

# The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the interpretation of Ezekiel's prophecies, emphasizing their fulfillment in Christ and the spiritual principles underlying them.*

**Duration:** 58:17

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 1:28, Ezekiel 43:3, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Purpose Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the problem of interpretation in the prophecies of Israel, specifically focusing on the later visions in the book of Ezekiel. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the principles of interpretation outlined at the beginning of the course. These principles are key to understanding this section of the prophecies. The speaker also acknowledges the controversy surrounding the interpretation of these chapters and the variety of spiritual positions represented in the audience.

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## Transcript

You have been reading these following six chapters and so you know all about it. You notice that this chapter and this section begin with a new date. When the Prophet 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 39 finishes what we may call direct prediction. Chapter 40 begins what we may call apocalypse.

Excuse me. Here we have a revelation as to the realization of God's purpose. You will notice that the date is given as 25 years after the captivity.

We know that the captivity lasted for 70 years. 25 from 70 means that there were 45 years yet to go. That is something that we must keep in mind.

Because this section is looking a long way on. We might ask the question, why should this vision be given 45 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 two parts of the Bible have been more controversial than this part. And there are many schools of interpretation. Now I've got to stop here for a moment.

Because what I'm going to say may only be helpful to those who have responsibility in ministry. One difficulty that I have been facing through all these sessions is this. There is such a variety of spiritual positions represented in this company.

There are many who are only at the beginning of their training. Perhaps their knowledge of the Bible is limited. There are others who are not responsible for ministry.

They are in the work in a more general way. But then there are all these very important people here. These men who have real responsibility in the ministry and in the church.

I have been trying all the way along so to present the message as to meet the need of all. That is not always easy. Those who are further advanced are wanting something deeper and stronger.

Those who are not so far advanced might be mystified about much that was being said. That is my problem. Now in the next few minutes probably what I shall say will only apply to those who are in ministry.

And yet it may be helpful to all who are studying the Bible. So we come to this problem of interpretation. Of course you will remember what we said right at the beginning of the course about principles of interpretation.

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 you start at chapter 40.

Because those principles are the key to this section of the prophecies in a special way. Now about the interpretation of these 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? Now I may mention the several schools of interpretation. There is what is called the historical literal school. That school teaches that Ezekiel had seen Solomon's temple.

And with certain alterations he was reproducing the pattern of Solomon's temple for the people after the captivity. Therefore for that school what is in these chapters is the pattern of the temple to be built after the captivity. There are a lot of people who believe that.

Well there are very very big difficulties about that. Well we leave that for the time being. And come to another school.

This is what is called the historical ideal school. This temple never had been. It was an altogether new idea.

Something greater and better than anything that had been. And after the captivity there would be something better than there was before. This was the ideal temple.

And this ideal temple was going to be built after the captivity. Well there is a whole school that believes that. That is what was intended to be after the captivity but of course what did not happen.

Then there is a third school. And this school believes that what is here was what actually began after the captivity. This is the temple that the remnants began to build.

But that they were never able to do it. They found that they had not got the resources. And the difficulties were so many and so great.

That they had to build something very much more simple. That school so interprets those words from Haggai and Zechariah about disappointment of those who had seen the earlier temple. They had been led to believe by the Egyptians that the latter house would be more glorious than the former.

And when they looked upon that latter house they were disappointed. They had started to build according to Ezekiel's pattern but they had not been able to do it. That is what this third school teaches.

They go a little further. And they say that Herod took up the pattern of Ezekiel and built his temple according to it. So that the great temple which existed in the days of Jesus really corresponded to this pattern.

You can believe that if you like. You will see presently how impossible it is. Then there is number four school.

This number four school has its own interpretation. This is the school that believes that this is the temple that is going to be built in the millennium. When the millennium comes and the Jews return to their own country then they will rebuild the temple according to the pattern of Ezekiel.

I think the largest school of interpreters believe that. Well we will leave them with that for the moment. And then we come to number five school.

This is the Christian spiritual school of interpretation. That is that all that is here in this section is just typical and symbolic of something spiritual. This is not a very large school of interpretation.

Now we have got to choose between one of those five schools of interpretation. You are bound to come up against these things in your ministry sooner or later. And it is very important that you know where you are in this matter.

My method this morning will be to present you with two or three great facts. I will put them to you in the form of questions. Firstly, will there ever be a return to the ground which means that all was not fulfilled in Christ? Let me put that in another way.

Is there anything in the Bible that really supports this view that the time will come when the ground will again exist where everything was not fulfilled in Christ? 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.

Will the time ever come in the history of this world when that will all be reversed? When we get back again behind all that and look on toward it. Was the work of Christ a once forever work or only until the millennium? And when the millennium comes, all that will be set aside and will be back again on Old

Testament ground. Can we believe that? Well, if you can believe that, then you can accept one of these others for school.

Let me put that in another form. We just take out of our New Testament the letter to the Hebrews. We hold that up in the millennium.

And we tear it to pieces. And we say that does not apply to the millennium. We are starting all over again with priests and sacrifices and altars and temples and everything else.

For the millennium, Christ did not finish all that. Well, that is the first problem that you have got to solve. For my own part, I do not accept that interpretation.

I cannot believe that there ever will be a future time when the work of Christ is as though it had never been. Then we have to face another big problem. Well, we have to face another big problem.

The description of the temple and the city and the land and the river represent physical impossibility. If you will take up the full circuit of the wall that encompasses the holy ground, If you will take up the full circuit of the wall that encompasses the holy ground, it will amount to half a mile and 166 yards. It will amount to half a mile and 166 yards.

And if you measure the square of Ezekiel 42 verse 20, You will find it six times as large as the measure we have just given for the wall. So that what we have here is a total of three and a half miles and about 140 yards. So that what we have here is a total of three and a half miles and about 140 yards.

So what have we? We have accomplished far greater than the measurement of the whole of Mount Moriah. A physical impossibility. The whole contour of the land has got to be changed to have a temple according to these measurements.

This river is a physical impossibility in that land. If you look at this temple and take its measurements, If you look at this temple and take its measurements, you will find that it is larger than the whole of the present Jerusalem. And the Jerusalem that is in this book is larger than the whole of the land of Canaan.

Now note that it was the Spirit who was showing this to Ezekiel. The Spirit must be correct. If this thing is a physical impossibility, that is, it is something that really could not be on the earth.

That is, in that country. Then the Spirit must have another meaning. I pointed this out to someone on one occasion.

And I said that for such a temple you would have to go right into the sea. The answer was, well, in the book of the Revelation it says there will be no more sea. You see how people try to get round things.

Before we touch that, let us take one other problem. Before we touch that, let us take one other problem. Paul teaches us this very clearly.

It had been hidden from all ages and generations. But in this dispensation, that mystery has been brought to light. 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.

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. The Spirit was showing him, showing to Ezekiel something beyond Ezekiel's understanding. But 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 the work of the Holy Spirit is in every dispensation related 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 is a symbolic representation of Christ and his church.

Now I don't know how much help all that has been to you. It is very technical, but I think it is important for Bible students to understand. I leave that with you and come to this section.

We shall be able to only go a little way with it this morning. There are several preliminary points to notice. Firstly, these later visions are governed by the first vision of chapter 1, verse 28.

Look at chapter 43 at verse 3. And it was according to the appearance of the visions which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chiba, and I fell on my face. You see, that statement brings the vision of chapter 1 right over into this section.

So that all that we said about the vision in chapter 1 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 that every section of it applies to this particular part of the revelation. All in a word, all this is governed by the throne with the man upon it. And therefore we are again 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 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. Of course that is so simple.

It is so simple that nobody could fail to see it. It is very difficult to separate the man with the rod from the spirit. If you read these words in chapter 40.

You find it very difficult to make that separation. The spirit is mentioned. The man with the measuring rod is mentioned.

And then 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. As you read 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 just look at the first chapter of the book of Revelation. John there says, 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.

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 we have New Testament truth again.

We remember all that the Lord said about what the Holy Spirit would do when he was come. The Spirit's work when he was come would be all related to himself. He shall take up mine and show it to 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. That is exactly what the Spirit did. First of all he presented Christ.

And then he went on to show the dimensions of Christ. 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.

That is I think a very clear spiritual truth as contained here. I said that what is here was a physical impossibility. When I use the word physical I do not mean just our body.

You know that. I use the word in a geographical sense. Most of you understand that.

This was a geographical impossibility. And Christ is a geographical impossibility. You cannot contain him in any earthly place.

He is found in Ephesians in the heavenly. In order to see this you must be in a heavenly position. We can read what is in Ezekiel.





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