

Of the Spiritual Reign of Christ.

by John Gill

The spiritual reign of Christ will be a period of time when Christ exercises his kingly office in a more visible and glorious manner, characterized by greater purity, perfection, and extent.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Spiritual Reign of Christ", "Gospel Proclamation"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the spiritual reign of Christ, which is characterized by a more profound and pure administration of the gospel, leading to greater conversions and a unified faith among believers. He describes how this reign will involve the preaching of the everlasting gospel with clarity and consistency, resulting in a significant spread of the gospel and the conversion of many, including the Jews. Gill also highlights the anticipated destruction of antichrist, which will pave the way for the expansion of Christ's kingdom across the world, ultimately leading to a time of peace, holiness, and spiritual fervor among the saints.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 5--Chapter 14

OF THE SPIRITUAL REIGN OF CHRIST

It has been observed in the preceding chapter, that Christ has been exercising his kingly office in all ages of time, both before and since his incarnation: and there are two remarkable periods of time yet to come; in which Christ will exercise his kingly office in a more visible and glorious manner; the one may be called, the "spiritual reign of Christ;" and the other his "personal reign;" it is the former of these that will now be attended to; and which is no other than the present reign continued; and which will be administered in the same manner: only, 1.

First, with greater purity, and to a greater degree of perfection; both as to doctrine and practice. 1a. The kingdom of Christ will be carried on by the ministry of the word, as now; the gospel will then be preached; and in this the spiritual reign will differ from the personal one, in which there will be no ministry of the word, all God's elect being gathered in, and the saints in a perfect state; but in this there will be multitudes to be converted, and will be converted by the word, and saints be in an imperfect state, and to be edified and

comforted.

The gospel is to be preached unto the end of the world, and Christ has promised his presence with his ministers so long; and hence the gospel is called the "everlasting gospel" (Matthew 28:19,20; Rev. 14:6), but in the spiritual reign it will be preached. 1a1. With more light and clearness than now. The light of the present time is fitly described as being neither "clear nor dark;" not so clear as in the first times of the gospel, nor so dark as in the darkest times of Popery, or as it may be before a brighter day appears.

It is "one day," a remarkable uncommon day; "known to the Lord," how long it will last, and to him only; "not day nor night," not clear day nor dark night, but a sort of an evening twilight; and at "evening time," when a greater darkness may be expected to be coming on, "it shall be light" (Zech. 14:6,7), a blaze of light shall break out, and that to such a degree, that "the light of the moon," which at most is the light we now have, "shall be as the light of the sun" in its meridian splendor; and "the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days;" as great as the light of seven days could it be collected together; so great will be the difference between the gospel light as now, and as it will be then (Isa. 30:26).

"The angel having the everlasting gospel to preach;" by whom is meant a set of gospel ministers in the spiritual reign; is said to "fly in the midst of heaven" with it, which not only denotes the public but the clear ministration of it (Rev. 14:6). 1a2. The gospel will be preached with greater consistence; a principal fault in the present ministry of the word is inconsistency; not only in different ministers, but in the same ministers at different times, and even in the same discourse; "the trumpet gives an uncertain sound;" but "in that day," in the spiritual reign, "the great trumpet" of the gospel will be "blown" with great strength and fervour, and with a more even and unwavering note, and so be understood by saints and sinners, and be a better direction to them; there will not be that yea and nay as now, but the ministry of the word will be uniform and all of a piece. 1a3.

There will be an agreement in the ministers of it; now they clash with one another, scarcely two persons think and speak the same thing; and some so widely different, that it seems to be another gospel preached by some than what is by others; though indeed there is not another gospel; but in the spiritual reign the "watchmen," Christ's ministers, who watch for the good of the souls of men, "shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion," or restore his church to its former state and glory (Isa 52:8 their light will be the same, their ministry will be alike, they will see things in the same light, and speak the same things, and in the same manner. 1a4.

There will be one faith, one doctrine of faith or system of truths, which will be preached and professed by all; there will be no more an Arian, a Socinian, a Pelagian and Arminian, or any other heterodox person; as there will be but one Lord, "his name" will be "one," one religion professed by all that name the name of Christ; they will be all of one accord, of one mind (Zech. 14:9). 1a5. The gospel will have a greater spread than now; at present it lies in a narrow compass, chiefly in the isles, very little on the continent; and in the countries where it is, it is but in few places there; but hereafter many will run to and fro, and knowledge, evangelical knowledge, will be increased; the earth shall be full of it, as the waters cover the sea; the angel, or a set of gospel ministers, shall have it to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

Those "living waters," the doctrines of grace, which are the means of quickening sinners and enlivening saints, "shall go out from Jerusalem," the church of God; "half of them towards the former," or eastern "sea," and "half of them towards the hinder" or western "sea;" that is, they shall go east and west, even into all parts; "in summer and in winter shall it be;" these waters shall be always flowing, or these doctrines

constantly and continually preached (Dan. 12:4; Isa. 11:9; Rev. 14:6; Zech. 14:8). 1a6.

The gospel will be preached with greater success; there will be no more such complaints, as "Who hath believed our report?" the report of the gospel will be generally believed; and "to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" the power of God will go along with the word, to the conversion of multitudes; who, to the great surprise of the church, will "fly as a cloud" for number; so that there shall scarce be room enough in the church for them; and it will be said, "The place is too strait for me, give place to me that I may dwell;" the place of her tent must be enlarged, the curtains of her habitation stretched forth, and her cords lengthened, since she shall break forth on the right hand and on the left, and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles (Isa. 49:18-20; 54:2,3; 60:4-8). 1b.

The same ordinances will be administered in the spiritual reign as now; in this it will differ also from the personal reign; for then the "city," the church, will have no "need of the sun nor moon" of gospel ordinances, the Lord himself personally will be the light of his people; but in this state the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper will be celebrated; for they are to continue till Christ's second coming and personal appearance (Matthew 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:26), but not as they are commonly administered now, but as they were first delivered; through a course of time and prevailing corruption, men "have transgressed the laws, change the ordinances, and broken the everlasting covenant" (Isa. 24:5), so that were the apostles to rise from the dead, they would not know the ordinances as in general use, to be the same that were given to them; but in the spiritual reign of Christ they will be restored to their primitive purity, and be observed clear of all renovation and corruption; we shall no more hear of that absurd notion of transubstantiation, or of the bread and wine in the ordinance of the supper being transubstantiated into the very body and blood of Christ; nor of withholding the cup from the laity; nor of kneeling at the reception of the elements, as if adored; nor of the prostitution of this sacred ordinance to secular purposes, to qualify for places of honour or trust, or profit in civil things; nor shall we hear any more of the childish practice of infant sprinkling; the ordinance of baptism will be administered only to its proper subjects, believers in Christ, and in its proper manner, by immersion. 1c.

The same discipline will be observed in the churches of Christ as now; only with greater strictness, and more agreeable to the laws and rules of Christ: in this also the spiritual reign will differ from the personal; there will be no temple seen in that, but the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb will be the temple of it (Rev. 21:22). The worship and discipline of Christ's house will not be carried on in the manner as in the present state: but in the spiritual reign, "the temple of God will be opened in heaven, and the ark of his testament will be seen" in it: the affairs of the church will be restored as at first; and all things will be done according to the pattern Christ has given; the form and fashion of the house, the church, its comings in, and goings out, admission and exclusion of members, the laws and ordinances of it, respecting discipline, will be shown most clearly to it; and which will be strictly and punctually observed: there will be no more controversies about the nature of a church, and the government of it, and of officers in it; and in whom the exercise of power lies; and who to be admitted into it, and rejected from it, and by whom; see (Rev. 11:19; Isa. 1:26; Jer. 30:18; Ezek. 43:10,11).

Churches will be formed and governed upon the plan they were in the times of the apostles. 2. Secondly, The spiritual reign of Christ will be more large and ample than now it is; it will reach all over the world. 2a. The first step towards the increase and enlargement of Christ's kingdom, will be the destruction of antichrist; who, in the prophecy of Daniel, is spoken of as a "little horn;" an "horn," which is an emblem of strength, power, and dominion: a "little" one, as at his first rise, and in comparison of other powers; having eyes like "the eyes of man;" denoting his sagacity, penetration, and looking out sharp on all sides, to

enlarge his power and dominion; and a "mouth speaking great things," in favour of himself, and against the most high, and his people; and a "look more stout than his fellows," than his fellow bishops, more bold, arrogant, and impudent; making war with the saints, the Waldenses and Albigenses; and thinking to "change times and laws;" to change times and seasons, for different purposes than for what they were designed; and to dispense with the laws of God and man, and make new ones: but though he should continue thus great and mighty for a time, it is said, his "dominion should be taken away, consumed and destroyed;" and that he should "come to his end, and none shall help him" (Dan. 7:20-26; 11:45).

In the New Testament he is called, "the man of sin," because extremely wicked; and "the son of perdition," because not only deserving of it, but shall certainly come into it; who "opposeth" Christ in his offices; "exalteth himself above all that is called god;" above heathen deities, above angels, and above civil magistrates; "sits in the temple of God," the church, over which he sets himself as head; "showing himself that he is God;" taking the name of God to himself; and assuming the prerogative of God, to forgive sin: he is called, "that wicked" and lawless one, and "mystery of iniquity," that began doctrinally and practically to work in the times of the apostles; though this evil one lay greatly hid for a while, and was let and hindered from a more open appearance by the Roman emperor; yet, upon his removal from Rome to Constantinople, way was made for him to take his seat, and show his power: but notwithstanding his long and tyrannical reign, Christ will consume him "with the Spirit of his mouth," and destroy him "with the brightness of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:3-8).

In the book of Revelation, he is described by two beasts, one rising out of the sea, the other out of the earth; signifying his twofold capacity, civil and ecclesiastical; and his twofold power, temporal and spiritual: great things are ascribed to him, and said to be done by him; who shall continue long, but at last go into perdition: this mother of harlots, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, shall be hated by them, and she be burnt with fire; (see Rev. 13:1-18; 17:8,16), then they that destroyed the earth with false doctrines and worship shall be destroyed (Rev. 11:18), the man of the earth shall no more oppress and tyrannize over the consciences of men; the Heathen, or Gentiles, by which name the papists are sometimes called, shall perish out of the land; and those sinners shall be consumed out of it, and those wicked ones be no more; see (Ps. 10:16,18; 104:35) so the judgment and burning of the beast, antichrist, is related as previous to the kingdom of Christ, the Son of man (Dan. 7:12-14).

The reign of antichrist is fixed in prophecy, for a certain time; in (Dan. 7:25), for a time, and times, and the dividing of time; that is, for three years and a half; the same with forty-two months, and one thousand two hundred and sixty days; which are so many years: but when these will end, cannot be said with any precision, because it is difficult to settle the beginning of his reign; could that be done, it would easily be known when it would end: there have been many conjectures made, and times fixed, but without effect; even this very year, one thousand, seven hundred, and sixty-six (The substance of this Chapter was preached in that year) has been pitched upon as the time of antichrist's destruction, and the beginning of the millennium; but nothing of this kind appears; or as being very near at hand: however, what is said of the ruin of antichrist, and of the antichristian states, will be fulfilled by the Lord in his own time.

And this will be done, partly by the preaching of the gospel, which is the Spirit and breath of Christ's mouth; with which antichrist will be consumed and destroyed, upon the angel flying in the midst of heaven, with the everlasting gospel, to preach to all nations; and upon mother angel appearing with such splendor, power, and glory, as to lighten the whole earth, the fall of Babylon will immediately follow, and be proclaimed; the gospel then preached, will give such a light as to open the eyes of men, to behold the abominable doctrines and practices of the church of Rome, so as to hate it, depart from it, and leave it

desolate; (see Rev. 14:6-8; 18:1,2; 17:16), and partly the ruin of antichrist, and the antichristian states, will be effected by the pouring out of the seven vials of God's wrath upon them; which will be put into the hands of seven angels, or protestant princes, by one of the four beasts, or living creatures, the emblems of gospel ministers; who having some knowledge of the time of antichrist's destruction being near, will stir up the protestant princes to take this work in hand; who will carry their victorious arms into popish countries, and make a conquest of them; first into Germany, then into France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy; and into the very kingdom and seat of the beast; for the first five vials will be poured out on the Western antichrist, and his dominions; which will cause revolutions in them from popery, and where the gospel will take place; and all those countries now under the power of papacy, will become the kingdom of Christ, and will make a large addition to his interest in the world; (see Rev. 15:1-8; 16:1-21). 2b.

The next step to the increase and enlargement of Christ's kingdom and government in the world, will be the conversion of the Jews, which will follow upon the destruction of antichrist; for the Popish religion is the great stumbling block which lies in the way of the Jews; and therefore must be first removed. There are many prophecies that speak of their conversion; as that they shall be "born" at once; not in a civil sense, set up and established as a nation; but in a spiritual sense, born again of water and of the spirit; they shall be brought into a thorough conviction of sin, and a true sense of it, and shall mourn for it; particularly the sin of their obstinate rejection of the true Messiah, and their continued unbelief in him; when they shall be led and go forth with weeping and with supplication, and shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king, the Messiah, and receive him and submit unto him; and join themselves to Christian churches, and be subject to the ordinances of Christ: and this will be universal; all Israel shall be saved, the whole nation shall be born at once, suddenly; for which for many hundreds of years they have been kept a distinct people, and have not been reckoned and mixed among the nations, though scattered in the midst of them; which is a most marvelous thing in providence, and plainly shows that God has some great things to do for them and by them.

In the reign of the late king, and within our knowledge and memory, was a very surprising event respecting this people, yet little taken notice of; a bill was brought into our British Parliament to naturalize them; I then thought in my own mind it would never pass; God would not suffer it in providence, being so contrary to scripture revelation and prophecy, and the state of that people, in which they are to continue until their conversion; but the bill did pass to my great astonishment, not knowing what to think of prophecy, and of what God was about to do in the world, and with that people.

But lo! the bill was repealed, and that before one Jew was naturalized upon it; and then all difficulties were removed, and it appeared to be the will of God, that an attempt should be made, and that carried into execution as near as possible, without crossing purposes, and contradicting prophecy; and to let us see what a watchful eye the Lord keeps upon the counsels of men, and that there is no counsel against the Lord; and that the Jews must remain a distinct people until the time of their conversion.

How otherwise at that time would it appear that a nation is born at once, if not then a people that dwell alone, and not reckoned among the nations? These two sticks, Jews and Gentiles, will become one; but it will be in and by the hand of the Lord; it will not be effected by Acts of Parliament, but by works of grace upon the souls of men; the Jews will never be naturalized until they are spiritualized; and when they are, they will return to their own land and possess it, being assisted, as they will be, by Protestant princes, who will drive out the Turk and establish them in it; this will be another addition to the kingdom of Christ. 2c.

By this means, the conversion of the Jews, and the settlement of them in their own land, a way will be opened for the great spread of the gospel in the Eastern nations, and for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom there; for the Protestant princes, who will be assisting to the Jews in replacing them in their own land, will carry their victorious arms into other parts of the Turkish dominions, and dispossess the Turk of his empire; which will be effected by the pouring out of the sixth vial upon the river Euphrates, which will be dried up; an emblem of the utter destruction of the Ottoman empire; whereby way will be made for the kings of the East; or for the gospel being carried into the kingdoms of the East; not only into Turkey, but Tartary, Persia, China, and the countries of the Great Mogul; which, upon the passing away of the second, or Turkish woe, the kingdoms of this world, those vast kingdoms just mentioned, will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ (Rev. 16:12; 11:14,15).

And now will the fulness of the Gentiles be brought in; and those vast conversions made among them, prophesied of in (Isa. 60:1-22). And now will the interest and church of Christ, make the greatest figure it ever did in the world; now kings shall come to the brightness and glory of Zion; her gates shall stand open continually for the kings of the Gentiles to enter in; who will become church members, and submit to all the ordinances of Christ's house; their kings shall be nursing fathers, and their queens nursing mothers: and this will be the case, not only of one or two, or a few of them; but even of all of them; for all kings shall fall down before Christ, and all nations shall serve him: churches shall be raised and formed everywhere; and those be filled with great personages: now will be the time when the kingdom, and dominion, and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High (Isa. 60:3,10,11; 49:23; Ps. 72:10,11; Dan. 9:27).

Yet such will be the spirituality of this state, that it will be a counterbalance to the grandeur and riches of it; so that the saints shall not be hurt thereby; as in former times, particularly in the times of Constantine; which leads me further to observe, 3. Thirdly, That the reign of Christ in this state, will be more spiritual than now; from whence it has its name. 3a. There will be a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of God upon ministers and churches, in this state: the prophecy of Joel, concerning the pouring forth of the Spirit, had a very great accomplishment on the day of Pentecost, upon the apostles; but not its whole accomplishment; for the Spirit was not then poured forth upon "all" flesh, as promised; nor upon the Gentiles: but now it will be poured out on them in general from on high; so that the wilderness of the Gentiles shall become a fruitful field (Isa. 32:15,16), and to this will be owing the above things; as the destruction of antichrist, which will be by the Spirit of Christ accompanying his word; and the conversion of the Jews will follow, upon the Spirit of grace and supplication being poured forth on the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the many and great conversions in the Gentile world, will be, not by might or power of mere, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. 3b.

The saints in general will be more spiritualized than now: they will have more spiritual frames of soul; and will more mind, savour, and relish the things of the Spirit of God; and with their whole hearts and spirits, seek more after God, and communion with him; they will have more spiritual light and knowledge in the doctrines of the gospel; and the light of Zion will rise, and be very bright and glorious, conspicuous to others, and be very inviting; it will be like the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.

The saints will be more spiritual in their conversation; there will be less of that frothiness, vanity, and emptiness, which now too often appear in them; they will frequently meet together, and speak often one to another, about divine, spiritual, and experimental things. They will be more spiritual in their worship; they will worship God in the Spirit, with their spirits, and under the influence and conduct of the divine Spirit; and will enjoy more of the spiritual presence of God and Christ; who will come down upon them like rain

upon the mown grass, and as showers of rain upon the earth, very refreshing and delightful. 3c.

The graces of the Spirit of God will be more in exercise. Faith, which a little before this time will be scarcely found in the earth, will now be in high exercise; and especially the grace of love, which will be the distinguishing character of this state; and which will answer to its name, Philadelphia, which signifies brotherly love; for in that church state, the spiritual reign will be: then the saints will be of one heart, and of one soul; as the primitive Christians were; they will be kindly affectioned one to another; no animosities and contentions among them, on any account, civil or religious; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim; but all being of one mind, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, they will keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; (see Isa. 11:13; Eph. 4:2-4). 3d.

There will be abundance of peace in this reign, even of outward peace; no more wars, nor rumors of wars; swords and spears will be beaten into plowshares and pruning hooks; and war shall be learnt no more: no more persecution, nor persecutors: there will be none to hurt and destroy in all God's holy mountain: and such as were like wolves, and leopards, and bears, shall be as tame as lambs, kids, and calves; and shall feed and lie down together: there shall be an abundance of peace of every kind, and of it no end; and particularly internal and spiritual peace; for as grace will be high in exercise, joy and peace will increase and abound; see (Ps. 72:7,8; Isa. 9:7; 11:6-9). 3e.

There will be a great degree of holiness in all saints, of every class and rank; all the Lord's people will be righteous; "Every pot in Jerusalem, and in Judea;" that is, every member of the church, "shall be holiness unto the Lord;" in his sight, and to his glory; yea, "holiness to the Lord shall be upon the bells of the horses;" signifying how common it should be, and appear in every civil action of life, as well as in religious ones; and that holiness shall then be as common as unholiness is now; and that it shall be visible in the lives and conversations of saints; and be seen of all; (see Isa. 9:21; Zech. 14:20,21).

The other period of time in which Christ will, in a most glorious manner, reign with his people on earth, and which may be called, his personal reign; being what will take place at his second coming to judgment, and personal appearance then, and upon the first resurrection; it will be most proper to defer it, until those articles come under consideration.

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