EZEKIEL

Chapter 10

*The Glory Departs From the Temple*

**I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim.  2 The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, “Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city.” And as I watched, he went in. 3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court.  4 Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD.  5 The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. 6 When the LORD commanded the man in linen, “Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim,” the man went in and stood beside a wheel.  7 Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand to the fire that was among them. He took up some of it and put it into the hands of the man in linen, who took it and went out.  8 (Under the wings of the cherubim could be seen what looked like the hands of a man.) 9 I looked, and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like chrysolite.  10 As for their appearance, the four of them looked alike; each was like a wheel intersecting a wheel.  11 As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the cherubim faced; the wheels did not turn about as the cherubim went. The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went.  12 Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels.  13 I heard the wheels being called “the whirling wheels.”  14 Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. 15 Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River.  16 When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side.  17 When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still; and when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them. 18 Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.  19 While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the LORD’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. 20 These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River, and I realized that they were cherubim.  21 Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings was what looked like the hands of a man.  22 Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River. Each one went straight ahead.**

For the place of this chapter in the extended vision of the departure of the Glory from the temple, see “Introduction to Ezekiel 8–11” at the start of chapter 8. (CC)

Chapter 10 gives exegetes a disproportionate share of grief. The basic problem is the frequent alternation between the flow of the action narrative and the descriptions of the Glory (כָּבוֹד) and cherubim. We have narrative in 10:1b–2, 4a, 6–7, 15a, and 18–19. All the rest—that is, most of the chapter—is descriptive. When certain details of the vision capture Ezekiel’s attention, he tries to describe them even though they may seem incidental to the reader who is trying to follow the sequence of the action. The same alternation between narration and description will continue into chapter 11, although the two parts seem to flow together more smoothly there than here. (CC)

Especially in chapter 10 one almost gets the impression that Ezekiel is taking notes as he observes the scene before him, sometimes reporting the action, but more often attempting to verbalize what he saw. After the vision was over, Ezekiel could have converted his notes with relatively minimal change into the text we now find in his book. To be sure, this text really does not give us any more information about the external aspect of the process of its divine inspiration than other texts in the book do. But what I have submitted seems to be at least a plausible speculation. (CC)

Chapter 10 repeatedly echoes (and, at points, virtually duplicates) previous texts. The description of the Glory enthroned upon the dome over the heads of the cherubim and their attendant wheels is largely parallel to that in chapter 1. Ezek 10:1 clearly reflects 1:26 (the heavenly throne above the dome). Ezek 10:4 echoes 9:3 since both narrate that the Glory ascended from the cherub(im) and stood at the threshold of the temple. Thoose two verses in their contexts consider the same event with alternative accents: in 9:1–11 the accent is on Yahweh’s wrath on Jerusalem with secondary consideration of his departure; in 10:1–8 the accent switches to his departure. And 10:9–22 is full of echoes of 1:16–21. (CC)

**10:1** *I looked.* Ch. 10 echoes ch. 1, underscoring the identity of what Ezekiel saw at the Kebar River with what he now sees in his vision (see 8:4). The creatures in ch. 1 are here called cherubim (see note on 1:5). (CSB)

The first sentence of this verse interrupts the narrative line about Yahweh and the linen-clad man (9:11; 10:2) with description. The interruption serves a variety of purposes. Structurally, it links the throne-chariot Ezekiel describes to the following narrative: the city’s judgment coincides exactly with Yahweh’s abandonment of his temple. The interruption also underscores the theme of judgment. The throne-chariot had appeared at the start of the prophet’s call narrative (chapters 1–3), which had stressed Yahweh’s character as a judge and Ezekiel’s call to proclaim his judgment. Now that same judgment-bearing scene reappears. (CC)

**10:2** The subject of “said” is still Yahweh, even though he was last named as the speaker back in 9:4. He addresses “the man dressed in linen,” who is no longer depicted with his writing kit as a scribe (9:2–3, 11), but now as an incendiary. His orders correspond to those given the other six angels in 9:5–7, who were told to kill, but his commission is to destroy the city itself. He is to enter among the cherubim and receive (cf. 10:7) in his cupped hands some coals of the heavenly fire blazing among them. His linen vestments suggest a priestly status (see the textual notes on 9:3). Without Yahweh permitting him to handle the sacred fire, we may surmise that the same judgment that befell those who abused fire in divine worship (Lev 10:1–3; Num 16:35) would have overtaken him. (CC)

 *burning coals.*† Taken from among the living creatures. (CSB)

 *scatter them over the city.* A judgment by fire (see Ge 19:24; Am 7:4). (CSB)

The conflagration to be wreaked on the city evokes comparisons with Sodom, the wicked city infamous for homosexuality, upon which God rained down “brimstone and fire” (Gen 19:24); Ezekiel in 16:46–56 will refer to Sodom and its destruction (16:50). Other passages that speak of similar judgments include Ps 11:6; Is 34:9; Ezek 38:22; Rev 11:5; 14:10; 19:20; 20:9; and the “lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death,” to which all who do not believe in Christ are consigned for eternity (Rev 21:8). (CC)

Yahweh directs the priestly angel here to “scatter/sprinkle/strew” the coals all over Jerusalem (Ezek 10:2). The same verb (זָרַק) was in Ex 9:8–10, where Moses threw ashes from a kiln to cause the plague of boils. The verb most commonly appears in sacrificial contexts, often for the sprinkling of blood (e.g., Ex 24:6, 8; Lev 1:5, 11; Ezek 43:18). Judgment Day can be depicted metaphorically as a sacrifice with the city and its inhabitants pictured as a sacrificial victim (e.g., Zeph 1:7–8), but that does not appear to be the case here. (CC)

The actual burning of the city by the Babylonians is described in 2 Ki 25:9 and 2 Chr 36:19 and confirmed by archaeological excavations in the city of David. Hence, via visionary experience, we meet again the “vertical typology” in which a heavenly action corresponds to very real events on earth. (CC)

**10:3-4** The chariot parks (literally) “to the right of the house/temple” (מִימִ֥ין לַבַּ֖יִת), that is, on the south side, probably more specifically south of the altar of burnt offering. No reason is given for this location, but probably it is to be at the farthest possible remove from the “statue of jealousy” at the north gate (8:5), and possibly also because of the association of the north gate with the executioners (9:2). (CC)

“The man” who “entered” (10:3) is almost certainly still “the man dressed in linen” who was to enter the wheelwork (10:2), although some commentators entertain the possibility that it is the fiery human figure of 8:2, in which case these verses would take us back to the beginning of this vision. (CC)

“*The* cloud” (10:3–4) is to be associated with Yahweh’s personal guidance of his pilgrim people in the desert (Ex 13:21), in a pre-tabernacle tent-sanctuary (Ex 33:7–10), and, more permanently, at the consecration of both the tabernacle (Ex 40:34–35) and its successor, the temple (1 Ki 8:10–11), fulfilled in the tabernacling of the Word made flesh in Jn 1:14 (see the commentary on Ezek 9:3). The reference to “the cloud” here is almost ironic because in those earlier accounts the accent was on God’s gracious presence, especially as he became “incarnate” in the sanctuary where he had “caused his name to dwell [שָׁכַן]” (e.g., Deut 12:11). (In postbiblical literature, the “Shekinah” is a term for this gracious presence, formed from the verb used of God’s tabernacling presence with his people, שָׁכַן.) Here God is abandoning the structure because it has been polluted by idolatry (Ezekiel 8). (CC)

Even though the Glory had only moved to the threshold, its “radiance” (נֹגַהּ, 10:4) was of such magnitude that it filled the courtyard. This is a clear echo of chapter 1; the same term was in 1:4, 13, 27, 28. (CC)

**10:6-7** These verses complete most of the main narrative of chapter 10. (Aside from the brief narrative insertion in 10:15a, the narrative does not resume until 10:18–19, where it is concluded.) Even so, it is sketchy enough that many questions might be raised, such as the precise position of the man in linen in relation to the various cherubim as some of the fire is withdrawn and put in his hand. Furthermore, we are never told that the man in linen actually scattered the coals over the city, as he was commanded to do in 10:2. (In contrast, in 9:11 he reported that he had completed the assignment given him in 9:4.) This is sometimes explained as an example of the literary principle of “unity of place”: the narrative assumes that Ezekiel is only able to report what he would have been able to observe from his location. (CC)

Parallel to 10:2, 6–7 is Rev 8:5, where the angel fills his censer with coals of fire from the incense altar in heaven, and the apostle John then does see the angel throw the coals down on the earth, causing lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. (CC)

**10:7** *one of the cherubim reached out his hand.* Though the “man clothed in linen” was initially commanded to get the coals himself (v. 2), he received them from the hand of one of the creatures (see 1:8). (CSB)

 *who took it and went out.* No further report is given, but the destructive spreading of the coals over Jerusalem is assumed.

**10:8-17** A long excursus on the cherubim and especially the chariot wheels begins here. Functionally, it emphasizes the chariot’s prominent role in the gradual departure of the divine Glory from the city. Some of these verses might be understood to ascribe to the wheels some of the same features possessed by the cherubim, for example, a “body,” “backs,” “hands,” and “wings,” though it is more likely that these belong to the cherubim (see the textual notes on 10:11–12). But it is clear that the wheels are “full of eyes all around” (10:12) and are animated because they have the same “spirit” or life force that the living creatures/cherubim have (10:17). In that sense the wheels are alive and are not simply an inert means of mobility. (CC)

Especially since the “Glory” (כָּבוֹד) can be identified with the preincarnate Christ, the “spirit” of the cherubim in the wheels (10:17; also 1:20–21) recalls the “S/spirit” in 1:12, 20, where the third person of the Trinity is at hand. In both the Christological and the Pneumatological exegesis of the OT, the hermeneutic is not of “reading in” NT theology alien to the OT text, but of “reading out” of the OT text its full implications in the light of the fuller NT revelation. (CC)

**10:14** *One face was that of a cherub.* While the faces of the man, lion and eagle are identical with those in 1:10, the ox is here called a cherub (see note on Ge 3:24). (CSB)

**10:18-19** Here the primary narrative resumes after the long digression about the cherubic porters and wheels. We are left to assume that the angel scattered the destroying coals and reported back at the threshold before the Glory’s departure. (CC)

Ezek 10:18–19 describes the second phase of Yahweh’s abandonment of the temple. The first had been depicted in 10:4 (anticipated by 9:3), and the third and final phase will not come until the end of chapter 11. First, the Glory resumes his place on the throne above the cherubim, but no longer in the Holy of Holies (10:18). Next, the divine chariot moves to the main entrance to the entire temple area, poised to quit the now-defiled area completely (10:19). (CC)

Interpreters can make too much out of the precise terms used of the temple or of God, but two occur in this verse that may have significant overtones. Throughout Ezekiel the usual word for the “temple” (and often so translated) has been simply בַּיִת, literally, “house.” It is so commonly used that it clearly is not deprecatory per se. But only in the vision of the Glory’s departure (chapters 8–11) is the Jerusalem temple called “the house of Yahweh” (8:14, 16; 10:19; 11:1). That phrase will not recur again in the book until the Glory returns—not to the Jerusalem temple, but to the eschatological one (Ezek 44:4–5). Hence we get a sense of God’s increasing distance from what had been his “incarnational” dwelling ever since its dedication by Solomon (1 Kings 8), and earlier in the temple’s tent predecessor, the tabernacle. Never again in Ezekiel will the present, earthly Jerusalem be the site of “the house/temple of Yahweh,” but in the eschaton the city shall be called “Yahweh Is There” (48:35). (CC)

Similarly, perhaps we can mine the significance of the use of the phrase “God of Israel” instead of “Yahweh” in 10:19–20. By his departure, the God who had revealed his ineffable name to Israel was now withdrawing his gracious presence from the people who had broken his covenant. Yet this is not the permanent end of Israel, of course; God promises to reconstitute his people with a “new heart” and a “new S/spirit” (36:26) and make a new covenant with them through his shepherd and prince, the new David (34:23–25; 37:24–26). This is fulfilled in the NT church, the new Israel comprised of all baptized believers in Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike (e.g., Rom 6:1–4; chapters 9–11; Gal 3:26–29; 6:16). (CC)

**10:19** *to the east gate … and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.* A second movement of the glory, again in an easterly direction (see 9:3; 10:4; see also note on 8:1–11:25). (CSB)

10:20-22 Ezekiel’s identification of the “cherubim” in chapter 10 as the same “living creatures” that he saw in chapter 1 impresses upon him that the chariot is not only the means for Yahweh to proclaim his majesty and sovereignty to his faithful exiles (chapter 1), but also the means by which Yahweh will terminate his relationship with his defiled temple and his apostate people (chapter 10). The visible church on earth (ethnic Israel in the OT; nominal members of the NT church) has no unconditional claim on God (Mt 7:21–22). If necessary, he is able to raise up children of Abraham from the stones (Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8). (CC)