

# The Voice of Ezekiel (Continued) I

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the significance of the title 'Son of Man' in the Bible and its relationship to the Prophet Ezekiel and Jesus, highlighting the importance of the Cross in understanding God's sovereignty in creation and redemption.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 8:4, Acts 13:27

**Topics:** "Hearing God's Voice", "The Role of the Prophet"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of recognizing the deeper 'Voice' behind the familiar words of the prophets, particularly in the context of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry. He highlights how Ezekiel, referred to as 'Son of Man', serves as a representative of God's sovereignty and the suffering aspect of the prophetic role. Sparks draws a connection between Ezekiel and Christ, noting that while Ezekiel was a 'Son of Man', Jesus is 'THE Son of Man', embodying the fullness of God's redemptive plan. He warns that the Jewish people's national prejudice and their unwillingness to accept a suffering Messiah blinded them to the true message of Christ. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper spiritual understanding to truly hear the voice of God amidst the familiar words of scripture.

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## Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

Having laid the foundation for these messages, but making some essential distinctions and differences, especially regarding symbolism and reality, and mysticism and spirituality, we can now proceed to indicate how Ezekiel and his prophetic message falls into our basic purpose. That purpose is to show that it is possible to be very familiar ("every sabbath") with the words of the Divine message, and yet, at the same time, miss the inner meaning, the 'Voice'.

If we take only one major aspect and instance of this, it will indicate how serious this is, as well as obvious, to us who have the fuller story.

It will be known to those who are familiar with 'Ezekiel' that one of the most common characteristics of that book is the form of God's address to the Prophet. No fewer than ninety times Ezekiel is addressed as "Son of Man".

It does not concern me very much that in the Hebrew the term simply means 'Son of Adam', and is repeatedly used simply to indicate a human being, just mankind. I am impressed with two things in this book: one, that in no other case is it anything like as characteristic of an Old Testament book; and, two, the persistent and exclusive reiteration of the designation. There are deeper things than these which we shall draw out as we proceed; for it is in the deep significance of the two things noted that we shall find our message. This book is a book of visions, revelations, disclosures. It is a book of portents and predictions. It is not least a book of movements, activities, and energies. But in all of these God is addressing Himself to, and through, one whom He invariably calls "Son of Man". In every matter it is by keeping to this form of address. Very well, then, if that is noted, we can go further.

The "visions of God" which comprise this book are all governed by an inclusive and initial vision

### The Vision of the Cherubim

We are not going to move into a study of the Cherubim from the Garden of Eden to the book of the Revelation - the first and last mention of them. We shall keep to Ezekiel with but one object. By the river Chebar the Prophet was given the vision of what has been called 'the chariot-throne of Jehovah', borne by the Cherubim. The Cherubim are a symbolic representation of creation. Four is the number of creation, and the representation is of the four realms and governments of creation. The lion, king in his realm. The ox, king in the realm of domestic creatures and the service of man. The eagle, lord of all the realm of the air. And man. It is common knowledge that in this symbolism the man-feature is pre-eminent. The fact that it is the 'chariot-throne of Jehovah' that is being borne by the Cherubim is meant to show the absolute sovereignty of God in His creation. This sovereignty is chiefly expressed - in the creation - manwise. "What is man? ...Thou madest him to have dominion..." (Psalm 8:4,6). In the three instrumentalities and methods of Divine government, i.e. Priest, King and Prophet (the Old Testament order), the Prophet is always represented as the man particularly. Man particularizes the speech of God. By his very creation in "the likeness and image" of God he speaks as God's representative. Of course, it is true that the Priest - the mediator - is man. The same is true of the King. But these have their own symbolism in the lion and ox, while the man is particularly indicative of the Prophet. The Prophet runs right through the Old Testament, so far as function is concerned, but he comes into full measure when Priest and King are either in weakness or needing special counsel from heaven.

I think that we have now reached the heart of 'Ezekiel', and there we find in as full a way as anywhere in the Old Testament the representative of God's mind in speech by vision, word and deed. That is why the Lord said to Ezekiel: "Son of man, say unto the people of Israel, I am your sign." "I have made you a sign..."

We lift out of this book the teaching and truth that the sovereignty of God in creation and redemption is manwise. Man - let us repeat - is God's representative in His government, and His instrument in redemption. (See Romans 5:12,19, and 1 Corinthians 15:21.)

### The Prophet as a Sufferer

One other factor must be mentioned as essential to this particular message, for, without it, the whole case will break down. It is the suffering aspect of God's representative in redemption. The Prophet is invariably a suffering man. Suffering for God's people is a very real thing whenever and wherever the prophetic function is in operation.

This that we have said is the voice of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Now we are ready to make

The Transition from Ezekiel to Christ

The link between the two is largely found in the name, with a difference. In Ezekiel it is "Son of Man". In the Gospels it is "THE Son of Man". Here again, on the best of grounds, we reject (despite the Aramaic language) that it is just and only 'a man', one of the human species called 'man'.

This is a title chosen by our Lord as particularly His favourite. It occurs eighty-two times in the New Testament, and in all but two it came from His own lips. This alone gives it a significance that is more than the general 'a man'. But the main strength of its uniqueness is found in its various connections.

It is used in relation to:

1. His first coming.
2. His life here in union with heaven.
3. His ministry and work here among men. (His authority.)
4. His going out of the world.
5. His "lifting up"; the Cross.
6. His coming again.
7. His glorification.
8. His judgment of men and the world.

Inclusively and comprehensively the title is always with a supernatural context.

Jesus never referred to Himself as "Son of Abraham", "Son of David", "Son of Israel", etc. This keeps us to the real significance. Why did Jesus prefer and love this title?

First, it goes right to the heart of God His Father. It leads us to that great and dear concern of God for man; a creation in which God has vested so much for His creational glory and pleasure. It touches the deep sorrow of God because of man being "lost" (see Luke 19:10 and 15:4,6,9,24,32). It is therefore the Redeemer title; the title of the 'Kinsman Redeemer'. It is a name of universality; the whole race. It is more than any earthly category of nationality, colour, language, temperament, sex, age, culture, or zone. Herein is the "Voice" of the Greatest of all Prophets, it is "the voice of the Son of man" (John 5:27-29).

So, with a vast subject only hinted at, we come to our particular point. Why did Israel not hear this voice, although hearing the words every Sabbath, and hearing His words for over three years? There are two answers, or two factors to the one answer.

One was their national and exclusive prejudice.

Their horizon was Israel, and all others were "dogs", outsiders, and worse. They had lost their vision and vocation to the nations. They had narrowed God down to Jewry and Judaism. Still worse, they had come

to believe that they alone were righteous, and all others were "Sinners of the Gentiles". It was not men for whom they cared, but for themselves as Israelites. Hence anything that did not conform to their exclusiveness was anathema to them: and Jesus did not conform! He refused to be trammelled by their legalistic strictures, the 'heavy burdens which they put upon men's backs'. He was already breaking down that legalism against which He later swung His great Apostle Paul like a battle-axe. Prejudice, born of exclusive self-rightness, will always result in blindness, confusion and limitation.

But there is another factor in their inability to hear; the last one mentioned in relation to the Prophet's ministry.

The idea of the Messiah being a man was not strange or foreign to the Jews. When Jesus was in popularity with the multitude they were ready to acclaim Him the Messiah. But a hitch and affront came to their enthusiasm, as it came to the disciples themselves when He introduced the subject of His approaching death, and that by 'lifting up', that is, the Cross. The word which expressed their reaction to that intimation was "Offended". The point was reached when everyone, even His disciples, lost confidence in Him. A suffering Messiah? "Far be it from thee, Lord, this shall never come to thee." "The Son of Man must go...", but surely not that way! So the multitude changed their minds and asked: "Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12:34). Unwillingness and unpreparedness to accept the Cross, "the fellowship of his sufferings", will certainly make blind and deaf to the full knowledge of Him, and hinder the fullness of the "New Man". The movement from the one man, Adam, to the One Man, Christ, is ever and only by way of the Cross. The ear has to be a crucified ear if it is to hear "the Voice of the Son of Man". Until the Cross has separated between the old and the new, the natural and the spiritual, there is no faculty for hearing "what the Spirit saith".

Words, yes words; year in and year out; but at the last the 'voice' has not really been heard.

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