

Concerning the Ascension of the Messiah to Heaven.

by John Gill

The sermon discusses the Messiah's ascension to Heaven, his session at God's right hand, and his second coming to judgment, highlighting the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the Messiah's role as a judge.

Topics: "Second Coming", "Ascension of Christ"

Description

John Gill preaches on the ascension of the Messiah, emphasizing that the Old Testament prophecies foretold His resurrection, ascension to Heaven, and session at God's right hand. He cites various scriptures, including Psalms and Daniel, to illustrate that the Messiah's ascension was a literal event, marked by divine glory and the fulfillment of God's promises. Gill also discusses the significance of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, indicating His authority and the assurance of His return to judge the world. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the future judgment, affirming that the Messiah will return to fulfill this role, bringing hope to believers. Gill's message encourages the congregation to look forward to the second coming of Christ.

Transcript

The Prophecies Respecting the Messiah

CHAPTER XII.

Concerning the Ascension of the Messiah to Heaven, his session at God's right hand, and second coming to judgment.

That the Messiah was to suffer death, and rise again from the dead, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, I have endeavored to prove in the two preceding chapters; my business in this will be, to shew that he was to ascend into Heaven, sit down at God's right hand, and come a second time to judge the world in righteousness. First, I shall endeavor to prove from the prophecies of the Old Testament, that the Messiah, after his resurrection from the dead, was to ascend up into Heaven; and there are several prophecies which point out this unto us, particularly Psalm 47:5.

God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet; which Psalm, both Kimchi and Aben Ezra acknowledge, belongs to the Messiah, who is very manifestly prophesied of in the glory of his regal

majesty, and as exalted upon the throne of his holiness; and if it should be said, that these words are inapplicable to the ascension of Jesus into Heaven, because his ascension thither was not attended with a shout, or the sound of a trumpet; it may be replied, that if it be considered what the angels said to the disciples, who stood gazing at Jesus as he went up to Heaven, it will appear highly reasonable to conclude, that he went up with the shout of angels and the trumpet of God, for they tell them, (Acts 1:11), that this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven.

Now we are told, (1 Thessalonians 4:16) that he shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. If therefore his ascent to Heaven was as his descent will be, then it was both with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet. Again, the Messiah's ascension to Heaven might be argued from his session at God's right hand; for if he was not to ascend up into Heaven, he could never sit at God's right hand there. That he was to sit at God's right hand is manifest from Psalm 110:1 which can't, or be understood of David, or any other person, but the Messiah, as the apostle, from its literal and obvious sense, very strongly argues, saying, (Acts 2:34).

For David is not ascended into the Heavens, for he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand; but of this more hereafter. Again, Daniel 7:13. Where one like the son of man is said to come with clouds of Heaven, unto the Ancient of days, and to be brought near before him, may very well be understood of the Messiah's ascension into Heaven, and his introduction into the presence of the Most High. That the Messiah is here intended by the son of man, many Jewish writers acknowledge, [1] and the word ynn[Anani, which signifies clouds, in which the son of man is said to come, is from hence become among them a known name for the Messiah; [2] and that this is to be understood of his ascension into Heaven, may easily be collected from his coming with the clouds of Heaven, which was literally fulfilled in Jesus, whom when he was taken up from the earth, a cloud received out of sight: [3] from his being conducted by others to the Ancient of days, as Jesus was by angels into his Father's presence: from that dominion, glory, and kingdom, which are said to be given him, in verse 14 which well agrees with the ascension of Jesus, who being exalted at God's right hand, was made or declared to be both Lord and Christ, all which is certainly more agreeable to the literal sense of Daniel than what the author of The Scheme of Literal Prophecy advances, who, with Grotius by the son of man, understands the "Roman kingdom;" and by coming with the clouds of Heaven, "coming with a quick motion," which is his literal sense of this prophecy.

Again, Micah 2:13. might be alledged, as a prophecy of the Messiah's ascension into Heaven, where it is said, that The Breaker up is come up before them: they have broken up and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it, and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them. The Jews understand this of the Messiah, [4] which may be very aptly applied to Jesus, who is gone up and entered into heaven as prodromov, the fore-runner for his people, having broken up the way, removed all difficulties out of it, and opened the gates of heaven for them.

But that which most clearly of all expresses the ascension of the Messiah into heaven is Psalm 68:18. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. The design of this Psalm is to prove, that the presence of God among his people is always useful and salutary to them, though to the confusion and destruction of their enemies, which the Psalmist expresses in verse 1-5 which he proves by an induction of particular instances under the legal dispensation, beginning at verse 7 and ending at verse 14 and from thence proceeds to set forth the glory and security of the gospel church, from the presence of Jehovah in it, verse 15, 16 who is described by his magnificent retinue, even thousands of angels verse 17 by his

triumphant ascension into Heaven, verse 18 and by his being the author of salvation, verse 19, 20 the whole of which description entirely agrees with the Messiah; and particularly what is said of this person's ascending on high, can be understood of no other; not of Moses's ascending up to the firmament at the giving of the Law, as the Targum and Jarchi interpret it, for though Moses ascended to the top of mount Sinai, yet we nowhere read that he went up to the firmament of Heaven; nor is it to be understood of David's going up to the high fortresses of his enemies, as Aben Ezra would have it, which sense is both jejune and impertinent; or of God's ascent from mount Sinai when he gave the Law, of which ascent there is not any mention made in scripture; but of the Messiah's ascension into Heaven, which may very well be signified by this phrase on high; see Psalm 102:19, Jeremiah 25:30 which ascension is not to be understood figuratively, as Genesis 17:22 but literally, it being real, local, and visible, as that of Jesus's was.

Besides, the circumstances which were to attend this ascension, manifestly shew this to be the sense of the words, as his leading captivity captive, which well expresses the Messiah's triumphant conquests over all his enemies, and had its full accomplishment in Jesus, who made an end of sin, abolishes death, and spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, and having so done, went up, as a triumphant conqueror to heaven, where he received the promise of the Holy Ghost, that is, the several gifts and graces of the Spirit in their fullness, and bestowed them upon men, even rebellious ones, whereby they became a fit habitation for God, that he might dwell with them and they with him; and thus the other circumstance which was to attend the ascension of this person, namely, his receiving gifts for men, had its completion in the Messiah, Jesus.

The apostle, in citing those words, Ephesians 4:8 and applying them to Jesus, renders this last clause somewhat different from what it is in the original text, and instead of received gifts for men, reads it, and gave gifts to men; though the Jews have no reason to quarrel with it as they do, [5] for their own Targum renders it after the same manner, the Hebrew word signifying both to give and to receive; [6] nor is there any disagreement in sense; the Messiah was to receive these gifts, in order to give them to men; accordingly Jesus, having received them, did so.

The words, as they stand in the Psalms, are a prophecy of what the Messiah was to do, but as cited by the apostle, are a narration of what Jesus had done. From the whole it appears, that the Messiah was to ascend into Heaven, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, which had their fulfillment in Jesus, who, as he before-hand declared that he should ascend into Heaven, actually did so, of which his disciples were eye-witnesses; he also being seen of angels, and accompanied by them, was received up into glory, where he ever lives to make intercession for his people.

I proceed, Secondly, To shew that the Messiah, upon his ascension into Heaven, was to sit down at God's right hand. He is called [7] the man of God's right hand, Psalm 80:17. and that not only because he is most dear to God, as Benjamin was to his father, and therefore was called by him the son of the right hand; nor because that by him he sustains and upholds all things, nor because he was strengthened and supported by God's right hand in performing the work of salvation; but because, being exalted by it, he was made to sit down at it, which is in so many words expressed in Psalm 80:17.

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. That the Jews, in the times of Jesus, understood this Psalm of the Messiah, is manifest from the discourse which passed between him and them concerning the Messiah: He first asks them, (Matthew 22:42-46) What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? To which they readily reply, The son of David. To this he objects,

How then does David in spirit call him Lord? and for the proof thereof, produces this very text, The Lord said unto my Lord, etc. from whence he argues, If then David call him Lord, how is he his son? which nonplussed them, and threw them into the utmost confusion; for no man was able to answer him a word.

Now had it been the generally received sense of the Jewish synagogue, at this time, that this Psalm was to be understood of some other person, and not the Messiah, they could very easily have objected it to him: but Jesus seems to argue with them from what was agreed on, on all hands, and of which there could be no dispute among them: namely, that this Psalm was wrote by David; that it was wrote by him tinder the inspiration of the Spirit; and that the Messiah was the subject thereof: and, indeed, they by their silence acknowledge it; for had they not believed it, they would not have been reduced to the distress they were; nay, even some of their most celebrated Doctors since, [8] have confessed the same, though others, observing what confusion their forefathers were thrown into from hence by Jesus, and what improvement his followers have made of it since, for the vindication and establishment of their religion, have quitted the sense of the old synagogue, and introduced strange and foreign ones, which are inconsistent with themselves, and have no manner of foundation in the Psalm.

Some of them [9] would have Abraham the patriarch to be the subject thereof, and that it was composed, either by Melchizedek, or Eliezer the servant of Abraham, or else by David, on account of the victory Abraham obtained over the kings, Genesis 14 in rescuing his kinsman Lot. But Melchizedek could not be the author of it, because he was a far greater person than Abraham; he blessed him, and received tithes from him, and therefore could not call him his Lord. It is true Eliezer might, as being his servant, but then he could not assign unto him a seat at the right hand of God; nor say of him, that he had an everlasting priesthood after the order of Melchizedek: Besides, the Psalm is a Psalm of David, though not composed by him on this account, for the very same reasons.

Others [10] would have David intended, but David was the penman of this Psalm, and therefore cannot be supposed to say so of himself; and whereas some of them say, [11] that it was wrote by some of the singers, concerning him, it may be replied, that the title declares the contrary. Besides, David, is not ascended into the Heavens, neither is he set down at the right hand of God, nor had he any thing to do with the priesthood, much less was he a priest after Melchizedek's order; which is peculiar to the Messiah Jesus, who was made an high-priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, (Hebrews 6:20) of whose kingdom and priesthood, sufferings and exaltation, his conquests over his enemies, and success of his gospel, this Psalm is a very plain and manifest prophecy.

The person speaking in this first verse, is Jehovah, the father; the person spoken to is David's Adon, or Lord, the promised Messiah, whom the Jews, in Malachi 3:1 sought, and whose coming they earnestly desired. What is said unto him, is, that he was to sit at God's right hand, which is expressive of his exaltation, power and authority; the time how long, is until he made his enemies his footstool; that is, until they are all subdued under him, and the last enemy which shall be destroyed, is death.

Now that Jesus is set down at God's right hand, the writings of the New Testament constantly affirm. Jesus himself, before the high-priest, declared, that they should see the Son of man, (Matthew 26:64) meaning himself, sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven; and his apostles do frequently aver, that he is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: Nay, Stephen saw him standing there, being risen from his seat, as one provoked at the indignity offered to his servant; otherwise his usual posture is to sit; which signifies, that he has done his work, which has been graciously accepted, and is now taking his rest, ease, and pleasure, being placed upon the same throne with God, and crowned

by him with glory and honor, where he will continue to sit, for the advantage of his church and people, until he comes a second time to judge the world, which I shall, in the next place, Thirdly, consider.

That there will be a future judgment, we have no controversy with the Jews, and it might easily be established, from the very reason of things against the Deists. The Jews suppose a revelation of this truth very early in the world; yea, that this notion obtained as early as the times of Cain and Abel, [12] making the reason of their disagreement to be their differing sentiments about it, which was the cause of that tragical and barbarous action which Cain committed. However, it is certain, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of the day of judgment, (Jude 14, 15) and the writings of the Old Testament abundantly confirm the truth of it, where God is frequently represented as a judge, and the persons to be judged, both the righteous and wicked, (Ecclesiastes 3:17.) are very evidently pointed out, as well as the several things which shall be brought into judgment, as every kind of work, whether it be good or whether it be evil, (Ecclesiastes 11:9; Ecclesiastes 12:14) nay, the several issues and events thereof, as the everlasting happiness of the saints, and perpetual punishment of the wicked; yea, the glory, majesty, form, and manner of this awful procedure are exactly described, as the setting of the judgment, the placing of the thrones, the majestic appearance of the judge, his vast retinue, the large number of persons that shall stand before him to be judged, and the opening of the books, from whence they are to be judged; see Daniel 7:9, 10. compared with Revelation 20:11, 12.

Now the person who is to have the conduct and management of this awful affair, is the Messiah, who is often spoken of as a judge [13] in the Old Testament, and as every way qualified for such a work, being a person of great knowledge and wisdom, (Isaiah 11:2-5) courage and majesty, having the fear of God before his eyes, of very great sagacity and penetration, as well as of very great integrity and faithfulness, of whom it is prophesied in Psalm 98:9 that he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity; which Psalm solely belongs to the Messiah.

Kimchi (Psalm 93:1) says, that all the Psalms, from the ninety-third Psalm to the hundredth Psalm inclusive, belong to the days of the Messiah, and the several arguments of them will easily evince it. Jarehi endeavors to prove, (Psalm 96:1) that the ninety-sixth Psalm, which is of the same nature with this, beginning and ending in the same manner, regards future times; because it thus concludes, for he cometh to judge the earth; and adds, that wherever mention is made of a new song, it is dyt[j] [concerning the time to come, or relates to the times of the Messiah; and R.

Abendana says, [14] the reason of those metaphorical expressions being used in verse 4-8 is, because of the greatness of that joy which shall be in the days of the Messiah; which is justly occasioned by those marvellous things which he has done, in redeeming his people, and those conquests which he has obtained over all his and their enemies, verse 1. as also, by making his salvation known, and openly shewing his righteousness to the Gentiles, as well as to the house of Israel, verse 2, 3. which exactly suits with the Messiah, and has had its fulfillment in Jesus; that this is to be understood of his second coming, and not of his first, may be concluded from the end thereof, which is to judge the earth; but the end of his first coming was not to judge the world, (John 12:47) but to save it.

Moreover, in the parallel text to this, in Psalm 96:13 this phrase is repeated, for he cometh, for he cometh, to judge the earth; which may be designed to denote either his second coming, or the certainty thereof, or else the speed and haste he would make in coming, as Jesus says, Surely I come quickly, (Revelation 22:20) to which John replies, Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus. Again, as the first coming of the Messiah was matter of great joy to all those who waited for the consolation of Israel, so will his second coming be to

all those who love and look for his glorious appearing; at or about which time many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, which now remain unfulfilled, will have their full accomplishment, for which the people of God, under the present dispensation, are looking, waiting and praying. ENDNOTES:

[1] Zohar in Genesis fol. 85. 4 Jarchi & Saadiah Gaon in 1oc. & R. Jeshuash in Aben Ezra in loc. Tzeror Hammor Tahnud Sanhed. & Midrash Tillim in Psalm 21:7 in Pearson on the Creed, art. 7.

[2] See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, p. 131. and Bereshith Rabba. in Pearson on the Creed, art 7.

[3] Acts. 1:9.

[4] The Author of Sepher Abkath Rochel & R. Moses Haddarsan in Genesis 40:9. & Bereshith Rabba in Genesis 44:18 in Pearson on the Creed, art. 6 Vid. Galatin. de Arcanis, C. V. 1. 8 c. 23.

[5] Isaac Chizuk, Emun, par. 2. c. 91.

[6] Vid. Pocock. Not. Misc. in Port. Mos. p. 84 and Bishop Kidder's Demonstration of the Messiah, par. 2. p. 87. Edit. fol.

[7] Vid. Targum in v. 15. & RI Aben Ezrm in loc.

[8] Zohar in Numbers fol. 99. 2. Raya Mehimna in Zohar in Genesis fol. 87. 3. R. Moses Haddarsan in Bereshith Rabba in Genesis 18:1. Midrash Tillim in loc. and in Psalm 18:35. R. Obadiah, & R. David Kimchi in loc. R. Saadiah Gaon in Daniel 7:13. Nachmanides in disput. cum fratre Paule, p. 36, 55.

[9] Jarchi in. loc. & Vet. Nizzachon p. 179, 180.

[10] Isaac Cbizuk, Emunpar. 1. c. 40.

[11] Aben Ezra in loc.

[12] Vid. Targum Jon. in Genesis 4:8

[13] See Mic. 5:1. Isaiah 2:4 Obad. 21. and Kimchi and Aben Ezra on the same.

[14] Not. in Miclol. Yophi in Psalm 98.

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