

The Watchman's Answer to the Question, What of the Night?

by John Gill

The sermon explores the role of the watchman in relation to the night, and how they provide guidance and advice to the people during times of darkness and affliction.

Scripture: Isaiah 21:11

Topics: "Vigilance in Faith", "Hope in Darkness"

Description

John Gill preaches on the prophetic significance of the watchman's response to the question, 'What of the night?' emphasizing the duality of morning and night as symbols of hope and despair. He explains that the watchman, representing either God, Christ, or the prophets, provides assurance that while darkness may prevail, a new dawn of redemption is coming. Gill warns of the cyclical nature of spiritual states, where periods of light are often followed by darkness, urging believers to remain vigilant and faithful. He encourages the congregation to seek understanding through scripture and to return to God with humility and repentance, as the ultimate morning of Christ's return will bring eternal light to the faithful.

Transcript

THE WATCHMAN'S ANSWER

TO THE QUESTION,

WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

A SERMON,

Preached at a Wednesday's Evening Lecture,

in

GREAT EAST-CHEAP, Dec. 27, 1750.

Isaiah 21:11, 12.

The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: If ye will enquire, enquire ye; return,

come.

There are several prophecies in this book, both in the preceding and following chapters, which are called burdens; which contain sad and heavy judgments, grievous calamities and distresses, that should come upon nations; and foretell the ruin and destruction of kingdoms and states, and which may be the reason why they are so called; though it must be owned, that there are some prophecies which bear this name, that[1] bring good tidings of good things, yet more rarely. There are no less than three prophecies of this name in this chapter.

The words of the text are one, and there is one before them, and another after them. The chapter begins with the burden of the desert of the sea, or plain of the sea; which describes the city of Babylon, afterwards named; and which was built on a plain, and in a watery place, by the river Euphrates; and it is usual with Jewish writers, inspired or uninspired, to call any confluence of water a sea; whose destruction is foretold as what would be by the Medes and Persians; and these are mentioned by name, verse 2, as well as signified by a chariot with a couple of horsemen, verse 7, and its ruin is declared in express words, verse 9, and the whole is delivered out in such a manner, as may easily be accommodated to mystical Babylon, who is represented as in a wilderness, sitting upon many waters, agreeable to verse 1, whose destruction will be by the lion of the tribe of Judah, see verse 8, and which is expressed by the self-same words as are in verse 9, and that for the comfort of the Lord's people, verse 10.[2] The prophecy in our text is called the burden of Dumah; whether it respects the Arabians, particularly the Dumean Arabians, or whether the Edomites or Idumeans, is a matter of question: some think the former, because Dumah was a son of Ishmael, (Gen. 25:14) and of him Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret it here; and there was a place in Arabia called Dumatha:[3] but others are of opinion, that the latter, the Edomites, or Idumeans, are intended; and the Septuagint version renders the words the vision of Idumea; and the Arabic version calls them a prophecy concerning Edom and Seir; and so Jarchi by Dumah understands Edom: and the rather the Edomites may be thought to be here meant, since a distinct prophecy concerning Arabia follows after; and because mention is made of Seir, which was inhabited by the Edomites (Gen. 36:8-9) he calleth to me out of Seir; or there was a cry out of Seir; one called from thence to the watchman, and asked him a question, to which he returned an answer, and also gave some advice.

Now let it be observed, that this prophecy may refer to the time when Edom should be a possession, and Seir also should be a possession for his enemies; that is, be possessed by the Jews, as is foretold (Num. 24:18) they would and which was fulfilled before the coming of Christ, when the Jews and Idumeans were mixed together; and the latter, at least many of them, embraced the Jewish religion,[4] and so had knowledge of the Messiah and his coming; and perhaps some of them savingly believed in him; and these, some one or more of them, or however, the Jews that were in Seir or in Idumea, may be thought to be here inquiring after him, when he would come and put an end to the then present night of darkness, and make the morning of the gospel-dispensation; and it may be further observed, that as Esau and Edom may be considered as a type of antichrist, the Edomites may represent the antichristian party.

Jerome[5] says, that some of the Hebrews read Roma for Duma here, and suppose that the Roman empire is designed; and certain it is, that nothing is more common with them, than to call the Roman empire, and Rome itself, Edom, and the Romans or Papists, Edomites.[6] Now, as in the darkest times of Popery, there were some that rose up as witnesses to the truth, there were others that embraced it; who doubtless inquired of the witnesses, the watchmen, when the night of popish darkness would be over, and gospel-light break forth; and it is easy to observe, that a little before the destruction of Babylon, God will have a people in her, whom he will call to come forth out of the midst of her, that they partake not of her

sins, nor of her plagues; (Rev. 18:4) and these, sensible of the state of darkness they are in, may be supposed to be inquiring after latter-day-light and glory.

These short hints may serve to give us a little light into this obscure passage; and which will open more and more as we go along, considering the following thing: I. Who the watchman is that is here applied unto. II. The question that is put to him and repeated Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? III. The Watchman's answer to it, The morning cometh, and also the night. IV. An Exhortation upon it, which may serve for the use and improvement of the whole; If you will enquire. enquire ye; return, come.

I. WHO THE WATCHMAN IS, THAT IS ADDRESSED; AND TO WHOM THE QUESTION IN THE TEXT IS PUT. 1. Some by the watchman understand God himself:[7] the name and title of a watcher is sometimes given to him, and indeed to all the divine persons, who are called watchers and holy ones, Daniel 4:17 where the affair of Nebuchadnezzar being driven from his throne and palace, to dwell among the beasts of the field, is said to be a matter by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones.

I know this is commonly understood of angels, and they are watchers by office, being the guardians of God's people, and holy by nature; they may be said also to declare and execute the decrees of God; but then his decrees are never called theirs; and besides, this decree is expressly called the decree of the Most High, verse 24, and these watchers and holy ones are represented as having others under them, whom they call upon to execute this decree, verse 23, and where they are called the watcher and the holy one, as before, the plural number is used, to denote the plurality of persons in the Godhead, there the singular, to secure the unity of the divine essence.

Acts of watching are ascribed to God, sometimes in a bad sense, and sometimes in a good one: I mean, that sometimes he is said to watch over men for evil, and sometimes for good; his eyes are upon the ways of all men, good and bad, and he sees all their goings, and watches their sins to chastise or punish for them; he watches over the sins of his own people, to correct them for them, in a fatherly way, but not in a way of strict justice; not so as to demand satisfaction of them, or inflict vindictive wrath upon them; should he mark iniquity in such a manner, there would be no standing before him; though sometimes they think he does do so: thus Job (Job 14:16-17), now thou numberest my steps, dost thou not watch over my sin? my transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity; in order to bring it forth one day, as he thought, against him, to his condemnation.

God does indeed watch over the sins of wicked men, of a rebellious and impenitent people, to punish them for them; and he watches upon the evil of punishment, to bring it on such for the evil of sin; as Daniel says, (Dan. 9:14) therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: and as he sometimes watches over a people to pluck up and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so he watches over them, to build and to plant (Jer. 31:28), or to do them good; he waits upon his own people to be gracious to them, and watches the set time for that purpose: his eyes are always on them, and are never withdrawn from them; they are engraved on his hands, and they are continually before him.

The Hebrew word shamar (shaw-mar'), here translated a watchman, is used of God in Psalm 121:4, 5 and is there rendered keeper, and well agrees with him who is the keeper of his Israel, both in a way of providence, and in a way of grace: he is the preserver of men, yea, the Saviour of all men, as the God of

providence, especially of them that believe; he keeps them from evil; he preserves their going out and coming in; he watches over them night and day, lest any hurt them; and indeed, except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain (Ps. 127:1): and he is the keeper of his people in a way of grace; they are sensible of their own weakness, and of their need of his power, and therefore apply to him for preservation; one says, keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me (1 Chron. 4:10); and another says, keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins (Ps. 19:13); and the Lord does preserve the souls of his faithful ones; they are kept by his power through faith unto salvation.

To all which may be added, who so proper to apply unto, to know the time of night, as to God, who hath put the times and the seasons in his own power, and who hath determined the times before appointed, for the performance of every thing that is done in this world? for to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven (Acts 1:6; 17:26; Eccles. 3:1); every thing is done as it was purposed, and at the time it should, and which is known to God; particularly the time of Christ's first coming into the world, as agreed and fixed upon between the Father and the Son, called the fulness of time (Gal. 4:4), and was known to them both, and made known in the word: and the time of his second coming is also appointed; God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Christ, and him he will show in his times; though of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels in heaven, but the Father only (Acts 27:31; 1 Tim. 6:15; Matt. 24:36). 2.

Others[8] by the watchman think Christ is meant; so the Jews[9] say, this is Metatron, the Keeper of Israel, which with them is one of the names of the Messiah and to whom this character of a watchman agrees, as he is a shepherd; one part of whose business it is to watch over the flock by night and by day: Christ does the whole work and office of a shepherd to his flock: he feeds his flock like a shepherd; he guards and protects it, as David his type did; he secures it from the lion and the bear; and being the proprietor of the flock, whose own the sheep are, will not flee as an hireling does when the wolf cometh, but expose his life to danger for them; and indeed he laid down his life for the sheep.

This character of a watchman agrees with him, as the keeper of his people; they are put into his hands, and there they are, out of which none can pluck them; they are preserved in Christ, who is able to keep them from falling, and who keeps a watchful eye over them continually, and will take care that not one of them should be lost or perish, but have everlasting life. And now, as he is the omniscient God, he knows and can declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done (Isa. 46:10).

He knew the time of his first coming into the world, and so likewise of his going out of it. Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father (John 13:1); and he knows the time of his second coming also, and of all intermediate events; of every thing that should happen from his first to his second coming; he knows the things that are, and which shall be hereafter: the book of the Revelation is called, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him to shew unto his servants, things that must shortly come to pass (Rev. 1:1); wherefore whither should we go but to him, to know what of the night it is?

But perhaps it may be thought to be too bold, too free and familiar, to address God or Christ under this character, and in such language, Watchman, what of the night?--Therefore, 3. I choose rather to join with those, who think that a prophet or minister of the word is intended by the watchman: it was usual under the Old Testament, for prophets to be called watchmen: the Prophet Isaiah was one, and perhaps is intended in verse 6, 8, and in the text; and so was Jeremiah; and so was Ezekiel; to whom it is said, Son of man, I

have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel (Ezek. 3:17).

Gospel-ministers are also called watchmen (Isa. 53:8); the watchmen shall lift up the voice, &c. and this in allusion to shepherds, which is one of their titles and characters; pastors, which God gives after his own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15); who, having taken the oversight of the flock, ought to take heed to themselves, and to that; and one part of their work is to watch in all things; and they do watch for and over the souls of men, as they that must give an account.

Moreover, they are called watchmen, in allusion to watchmen in cities, of which there are two sorts; some that go about the city, and others that are set on the walls of it; and to each of these the ministers of the word are compared in Canticles 3:3 and chapter 5:7; see also Isaiah 62:6, I have set watchmen upon thy walls, Jerusalem, &c. The qualifications for such an office are quickness of sight, vigilance, constancy, courage and faithfulness; watchmen ought to have their sight, and keep a good look out; they ought to be awake and not asleep, and constant in their post; should be men of resolution and intrepidity in time of danger, and faithful to give warning of it; and so should the ministers of the word.

Sad it is, when Zion's watchmen are blind, and yet we read of such. The four living creatures, mentioned in the book of the Revelation (Rev. 4:6, 8), are emblems of Gospel-ministers; and they are said to be full of eyes within, and before and behind; and they have need of all the eyes they have, to take heed to themselves, and to watch over others: they ought to be sober and vigilant, and in their watch-tower, and on their guard; for while men sleep, the enemy sows tares of error, heresy, and division: they should be "stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" they should watch, and stand fast in the faith, and quit themselves like men, and be strong; and they should not conceal any thing that ought to be known, or keep back that which is profitable, but declare the whole counsel of God.

Their work is to warn sinners of their evil ways, and of the danger they are in by them; to shew them what an evil and bitter thing sin is, and that the wrath of God, is revealed from heaven against it; that the wages of sin is death eternal; and that destruction and misery are in all their ways, in which they will issue, if grace prevent not; and to convince them of the worth of their precious and immortal souls, and that the loss of them is irrecoverable, and that nothing can be given in exchange for them.

Also their business is to arouse and awake sleepy saints; the wise as well, as the foolish virgins sometimes fall asleep, and it is the duty of the watchman to awake them, and let them know how unbecoming it is for persons of their characters to be asleep; they that sleep, sleep in the night;--but let us who are of the day be sober: let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch (1 Thess. 5:5-7). Children of the light and of the day, should not sleep as those who are of the night and darkness; the watchmen should tell them, it is high time to awake out of sleep, and jog them and stir them up; and if this will not do, they should "cry aloud, and spare not, and lift up their voice like a trumpet," and say, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14).

Moreover, another part of their office is, to give the time of the night: as it is the business of a watchman on the walls to look out, and if he descries an enemy, to observe his motions and advances, and give notice of approaching danger to them within the city; so it is the business of the watchmen that go about the city, as to take up strolling persons and examine them; so to give the inhabitants the hour of the night, that they may know how much of it is gone, and what is yet to come; and this is the office of the ministers of the word: the watchmen of the Old Testament, the prophets, gave the time of night then; they enquired and searched diligently, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did

signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

And so the watchmen of the New Testament, the ministers of the Gospel, it becomes them to inquire what time it now is, that they may be able in some measure to give an answer to such a question as is here put, what of the night? in order to which it is necessary to study the prophetic part of the New Testament, particularly the book of the Revelation; and which, according to its name, is a revelation, and not a secret; an open, and not a sealed book: and blessed is he that readeth this book, not only privately, but in public, in order to explain it unto others; and blessed are they that hear the words of this prophecy (Rev. 1:3) explained by their minister; so the one will be ready to ask, and the other ready to answer the question here proposed, which is the next thing to be attended to; wherefore I pass on to consider, II THE QUESTION PUT TO THE WATCHMAN, WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

AND WHICH IS REPEATED, WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT? This is usually done when persons are in a panic, or they fear the watchman did not hear them the first time; or it may denote one coming after another in a fright asking the same question. The sense is either what from the night? as the words may be rendered; what has happened since it was night? hast thou observed nothing? is the enemy near, or danger at hand? or what sayst thou concerning the night? the night of darkness and affliction in which we are, when will it be over or what time of night is it? what o'clock is it? how much of the night is there gone? and what is there that remains to come?

Now let it be observed, that there was a night both in the Jewish and Gentile world, preceding the first coming of Christ: the former dispensation was a night of darkness with the Jews themselves, in comparison of the Gospel-day, or that famous day, so much and so often spoken of in this prophecy of Isaiah; which was made by the rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings; and which reaches from the first coming of Christ unto his second coming; and of which it may be said, during that time, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2): but before this it was night; and it may be, that in reference to this, as well as to the darkness which overspread the Gentile world, and which was in a great measure removed by the preaching of the Gospel, the apostle says, the night is far spent, the day is at hand (Rom. 13:12): it is certain, however, that there was a great obscurity in the Mosaic dispensation; the law was given amidst blackness, darkness, and tempest; there was a veil over the face of Moses when he spoke unto the people; and there is another on their hearts, in reading the Old Testament, Moses and the prophets; and which remains untaken away from them to this day, but will be removed when they shall be turned to the Lord; the doctrines of grace though then delivered, yet very obscurely in types and figures; the way of salvation by Christ, and unto eternal happiness, was pointed out, but not so clearly as now; the way into the holiest of all, was not so manifest, as now the veil of the temple is rent in twain.

The shadows of the ceremonial law were stretched out at that time; the law was only a shadow of good things to come, and was not so much as the very image of them which shadows were done away, when Christ, the body and substance, was come to which the church refers, when she says, until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh., and to the hill of frankincense (Cant. 4:6). There were indeed, in this dispensation, the stars of light, the prophets, and ministers of the word to instruct the people: but then the appearance of these shows it was a night season; they had the word, which was a light unto their feet, and a lamp unto their paths; they had the scriptures, which were profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness, and able to make men wise unto salvation; they had the moon of the ceremonial law to lead them to Christ; this perhaps is meant by the moon under the

church's feet, (Rev. 12:1) one part of it lay in the observation of new moons, and its solemn festivals were governed and regulated by them; it had its spots and imperfections as the moon, and was changeable as that is; and is now done away because of the weakness and unprofitableness of it: it is true, it reflected and gave light to the saints under that dispensation; but then as the moon is the lesser light, and which rules by night, this shows it was as yet a night-season, and the day was not come; as yet the bright and morning-star had not appeared; the day-spring from on high had not visited man; and the Sun of righteousness as yet had not risen, and made the glorious Gospel-day.

It may be to this gradual progress of light, through the various dispensations of the church, Christ may have respect, when he says, who is she that looks forth as the morning, in the patriarchal state; fair as the moon, under the ceremonial law; clear as the sun, under the Gospel-dispensation ; and terrible as an army with banners, in the latter day, when she will enjoy purity of doctrine, discipline and ordinances, as well as have honor and authority? Thus it was with the Jewish church before the coming of Christ; and as to the Gentile world, it was a time of gross ignorance with them, which God winked at, overlooked, and took no notice of, or used any methods to remove; they knew not God, the one only living and true God, and much less God in Christ; they were without him, and without the Messiah, and any knowledge of him; were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise; they sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death, till Christ came a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel.

Now the question may be with respect to this night of Jewish and Gentile darkness, what of this night it was? how near it was to an end? when that would be, and the day break? There were some general rules with respect to this matter, or several prophecies which pointed to the time of Christ's coming, and served as a direction to it, and furnished with an answer to this question: the tribe of Judah was not to cease to be a tribe, nor rule and government to cease from it; it was to be the seat of it, until the Messiah came, according to Jacob's prophecy; the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come (Gen. 49:10): and by other prophecies it appears, that the second temple would not be destroyed until he came, for he was to come into it as the Lord, the owner and proprietor of it; which coming of his into it would give it a greater glory than the first temple had (Mal. 3:1; Hag. 2:7, 9).

There were frequently hints given out by the watchmen, the prophets, with relation to the coming of Christ, and to his speedy coming; when the faith of the Lord's people was almost worn out, because his coming was so long deferred; one of these watchmen is bid to say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not, behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence, and will save you (Isa. 35:4); and another when on his watch-tower, says, the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry (Hab. 2:1, 3); and another of these watchmen brings good tidings, and calls upon Zion to rejoice, saying, behold thy King cometh; he is just ready to appear, and will be here quickly, and describes him and the creature he was to ride upon (Zech. 9:9); and the last of them declares, that the Lord, and messenger of the covenant, would suddenly come to his temple (Mal. 3:1): Daniel, he fixes the very time of his coming, and says (Dan. 9:24), that seventy weeks were determined or cut out for it, even weeks of years, four hundred and ninety years from a date which he gives.

By these hints of the watchmen, and especially by the last, the people knew what time of night it was, and how long it would be to the coming of the Messiah, and lived in expectation of it. R. Nehemiah, that lived about fifty years before the coming of Christ, gave out that the time of the Messiah signified by Daniel could not be protracted longer than those fifty years;[10] and about the time that he did come, we find that

there was among the people of the Jews a general expectation of him: good old Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel; and Anna the prophetess spoke of him to them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and when John the Baptist his forerunner appeared, all the people were in expectation; and mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ or no (Luke 2:25, 38; 3:15).

It might be further observed, that as there was a night of darkness preceding the first coming of Christ, when at certain times the watchmen were applied unto, to know what time it was; and who gave several hints which were directions in this matter, and served to keep up the saints faith and expectation of it; and by which they knew in some measure whereabouts they were, and when that would be; so there will be a night of darkness which will go before both the spiritual and personal coming of Christ again, and to which this question may also relate but of this more hereafter; we shall find a more proper place for the consideration of it under the next head, to which I hasten.

III. THE WATCHMAN'S ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, THE MORNING COMETH, AND ALSO THE NIGHT: there is a morning at hand, and a night will follow; a morning of prosperity and a night of adversity; and as sure as the one comes, so sure will the other; there will be a constant succession and revolution of these unto the end of time. The first coming of Christ was as the morning; so the Jews^[11] interpret these words of the morning of redemption to the righteous, and of the night of darkness to the wicked; or as they elsewhere^[12] express it, "the morning is for the righteous, and the night for the wicked; the morning for Israel, and the night for the nations of the world;" whom they exclude from all benefit by the Messiah.

It is said of him, the righteous ruler over men, that he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds (2 Sam. 23:4); of no other can this be so well understood as of Christ; of whom it is expressly foretold, his going forth is prepared as the morning (Hos. 6:3): this was attended with joy and cheerfulness, as the morning; in a clear morning, when the sun rises, all nature looks brisk and gay, pleasant and delightful; hence those words, who is she that looks forth as the morning (Cant. 6:10)?

The news of Christ's birth, brought by the angels to the shepherds, at the time of his incarnation, were good tidings of great joy, which should be to all people (Luke 2:11). The apostles and disciples, when they first had the knowledge of him, in what an exulting manner do they express themselves, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ (John 1:41). The first preaching of the Gospel by his forerunner, by himself, and by his apostles, caused joy and gladness wherever it came with power, whether in Judea, or in the Gentile world especially the latter, and particularly in Samaria; of which place it is said, that Philip preached Christ, and there was great joy in that city (Acts 8:5, 8).

The coming of Christ dispersed the shadows of the ceremonial law; these vanished and disappeared when Christ was come, and suffered in the flesh, who was the body and substance of them; and the morning of the Gospel-dispensation dawned; and as it dispelled the darkness of the law, it introduced light. John the forerunner of Christ, was not the light itself, but he came to bear witness of the light; which is Christ, the light of the world; who brought light into it; and is that great light which shined on men sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

The gospel which came by him, and he gave his apostles to preach, is a glorious light; and this shone out and appeared to all men, Jews and Gentiles. This, like the morning-light, spread itself all over the world; the apostles had a commission to go into all the world, and preach it to every creature; and the sound of it by them did go into all the earth, and their words or doctrines unto the end of the world: before the

destruction of Jerusalem, the Gospel was preached unto all nations; one of the apostles, the apostle Paul, preached it fully from Jerusalem, round about unto Illyricum: And this, like the light of the morning, moved on irresistibly; nothing could stop it, as nothing can the morning light; it had a free course, and ran, and was glorified; notwithstanding the rage and fury of persecutors, the word of the Lord grew and multiplied; though the whole world was against it, Jews and Gentiles, the most powerful, wise and learned, it made its way, and bore down all opposition to it; the ministers of it triumphed in Christ, and diffused the savor of his knowledge, and the light of his word, in every place.

But then as sure as this morning came, so sure a night followed, and that very quickly, to the Jews; the light of the Gospel was in a little time taken from them, they despising, contradicting, and blaspheming it; even whilst Christ the light was with them, they rejected him; they loved and chose darkness rather than the light; there were only a few, a remnant according to the election of grace, that received him, the rest were blinded; and the blindness which happened to them continues unto this day, and will continue till the fulness of the Gentiles be brought in.

It has been a long night with them, and when it will be otherwise, cannot be precisely said; the veil of darkness and ignorance in reading Moses and the prophets, and especially in those things which respect the Messiah, remains untaken away; but will be done away in Christ, and be removed when they shall be converted, and turn to the Lord. And though the light of the Gospel continued longer in the Gentile world, and may be thought to have been in its meridian in the times of Constantine, yet thenceforward it visibly declined; an evening came on, a night of darkness prevailed; which was brought on in the eastern part of the world, by the arising of the false prophet Mahomet; who having the key of the bottomless pit, opened it, and let out the smoke of his false doctrine, contained in his Alkoran, by which the sun and the air were darkened; and also his locusts the Saracens, which ran over the East and spread his doctrine and worship every where (Rev. 9:1): about the same time, the man of sin, the Romish antichrist, was revealed, being come to his maturity and ripeness; and that which let or hindered his appearance, the Roman emperor, being taken out of the way; whose coming was after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:3, 7, 9, 10); and spread darkness all over the western part of the world; and then those times came on, the Spirit expressly speaks of, that many should depart from the faith; give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speak lies in hypocrisy; forbid to marry; and command to abstain from meats God has created to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:1-3); which are manifestly popish tenets.

This dark state of things is represented by the Thyatirian church-state; in which were the depths of Satan, and the blackness of popish darkness; when the woman Jezebel taught and seduced the servants of the Lord to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20, 24); and a long dismal dark night it was, which lasted till the Reformation. But when the Reformation came on, another morning appeared; and which is expressed by the morning star (Rev. 2:29), promised to the overcomers of the errors and superstitions of the Thyatirian state; and which the Sardian church-state brought in: then the Gospel broke out in a most glorious manner, and spread itself like the morning-light, swiftly and irresistibly, over these Western parts, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, and these isles of Great Britain and Ireland, and other places; and brought with it great joy and gladness every where; and things went on in a very comfortable and promising manner; and it looked as if the old apostolical times were coming over again; and indeed the first Reformers proposed to go upon the plan of the apostles' doctrine and practice: hence part of the same character is taken by the writer to this church of Sardis, as to the church at Ephesus, which represented the truly apostolic church; these things, saith he

that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars (Rev. 2:1; 3:1); for great gifts were now bestowed on men, and who shone as stars in Christ's right hand; but then it is not added, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; for though the first Reformers went a great way in restoring true doctrine, they yet fell short in reforming the discipline of the churches, and therefore their works were not found perfect before God: there were many bright Gospel-ministers, but few, if any churches formed according to the primitive model; and in process of time, there was an entire stand put to the Reformation itself, and things went backwards instead of forwards; and of late years, there has been a very visible decline; and a night is coming on, which we are entered into; the shadows of the evening are stretching out apace upon us, and the signs of the eventide are very manifest, and which will shortly appear yet more and more.

A sleepy frame of spirit has seized us; both ministers and churches are asleep; and being so, the enemy is busy in sowing the tares of errors and heresies, and which will grow up and spread yet more and more. Coldness and indifference in spiritual things, a want of affection to God, Christ, his people, truths and ordinances, may easily be observed: the first love is left; iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold, and it will wax yet colder and colder; and will issue in a general forsaking of assembling together, and in an entire neglect of the ministers of the Gospel; when such who have been professors themselves will be shy of them, and carefully shun them; will not care to own them, or speak to them, and much less receive them into their houses and still less hear them; which, I think, is meant by, or at least is one part of the meaning of the dead bodies of the witnesses not being suffered to be put unto graves (see my Exposition of Rev. 11:9); the sun of the Gospel will be set, and its light for a while wholly withdrawn; the witnesses will be slain, their dead bodies lie unburied, and so cease prophesying, their testimony being finished; this will be a dismal dark night indeed; only it will be a short one.

If it should be asked, what time it is with us now? whereabouts we are? and what is yet to come of this night? As a faithful watchman, I will give you the best account I can: I take it, we are in time Sardinian church-state, in the latter part of it, which, as before observed, brought on the Reformation, and represents that; we are in the decline of that state: and there are many things said of that church which agree with us; as that we have a name; that we live and are dead; the name of the reformed churches, but without the life and power of true religion; and that there are a few, and but a few names among us, even in our Sardis, which have not defiled their garments (Rev. 3:1, 4) with false doctrine or superstitious worship.

The times we live in are just such as are described in Zechariah 14:6, 7, that the light shall not be clear nor dark, but it shall be one day, which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night: not clear, not full day, as at noon, as it was in the times of Christ and his apostles; when the Sun of righteousness was risen, and the shadows of Jewish and Gentile darkness vanished, and the Gospel shone out in the ministry of the apostles when the church had on her head a crown of twelve stars, was clothed with the sun, and had the moon under her feet: nor is it so clear day with us as even at the Reformation; for though there may be some ministers and churches which may have more clear, distinct, and evangelic light than there was at that time; yet take the Protestant churches in the bulk, and there is not so much light now as then; nor is it such clear day as it will be in the spiritual reign of Christ, when will be the brightness of Zion's rising; not to take notice of the kingdom-state during the thousand years, which will be all day and no night; nor of the ultimate glory, the inheritance of the saints in light: and yet it is not totally dark, or quite night; not so dark as it was with the Jews under the former dispensation, who could not see to the end of that which was to be abolished; much less as it was with the Gentiles before the coming of Christ; or as in the dark times of popery; nor as it will be at the eventide of the present dispensation we are under, before described; it is a sort of a twilight with us, between clear and dark, between day and night.

As to what of the night is yet to come, or what will befall the churches, and will bring on the dismal night before us; they are, the slaying of the witnesses, and the universal spread of popery all over Christendom; and the latter is the unavoidable consequence of the former. The slaying of the witnesses, which I understood not so much in a literal sense, or of a corporal death; though there may be many slain in this sense when it will be but in a civil sense, with respect to their ministry, being silenced by their enemies, and neglected by their friends; this is an affair that is not yet over: some have thought that it is, and that the prophecy of it had its accomplishment in the burning of the protestants in Queen Mary's time, which lasted about three years and a half; or, according to others, in King James the II's reign, which was about such a length of time; but this is not at all likely, since then the witnesses had liberty granted them to prophesy: it is more likely, that it should be fulfilled in the case of the protestants of the valleys of Piedmont, who were driven out from thence for nonconformity to the Romish religion by the duke of Savoy; and who recalled and reestablished them by an edict just three years and a half after; but these instances, with others which are proposed, were only hints or pledges of what, is hereafter to be done: these were at most only partial slayings of the witnesses; whereas this will be universal; it will not be in one place only, but every where, wherever there are any.

Besides, the outward court must be given to the Gentiles, ere the witnesses, which are in the inward court, can be come at and slain, which is not yet done. The Gentiles are the papists; the outward court is the bulk of the Reformed churches, which will fall into the hands of the papists again; since the Reformation has been at a stand, and things have been upon the decline, the papists have got ground, and have regained some part of the outward court, as in Germany, Poland, &c.

But they have not as yet got the whole into their hands, as they will, and which they must, ere they can make this universal slaughter of the witnesses: an house that has an outward court, or a courtyard unto it, the court is a fence to the house, and there is no coming at the one without entering the other; and so all churches established by the laws of the countries where they are, or all those civil and worldly establishments, are fences and guards about the witnesses; so long as these are out of the hands of the papists, they cannot come at the witnesses, they are safe; but when these are once gained over, then they will be slain, and not till then.

Moreover, the witnesses have not yet finished their testimony; they are still prophesying, though in sackcloth, or under some discouragements; whereas it will be when they have finished their testimony, and at the close of the 1260 days or years of antichrist's reign, that they will be killed. And had they been slain at any of the times before-mentioned, they would have risen long before now; for the time between their death and rising is but three days and a half, that is, three years and a half; they would have ascended up to heaven before now, which denotes a most glorious state of the church; and the ruin of antichrist would have come on long before this time; for that will immediately follow the rising and ascension of these witnesses (see aforementioned Rev.

Exposition); for at the same hour that they shall ascend, will be a great earthquake, or a revolution in the papal state, and the tenth part of the city, or of the Romish jurisdiction, shall fall; that is, one of its ten horns, kings or kingdoms belonging to it, and perhaps the kingdom of France is meant; and seven thousand men of name will be slain, and the rest be affrighted, and give glory to God (Rev. 11:13 and Exposition); nothing of which has as yet been done: to which may be added, that upon the fulfillment of the above things, the second woe will pass away, and the third woe will take place; the second woe brought the Saracens and Turks into the empire, and the passing away of it relates to the destruction of the Turkish empire, or will issue in that; for when that is over, the Turkish empire will be at an end; whereas it

is still in being, and in great power; and the third woe, or the sounding of the seventh trumpet, will bring on the kingdom of Christ; but as yet, there is no appearance of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.

From all which it may be concluded, that the slaying of the witnesses is yet to come, and will make the dismal part of that night we are entering into, and which will be accompanied with an universal spread of popery: popery will be once more the reigning, prevailing religion in Christendom; and indeed how should it otherwise be? For when the witnesses will be slain, there will be none to oppose the power and progress of it; there will be an universal triumph among the inhabitants of the earth; the popish party upon this will rejoice, and send gifts to one another; the outward court being in their hands, and the witnesses slain (Rev. 11:10): and that mystical Babylon, or the whore of Rome, will be in statu quo, and in all her glory and grandeur at the time of her destruction, is evident from her saying, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow; every thing now being according to her wishes; having regained all her former power and glory, and nothing to fear from the witnesses who had before tormented her, they now being slain; but her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire (Rev. 18:7-8): even in the ruff of all her glory; which does not seem to comport with her present state and circumstances: she will have more flesh upon her than now she seems to have, when the kings shall hate her, and make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire (Rev. 17:16): before the utter destruction of antichrist, he shall go forth again with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many; yea, he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain, or the mountain of delight, of holiness; and what place is there in all the globe, to which this description so well answers as Great Britain?

This will be done before, and but a little before his ruin; for it follows, yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him (Dan. 11: 44, 45). And I am the more confirmed in all this, by the present appearances of things in the world; as, the very great increase of popery in our own land, and in other countries; for though the Pope of Rome, as a secular prince, and with respect to the exercise of his power and authority as such, is not what he was, and is much declining, and has not that regard paid him by the kings of the earth as formerly; yet popery itself is far from being on the decline, or losing ground: as also the great departure of the reformed churches, so called, from the doctrines and principles of the reformation; and even of protestant dissenters, who are gone, and are going more and more into doctrines and practices which naturally verge and lead to popery: to which may be added, the various sects which within a few years have sprung up among us; the doctrines and practices of some of them being similar to those of the church of Rome: I will not say that in general they have it in view and design to encourage and increase the Romish religion; yet I am very jealous that this is the view of some; but be this as it will, I am very much of opinion, that these things will at last issue in popery; and that some of those persons will be suffered as instruments to spread it, both here, and in all our colonies and plantations abroad.

Now in all that I have said upon the whole, I do not pretend to any extraordinary impulse from God, or to any prophetic spirit, but I ground all upon the word of God; and if what I have said does not appear from thence, and upon the face of things in providence, I have no pretensions to any thing else to support my opinion with; and as such only I deliver it. But then after this dark night, There will be another morning, the spiritual reign of Christ, which the Philadelphian church-state will introduce; and a bright glorious morning it will be; when it shall be said to the church, Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee; and then the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days (Isa. 60:1; 30:26): then will the witnesses rise and ascend to

heaven; then will the vials of God's wrath be poured out upon the antichristian states, and the kings of the earth will hate the whore and burn her with fire and then the gospel will be spread every where; there will be an open door for it, and none will be able to shut it; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased; the earth will be filled with it, as the waters cover the sea; the watchmen will see, eye to eye, all truths very clearly, distinctly, and in agreement with one another; multitudes will be converted every where; and churches set up according to gospel-order in every place; the doctrines of the gospel will be purely preached; its ordinances administered as they were first received from Christ, and gospel-discipline strictly attended to; the fulness of the Gentiles will now be brought in, and the nation of the Jews born at once.

It will be a time of great joy and gladness to the saints: now will those voices be heard in heaven, the church, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; the four and twenty elders, the representatives of gospel-churches, will fall upon their faces, and give thanks to Christ, because he has taken to himself his great power and reigns; those that have got the victory over the beast and his image, will stand upon the sea of glass, with harps in their hands, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb; the voice of much people will be heard, saying, Allelujah, salvation, and glory, and honour and power, to the Lord our God; both because of his judgments on the great whore, and the revenging of the blood of his servants at her hand, and because the marriage of the Lamb will be come (Rev. 11:15-17; 15:1-2; 19:1-8): it will be a time of great prosperity, both temporal and spiritual; in those days of Christ's spiritual reign, the righteous will flourish, both in things outward and inward; and abundance of peace, both from without and from within, shall be had as long as the moon endures: Christ shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth; kings shall bring presents to him, shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him; for kings will now come with their subjects, to the brightness of the church, and embrace the doctrines, and submit to the ordinances of it, and will be nursing fathers unto it (Ps. 72:7, 8, 10, 11; Isa. 60:3; 49:23): and yet as sure as this morning comes, A night will follow; not of persecution of the churches of Christ; for after the slaying of the witnesses, there will be no more persecution; but a night of coldness, deadness, sleepiness, and carnal security, brought in by the Laodicean state; of which church Christ complains, that it was neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, and therefore threatens to spue her out of his mouth (Rev. 3:15, 16); that is, unchurch her: and indeed after that, he will have no other church on earth in an imperfect state, for that will issue in his personal coming; and with this entirely agrees the account our Lord gives of men at that time, that there will be little grace in exercise; when he comes he will find scarce any faith on the earth, in exercise on himself: and with respect to his coming, these days will be like the days of Noah and Lot, when men were eating and drinking, and marrying, and giving in marriage, and had no thought of what was coming upon them (Luke 17:26-29; 18:8): this will be the last night to the church; and then, Another morning will come, when Christ, the bright and morning star, shall appear, and bring on that day, which will last a thousand years, and which thousand years will be as one day.

Upon Christ's personal coming, the dead in him will rise first; they will have dominion in the morning of this day, the morning of the resurrection, which will now take place; for the rest of the dead will not live till the evening of this day, or rather till the thousand years are ended. And in this state, there will be no need of the sun, or of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof; the sun shall be no more the light of men by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light; but the Lord shall be an everlasting light, and the days of mourning shall be ended (Rev.21:23; Isa. 60:19, 20); there will be no night in this state, no setting of the sun, or withdrawing of the moon; and after this, there will be no more night to the saints but there will be an everlasting one to the wicked; who will rise at

the end of the thousand years, and be judged, and be cast into the lake of fire, into outer darkness, even blackness of darkness, where will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Thus there will be a constant succession of morning and night, unto the end of time; which will issue in an everlasting day to some, and in an everlasting night to others.[13] I now proceed, IV. TO THE EXHORTATION UPON ALL THIS; IF YE WILL ENQUIRE, ENQUIRE YE; RETURN, COME. If you will enquire about the time of night, and when the morning will come, enquire in good earnest; enquire seriously; search the scripture; look into the prophetic parts of it; the several prophecies of the Old and New Testament, respecting both the spiritual and personal coming of Christ, and particularly the book of the Revelation; which is a prophetic history of events, that should befall the church and the world, from the first times of Christianity to the end of all things; many of which have been fulfilled, and others remain to be fulfilled: carefully read over these accounts, and get the best help you can from those who have made it their study to understand, and explain the things written therein; whereby you will in some measure know what is come to pass, and what is yet behind.

And to reading add prayer and supplication, as Daniel did; who, after he had understood by books, by reading the prophecies of Jeremiah, when would be the end of the Babylonish captivity, the night he and his people were then in; set his face to seek the Lord by prayer and supplication, and had the time of the Messiah's coming made known to him (Dan. 9:2-4): and whilst you are enquiring either after the spiritual reign of Christ, or his second coming to judgment, enquire with modesty and humility; not indulging a vain curiosity, or looking into things that you ought not, and which are not written; or fixing times and seasons which God has put in his own power.

Return to the Lord by faith and repentance, from whom you have backslidden in doctrine and practice; who invites you so to do with promises of a gracious reception, and with the healing of all your backslidings: as you are of the Sardian church, hear what is said unto you; be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die;--remember her how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent (Rev. 3:2, 3); remember from whom and from what you have gone back; and do your first works of faith and love, and hold fast the old doctrines of the Reformation, then heard and received, and abide by them.

Come to the Lord as humble penitents; let backsliders come for the fresh application of pardoning grace and mercy; let sensible sinners come to the person, blood and righteousness of Christ for justification and salvation; let them come to his word, and to his ordinances; The Spirit and the bride say, Come ; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17); and such who come to Christ aright, will hear another day those words spoken to them; Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). ENDNOTES

[1] Vid. Zach. 9:1, 9 and chapter 12:1, 10.

[2] Revelation 17:1, 3 and chapter 5 and 19:11-20, and 18:2, 4.

[3] Vid. Hiller, Onomasticon Sacr. P. 797.

[4] Josephus Antiquities 1:13 c. 9.

[5] In loc.

[6] Vid. Buxtorf Lexic. Talmud col. 30, 31 &c.

[7] So Jarchi and Abardinol in loc.

[8] Cocceius in loc.

[9] Zohar, in Exod. fol. 54:2.

[10] Apud. Grotium de Veritat. Rel. Christ, 1, 5 & 24.

[11] Gloss. in T. Bab. Bava Kama. fol. 3. 2.

[12] T. Hieros Taaniot. fol. 64. 1.

[13] So the Targum paraphrases these words, "the prophet said, there is a reward for the righteous, and there is vengeance for the wicked;" taking them to relate to the world to come.

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