

DEEP END - HIGHLIGHTS (text not audio)

John 20:20 - Celestial Sentinels

In the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle there were two cherubim symbolically “guarding” the Ark, the “throne” of the Lord (from any violation by wicked and unholy men? Exodus 25:18)

It appears that the shekinah (the glory cloud) “sat” or “hovered” on the ark with the cherubim on each end of the mercy seat spreading their “wings” to overshadowed the Ark, the “throne” of the Lord (Ps 80:1). This arrangement was called God’s “chariot” in 1 Chronicles 28 (some versions translate it differently, but “chariot” seems preferable, particularly in the light of Ezekiel 1 & 10). So if you could look into the most holy place it would appear that God was riding on a winged war chariot, reminding us that he is in our midst as a warrior to execute his purposes of justice and righteousness to the ends of the earth. (I should mention that statues of a winged chariot, representing a hero in the ancient world are not uncommon.)

Then building on this, it appears (by piecing together all the verses in Kings and Chronicles) that there were four cherubim in the Temple of Solomon that expanded and enlarged the original configuration in the Tabernacle. It appears that the first two were in their original positions and that the other two spread their wings to overshadow both the Ark and the first two cherubim with their wings spreading to touch the curtain of the most holy place on each side.

In Ezekiel 1 & 10 we see the four cherubim now repositioned as the four wheels of God’s chariot (a chariot distinct but mysteriously linked to the representation in the temple –1 Chronicles 28:18; 1 Kings 6:23-28). This mysterious vision is interesting as it demonstrates that God’s throne, God’s reign, is not static, but can move fluidly, as required, to the four corners of the earth. Much to their astonishment, the exiles discovered that God’s chariot had left the polluted and corrupt temple in Jerusalem and was now present with them in Babylon (Ezekiel 1 & 10).

This should be a huge encouragement to all of God’s people. God’s throne is “living” and can move into the midst of our circumstances wherever we are - even if we feel forsaken in Babylon because of our sin and disobedience.

Two final observations: first, in Revelation the cherubim seem to also to be described as “living creatures”. They stand around the Lamb, again symbolically guarding him, as in the Tabernacle and temple (Rev 5:6). Then finally, if we are attuned to this symbolism, would the disciples who were told by Mary Magdalene that she “saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot” (John 20:12) make the connection to the cherubim who sat at each end of the mercy seat guarding the shekinah glory that rested on the Ark?

If they did not, then we should. The cherubim are not only guardians of the throne they are also the guardians of death and life—even today! And if we find that any part of our life has gone into “death” they are present, with the one who said “I am the resurrection and the life”, to reverse every adversary we might meet in our pilgrimage. (Note that Jesus did not simply that “I will be” (at the end of the age) the resurrection and the life, but that “I am”, now, the one who by death and resurrection broke every chain of sin and death that could possibly overtake us.

And while the cherubim/living creatures/ remain shrouded in mystery, the one who they witnessed breaking the bonds of death and hell is available today to do the same in our lives. (My thanks to John Molloy for the link between the cherubim and the empty tomb.)