

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Ezekiel 6 is a prophetic oracle of judgment directed against “the mountains of Israel” — a synecdoche for the land itself and the people who have filled it with idolatrous high places. The LORD commands Ezekiel to prophesy against the mountains, valleys, ravines, and riverbeds (vv. 1–3), announcing that the high places and altars will be desolated, the idols smashed, and the people who worshipped there will be slain — their corpses laid before their idols in defiling irony (vv. 4–7). A pivot occurs in verses 8–10: a remnant will survive among the nations, and in their exile they will *remember* the LORD, loathe themselves for their idolatry, and recognize that the LORD did not speak in vain. The oracle resumes in verses 11–14, as the LORD commands Ezekiel to clap his hands and stamp his foot in a gesture of divine mourning-judgment, pronouncing that sword, famine, and pestilence will consume the nation across every terrain and settlement until the land is laid waste — and they will know that He is the LORD.

The chapter’s governing refrain is the recognition formula: “*and they shall know that I am the LORD*” — appearing in verses 7, 10, 13, and 14. This is not incidental repetition. It is the theological engine of the entire oracle. The judgment is not punitive indulgence; it is covenantal discipline aimed at the recovery of the knowledge of God that Israel’s idolatry has suppressed and replaced.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking to shatter the complacency that makes idolatry possible — the assumption that covenant relationship with the LORD can coexist with divided loyalty, and that unfaithfulness has no real consequences. But the intent is not merely to terrify. The remnant passage (vv. 8–10) reveals that behind the devastation lies a restorative purpose: God is working through judgment toward *recognition* — the restored knowledge of who He is and what He requires. The intended effect on the reader is a collision of holy fear and gospel hope: fear at what covenant unfaithfulness costs, and hope that God’s severest judgments never exhaust His redemptive purpose.

Subject Sentence: The LORD judges His people’s idolatry in order to be known.

Primary Claim: God will not share His people with idols — He dismantles every competing loyalty through judgment so that He alone is known as LORD. Even in devastation, His

purpose is not the destruction of His people but the recovery of a remnant who will remember Him.

Interpretive Evaluation

The “Mountains of Israel” as Literal Geography vs. Theological Symbol: Some readers take the address to the mountains, valleys, and riverbeds as merely a dramatic rhetorical device — poetic personification with no theological weight. But the Reformed reading recognizes that the land itself is a covenant category. The mountains and high places are addressed precisely because they have become the *sites* of covenant defection — the geographical embodiment of Israel’s spiritual adultery. The land that was promised as the dwelling-place of covenant faithfulness has been turned into a theater of idolatry. Addressing the land is addressing the depth of Israel’s sin: it has gone all the way down, into the soil. This is not merely rhetorical. The land suffers under the covenant curse (cf. Leviticus 26) because Israel’s sin has polluted it.

The Remnant Passage (vv. 8–10) — Grace Within Judgment or Afterthought? Some expositors treat verses 8–10 as a softening clause appended to mollify the severity of the preceding oracle — a pastoral safety valve. This misreads the passage’s structure. The remnant is not an afterthought; it is the theological *telos* of the entire oracle. The recognition formula (vv. 7, 10, 13, 14) frames the whole chapter, and verse 10 applies it specifically to the remnant who will *remember* and *loathe themselves* in exile. The judgment does not contradict the remnant’s survival — it produces it. This is a thoroughly Reformed and covenantal reading: God uses judgment as a means of grace, preserving and purifying a people for Himself through the very discipline He unleashes. Arminian or broadly evangelical readings that pit the judgment oracles against the remnant passages create a false tension; the text holds them together deliberately.

The Gestures of Verses 11–14 — Prophetic Mourning or Divine Anger? The command to clap hands and stamp feet (v. 11) has been read variously as expressions of divine wrath, divine grief, or prophetic mockery. The Reformed reading does not force a single interpretation: within the covenant context, these gestures may carry the weight of lamentation (as in 21:14 where hand-clapping accompanies mourning) as well as judicial declaration. God’s anger in the prophets is never dispassionate — it is the anger of a spurned covenant Lord who loved His people and was despised by them. The gestures enact the pathos of divine judgment: not cold execution but agonized covenantal discipline.

Dispensational Reading — Israel’s Specific Land Promises: Dispensational interpreters rightly note that the land promises here are specific to Israel and should not be spiritualized away or universalized without remainder. The Reformed reading agrees: Ezekiel 6 is first and foremost a word to covenant Israel about their specific covenant land and covenant obligations. However, the *theological pattern* — idolatry brings covenant curse; judgment aims at recognition; a remnant is preserved — has canonical weight beyond its first application and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, who bears the curse

of the broken covenant and constitutes the remnant in Himself. The specificity of Israel does not exhaust the text; the pattern generalizes canonically without erasing the specific historical referent.

Key Canonical Support

- **Leviticus 26:27–33** — The covenant curse passage that Ezekiel 6 enacts: desolation of the high places, slaughter, scattering among the nations — all specified in Mosaic covenant law as the consequence of persistent covenant unfaithfulness. Ezekiel is not inventing new judgment; he is announcing the arrival of what Moses warned.
 - **Deuteronomy 4:25–31** — Moses anticipates that Israel will provoke the LORD with idols, be scattered among the nations, and *there* will seek the LORD and find Him. The exile that Ezekiel announces is already embedded in the Mosaic covenant as a disciplinary movement toward repentance and return.
 - **Hosea 2:6–7, 14–16** — The closest prophetic parallel to Ezekiel 6’s structure: the LORD strips Israel of everything she credited to her idols, so that she will return to Him as her first husband. Judgment as the dismantling of idolatry in order to restore covenant knowledge.
 - **Romans 1:18–25** — The New Testament exposition of idolatry as the suppression of the knowledge of God. Paul describes the same dynamic Ezekiel diagnoses: the exchange of the glory of God for created images as the root of covenant unfaithfulness. The judgment of Romans 1 (divine abandonment) parallels Ezekiel’s covenant curse.
 - **Revelation 2:12–17 (Pergamum)** — Christ’s letter to a church that has allowed idolatrous accommodation parallels Ezekiel’s oracle: the LORD will not coexist with rivals; He calls His people out of compromise and promises to those who overcome a share in His own name.
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Aim: To confront the reader with the absolute intolerance of God toward idolatry and to demonstrate that His severest judgments are inseparable from His unrelenting purpose to make Himself known to a remnant He will preserve.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	The LORD commands	“Set your face against” is a

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Ezekiel to set his face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them	hostile orientation formula; prophesying <i>to</i> the land indicates the depth of national corruption — it has penetrated the land itself
3	The LORD announces His word to the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys: “I myself will bring a sword upon you”	The land’s topographical features are the sites of the high places — every geographic category is complicit
4–5	The high places will be desolated, altars smashed, idols broken; the slain will fall before their idols — their bones scattered before the altars	Devastating irony: the worshippers end up prostrate before the gods they served, but as corpses, not adorants; judgment enacts the futility of what they chose
6–7	Cities will be laid waste, high places desolated across every settlement; the slain will know (implicitly) that He is the LORD	First occurrence of the recognition formula — even the dying will recognize the identity of the One who judges
8–10	A remnant will survive among the nations in exile; they will <i>remember</i> the LORD; they will <i>loathe themselves</i> for their idolatry; they will know that He did not speak in vain	Theological pivot of the chapter — survival is not rescue from judgment but preservation through it; the remnant’s response is self-loathing and remembrance, not immediate celebration; the emphasis is on the authenticity of repentance
11	The LORD commands Ezekiel to clap his hands, stamp his foot, and say “Alas!” because of all the evil abominations	Prophetic enactment of divine grief-anger; the prophet’s body becomes the instrument of covenant lamentation
12	Triple death announcement: far off will die by pestilence, near will fall by the sword, those who survive and are besieged will die by famine	The totality of covenant curse instruments — no escape route

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
13	The slain will lie among their idols around the altars, on every high place, under every green tree and leafy oak — the sites of their idolatry	Geographic comprehensiveness reinforces the completeness of judgment; “every green tree and leafy oak” echoes Deuteronomy’s warnings about Canaanite worship sites
14	The LORD stretches out His hand and makes the land more desolate than the wilderness of Diblah — from the wilderness to Riblah	Totality formula — north to south, every terrain; “more desolate than the wilderness” intensifies the covenant curse to its maximum expression; fourth and final occurrence of the recognition formula

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–7	The Oracle Against the Land: Idolatry Answered by Desolation
2	8–10	The Remnant Pivot: Judgment as the Path to Recognition
3	11–14	The Totality Declared: Sword, Famine, Pestilence, and Desolation Complete

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD judges His people’s idolatry in order to be known.

Primary Claim: God will not share His people with idols — He dismantles every competing loyalty through judgment so that He alone is known as LORD. Even in devastation, His purpose is not the destruction of His people but the recovery of a remnant who will remember Him.

Applications (Five)

1. Idolatry is not a private spiritual preference — it is covenant treason with covenantal consequences.

(Mind/belief) The modern tendency to treat religious syncretism as an enhancement of faith — keeping God while adding other allegiances — is exactly the posture Ezekiel indicts. Israel did not *replace* the LORD with idols; they *supplemented* Him. The high places coexisted with the temple. The application is not only to crude paganism but to every arrangement in which God is present alongside ultimate allegiances to security, approval, comfort, or achievement. The text demands that the reader examine not whether God is present in their life but whether He is alone.

2. The judgment of God against idolatry is an act of covenant love, not divine frustration.

(Affections/worship) The reader who encounters the severity of Ezekiel 6 — the slain before their idols, the scattered bones, the desolated land — is prone to recoil and conclude that this is a God to be feared but not loved, or loved but not trusted. The recognition formula overturns this. The purpose of every stroke of judgment is *that they shall know that I am the LORD*. God is not venting; He is pursuing. He would rather devastate His people and recover them to Himself than leave them comfortable in spiritual adultery. This should produce not dread but undone worship: He is too committed to our real good to allow our lesser goods to remain undisturbed.

3. Genuine repentance over idolatry is self-loathing, not merely regret.

(Affections/worship) The remnant passage (vv. 8–10) is specific about the content of genuine repentance: they will *loathe themselves* for the evil they have done. This is not the shallow remorse that regrets consequences while clinging to the idol's appeal. It is the deep self-judgment that sees one's own choices as genuinely abominable — not merely inconvenient. The application calls for a specific examination: Is there a pattern of returning to the same sin with regret but without self-loathing? Is there sorrow over outcomes while the idol itself still holds attraction? The remnant text will not allow a therapeutic repentance that is warm toward the self while mildly disappointed in the behavior.

4. God's most severe providences may be His most purposeful mercies.

(Mind/belief) Ezekiel 6 will not allow the reader to separate devastation from divine purpose. The same God who promises desolation also promises a remnant, and the remnant is *produced* by the desolation — not despite it. For any reader in the midst of a season of loss, collapse, stripping, or suffering that feels like abandonment, the chapter insists: the LORD who does not speak in vain (v. 10) is working through the desolation, not absent from it. This does not explain every providence or justify easy formulas. It does forbid the conclusion that devastation means God has finished with someone.

5. Stop arranging your life to keep God and your idols together.

(Will/behavior) The practical demand of this passage is immediate and concrete: Israel's sin was structural — they built high places alongside the covenant. They did not have to choose because they arranged their landscape to include both. The application is to identify the structural

arrangements in your own life that allow divided loyalty to persist without ever being forced to a choice. What financial structures, relational patterns, entertainment habits, or occupational priorities have you designed so that you never have to fully give the LORD the field? The mountains of Israel were not accidental — they were built. What have you built that this passage is calling you to tear down?

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 6 teaches that the LORD's jealousy is a perfection of His character, not a deficiency — it flows from the covenant relationship He has established with His people and His total claim on their exclusive allegiance. The passage also teaches that divine judgment is teleological: it aims at a specific end (*that they shall know that I am the LORD*), not merely at punishment proportionate to guilt. This means God's wrath is never purposeless — it is always in service of His covenantal aim. The remnant theology embedded in the oracle further teaches that God is never working purely in destruction; even within the most severe judgment oracle in Scripture, preservation and recognition are the final categories. The chapter's address to the land itself reveals the comprehensive reach of sin: covenant unfaithfulness does not stay contained in the human heart but spreads into every social, geographical, and material structure.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 6 is a window into the covenantal structure of all divine dealings with His people — the pattern of sin, covenant curse, remnant preservation, and recognition that governs Ezekiel governs the whole of redemptive history. The recognition formula (*they shall know that I am the LORD*) is the goal of all God's redemptive work, reaching its apex in the gospel: the cross is the supreme act by which God makes Himself known — as both the One who judges sin with absolute severity and the One who bears that judgment in the person of His Son to preserve a remnant for Himself. The remnant theology of verses 8–10 is proto-evangelical: survival is not earned but granted; the response of the remnant is not pride but self-loathing and remembrance — precisely the posture of those who receive grace. Reformed soteriology's insistence on the radical nature of grace and the depth of human sinfulness is confirmed here: the remnant does not repent and then survive — they are preserved *in order to* repent, and their repentance is a gift of the judgment itself, not an achievement they bring to qualify for rescue.

Main Takeaway

God will not quietly coexist with your idols. He is not competing for a share of your loyalty — He is the LORD, and He will dismantle every rival, in His time and by His means, because He is committed to being known as the only one. The most terrifying thing about this passage is not the judgment — it is the love that drives it. He would rather break you free from what is destroying you than leave you comfortable in it.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching judgment without the recognition formula.** The most common homiletical failure with Ezekiel's judgment oracles is to treat them as straightforward announcements of divine wrath against sin — morally serious, prophetically weighty, but ultimately without a constructive core. Ezekiel 6 will not support this. The recognition formula appears four times in fourteen verses; it is not decoration. Every application of this passage must move through the judgment to its declared purpose: *that they shall know that I am the LORD*. A sermon that produces only dread has not preached the whole chapter.
- **Treating the remnant passage as a softening of the judgment rather than its telos.** Verses 8–10 are frequently handled as pastoral relief — a note of comfort appended to hard material. This misreads the passage's logic. The remnant *is* the point. Judgment is the *instrument* by which the remnant is produced, preserved, and brought to genuine self-loathing repentance. Present the remnant as the theological culmination of the oracle, not as an asterisk to it.
- **Restricting “idolatry” to ancient religious practice.** It is possible to preach Ezekiel 6 in a way that leaves contemporary listeners entirely comfortable — because nobody in the congregation literally burns incense at a high place. The Keller idol-diagnosis lens is essential here: the passage is diagnosing the universal human condition of competing loyalties, misplaced trust, and the substitution of created goods for the Creator. The application must identify the functional high places of contemporary life — security, achievement, approval, comfort — not merely condemn a religious practice no one in the room is tempted by.
- **Skipping the self-loathing language of verse 10.** The text is specific about what genuine repentance looks like — and it is more severe than contemporary evangelical repentance language typically allows. A preaching culture that reduces repentance to “turning around” or “returning to God” may domesticate what Ezekiel insists on: a deep, personal loathing of one's own idolatrous choices. This does not mean wallowing in shame, but it does mean that easy, consequence-free repentance has not reckon honestly with this text.

- **Failing to show Ezekiel 6 within the covenant framework.** Without grounding in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30, the judgment can appear arbitrary — God unexpectedly unleashing severe punishment on a people who perhaps did not know what was coming. But Israel knew exactly what was coming. The covenant curses were specified, agreed to, and repeatedly warned against across centuries of prophetic ministry. Ezekiel is not announcing something new; he is announcing the arrival of what was promised. This matters for application: the contemporary reader also has a revealed covenant, revealed warnings, and revealed consequences. Ignorance is not available as a defense.
- **Losing the geographic comprehensiveness.** The repeated formula — mountains, hills, valleys, ravines, every settlement, from the wilderness to Riblah — is not rhetorical padding. It is the declaration that there is no corner of the land, no pocket of society, no institution or structure that falls outside the reach of the covenant Lord's judgment and His restorative purpose. Applications should reflect this comprehensiveness: the LORD's claim is not over religious life only. He stakes His name on every domain.