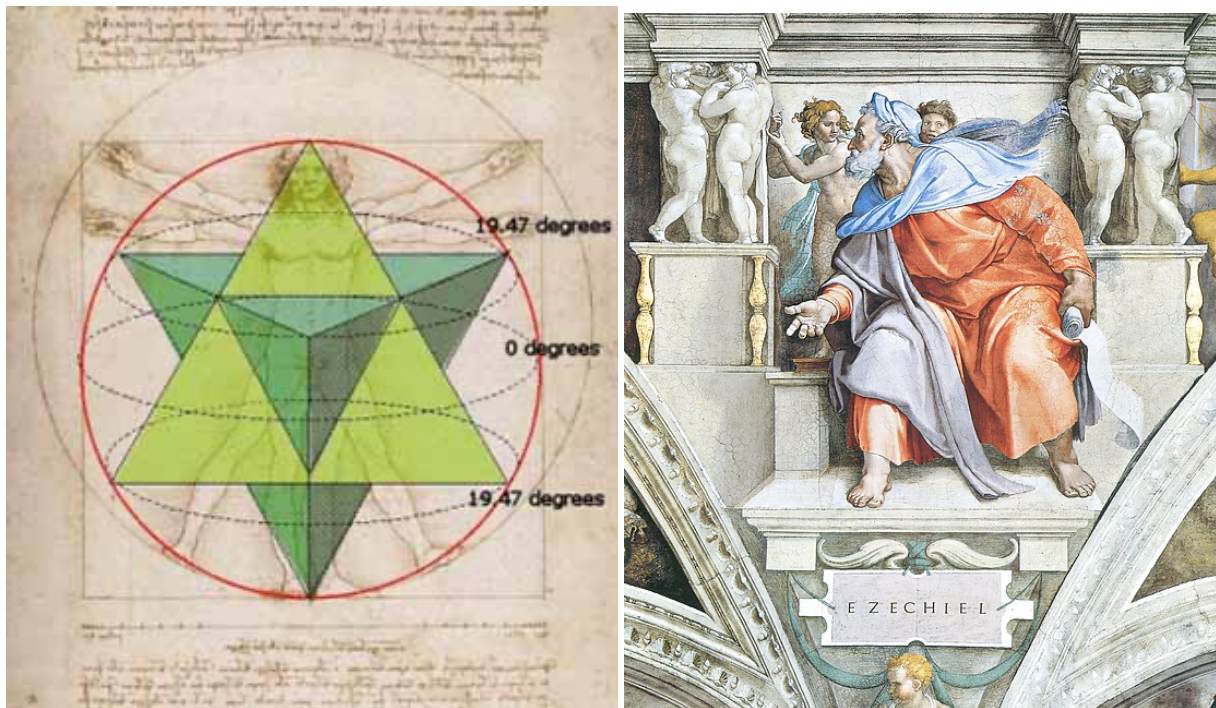


Merkabah (מרכבה: Hebrew for "chariot"), refers to the throne of **God**, described in **Ezekiel** (1:4-26), which is said to be a four-wheeled chariot driven by four "living creatures" ("*chayot*"). Each of these creatures has four wings with the four faces of a man, **lion**, **ox**, and **eagle**. The merkabah is the divine light vehicle allegedly used by ascended masters to connect with and reach those in tune with the higher realms.



"Mer" means Light. "Ka" means Spirit. "Ba" means Body. Mer-Ka-Ba means the spirit/body surrounded by counter-rotating fields of light, (wheels within wheels), spirals of energy as in DNA, which transports spirit/body from one dimension to another.

Students of Jewish mysticism have focused on these passages from Ezekiel, seeking to understand their deeper meaning. Jewish biblical commentaries emphasize that the animal imagery of the Merkabah is not meant to be taken literally; rather it provides analogies for the various ways that God reveals Himself in this world. (Maimonides, in his "Thirteen Principles of Faith," emphasizes that God is not limited to any particular form, as this prophecy might seem to imply.) Hasidic philosophy and Kabbalah discuss at length what each aspect of this vision means.



In medieval Judaism, the beginning of the book of Ezekiel was regarded as the most mystical passage in the entire Hebrew Bible, and its study was discouraged, except by mature individuals with an extensive grounding in the study of traditional Jewish texts. Today, Jews customarily read the biblical passages concerning the Merkaba in their synagogues every year on the holiday of Shavuot, and the Merkabah is also referenced in several places in traditional Jewish liturgy.

In Christianity, the man, lion, ox, and eagle are used as symbols for the four evangelists (or gospel-writers), and appear frequently in church decorations. They also appear in

the Tarot card, "The World." The creatures are called Zoë (or the Tetramorph), and continuously surround the throne of God in Heaven, along with the twenty-four angelic rulers, the Seraphim, the Cherubim, the seven Archangels, the Ophanim, and countless angels, spirits, and saints, where they sing praises to the Trinity, and beg Christ to have mercy on humankind.

2 Kin.2:11

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a WHIRLWIND into heaven.

According to the verses in Ezekiel and its attendant commentaries, his vision consists of a chariot made of many heavenly beings driven by the "Likeness of a Man." Four beings form the basic structure of the chariot. These beings are called the "living creatures" (Hebrew חיות khayyot). The bodies of the creatures are "like that of a human being", but each of them has four faces, corresponding to the four directions the chariot can go (north, east south and west). The faces are that of a man, a lion, an ox (later changed to a cherub in Ezekiel 10:14) and an eagle. Since there are four angels and each has four faces, there are a total of sixteen faces.

Each Chayot angel also has four wings. Two of these wings spread across the length of the chariot and connected with the wings of the angel on the other side. This created a sort of 'box' of wings that formed the perimeter of the chariot. With the remaining two wings, each angel covered its own body. Below, but not attached to the feet of the "Chayot" angels are other angels that are shaped like wheels. These wheel angels, which are described as "a wheel inside of a wheel", are called "Ophanim" אופנים (lit. wheels, cycles or ways). These wheels are not directly under the chariot, but are nearby and along its perimeter. The angel with the face of the man is always on the east side and looks up at the "Likeness of a Man" that drives the chariot. The "Likeness of a Man" sits on a throne made of sapphire.

The Bible later makes mention of a third type of angel found in the Merkaba called "Seraphim" (lit. "burning") angels. These angels appear like flashes of fire continuously ascending and descending. These "Seraphim" angels powered the movement of the chariot. In the hierarchy of these angels, "Seraphim" are the highest, that is, closest to God, followed by the "Chayot", which are followed by the "Ophanim." The chariot is in a constant state of motion, and the energy behind this movement runs according to this hierarchy. The movement of the "Ophanim" is controlled by the "Living creatures" while

the movement of the "Chayot" is controlled by the "Seraphim". The movement of all the angels of the chariot are controlled by the "Likeness of a Man" on the Throne.

The Divine Throne-Chariot **Introduction by Geza Vermes**

The Divine Throne-Chariot draws its inspiration from Ezekiel (1:10) and is related to the Book of Revelation (4). It depicts the appearance and movement of the Merkabah, the divine Chariot supported and drawn by the cherubim, which is at the same time a throne and a vehicle. The "small voice" of blessing is drawn from 1Kings 19:12: it was in a "still small voice" that God manifested himself to Elijah. In our Qumran text this voice is uttered by the cherubim and it is interesting to note that although the Bible does not define the source of the voice, the ancient Aramaic translation of 1Kings (Targum of Jonathan) ascribes it to angelic beings called "they who bless silently."

The Throne-Chariot was a central subject of meditation in ancient as well as in medieval Jewish esotericism and mysticism, but the guardians of Rabbinic orthodoxy tended to discourage such speculation. The liturgical use of Ezekiel's chapter on the Chariot is expressly forbidden in the Mishnah; it even lays down that no wise man is to share his understanding of the Merkabah with a person less enlightened than himself. As a result, there is very little ancient literary material extant on the subject, and the Qumran text is therefore of great importance to the study of the origins of Jewish mysticism.

-- Excerpt from: *The Other Bible*, ed. Willis Barnstone (Harper & Row, 1985), p. 705.

The Divine Throne-Chariot

...The ministers of the Glorious Face in the abode of the gods of knowledge fall down before him, and the cherubim utter blessings. And as they rise up, there is a divine small voice and loud praise; there is a divine small voice as they fold their wings.

The cherubim bless the image of the Throne-Chariot above the firmament, and they praise the majesty of the fiery firmament beneath the seat of his glory. And between the turning wheels, angels of holiness come and go, as it were a fiery vision of most holy spirits; and about them flow seeming rivulets of fire, like gleaming bronze, a radiance of many gorgeous colors, of marvelous pigments magnificently mingled.

The Spirits of the Living God move perpetually with the glory of the wonderful Chariot. The small voice of blessing accompanies the tumult as they depart, and on the path of their return they worship the Holy One, Ascending they rise marvelously; settling, they stay still. The sound of joyful praise is silenced and there is a small voice of blessing in all the camp of God.

And a voice of praise resounds from the midsts of all their divisions in worship. And each one in his place, all their numbered ones sing hymns of praise.