

CHERUBIM

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Cherubim were heavenly beings depicted in the Old Testament as guardians of sacred places and supporters of the throne of God. Biblical scholars have suggested many etymologies for the word *cherub* but have reached no consensus. It is possible that the word shares a derivation similar to that of the Akkadian *kūribu*, which is associated with certain kinds of protective spirits in Mesopotamian religion. *Cherubim* is the Hebrew form of the plural—the equivalent of the English *cherubs*. Cherubim are described in Ezekiel 1 as composite beings with features of humans, eagles, lions, and bulls. In appearance and function, cherubim were likely similar to the sphinxes from Egyptian iconography.

In the Old Testament, cherubim are closely associated with the temple and with the division of sacred space. For example, they guard the way to the tree of life in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis (Genesis 3:24). Images of cherubim were depicted on the walls of both the tabernacle and the temple and were embroidered on the temple veil itself, symbolically showing the beings' guardian status (see Exodus 26:1, 31). God is often depicted as sitting or riding on a cherub, and cherubim formed the basis of His heavenly throne on the cover of the ark of the covenant (called the mercy seat in the King James Version). One of God's titles that is especially associated with the ark of the covenant in 1 and 2 Samuel is the "Lord [Jehovah] of hosts that dwells [or sits] between the cherubim" (1 Samuel 4:4; author's own translation). When the glory of the Lord departed from the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel, it did so on the back of cherubim (see Ezekiel 11:22–23).

Related verses

Genesis 3:24

Exodus 25:18–22

Exodus 26:1, 36–35
Exodus 37:7–9
Numbers 7:89
1 Samuel 4:4
2 Samuel 6:2
2 Samuel 22:11
1 Kings 6:23–35
1 Kings 7:29
1 Kings 8:6–8
2 Kings 19:15
Psalm 18:10
Psalm 80:1
Psalm 99:1
Ezekiel 1:4–14
Ezekiel 9:3
Ezekiel 10:1–22
Ezekiel 11:22–23
Ezekiel 41:19–26

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