's strongly ordinal language ("*the first,*" "*the second,*" etc.)—in the absence of any spatial clues—as evidence that the Scriptural order was intended.

Among the several assumptions made about the operations of Ezekiel's chariot, the most important was that the chariot never rotated between the three visions in which it appeared in the book of Ezekiel. The author has found only one other commentary that explicitly acknowledges this assumption, though it seems to follow from Ezekiel's text, as discussed above.

The author hopes this article may open up to view a world of inner agreement between the plan of the four Gospels, the form of Ezekiel's Temple, the "chariot" vision of Ezekiel's first chapter, and the heavenly throne vision of Revelation 4. One unusual feature was the treatment of Ezekiel's Temple as a superstructure of Scripture erected upon the foundation of two essentially flat "axes" embodying the two sides of the covenant formula, "*I will be their God, and they shall be my people,*" revealing and superimposing, like a multi-faceted crystal or "hologram," as it were, biblical truth from the Tabernacle, the First Temple, the Second Temple, and beyond, erecting a structure of New Testament truth upon the foundation of the Old.

Another possibly new approach was to understand Ezekiel's "chariot" not in a presumed orientation based on the prophet's first spotting it in a distant cloud in the north, but in the Bible's east-facing orienting convention, which better accounted for the biblical data—including the manner of Ezekiel's first describing it—and enabled a consistent identification of Ezekiel's cherub-faces and the so-called "Gospel symbols."

Mainly it was shown how the life and work of Jesus Christ is the triumphal achievement of the mysterious dynamics of Ezekiel's chariot, as it traced out that life and work on the two axes of Ezekiel's Temple, coming to His Temple on the East-West axis in His Incarnation and Passion, filling it in His dwelling with man and gathering Israel in His north-south trips to Galilee, and climaxing at Ezekiel's central altar of burnt offering, where His atoning death on the cross fulfilled everything implied by those axes and satisfied divine justice for the sins of His people, forming the basis for the ultimate restoration of the sin-rent cosmos.

*Ezekiel's Temple and the Christian Gospels, page 21*

If there is truth here, it is only because it is in God's Word, and its divine Author has put it there to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of all things and only Savior of sinners, and to demonstrate the intricate beauty and internal consistency of the Bible in a day when it is unjustly attacked as a collage of humanly contrived, and often ill-fitting pieces.

The above article is based on Part 3: "Ezekiel's Temple and the Structure of the Four Gospels" from the author's book, *Ezekiel's Temple: A Scriptural Framework Illustrating the Covenant of Grace* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2013, rev. 2016), pp. 43-48, with revisions and additions.

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I would invite you to read my four-part "Christian midrash" on Ezekiel's Temple Vision, on the Free Articles page of my [www.ezekielstemple.com](http://www.ezekielstemple.com) website. Part 1, ***Lost and Found in the Temple***, and Part 2, ***Jesus in the Temple***, explain not only the reason from my life history that led me to Ezekiel long before I called myself a Christian—indeed having grown up with at least some "anecdotal" Jewishness in my family—but also what I believe God allowed me to discover during a lifetime of pondering Ezekiel's plan. Part 3, ***Ezekiel's Temple and the Temple of Talmud***, came about when I noticed that Orthodox Jews view Ezekiel's Temple slightly differently from Christians and other Jews. It explains the difference, drawing some comparisons and contrasts between the Temple's complexities and those of the Talmud, and tells why I think Jewish persons should care about the difference. Part 4, ***Three Jewish Objections***, discusses the anti-semitism of Martin Luther, the "Christian Sabbath" on Sunday, and the Trinity, with observations of Ezekiel's Temple derived from the previous three parts.

**Are you a Jewish person desiring to receive Jesus (Yeshua) as your Messiah?** If you are willing to acknowledge that your sins disqualify you from any hope of eternal life and that you need a Savior, and if you are willing to transfer your trust from whatever you've been trusting in to Jesus, and forsake your sins, then pray to God as your Heavenly Father, in Jesus' name, asking Him to forgive you. Tell Him you now realize His Son Jesus lived the only perfect Torah life and died on the cross as the spotless Lamb of God whose blood atones for your sins. Ask God to help you repent and believe, and to fill you with the comfort and guidance of His Holy Spirit. Thank Him for His free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus. Only God sees your heart. If you prayed that sincerely, then study the Gospel of John in the New Testament. Choose Life, *whatever other people say!* Immediately begin looking for a Bible-believing church where you can be baptized, taught the Word, and disciplined by mature believers.

Some Jewish persons coming to faith in Jesus find fellowship in Messianic congregations where some Jewish traditions are observed, and one might help you—though God's ultimate plan is to make of the Jew and gentile "*one new man*" (Ephesians 2:14-18) conformed neither to Jewish traditions nor gentile ones, but to Jesus. Many, perhaps most new Jewish believers in Yeshua join more conventional churches that place their primary emphasis on the preaching of all the Bible, and have people of many ethnic and cultural backgrounds searching the Scriptures together, united in the love of Jesus—a grounding which also can help you find how to share your distinctively Jewish background in the community of faith. No church or congregation is perfect. Maybe one that believes God's Word *needs you* in order to grow more into the pattern Jesus wants.