

The Expressive Grammar of Ezekiel 1:1-2

The first two chapters of Ezekiel 1-2 provide a fascinating comparandum for Hebraic and Greek vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Describing the appearance of God in his chariot, Ezekiel 1 is an important chapter in the Bible, particularly to a branch of Jewish mysticism. The awe and wonder Ezekiel would have felt at such a sight is reflected in the passage's vocabulary and grammar. The author manages to paint an image of this ethereal, heavenly being, but makes it accessible to a human audience. The grammar is full of strangely worded phrases, odd verb forms, and many subject changes, all of which add to the confusion, complexity, and immediacy of the passage. Though the Greek mimics the Hebrew in its word order, it lacks the peculiarity in its grammar, and thus does not have quite the same power as the Hebrew. The Greek also gives a different reading in several verses, some from early errors, limits of available vocabulary, or hard-to-translate subtle meanings, though most of the differences come in the form of later Hebraic additions to add more imagery or to connect earlier verses.

In comparison with the grammar of the following chapters, we can see that this is a deliberate stylistic choice. This Ezekiel 2 is more formulaic in its description of God delivering his message to his prophet, Ezekiel. This formulaic style is reflected in the simplified grammar, repeated vocabulary, straightforward phrases, and more common verb forms. The Greek is similarly quite straightforward, and is even quite shorter in many verses, due to the Hebrew adding whole phrases to fix earlier errors or to add context and clarification.

The complex and expansive writing style of Ezekiel is hard to parse at times, but it effectively highlights the significance of the stories and successively integrates the audience into the passage.