

The Introduction; With a Particular Consideration of That First Prophecy, Respecting the Messiah, Recorded in Genesis 3:15.

by John Gill

The sermon explores the first prophecy respecting the Messiah, recorded in Genesis 3:15, and how it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:70, Luke 24:27, John 5:39, Acts 10:43, Acts 26:22-23, Hebrews 2:14, 1 Peter 1:10-11, Revelation 12:9

Topics: "Redemption", "Prophecy"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of the first prophecy regarding the Messiah found in Genesis 3:15, which foretells the enmity between the serpent and the woman's seed. He explains that this prophecy not only highlights the coming of Jesus Christ but also affirms the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament, reinforcing the truth of the Christian faith. Gill discusses the nature of the serpent as a representation of Satan and the implications of the curse pronounced upon it, illustrating the ultimate victory of Christ over sin and evil. He asserts that the Messiah's role includes the forgiveness of sins and the destruction of Satan's power, which is central to the gospel message. The sermon concludes by affirming that the promise of salvation was made immediately after the fall, showcasing God's grace and plan for redemption.

Transcript

The Prophecies Respecting the Messiah

CHAPTER I.

The Introduction; with a particular consideration of that first prophecy, respecting the MESSIAH, recorded in Genesis 3:15.

Though the prophecies of the Old Testament, concerning the Messiah, which have had their exact completion in Jesus, are not the only proofs of the truth of the Christian Religion; there being many others, namely, the nature, importance, and tendency of the doctrines of the gospel, the verity and reality of facts

recorded in the New Testament, such as the miracles of Christ, his resurrection from the dead, &c., yet are they real and unquestionable ones, and such as deserve our particular consideration; especially seeing Christ, and his apostles, so frequently appealed to them, to confirm the truth of what they delivered.

Salvation by Jesus Christ, is the great doctrine of the gospel, and the sum and substance of the Christian Religion, of which salvation, says the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 1:10, 11), the prophets have enquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified, before-hand, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. One main and principal branch of this salvation, is the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ; now to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43); and indeed Jesus and his apostles said (Acts 26:22, 23), none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

It was the common and usual practice of Christ to direct his hearers to search the scriptures of the Old Testament, they are they, says he (John 5:39, 46), which testify of me; yea he expressly says that Moses wrote of him; he always spoke of his sufferings, and of several circumstances of them, as predicted by the prophets; and therefore after his resurrection, in order to lead his disciples into a thorough acquaintance with these things (Luke 24:27, 44), beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself, and declared that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning him.

The marks and characters of the Messiah, as fixed by the prophets, in the Old Testament, are very plain and visible in Jesus, which have been no small confirmation of the faith, hope, and joy, of those who have believed in him. Hence, says (John 1:45) Philip to Nathanael, these two being some of the first that believed in him, and whose hearts were filled with joy at the first notice of him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now though this kind of proof is not the only foundation of the Christian Religion, yet it must be esteemed a very considerable part of it, for we who believe in Jesus, are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, which foundation a late author has endeavoured to undermine, in several (A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, &c; The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered, &c.; Letter to Dr.

Rogers, &s.) tracts on this subject of prophecy. Wherefore it highly becomes those who have any value for Jesus, the Redeemer, to attempt the rescuing of it, against such bold attacks, and daring insults, upon the best and most excellent religion in the world. I am sensible that several prophecies have been already, in this present controversy, very learnedly and judiciously discussed, and sufficiently cleared from those exceptions which have been made against them, as also am conscious of my own weakness and inability to engage in such a work; yet, having the Redeemer's glory at heart, and being fully assured of the goodness of the cause, as well as willing to contribute what I can towards the securing the honour of Jesus, the confirmation of believers, and conviction of infidels, I have undertaken the consideration of the prophecies of the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, which are either cited as such in the New, or are generally, by Christian interpreters, referred to him; and shall attempt to prove, that they truly and properly belonged to the Messiah, and have been actually and exactly fulfilled in Jesus, which must be no inconsiderable evidence of the truth of the Christian Religion.

I shall begin with Genesis 3:15, which is the first prophecy respecting the Messiah, of whom in the volume of the book, in the first roll thereof, in the head or beginning of the book of God, it was written, that he should do the will of God; which was no other than to destroy Satan the old serpent, with his works, and rescue sinful and miserable man out of his hands, pursuant to this original prophecy, which was given quickly after man's apostasy from God, and stands at the head and front of the Bible, from the giving forth of which, the Messiah has been spoken of by the mouth of all God's holy prophets, which have been since the world began (Luke 1:70).

Now this, and the preceding verse, contain the judiciary sentence pronounced by God upon the serpent, for his concern in the apostasy of man from his Creator, of the real causes of which, and what artful methods were used to effect it, together with the dreadful consequences thereof, a particular account is given in this chapter. But for the better and more full explanation of those words, it will be proper to consider these two things. Who, or what is meant by the serpent, on whom this sentence is pronounced.

The several parts and branches of that sentence. First, It will be proper to consider who, or what is meant by the serpent. That a true and real serpent, and not the mere appearance or image of one is here intended, is manifest, from its being reckoned among the beasts of the field, (ver. 1), from that cunning and subtlety which are there ascribed so it, and which are remarkably eminent in this creature, as also from the nature of the curse denounced against it, which was to go upon its belly and eat dust all the days of its life.

These words cannot be understood solely, and alone, of a real serpent, but of Satan, in it, and with it, and of that only, as used and actuated by him, he being the principal, this only the instrument, as will appear from the following considerations. 1. Speech is ascribed to it, which is peculiar to rational creatures; for the opinion of Philo, Josephus, Aben Ezra and others, that beasts, in their original, and primeval state, were endued with a faculty of speaking, must be rejected as entirely fabulous: but this may well be understood of Satan speaking in the serpent, whose common practice has been to utter voices in persons possessed by him; nay, to give forth oracles from the Gentile idols, things inanimate, and may as well be supposed to form articulate words in the mouth of the serpent, as the angel of the Lord did in the mouth of Balaam's ass. 2.

This serpent appears to be endued with reason and understanding; here is a design formed by him against the glory of God and the happiness of man, managed with all the subtlety and contrivance imaginable, as well as malice and envy, which are very visible throughout his whole conduct, and can never be applicable to an irrational creature. 3. It is not reasonable to suppose, that human nature, as endued with reason, knowledge, and wisdom, even in its full strength and glory, could be outwitted, seduced and overcome, by a creature so mean and inferior to it. 4.

The writings of the New Testament always refer the deception of mankind, to the malice and cunning of Satan and that often, under the name of a serpent (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 9:3; Rev. 12:9). 5. Though these writings are of no account with Jews and Deists, yet the sense of the former, respecting what we have now under consideration, perfectly agrees with them; many of their chiefest masters acknowledge, that Satan accompanied the serpent, was in him, was the cause of the ruin and destruction of mankind, and was principally intended in the curse, which also appears from the names they give the serpent, which signify the God that hath blinded, to which the apostle has some regard, when he says (2 Cor. 4:4), speaking of Satan, the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not: also they call him the Angel of Death, because he was the cause of death to Adam, and all the world; to this the apostle

refers, when he tells us (Heb. 2:14), that Jesus came to destroy him that had the power of death, that is the Devil.

Moreover, nothing is more usual with them than to call Satan, the old serpent, which is the very name St. John gives him (Rev. 7:9. and 20:2), and no doubt takes its rise from this history of the serpent in Genesis. But, Secondly, I shall now consider the several parts of the curse denounced against the serpent, which are these, namely, to be the most accursed of all creatures, to go upon its belly, to eat the dust of the earth, and live in a continual enmity with mankind, to which, though it would be hurtful, yet man should have the advantage over it; all which has been exactly fulfilled in it; for the serpent is the most hateful of all creatures, and, however erect its posture might he before the execution of this sentence, it is certain that now it is a reptile upon the earth; the dust of which is its food: and between which and man there is a real enmity; man abhors the sight of a serpent, and a serpent abhors the sight of man, and though it may secretly, and at unawares, bite the heels of men, yet man has the advantage over it so as he can easily bruise and crush its head, which, being most in danger, it is most careful to guard.

Now, the infliction of this upon the serpent is no ways unreasonable, since it was used by Satan as an instrument to bring about his vile and wicked designs; besides, by this curse, God shewed the more his detestation of the sin of Satan, in ruining mankind, and how much it was displeasing to him; seeing he would not suffer either principal or instrument to escape; for it must not be supposed that this curse only regarded this brute creature, but that it was chiefly designed against Satan, the sole projector and conductor of the whole affair; for it would not be agreeable to the justice of God, to inflict this on the instrument and let the principal go free; nor would there be any proportion between the sentence against man and the serpent, if this concerned the serpent only, which will appear more manifest, by considering the several parts of the sentence, and how they have been executed upon Satan.

First, One part of the curse is that he should go upon his belly, which is periphrasis of creeping upon the earth, and is aptly expressive of the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, being cast out of heaven into the earth, and his angels with him; where he now has his abode and rules in the hearts of men, for which reason he is called, the God and prince of this world, being never able to rise higher, and regain his place, and first estate in the highest heavens, which is no small part of his punishment.

Secondly, Another part of the curse denounced against him is, his eating the dust of the earth, which designs the mean and abject condition in which Satan now is, who does not, as formerly, feed upon angels' food, the joys of heaven, but entertains himself with base mean and earthly lusts, in which that impure spirit delights. Moreover, it may also intend the very great subjection of Satan, not only to Christ, the King of kings, who has led captivity captive, but even to the meanest of his people, under whose feet the God of peace will shortly bruise him, which is no small mortification to that proud spirit: Thus the phrase of licking the dust of the earth is used in Psalm 72:9 and Micah 7:17.

Thirdly, As a further degree of punishment to him, it is threatened by God that he would put enmity between him and the woman, between his seed and her seed: the meaning of which is, that the woman, into whose affections he had insinuated himself, and with whom he had so much familiar conversation, now seeing how much she had been imposed upon, and seduced by him, to the ruin of herself and posterity, should be filled with an enmity to him, which should be placed in her, as a punishment of him, and which enmity should not center in her only, but be transmitted to her seed, by which must be meant more especially the Messiah, who, by way of eminency, may be called the seed of the woman, who should oppose himself to Satan, and his seed, the evil angels, and the whole race of wicked and ungodly men,

which would hate and persecute both him and his people.

Fourthly, For the filling up the measure of his just punishment it is promised that an entire victory over him should be gained by the woman's seed, it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel, for this word it manifestly refers to the woman's seed, by which is intended the Messiah; nor can it be any just objection, to the application of it to him, that the word seed is a collective word, seeming it is often used to design a single person, as in Genesis 4:25, chapter 15:2, and chapter 21:13.

That this is to be understood of him, will appear more evident, if we consider the following things: First, That the person spoken of, is called the seed of the woman, and not of the man, which can agree with no other than the Messiah, who was to be born of a virgin, as was afterwards more clearly revealed by Isaiah 7:14. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel; which was fulfilled in Jesus, who was truly the seed of the woman, and of her only, being made of a woman, and not begotten by man, but was conceived in the womb of the virgin, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, The word which is here rendered "it", is one of the names of God, and is so used in Psalm 102:27 but thou art the same, thou art HE. See also Isaiah 48:12, and thus the Jews frequently use it, nay, in Zohar they apply it to the eternal and blessed God, bruising the serpent's head, as expressed in this text, which well agrees with Jesus, who is the unchangeable, eternal, and omnipotent HE, who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever, the true alpha and omega, the first and the last, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Thirdly, The work he was to do deserves consideration, and proves the person spoken of, to be the Messiah, which was to bruise the serpent's head, that is, to destroy Satan and all his works, set aside all his craft and cunning, crush all his machinations and designs, and overturn his whole empire; now this is frequently spoke of in the Old Testament, as the Messiah's work; and, in some places, a peculiar reference seems to be had to this original prophecy; as in Psalm 110:6, which psalm solely belongs to the Messiah, where it is thus prophesied of him, he shall wound the heads over many countries, which may be thus rendered, he shall wound the head, that is, him that is the head, or ruler, over a large country, which is no other than Satan, the god and prince of this world, who was to be wounded, bruised, and destroyed, by the Messiah.

Again in Habakkuk 3:13 it is said, Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine Anointed; thou woundest the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selak. Which agreeable to Kimchi's reading and comment, who expounds it of the Messiah, may be thus paraphrased, "As thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, when they entered into the land of Canaan; so wilt thou go forth for the salvation of thy people, by the hands of Messiah, the son of David, who shall wound Satan, who is the head, the king and prince of the house of the wicked, and shall raise up all his strength, power, policy, and dominion."

Now all this well agrees with Jesus; who has destroyed Satan, got an entire conquest over him, has spoiled principalities and powers, and subverted his whole empire. Fourthly, The sufferings of the Messiah, are very fitly expressed by the serpent's bruising his heel: Some by his heel, understand his people, here on earth; and by bruising it, those persecutions which Satan and his emissaries are continually raising against, and afflicting them with; though it rather seems to intend his human nature, which as the divine nature is the head and chief in Christ, this is the heel, the inferior and lowest nature in him, which was frequently exposed to Satan's insults, temptations and persecutions, and what he

particularly struck at, and at length so far succeeded as to bring him to a shameful and ignominious death, the iniquity of his heels, the sins of his people, which he bore in his own body on the tree, then compassing him about.

Fifthly, Several Jewish writers have understood this clause of the Messiah, and particularly the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem; the former of which in his paraphrase of it says, there shall be healing for the heel, in the days of the king Messiah; and much to the same purpose says the latter. The Targum of Onkelos, seems well to express the secret, spiteful, malicious, and insidious manner, in which Satan attacked the Messiah, in the end of the world by paraphrasing the words thus, he shall remember thee what thou didst to him of old, and thou shalt observe or watch him in the end.

Though later Jews oppose the application of it to the Messiah, especially to Jesus, and two things are chiefly objected by them. First, that Jesus did not bruise or destroy Satan, but rather Satan was the procuring cause of the death of Jesus; to which I reply, that Satan so far gained his point, as to bring about the death of Jesus, we Christians do not deny, but then we assert, that Jesus, through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, by which we do not mean an annihilation of his being, but a dispossessing him of his power, a confounding of his schemes and projects, a destruction of his works, and a subjection of him to Christ, the triumphant conqueror, who has ascended on high, and led captivity captive.

Secondly, they object that Satan still retains a power over persons; and that the apostle Paul himself acknowledges, that he hindered him and others from coming to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:18, and that in Rom. 16:20), the same apostle speaks of Satan, as to be bruised, under the feet, of the followers of Jesus, and not as already bruised: to which I answer, that Satan indeed has often a permission from Christ, to do many things which tend to the disquietude and discomfort of his people; but yet he can go no further than he has leave, which shows that he is entirely conquered by Christ, and in subjection to him; and though he is not fully and completely bruised under the feet of saints, yet is he under the feet of Jesus, who has spoiled principalities and powers and made a shew of them openly..

A late author objects (SLP, p. 239), that though Jesus might bruise the devil's head, or triumph over him, yet Jesus was the only person, that ever was born, whose heel the devil could not bruise, or over whom the devil could not triumph, by any attack, whatsoever. But I have already shewn in what sense Christ's heel was bruised, by the devil, and how he, and his emissaries triumphed over him, having nailed him to the cross, and laid and secured him in the grave: But this triumph did not last long, for though he was crucified through weakness, he liveth by the power of God, though his heel was bruised, his head could not be; for though he was dead, he is now alive, and will live for evermore.

In fine, from this first prophecy, we learn, that the Messiah was to be incarnate, born of a woman, and not begotten by man; that he was to suffer and die; as also, that he was to destroy Satan and his works, which Jesus has done: And it may be observed, that salvation was proclaimed, as soon as sin was committed, and a prophecy of a Messiah given forth as soon as there was any need of one.

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