

The Persistent Energies of God Toward His End

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Book of Ezekiel is about the persistent energies of God towards His End, and the open heaven is the most precious thing that any man or woman can have - fellowship with God where God is going on and on showing ever new things.

Scripture: Ezekiel 1:1, Ephesians 1:11, Ephesians 3:1

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Open Heaven"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the persistent energies of God as revealed in the Book of Ezekiel, illustrating how God's divine purpose unfolds through the prophet's visions. He highlights the importance of understanding the spiritual meanings behind Ezekiel's experiences, particularly the necessity of having periods of reflection and adjustment in our spiritual lives. Sparks draws parallels between Ezekiel's ministry and the church today, stressing that the open heaven signifies a deeper relationship with God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit for ministry. He warns that while an open heaven brings profound insights, it also comes with significant costs, including personal suffering and misunderstanding from others. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to embrace the challenges of ministry while remaining attuned to God's ongoing work in their lives.

Transcript

Let us turn to the Book of the prophecies of Ezekiel. To begin with, I am just going to give you a very broad outline of this book; however, let me say here that it is not my thought to study the whole of this book. I am just going to take out some of the great features. There is a large middle section that we shall hardly consider at all.

Now this book of Ezekiel is one of the most difficult books in the Bible to understand. I suspect that you have discovered this in reading only the first three chapters. So, I will just give you this very broad outline of the whole book; you can fill in the details.

First of all, you will want to know what the whole book is about. Can we see on the first page of the book anything that sums up the meaning of the whole book? I think we can! This is the book of the persistent purpose of God - the Divine energies in relation to Divine purpose. If you want a New Testament fragment that will explain that, you have it in Ephesians 1:11, "...according to His purpose Who works all things after

the counsel of His will." Ephesians 1:11 is the key to the Book of Ezekiel. That word in Ephesians 1:11, Who works (Who worketh), is a strong word. The Greek word is *energeo*, which means "energy," so that God is energizing "all things after the counsel of His will." In a special way that is what we have in this book of Ezekiel - you must read the whole book in the light of Ephesians 1:11. I think we shall see that as we go on.

Now for the broad outline of the book. We begin with the prophet himself, and his preparation for his ministry. That covers the first three chapters: the prophet himself, the prophet's vision and the prophet's commission. These are covered in chapters one through three. The next section is from chapter four to chapter twenty-six. That section has to do with the nation of Israel. There are three things in that section about the nation: firstly, their departure from God, secondly, their denunciation by God; and thirdly, their judgment. Then the next section is from chapter twenty-five to chapter thirty-two. This section has to do with the nations. There are first of all four nations that are dealt with: - Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia. And then there are two: - Tyre and Sidon. There is a very brief interval referring to the restoration of Israel in chapter twenty-eight, verses 25, 26. And then the judgment of the nations proceeds, and Egypt is judged.

Then we come to section four. This brings us back to Israel the nation. This section is from chapter thirty-three to chapter thirty-nine. This section deals with the watchman, the shepherds, the new order, the vision of dry bones, and the last enemy.

Then we come to the fifth and final section, that is, the restoration found in chapter forty to chapter forty-eight; and in that we have: the temple, the Lord, the service of the temple, the river, the land, the inheritance, and the city. Now as I have said, we are not going to study all that. That is only given to you to help you get a grasp of the whole of the book.

Now let us come back to our part of the study, for we are still going to spend some time in the first section. I think that it is most important that we should spend much time with this section. I suspect that from time to time you will be saying, "Well, I do wish that he would get on with the book," but I am in no hurry to cover a great deal of ground. I want to make sure that we really do get hold of these fundamental truths.

So, let us come back to the first three chapters and see the prophet's preparation for his ministry. This is a matter which concerns us very much - how the prophet was prepared for his ministry - for what was true of Ezekiel is true concerning us spiritually. Yesterday we saw the time factor in his ministry, the situation to which he was called to minister, and the expressed Word of the Lord to him personally.

Now this morning we come to the "visions." You notice what this says: "...I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God." And I want to say right here that while the form of these visions will not be repeated in the case of the Lord's servants, the spiritual principles and meaning must be true of us all. Our purpose is to get behind what is objective to the meaning of things, and we shall all the time be trying to get at the spiritual meaning. You see, the objective side is only the temporary method; it is just the means that God employed for the time being. The spiritual meaning is the permanent and the real.

The Prophet Was Given To See The Way

So, we come to the visions. Ezekiel said: "I saw visions of God." That had two meanings: (1) that means that the visions came from God, they were visions which God gave him, and (2) it meant that they were the visions of the goings of God. God was on the move, God was taking a certain course, and the prophet

was given to see the ways that God was taking: that is the meaning of "visions of God." But before he saw visions of God, it says "the heavens were opened." I am going to speak mostly about that this morning. But before I come to that, there are one or two things to say.

The visions that were given to Ezekiel varied in time, in nature, and in method; that is, they varied at different times - they did not all come to the prophet at the same time. The Lord gave something to the prophet, and this had the effect of bringing the prophet down on his face before the Lord. That is what it says at the end of chapter one. Then the Lord put him on his feet, and this kind of thing happened from time to time. My point is that there were intervals in the prophet's life, and in those intervals the prophet had to think about what had been shown to him, and to adjust himself to what the Lord had shown. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to put a line underneath that. We must have such intervals in our life before the Lord. If the Lord shows us something, we must take a time to consider it, to face what it means and what it implies. That is a necessity! A very great deal of value is lost by our just continually going on, and not giving those periods for quietness with the Lord over what He is saying. There must be a kind of Sabbath-quiet to meditate upon what the Lord is showing, and to adjust ourselves to it.

The Lord says something, and then we go and give it out, and we go on and on like that, and we do not pause to think about what the Lord is really saying - what this really implies, and to adjust ourselves to it. I believe that a very great deal of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul came out of his two years of silence in the desert. He had the vision of the Lord on the way to Damascus. It was a tremendous vision that brought him down on his face. It required two years of silence to adjust himself to the meaning of that vision. I have often tried to imagine what was going on during those two years - what it was that Paul had to adjust himself to, how he had to read all his Bible over again in the light of that vision. He had to reconstruct his whole theology in the light of that vision: he had to think things all over again in the light of that vision. And I believe that a great deal that we have from Paul came out of those two years.

Now I am not suggesting that after this training course you go away for two years. But, you see, here is a principle. The Lord spoke to Ezekiel, and Ezekiel was silent for seven days. He could not go on with his ministry until he had spent those seven days thinking about what the Lord had shown to him. My point is that the Lord does not give us everything at once. He waits until we have really understood what He has said, and He waits until we have adjusted ourselves to that. We are touching a very important principle here - this matter of periods between revelations. So it was with Ezekiel, he had his quiet times. Not just an hour in the morning, but from time to time he was silent, he was saying nothing, he was alone with the Lord.

Then the second thing, these visions varied in their nature and not only in their time. So you have the various kinds of visions. We are not going to stay with these just now, we only mention them: there was the vision of the Throne; the vision of the valley of dry bones; the vision of the Lord's House; the vision of the great river; the vision of the land; the vision of the people in their inheritance; and, finally, the vision of the city.

Ezekiel Was Instructed By The Spirit

In the third place, the visions varied in method, and this is something we must stay with for a minute. The visions that came to Ezekiel came in two different ways. Firstly, they came in an objective way - things were presented to him in vision, he was like John on the isle of Patmos, he saw things in an objective way, but the visions were not always in that way. There was a second method by which the visions came to

Ezekiel, and that method was by the instruction of the Spirit, and that was the larger method. Of course, these two methods were not always separate, but they do mark a distinction.

In our dispensation, the first method is very uncommon. Paul did have some visions and revelations in the first way, in 2 Corinthians 12, he said: "I will go on to visions and revelations... I knew a man... whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a man was caught up to the third heaven... and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak." Well, that was the first method for Paul. He had those objective visions. The Apostle John had the same, but these visions were the exceptional; and there are very few of us in this dispensation who have that kind of thing. Such visions usually belong to the beginning of things: the objective side usually relates to beginnings.

Paul and the other apostles were laying the foundation for this whole dispensation. Therefore, they had the exceptional, and what we might call the abnormal, side of things. However, what is the normal way in this dispensation? It is the second method that the Lord employed with Ezekiel, which had to do with the development of the purpose of God. When you come to such a great thing as the House of God, and the inheritance, and the city, it is the Spirit Who is doing it all the time. You notice it is "The Spirit led me in, the Spirit sat me down, the Spirit took me out, the Spirit showed me." It is all the movement of the Spirit! That is the normal way for this dispensation. The Lord Jesus Himself said that that would be the normal: "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth... He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you." And the rest of the New Testament is along that line: the normal way is the Spirit teaching us all things.

The Heavens Are Opened To Him

That brings us back to this first part of the vision: "The heavens were opened." Now you have heard me say quite a lot about the open heaven, but I want to say a little more about it this morning. We all know that in the symbolism of the garden at the beginning, the heaven was closed to the man who sinned. The garden stands to represent the kingdom of the heavens. It is an order which God Himself has created. It is the true representation of heavenly things. But when Adam sinned, he was turned out of that realm, and the door was closed behind him; and that door has remained closed to all the sons of Adam. BEHIND that door is the place where God is, BEHIND that door is the place where Life is, BEHIND that door is the place where Divine order is. Outside of that door is death, outside of that door God is not, outside of that door is no Divine order; and that door is closed, it is closed to all the sons of Adam.

But that door has been opened again. We know when it was opened; it was opened to 'the Son of Man.' You remember His words right at the beginning, His words to Nathanael? He said to Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Of course, that was a picture. It was a picture taken from the Old Testament. Nathanael knew what it meant. He knew it was taken out of the life of Jacob. Jacob was in the place of the closed heaven; at Bethel, he saw the heaven open, he saw the angels of God ascending and descending. Nathanael knew all about that.

Now Jesus said, "I Am that ladder. It is over Me that the heavens are opened; all communications between heaven and earth and earth and heaven are related to ME: no one comes to the Father, but through ME, no man gets anything from the Father but by ME." And so, on the banks of the Jordan, the heavens are opened to Him; and Jordan is a figure of His Cross. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus, one man has been put to death and buried, that is the man to whom the heavens are closed. On the other side of the Cross, a

New Man rises and to Him the heavens are opened: it is over the Lord Jesus as a new kind of Heavenly Man that the heavens are opened.

We know that that is exactly what the Lord was saying to Nicodemus - to Nicodemus, the very clever man; Nicodemus, the very educated man; Nicodemus, the very religious man. But there is another aspect, and that has to do with ministry. There is the opened heaven for ministry, and that is what we are talking about in the case of Ezekiel. For him, the opened heaven related to his ministry, and this is a matter that you and I need to understand. This is a special aspect of the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit when we are born from above, but **THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT RELATES TO MINISTRY**. Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, but He was anointed of the Spirit for His ministry. I do not want to draw too great a distinction between being born of the Spirit and being anointed, but there is a difference!

Here it is the effect of the Holy Spirit in us in relation to ministry. This is what the Apostle Paul meant in Ephesians when he prayed for the Church. You are so familiar with the words that I hardly dare read them; nevertheless, let us look at them again. You notice that the apostle has been saying these tremendous things about the calling of the Church. It is the great vocation of the Church that is in view. It is not just the salvation of believers - that had taken place; but now he is dealing with the matter of the Church and its great ministry, its ministry now and its ministry in the ages to come. That is what we have in this letter to the Ephesians. Do recognize that what is in this letter is not something to individual Christians. It only applies to individual Christians in a related way. None of the things that are in this letter can be fully true of any individual; no individual Christian can be blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. It takes the whole Church to have all the spiritual blessings. And you will only come into all the spiritual blessings in a related way; that is, by your fellowship with all the other members of the Church.

What are these spiritual blessings for? Are they just for our satisfaction? Just that we should be blessed? You look at this letter, and you see that it is for the purpose of ministry; it is that the Church shall fulfill its ministry. I did not intend to move out of Ezekiel into Ephesians at this time, but perhaps the Spirit is leading us also! Now you see what the apostle says here: "When He ascended on high... He gave gifts to men... He gave some, as apostles; and some, as prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, as pastors and teachers." What for? - "For the equipping of the saints, for the work of service" - for making the Church complete that it may fulfill its ministry. The object of everything is the ministry of the Church. And it is because of that ministry that the apostle prays in this way: "For this cause I also... cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" - that is, the knowledge of Christ. And the word "knowledge" here is full knowledge, "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of HIM; having the eyes of your heart enlightened that ye may know" (Eph. 3:1a; 1:16,17; KJV; ASV). Then the things that you "may know" are mentioned.

Here is the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to ministry. In relation to the ministry of the Church, **THE CHURCH** must have the eyes of its heart enlightened (v.18), **THE CHURCH** must have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Christ (v.17). This ought to be the normal life of the Church in this dispensation. That it is not the normal life means that things are all wrong. **THE CHURCH OUGHT TO KNOW** "what is the hope of His calling,"; **IT OUGHT TO KNOW** "what (is) the riches of the glory of His inheritance." (v.18); **IT OUGHT TO KNOW** "the surpassing greatness of His power" (v. 19). This ought to be the normal knowledge of the Church for its ministry! This is the meaning of the open heaven: "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" has been given, the eyes of the heart have been enlightened; and we are enabled by the Spirit **TO KNOW** the movements of God, **TO KNOW** the Way that God is taking, **TO**

KNOW the End that God has in view, and TO KNOW that God is working "all things after the counsel of His Own will."

That is what Ezekiel came to see by the opened heaven. God has an End! God is moving toward that End! All the mighty energies of God are directed towards that End! All these things in heaven and in earth are being governed in relation to that End! This is what Ezekiel saw! The Book is the Book of the persistent energies of God towards His End. We, brothers and sisters, OUGHT TO KNOW that in our own experience!

It was a tremendously costly way for Ezekiel. And that opens up quite a new line. Read through this book and see what it cost the prophet. There was a time when this vision cost the prophet his wife. His young wife died as a sign to Israel, and many other things happened to him which were very painful. It is a costly thing to have the open heaven. The cost may not come to us in the same way, but, believe me, an open heaven involves us in a great deal of suffering. It involves us in the impossibility of being understood by those who have no open heaven. It involves us in persecution from other people of God. That is what it meant to Ezekiel; and, yet, it is worth while! Anybody who has the open heaven would not give it up for anything. They would not give it up for all the popularity in this world. An open heaven is the most precious thing that any man or woman can have - an open heaven is to have this kind of fellowship with God - where God is going on and on showing ever new things.

If you are prepared to accept the cost, then ask the Lord to make it real, but do not be surprised if you have what Ezekiel had very soon after his first vision. He said: "I sat for seven days astonished." When anyone died, no one was clean for seven days. They mourned for seven days, and they were as dead for seven days; (the eighth day is always the day of new life in the Bible), but Ezekiel was like a man dead for seven days - the tremendous effect of vision - it took him through a very painful time. So, do not be surprised if you begin to have a difficult time; now what I mean is this, when we have undertakings with the Lord like this, the Lord usually begins to take us through deep experiences to make it very real. Oh, our flesh does want the vision, our flesh does want the ministry, our flesh wants all the glory, but the Lord takes action against our flesh; and we go through a period in which the flesh is brought to death, and then it is quite safe for the ministry. This is true to experience, and this lies right there at the heart of the ministry of Ezekiel.

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