

T. Austin-Sparks:

Now the prophecies of Ezekiel, which begin with chapter forty. As you read the following six chapters, beginning with chapter forty, you notice that this chapter and this section begins with a new date. When the Prophet Ezekiel gives us a date, it usually relates to a new phase of things. It means that one phase is ended and another phase is beginning. Chapter thirty-nine finishes with what we may call direct predictions, and chapter forty begins with what we may call apocalypse. Here we have a revelation as to the realization of God's purpose. You will notice that the date is given as twenty five years after the captivity (Eze. 40:1). We know that the captivity lasted for seventy years, and twenty-five from seventy means that there were forty-five years yet to go. That is something that we must keep in mind, because this section is looking a long way ahead. We might ask the question, "Why should this vision be given forty-five years before the end of the captivity?" The answer to that will come in our general consideration as we go on.

Now we cannot go on into this section without facing the problem of interpretation. Probably few parts of the Bible have been more controversial than this part, seeing that there are many schools of interpretation, and each one has its own view concerning it. So we come to this problem of interpretation. You will remember what we said right at the beginning about principles of interpretation, we said that there were five important principles of interpreting the Bible: (1) The Eternity of God; (2) The Comprehensiveness of Christ; (3) The Interpreter of the Bible is the Holy Spirit; (4) The Final Mention; (5) The Only Real Value is the Spiritual. And we said that those principles apply to the whole of the prophecies of Ezekiel. That is true, but they must be brought, in a very special way, into this section of the prophecies. I would suggest to you that you take that outline of principles of interpretation and just read it over again before we start at chapter forty, because those principles are the key to this section of the prophecies in a special way.

Now about the interpretation of these six chapters. We are going to come on the House of God, and then the river, the inheritance and the distribution of the land, and, finally, the city; and we ask, "How is all this to be interpreted?" We believe that all that is here in this section is just typical and symbolic of something spiritual. We believe that all this was fulfilled in Christ. That all sacrifices were finished in His one sacrifice. That all priesthood was gathered up in and finished with Christ. We believe that all types and figures were fulfilled in Christ. We believe that that applies to the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the House of God. We not only believe, but we know that the New Testament teaches that.

Paul teaches us very clearly that the mystery of Christ and the Church was hidden in all the prophets - that mystery was hidden in all scriptures of the prophets. It had been hidden from all ages and generations, but in this dispensation that mystery has been brought to light through the Spirit, and I think that is the key to the whole situation. What we have in this section of Ezekiel is a system of spiritual principles. It is not a literal temple that ever was, or was intended to be, or ever will be. It is a symbolic representation of what obtains in a spiritual way in this dispensation. That is the only honest and safe way of interpreting these chapters. So we must approach it in that way; and when we have seen that the mystery is now revealed, we see that Ezekiel was saying things which were much greater than he understood.

Now, note that it was "the Spirit" Who was interpreting all this to Ezekiel; the Spirit was showing to Ezekiel something beyond Ezekiel's understanding. The New Testament teaches that by the Spirit, we have come into understanding of these things. The whole meaning of spiritual understanding is that we see what the Spirit has always meant. It is one of our laws of interpretation that the whole Bible is focused in Christ, and that the work of the Holy Spirit in every dispensation relates to Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit never did relate to something finally on this earth, just for a time. The work of the Holy Spirit has always been related to the Eternal thought of God, and that is centered in Christ. So what we have in these chapters of Ezekiel is a symbolic representation of Christ and His Church.

Here in Ezekiel there are several preliminary points to notice. Firstly, Ezekiel's later visions are governed by the first vision of chapter one, at verse 28: "As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking." Now let us pass on to chapter 43, at verse 3: "And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face." You see, that statement brings the vision of chapter one right over into this section, so that all we have said about the vision in chapter one, governs this new section. We cannot go back over all the details of that first vision, but I suggest that you take your outline of that first vision and bring it here before this section and see how every section of it applies to this particular part of the revelation. In a word, all this is governed by the Throne with the

Man upon it. Therefore, we are right in concluding that what follows is a representation of that Man on the Throne. In various ways, we shall come on that fact as we go along. Now notice two governing factors here. They are represented by two words: one is "the glory," the other is "the Spirit." You put a line underneath those words, and then you come on another thing: "the glory and the Spirit." Carry that over into the New Testament, and you will find that the revelation of the Church in the New Testament comes by the Spirit on the ground of Christ Glorified. The beginning of everything is Christ Glorified on the Throne. That is where you begin the Book of the Acts. The Spirit comes because Christ has been Glorified, and the Spirit's work is connected with the Church - the formation and the revelation of the Church, those things are quite clearly seen here: the vision of the glory, the Man Glorified on the Throne, the Spirit coming, and then the House of God being brought in.

So He brought me there; and behold, there was a Man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze (brass), with a line of flax and a measuring rod in His hand; and He was standing in the gateway.

Here in this scripture, it is very difficult to separate the Man with the rod from the Spirit. If you read these words in chapter forty, you find it very difficult to make that separation. The Spirit is mentioned, the man with the measuring rod is mentioned, and then we find that a "he" is referred to. Who is that "he"? Is it "the Spirit," or is it "the man with the measuring rod"? That is not made clear, but as you read it, it looks as though they are the same. And I think in principle they are the same. The Man with the measuring rod is the Spirit; the Spirit relates to the Man with the measuring rod.

Perhaps we could understand that if we took just a look at the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation. John there said: "I was in the Spirit... and I saw." What did he see? He saw a Man with a measuring rod, that is, the vision of Christ coming to measure the Church, or the churches. These two are moving together, the Spirit and the Divine Man, and their activity is one activity - to measure the House of God. That is just a little point of interpretation, but it helps us to see that here in Ezekiel, we have New Testament truth again.

We remember all that the Lord said about what the Holy Spirit would do when He was come. He said that the Spirit's work, when He was come, would be all related to Himself. "He shall take of Mine, and shew it unto you." The work of the Spirit would be to show Christ, to give "the length, and the breadth, and the height, and the depth of Christ," - all the measurements of Christ. That is what the Lord said would be the work of the Spirit, and that is exactly what the Spirit did. First of all, He presented Christ, and then He went on to show the dimensions of Christ, of how great Christ is! - Christ is too big to be confined to any earthly Jerusalem, Christ is too big to be contained in any earthly temple, and Christ is too big to be confined to any earthly country. Therefore what we have here just bursts all the bonds of the old Jerusalem and the old country. I think that is a very clear spiritual truth as contained here in this book.

We can only really see what the Spirit presents when we occupy a heavenly position. To see the Lord and His Church, as we have it in Ephesians, you must be in the position that is there: "He hath raised us up together with Him and made us to sit in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." It was from that heavenly position that Paul gave us the revelation of Christ and His Body.

Everything According To That Man

One more thing for this morning. In Ezekiel chapter forty, it says: "And He brought me thither, and, behold, there was a Man, Whose appearance was like the appearance of brass." I think we shall have to stop halfway through that verse. "Behold... a Man" - here we find our Man idea again. You see, it is the Man idea that is going to govern everything. That is a thing that we have said again and again. "There was a Man," and there is a very great deal gathered into that statement. Everything is going to be according to the measurements of that Man. We make the statement again and leave it there. "Whose appearance was like the appearance of brass." This also takes us back to the first vision. You remember the vision of the cherubims: "their feet were like fine brass." When you come to the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation, in that presentation of "the Son of Man," in verse fifteen you find, "His feet were like unto fine brass." I expect you know what brass represents in the Bible: it represents righteous judgments. Here then, in the symbolism, all the activities and ways of this Man are those of righteousness. The unrighteous man has been judged and put away. He has no place in the House of God.

The great altar was made of brass, and everything was consumed on the great altar. It is the symbol of righteous judgment. It is God judging everything in righteousness. There is no place left for the flesh: all is reduced to ashes. Therefore, this is another Man, this is The Righteous Man, and everything is being measured according to righteousness. How much Scripture we could quote concerning this! Of the Lord Jesus it is said, "(He) is made unto us... righteousness"; "The Lord will judge the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He

has chosen"; "Jesus Christ the Righteous One"; and much more Scripture could be brought in. It is what Christ is in character that is the standard of the House of God. So the comprehensive statement is that the whole dimension of the House is "Holiness unto the Lord."

We shall come back to that later on, but it becomes perfectly clear at this point that there is no place for the natural man in this House. This House only gives a place to the Righteous Man. In this House it is the man who has "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." So, if the Lord wills, we will proceed with this tomorrow morning, and go on with the "measuring." But for now, I do hope that you have begun to see something of Spiritual value, or, shall I say, you have begun to see Someone for it is Christ by the Spirit Who is coming into view!

MAY WE BE GIVEN THESE VISIONS OF GOD.