

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 10

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Ezekiel 10 records one of the most theologically dense and visually overwhelming passages in the entire Old Testament: the departure of the glory of the LORD from the Jerusalem temple. The chapter opens with a vision of the throne-chariot (the *merkabah*) described in terms closely parallel to Ezekiel 1, establishing continuity with the prophet's inaugural vision. A figure clothed in linen is commanded to fill his hands with burning coals from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city — a judgment act that mirrors and fulfills the marking commission of chapter 9. The cherubim are then described in elaborate, almost obsessive detail: their four faces, their wheels full of eyes, the overwhelming sound of their wings. The chapter climaxes with the glory of the LORD lifting from the threshold of the temple and repositioning to stand over the cherubim — the beginning of a departure that will be completed in chapter 11. The identification of the cherubim with the living creatures of chapter 1 is explicitly made (v. 20), tying this vision to its origin and confirming the coherence of Ezekiel's prophetic call.

This Text — Intent

God is confronting His people — and anyone who reads this vision — with the catastrophic seriousness of covenant unfaithfulness. The departure of the glory is not merely a theological datum; it is a devastating relational and judicial event. What Israel assumed was permanent — the divine presence in the temple, the guarantee of national security, the surety of the covenant — is shown to be conditional, and that condition has been violated. God intends this vision to shatter false confidence in religious institutions and to force a reckoning with what is actually lost when sin is treated as manageable. The elaborate, ordered majesty of the divine throne-chariot simultaneously magnifies the tragedy: what is leaving is not an abstraction but a sovereign, holy, personal God — and He is leaving because His house has become a house of abominations. The intent is not despair but devastation that prepares for genuine repentance; subsequent chapters will hold out restoration, but only through the rubble of this moment.

Subject Sentence: The glory of the LORD withdraws from His defiled temple in sovereign, measured judgment.

Primary Claim: God is confronting His people with the devastating reality that His presence cannot coexist with sustained, unrepentant covenant betrayal — and that what is lost when the glory departs is far greater than any earthly catastrophe that follows.

Interpretive Evaluation

The relationship between chapters 9 and 10 and the sequence of judgment

Some interpreters read the coal-scattering commission in 10:2 as a parallel or recapitulation of the judgment announced in chapter 9 rather than its continuation or expansion. Others see it as a distinct, sequential act. The Reformed reading treats these chapters as a unified judgment sequence: the marking in chapter 9 distinguishes the remnant, and the coal-scattering in chapter 10 executes the judgment on the rest. The linen-clothed figure who marked the faithful in chapter 9 is now the same figure who carries the coals — a detail that presses toward the unity of divine mercy and judgment as aspects of a single holy act. There is no interpretive difficulty here that requires resolution so much as clarity that chapters 9-11 form a continuous visionary unit.

Whether the departure of the glory in chapter 10 is complete or anticipatory

Some readers treat verse 18 — “the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the house” — as the completed departure. The Reformed reading, supported by the text’s own movement, is that this is the beginning of a deliberate, staged withdrawal, not its completion. The glory moves from the inner sanctuary to the threshold (9:3), then from the threshold to the cherubim (10:18), then to the east gate of the temple (10:19), and finally — in chapter 11 — to the mountain east of the city (11:23). This staged departure is theologically significant: God does not abandon His people in a moment of rage but moves away in measured, solemn steps — almost as if reluctant, giving every opportunity for the city to register what is happening. Collapsing the departure into chapter 10 alone flattens this movement and loses the pastoral weight of its deliberateness.

Dispensational readings and the future return of the glory

Dispensational interpreters frequently place significant weight on Ezekiel 10’s departure as the anticipatory counterpart to the glory’s return described in Ezekiel 43:1-5, reading both as literal, physical events associated with a future rebuilt temple in Jerusalem during a millennial kingdom. The Reformed reading acknowledges the genuine canonical connection — the departure in Ezekiel 10-11 and the return in Ezekiel 43 are clearly paired — but locates the fulfillment of the glory’s return in Christ. John 1:14 (“the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us, and we beheld His glory”) is the New Testament’s explicit claim that the departed glory has returned in the person of Jesus. The language is not accidental — it is the evangelist’s deliberate invocation of the Shekinah tradition. This does not render the Ezekiel 43 vision meaningless but situates its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant community rather than in a rebuilt Solomonic-style structure. The

dispensational reading is acknowledged as surfacing the right canonical connection while being qualified for locating the fulfillment in a future physical temple rather than in Christ and the church as the new temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21-22; Revelation 21:22).

The cherubim and the wheels — allegorical versus literal-visionary readings

Some interpreters in the patristic and medieval tradition read the four faces of the cherubim as allegories for the four Evangelists or other symbolic categories. The Reformed reading resists this allegorizing. The cherubim are agents of the divine throne and of divine judgment — creatures that serve and surround the Holy One, whose overwhelming multiplicity of eyes and wings communicates the omniscience and terrifying mobility of the God who rules from this throne. The vision is not primarily a code to be decoded but an overwhelming sensory experience designed to communicate divine majesty and the weight of what is departing. Preaching this passage as an allegory misses the vision's affective and rhetorical intent entirely.

Key Canonical Support

- **Ezekiel 1:4-28** — The inaugural *merkabah* vision establishes the identity and appearance of the throne-chariot; Ezekiel 10's explicit cross-reference (v. 20) confirms continuity and frames the entire chapter as a return of the vision in a judicial context.
 - **Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-11** — The filling of the tabernacle and temple with the glory of the LORD establishes the covenantal baseline against which chapter 10's departure is measured; what God graciously gave, He now withdraws in judgment — the covenant has a both a filling and an emptying.
 - **John 1:14; John 2:19-21** — The Word tabernacling among us and Christ's body as the new temple are the New Testament's direct answer to the departure in Ezekiel 10-11; the glory that left has returned in a person, not a building.
 - **Ezekiel 43:1-5** — The return of the glory by the same eastern gate through which it departed completes the canonical arc; departure and return are the twin poles of this judgment-and-restoration movement.
 - **Revelation 21:22** — "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" — the eschatological resolution of the temple question: the glory does not return to a building but becomes the entire environment of the new creation.
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Aim: To bring the reader/hearer to a sobering reckoning with what is at stake in covenant unfaithfulness — not merely consequences but the loss of God Himself — and to press them toward the only place where the departed glory has truly returned: Jesus Christ.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Ezekiel sees the firmament above the cherubim with a sapphire throne-like appearance; the vision reestablishes the <i>merkabah</i> setting from chapter 1	Parallel to 1:26; the throne-chariot is present and active in the temple courts
2	The man clothed in linen is commanded to go between the wheels beneath the cherubim and fill his hands with coals of fire to scatter over the city	The judgment-fire comes from within the divine throne — it is not arbitrary destruction but holy judgment proceeding from God's own presence
3	The cherubim are standing on the south side of the temple; a cloud fills the inner court	The cloud of divine presence — the <i>shekinah</i> — is active; judgment and glory are simultaneous
4	The glory of the LORD rises from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the cloud fills the house and the court shines with the glory	The first movement of the departure: from cherub to threshold — deliberate, not instantaneous
5	The sound of the cherubim's wings is heard in the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty	Auditory overwhelm reinforces the majesty of what is departing; the congregation outside would hear something
6-7	The linen-clothed figure goes between the wheels; one cherub stretches out a hand and takes fire from between the cherubim and places it in the hands of the linen figure, who takes it and goes out	The fire is <i>given</i> by a cherub to the commissioned figure — the judgment is a divine, orderly act, not chaos

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
8	The cherubim are described as having the form of a human hand under their wings	A detail establishing the cherubim as personal agents, not mechanical forces
9-13	The wheels beside each cherub are described — gleaming beryl, all four alike, with a wheel within a wheel; the wheels are called “the whirling wheels” (<i>galgal</i>)	Extended re-description of the <i>merkabah</i> from chapter 1; the elaborateness emphasizes the overwhelming and sustained presence of divine majesty
14	Each cherub has four faces: the first face is a cherub’s face, the second a human face, the third a lion’s face, the fourth an eagle’s face	Slight variation from chapter 1 (where “ox” appears rather than “cherub”); most interpreters see this as the same description from a different angle or as the cherub’s face being the “face” of the ox-category
15	The cherubim rise up — these are the living creatures Ezekiel saw by the Chebar canal	Explicit identification: the beings in this vision are the same as in the inaugural call vision
16-17	The wheels move with the cherubim; when they stop, the wheels stop; when they rise, the wheels rise — the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels	The throne-chariot is a unified, living system under divine direction; it goes wherever the Spirit directs
18	The glory of the LORD departs from the threshold and stands over the cherubim	Second movement of the departure: from threshold back to the cherubim — the glory is now mobile, no longer fixed in the sanctuary
19	The cherubim lift their wings and rise from the earth; the wheels beside them; the glory of God stands over them at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD’s house	Third movement: to the east gate — the departure is staged and directional; east gate will become the gate through which the glory returns (Ezekiel 43:4)
20-22	Ezekiel identifies these as	Explicit, emphatic

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	the same living creatures from the Chebar canal vision; they had the same faces and the same configuration; each went straight forward	identification; the chapter closes by anchoring the present vision to its prophetic origin — God’s dealings are coherent and continuous

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1-2	The Throne Re-Established: The <i>Merkabah</i> Appears and Judgment Is Commissioned
2	3-8	The Fire Distributed: Holy Judgment Proceeds from the Divine Presence
3	9-17	The Throne Described Again: The Overwhelming Majesty of What Is Departing
4	18-19	The Glory Departs: Three Measured Movements Away from the Sanctuary
5	20-22	The Vision Identified: These Are the Living Creatures from Chebar — The Call and the Crisis Are One

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The glory of the LORD withdraws from His defiled temple in sovereign, measured judgment.

Primary Claim: God is confronting His people with the devastating reality that His presence cannot coexist with sustained, unrepentant covenant betrayal — and that what is lost when the glory departs is far greater than any earthly catastrophe that follows.

Applications (Five)

1. Reframe what you are actually losing when you persist in sin. (*Mind/Belief*) The people of Jerusalem were anxious about the Babylonian army, the loss of political sovereignty, the destruction of the city. Ezekiel is showing them that all of those losses are downstream of a prior and infinitely greater loss: the departure of God Himself. The application is not sentimental — it is diagnostic. When you treat sin as a private matter with manageable consequences, you are miscalculating what is at stake. The question is never merely “what will this cost me?” The question is “am I, by this pattern of life, becoming the kind of person from whom God’s presence withdraws?” Repent not because you fear consequences but because you understand what you are actually losing.

2. Let the deliberateness of God’s withdrawal produce grief, not presumption. (*Affections/Worship*) God does not storm out. He moves from the Holy of Holies to the threshold, from the threshold to the cherubim, from the cherubim to the east gate, from the east gate to the mountain east of the city. He moves in stages, as if giving the city every possible moment to register what is happening and cry out. This deliberateness is not weakness — it is mercy drawn out to its final possible extension before judgment falls. Let that merciful slowness produce not presumption (“He won’t really leave”) but grief and awe: a God this patient has been sinned against in ways that are staggeringly serious. Grieve the sins that require this kind of patience to exhaust.

3. Stop trusting the institution when the presence has departed from it. (*Mind/Belief*) Jerusalem’s fatal error was confusing the building with the God who had filled it. “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” — Jeremiah’s contemporaries repeated it like a protective incantation (Jeremiah 7:4). But the building without the presence is not the temple of the LORD; it is a shell. The application for today is direct: church attendance, religious activity, doctrinal membership, denominational identity — none of these is the presence of God. You can be inside the building after the glory has left. Guard your heart against mistaking the form of godliness for the reality. The question is not “am I in the right place?” The question is “is the living God actually present here — in my life, in this community?”

4. Worship a God whose mobility means He cannot be controlled or domesticated. (*Affections/Worship*) The *merkabah* — the throne-chariot with its wheels within wheels, its eyes in every direction, its movement governed by the Spirit — is a vision of a God who cannot be contained in one place, managed by one people, or kept by one institution. He goes where He wills. He departed Jerusalem and, by the time of Ezekiel 43, was found beyond the walls of the destroyed city. He came in fullness to a manger in Bethlehem. He indwells the gentile believer in Corinth and the persecuted church in Smyrna. Worship this God with awe at His sovereign freedom. He is not the property of your tradition, your nation, your preferred theological party. He moves.

5. Bring your sins of religious formalism specifically to Christ, the temple that was destroyed and raised. (*Will/Behavior*) The departure of the glory from the Jerusalem

temple is answered, in the New Testament, by Christ's declaration that He is the temple (John 2:19-21) — and that this temple would be destroyed and raised in three days. The glory that left an institution returned in a person. The application is not vague. Identify the specific ways you have treated religion as a form rather than as a living relationship with the holy God: the prayers you speak without presence, the worship services you attend without engagement, the doctrinal positions you hold without transformation. Bring those specifically to Christ — not as items on a list but as the idolatry they are — and receive from Him the only presence that the new covenant guarantees: the indwelling Spirit who makes your body the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 10 establishes with extraordinary force the doctrine of God's holy freedom — He is not bound to any institution, building, or nation by virtue of their external association with His name. His presence is covenantal, not automatic; relational, not mechanical. The chapter also teaches that divine judgment is not chaotic but ordered: the coals come from the throne, the glory moves in stages, the cherubim move in perfect coordination with the Spirit. God's judgment is as sovereign, purposeful, and deliberate as His mercy. Furthermore, the passage grounds the physical destruction of Jerusalem in a prior theological catastrophe: the city falls because the glory departed, not the other way around. This sequence forces a reordering of what is considered the primary disaster — which is the theological heart of Ezekiel's entire ministry.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: The departure of the glory in Ezekiel 10 is one of the Old Testament's most profound illustrations of the distinction between the outward administration of the covenant and its inward reality — a distinction central to Reformed covenant theology. Israel had the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the name of the LORD — and yet the glory departed, because covenant membership had become formal rather than vital. This is the Old Testament ground for the Reformed insistence that the visible and invisible church are not identical, that sacraments without faith are not means of grace, and that religious form without the Spirit's presence is not the covenant community. The passage also prepares the canonical ground for understanding the incarnation as the return of the Shekinah glory — the glory that left a building came back in a person, as John 1:14 explicitly claims. Reformed theology's insistence that Christ is the fulfillment of the entire temple cultus — priest, sacrifice, and sanctuary — is rooted precisely in this canonical movement from departure to incarnate return.

Main Takeaway

God's presence in your life is not guaranteed by your religious affiliation, your church membership, your theological pedigree, or your ministry activity. It is covenantal — meaning it is real, personal, and it can be grieved away. The glory that left Jerusalem did not return to the building; it returned in Christ. So the urgent question is not whether you are inside the right institution, but whether you are in Christ — in whom the fullness of the glory dwells, and from whom the Spirit will never depart.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Reducing the chapter to an apocalyptic curiosity.** Ezekiel 10 is visually overwhelming, and the temptation in preaching is to spend the sermon describing the cherubim, explaining the wheels, and cataloguing the details of the *merkabah* — while never landing the theological and pastoral claim of the chapter. The vision's elaborateness is not the point; it is in service of the point: what is departing is magnificent and holy and personal, and the people in whose midst it has dwelt have treated it as furniture. If the sermon ends with a well-informed congregation who cannot explain why the departure of the glory matters for their lives on Monday, the chapter has not been preached.
- **Preaching the departure without the return.** Ezekiel 10 in isolation can produce a theology of divine abandonment without the canonical counterweight. The departure is not the last word — Ezekiel 43 holds the return, and John 1:14 names where the glory has actually come to rest. A sermon that leaves the congregation in the devastation of chapter 10 without pointing toward the return of the glory in Christ has told half the story and produced despair rather than the devastating-but-hopeful confrontation the passage intends.
- **Moralizing the application as “don’t sin or God will leave you.”** This is both theologically imprecise and potentially crushing to the believer. The departure of the glory in Ezekiel 10 is a covenant-judicial event applied to Israel as a nation under the Mosaic economy — it is not a template for the experience of every individual believer in the new covenant. New covenant believers are sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) and cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39). The application is not “be good or God will leave” but “understand what unfaithfulness costs, grieve it accordingly, and take refuge in Christ in whom the presence is permanently secured.”
- **Ignoring the staged nature of the departure.** If the preacher presents the departure as instantaneous, the pastoral weight of God's patient, measured withdrawal is lost. The theological point — that God gives every opportunity for the city to register what is happening — is load-bearing for the application about presuming on divine patience. The movement from Holy of Holies to threshold to

cherubim to east gate to mountain east of the city (across chapters 10-11) must be preserved in the exposition.

- **Treating the cherubim description as an allegory or numerical code.** Patristic allegorization (four faces = four Evangelists, etc.) and some popular numerological approaches to Ezekiel treat the vision's details as a code to be cracked. This turns the passage into a puzzle and evacuates its rhetorical and affective force. The vision is designed to overwhelm — the multiplicity, the repetition, the eyes and wings and wheels — to communicate that what is departing is beyond full comprehension. Preach the bewilderment; don't decode it away.
- **Failing to connect the east gate departure with the east gate return (Ezekiel 43:4).** The glory departs through the east gate of the temple (10:19) and returns through the east gate (43:4). This is one of the most deliberate canonical bookends in the entire book of Ezekiel. Preaching chapter 10 without at least noting the significance of that eastward direction — and its later fulfillment — misses the structural theology Ezekiel has built into the narrative itself.