

The eschatology of the Calvinistic Baptist John Gill (1697-1771) examined and compared¹

Barry H. Howson

One of the enduring figures of Baptist history is the eighteenth-century Calvinist John Gill whose commentaries, treatises and systematic theology continue to be published. In the past fifty years numerous articles, books and dissertations have been written on Gill's theology.² For example, in a recent work entitled, *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, edited by Michael Haykin, Gill's doctrine of baptism, his spirituality, his view of the law, his soteriology, and his ecclesiology were examined.³ However, as in past studies there is little discussion of Gill's eschatology in this otherwise excellent work. This, I believe, is an unfortunate omission not only for a full account of Gill's thought but also for a better understanding of eighteenth-century English evangelicalism.⁴ For these reasons alone a study of Gill's eschatology is certainly warranted. Recently, this omission has been answered with an article by Crawford Gribben entitled, "John Gill and Puritan Eschatology." Using Gill's *Body of Divinity*, Gribben has published an excellent study of Gill's eschatology in relation to seventeenth-century puritan eschatology.⁵

Why, then, the need for a further examination of this subject? First, our study will be a more thorough examination of Gill's eschatology using his commentaries and treatises as well as his *Body of Divinity*. Second, we will compare Gill's eschatology with the postmillennial eschatology of Andrew Fuller (1754- 1815), the

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most important Baptist theologian next to Gill, of the eighteenth century. Postmillennialism was present from the early part of the seventeenth century, and by Gill's day was the dominant eschatological teaching in England and America.⁶

It later became one of the motivating forces behind the modern missionary movement beginning with the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist William Carey.⁷ Therefore, since Gill is the premier eighteenth-century Particular Baptist theologian we must examine his eschatology to see how it differs from the dominant theology in this tradition in the eighteenth century.

A third reason for a further examination of Gill's eschatology is missiological. It is undoubtedly true that eschatological beliefs affect one's actions and even one's overall theology. This is obvious from studies that have been done on religion and politics in seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century America.⁸

It is also true of nineteenth-and twentieth-century eschatology in modern evangelicalism.⁹ One excellent example is William Carey (1761-1834) and the Baptist Missionary Society. One important reason that the Society was founded and that Carey went to India was his hope of the fulfilment of the latter-day glory. Andrew Fuller, John Sutcliff (1752-1814), John Ryland Jr (1753-1825) and Carey believed the millennium was about to dawn with the conversion of the Gentiles as promised in Romans 11. Consequently, Carey believed Christians should "concur with God" in promoting His work and ultimately fulfilling His promise of the world-wide conversion of the heathen.¹⁰ Their eschatology was a major factor in their missionary endeavours. Did Gill's eschatology affect his actions in evangelism and missions concerning the conversion of the heathen? James De Jong believes that it did in

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two contradictory ways. He states that Gill's eschatology "undoubtedly contributed to [the] rebirth of missions" among Particular Baptists in the 1790s but that some of his eschatology also "fostered a complacency regarding their responsibility in influencing the course of history" and so their involvement in the missionary endeavours of the same period.¹¹ Is De Jong's statement true? Did Gill's eschatology affect his missiology? And if it is true, his eschatology would not only affect his own thoughts and actions regarding missions but it probably influenced many readers of his generation and the next. We know that his eschatological writings were read by many even into the nineteenth-century, and so his eschatological views through his works affected succeeding generations.¹² For example, John Ryland Sr. (1723-1792) was one of Gill's friends whose concept of world missions and evangelism was affected by Gillite eschatology. In September 1785 he was purported to have said to William Carey (the father of modern missions) concerning the latter's suggestion of world evangelism, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."¹³ This statement is often seen as resulting from his High Calvinism, but it certainly has as much to do with his eschatology as it does his soteriology. Ryland was one of the many in that day whose eschatology influenced his concept of world missions.¹⁴ Concerning the influence of Gill's eschatology, John Rippon (1751-1836), Gill's biographer and pastoral successor, wrote in the early nineteenth century,

[Gill's] single Sermons, on this subject [sacred prediction], have been, of late years, some of the most popular of his

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works; and their deserved value has caused them to pass through several editions. These Sermons, with the two folio volumes on the Prophets, and his Exposition of the Revelation, have gained him unfading honours, and induced such who have made those parts of the divine writings their study, to say, that if the works of Dr. Gill pre-eminently embrace almost every branch of sacred theology, *prophecy is his forte*.¹⁵

His influence in eschatology was so great among Baptists that during the Second Great Awakening they either followed his or Andrew Fuller's perspective.¹⁶ Gill's eschatology for missiological reasons therefore needs a thorough examination.

For the above reasons a further study of Gill's eschatology is certainly warranted. This essay, therefore, will examine Gill's eschatology by presenting a systematic overview of it¹⁷, and in conclusion briefly compare his eschatology with that of his fellow Calvinistic Baptist Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) to see the differences between their two perspectives.

I. Systematic overview¹⁸

In this section we will examine the end-time events as Gill perceived they would unfold chronologically. These events include Christ's spiritual reign, his personal reign, the resurrection of the dead, conflagration of the world, the new heavens and new earth, the millennium, the last and general judgement, the final state of the wicked in Hell, and that of the saints in heaven. Before unfolding Gill's eschatology it is necessary to briefly note the way he viewed history from the time of Christ's ascension to the ultimate glory in heaven. Gill believed that Christ reigns at all times

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over all things. After Christ's ascension and the initial Churchage there are two future prophetic historical epochs to be fulfilled before Christ's reign in ultimate glory.¹⁹ The first epoch Gill calls Christ's "spiritual reign" or the "latter day glory", and the second he calls Christ's "personal reign."²⁰

Spiritual reign²¹

Gill believed that the spiritual reign of Christ had not yet dawned when he wrote his *Body of Divinity*. It would, however, take place "upon the rising and ascending, of the witnesses [Rev. 11] into heaven ... [and] be introduced upon the blowing of the seventh trumpet."²² This future spiritual reign will be marked by three things. First, it will be similar to the present reign of Christ but marked "with greater purity and to a greater degree of perfection; both as to doctrine and practice."²³ First of all, this means that the ministry of the Word would be greater, that is, there would be: more light and clearness with regard to spiritual matters; greater understanding of the gospel; great agreement among ministers who preach the Word; and one doctrine of faith preached and professed by all, in other words there would be no heretics.²⁴ In addition, the gospel will spread out in a greater way and be preached with greater success.²⁵ Second, the ordinances will be restored to their primitive purity and be observed clear of such innovations and corruptions as transubstantiation and infant baptism. Third, discipline will be carried out with greater strictness and be far more agreeable to the laws and rules of Christ. Moreover, there will be no controversies about the nature of the church, its government or its officers. The churches will be as they

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were in the days of the apostles.²⁶

This spiritual reign will not only be greater in purity but, it will be “more large and ample than now it is,” that is, it will reach all over the world. Before this happens, though, two important things must take place.

The first is the destruction of the anti-christian states as well as the Antichrist himself who is the “little horn” of Daniel,²⁷ the “man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians,²⁸ and the two beasts of Revelation thirteen.²⁹ Following the hermeneutics of the Reformation Gill has no hesitation in identifying the Antichrist as the Pope of Rome. The anti-christian states are thus all those places where Roman Catholicism reigns. Their destruction is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel³⁰ and the pouring out of the seven vials of God’s wrath.³¹ The first five vials will be poured out by the Protestant princes as they march and physically conquer the papal countries, the western Antichrist, which include Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy. These countries will then become the kingdoms of Christ.³²

The second thing that must take place before the reign of Christ reaches over the whole world is the conversion of the Jews.³³ This follows the destruction of the Antichrist because the popish religion is a great stumbling block to the Jews. Gill believed that this conversion was not a civil or national one but a spiritual one, that is, they will be born again en masse and added to the Christian churches and yet still remain a distinct people. They will then return to their land and possess it with the help of the Protestant princes who will drive out the Mohammedan Turk.³⁴ These princes will continue to conquer the other Mohammedan dominions, which constitutes the fulfilment of the pouring out of the sixth vial.

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Consequently, the gospel will now spread to the eastern countries such as Tartary (present-day Russia), Persia, China, and the Great Mogul (present-day India). Now the fulness of the Gentiles will be brought in, Gentile kings will fall before Christ, and their kingdoms will be given to the saints.³⁵

This spiritual reign will not only be marked by greater purity, and reach over the whole world, but it will also be a more spiritual time than the present. Primarily this means there will be a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit. This effusion will come upon the ministers and churches as well as upon the Jews and Gentiles to bring about “many and great conversions.” At this time the saints will be more spiritual. They will seek more after God and have more light in the doctrines of the gospel, in their conversation, and in their worship. They will also enjoy more of the spiritual presence of God and Christ. In addition, the graces of the Spirit of love and faith will be more in exercise and there will be an abundance of peace and joy (Isaiah 11:6-9).³⁶ It is important to note that Gill sees this effusion of the Spirit taking place simultaneously with the destruction of the Antichrist.³⁷ Christ will now stand up as the glorious Head of the church, and as a triumphant Conqueror over all his enemies, and take to himself his great power, and reign, and that kingdom which rightly belongs to him.³⁸ Gill did not speculate as how long this latter-day glory—what he calls the “Philadelphian” church-state—would last. But he did say it would end with a “Laodicean” churchstate of lukewarmness, drowsiness and carnal security.³⁹ He suggested that this “Laodicean” church-state would last seven prophetic months or 210 years according to Ezekiel 39:12.⁴⁰ Following this final church-state the personal reign of Christ would begin.

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Personal reign of Christ

The personal reign of Christ begins with the personal appearance of Christ from heaven followed by the resurrection of the dead saints in Christ, the conflagration of the world, the making of the new heavens and earth, the binding of Satan, and the dwelling and reigning of Christ with His saints on the new earth. This personal appearance is the Second Coming of Christ to earth which takes place after the slaying of the fourth beast of Daniel 7.⁴¹ According to Gill this beast is Antichrist and the anti-christian states. This second coming of Christ will be a “personal,” “visible” coming with the clouds of heaven in fulfilment of such texts as Daniel 7:13-14,⁴² 12:1-3, Zechariah 14:4-5, and Malachi 4:1-3.⁴³ Moreover, Christ will come in great glory—that of His Father, that of His own divine and human nature, and that of His holy angels. Every eye will see Christ in His human nature. Both good and bad men will see Him as He “swiftly move[s] from one end of the heaven to the other.” This second coming will be “sudden,” “quick” and “speedy”, much as a thief in the night breaks in to steal when no one knows the time.⁴⁴ He will first come in the air of the earth where He will meet the saints raised from the dead, and the living saints will then be changed and brought to Him. The new earth will be prepared and they will all descend upon the earth. Gill speculates that at this coming Christ will descend upon the Mount of Olives and the time of restitution of all things will begin.⁴⁵

Gill is very cautious about determining the time when this appearance would take place. As he states: “It seems impracticable and impossible, to know the time of the second coming of Christ;

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and therefore it must be vain and needless, if not criminal, to enquire into it.”⁴⁶ However, this did not prohibit him from offering a suggestion, and from predicting what were to be the signs of His return. Concerning the time of Christ’s coming Gill believed that former interpreters had confounded the personal and spiritual reigns of Christ . They had located the end of the 42 months of the reign of Antichrist,⁴⁷ the prophesying of the witnesses, the time when Jerusalem is trodden under foot by the Gentiles, and the church’s wilderness experience as taking place just prior to Christ’s Second Coming. But, according to Gill, all of this takes place at the commencement of the spiritual reign of Christ. According to some expositors the Pope took his seat in 476 AD which commenced this 42 month reign. But according to Gill this must be wrong because the spiritual reign had not yet begun (Gill wrote his *Divinity* in the late 1760s). A better date for the commencement of Antichrist’s reign was the year 606 AD when the Emperor Phocas gave a grant of universal bishop to the pope.⁴⁸ In addition, this is around the time Mohammed, who is the eastern Antichrist, arose. Since the eastern and western Antichrists begin together they will end together.

Therefore, the reign of Antichrist will end around the year 1866. But Gill was uncertain of the date because Daniel’s calculation of the conversion of the Jews and their reintroduction into the land is 1290 years, that is, 30 more years than the end of Antichrist. Moreover, Daniel has given another calculation of 1335 years when the Ottoman empire will be destroyed and the gospel will be spread throughout the world. Consequently, according to Gill, the spiritual reign of Christ might begin sometime between 1866 and 1941.⁴⁹

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Now concerning the signs of this Coming, as has already been noted Gill believed the destruction of Antichrist, the call of the Jews, the enormous conversions of Gentiles, and the spiritual reign would precede it with a period of “great coolness and indifference in religion, and great defection in faith and practice.”

In addition, Gill maintained that “wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes; persecutions of good men, false teachers, the preaching of the gospel throughout the world...will be more frequent before the destruction of the world at the second coming of Christ.” Nevertheless, says Gill, “It seems as if there would be an uncertainty of it until the sign of the Son of man, which is himself, as before observed, appears in the heavens; for the Son of man will come in an hour unthought of by good men; and as a thief in the night to wicked men; suddenly and at an unawares; and to both wise and foolish professors, whilst they are slumbering and sleeping.”⁵⁰ Gill certainly did not believe in an imminent return of Christ, but he did maintain that Christ’s Second Coming could not be determined and that it would occur unexpectedly to all.⁵¹ How then were people to prepare for this Coming? Gill’s answer, based on Matthew 24:44 where Jesus had said, “Therefore, be ye also ready,” runs thus:

This [readiness] lies in being in Christ, having on his righteousness, and being washed in his blood; and also in regeneration and sanctification, in having true knowledge of Christ, and faith in him; for all which it becomes men to be concerned, as also all believers to be actually, as well as habitually ready; being in the lively exercise of grace, and cheerful discharge of duty, though without trusting to either.⁵²

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So they are to watch

In ordinances, in prayer, public and private, in hearing the word, at the Lord's Supper, and in every religious exercise; over the heart, the thoughts and affections of it; over words, actions, life, and conversation; and against all sin and unbelief, Satan's temptations, the world, and its charms and snares, false teachers and their doctrines, and for the Bridegroom's coming.⁵³

And why does Christ wait so long in coming? Gill states,

The reason why he tarries is, because his time is not come, and there are many things to be done first; there is to be a glorious spread of the Gospel all over the world; all the elect must be gathered in, both Jews and Gentiles; and the man of sin must be destroyed, and the ungodly must fill up the measures of their iniquities; and Christ tarries to try the graces of his people, who should exercise faith in his coming, by looking, watching, and waiting for it, desirous of it, and hastening unto it; being ready for him, prepared to receive him, and to go with him to the nuptial-chamber.⁵⁴

Resurrection of the dead⁵⁵

According to Gill that which immediately follows after the personal appearance of Christ is the resurrection of the dead. However, Gill believed that the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust will be separated by quite considerable amount of time.⁵⁶ He maintained that the just would be resurrected at the time of Christ's appearance just prior to the commencement of his thousand-year millennial reign, and the unjust would be raised just

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prior to the end of the millennium. Gill saw the former resurrection in Paul's 1 Thessalonians 4:3-17. It, thus, coincides with the catching up of the living saints at the time of Christ's Second Coming.⁵⁷ Gill also identifies this resurrection as the first resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:6. Concerning the nature of the resurrected body of the righteous it will not be "a new aerial, and celestial body as Origen and others thought; or a spiritual one" but the same body although different from it "as to its qualities but not as to its substance." It will be incorruptible, immortal, "like the angels," "consist[ing] of flesh and blood," and "pure and holy."⁵⁸ In scholastic fashion Gill also identifies the causes of this resurrection. The efficient cause is God the Father with Christ as a co-efficient cause. The meritorious cause is Christ by virtue of His death and resurrection. The instrumental cause is the voice of Christ, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel. The final cause is "the glory of the grace and mercy of God, in the complete salvation of his people, soul and body."

For Gill this doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was a "fundamental article of the christian faith" because "the resurrection of Christ stands or falls with it" and "the whole gospel is connected with it and depends on it." Moreover, according to Gill practical religion greatly depends on the truth and belief of it because it "promotes a studious concern of a holy life and conversation." It also serves to enlarge our views of such divine attributes as the omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, justice, immutability and faithfulness of God. In addition, it teaches us "to think highly of Christ, as God over all" and "to endear the Spirit of God" to us. Finally, it may be "a means of encouraging our faith and trust in God, in the greatest straits and difficulties, as being

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able to deliver out of them” and “be of great use to support saints under the loss of near relations, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14. and under their various trials and afflictions, and under present diseases and disorders of the body.”⁵⁹ The importance of this doctrine for Gill is also evident in the fact he spent answering objections to it.⁶⁰ Some of the details concerning the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium will be given below.

Conflagration of the world

Gill believed the conflagration of the world taught in 2 Peter 3 would take place after the resurrection of the dead saints and the catching up of the living saints. Before they can descend to the earth in their new bodies the earth must be renewed.⁶¹ This renewal is part of the restitution of all things (Acts 3:19-21)⁶² where the whole sublunary and visible world will be literally burned up. This would not affect the starry heavens.

This burning-up encompasses the whole earth and everything in the world.⁶³ All that will remain will be the pure doctrines of the Christian faith, the Book of life, the covenant of grace, the word of God, the saints’ title to their inheritance, their inheritance itself, and the saints themselves. Just as the bodies of the saints will be changed in quality though not in substance, so the earth will be dissolved as to its qualities but not as to its substance. It “will be only a purging, purifying, and refining it, as to its form and quality, and a removing from it every thing included in the curse, which the sin of man brought upon it; and so will become an habitation fit for the second Adam, and his holy, spiritual, and perfect offspring.”⁶⁴ The most concise description of this conflagration is found in Gill’s

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comments on 2 Peter 3:10, 12. It will not be a melting of the four elements—earth, air, water and fire—which first principles are neither generated or corrupted.⁶⁵ Rather the earth’s “noxious, hurtful, unnecessary, and disagreeable things, and all the works of nature, wicked men, cattle, trees &c., and all the works of men, cities, towns, houses, furniture, utensils, instruments of arts of all sorts, will be burnt by a material fire, breaking out of the earth and descending from heaven.”⁶⁶ Gill believed that in his day preparations were being made for this burning. He says,

Witness the fiery meteors, blazing stars, and burning comets in the heavens, and the subterraneous fires in the bowels of the earth, which in some places have already broken out: there are now many volcanos [*sic*], burning mountains and islands, particularly in Sicily, Italy, and the parts adjacent, the seat of the beast, and where it is very likely the universal conflagration will begin, as Aetna, Vesuvius, Strombilo, and other volcanos [*sic*]: and even in our own island we have some symptoms and appearances of these fires under ground, as fiery eruptions in some places, and hot waters at the Bath, and elsewhere, show; from which it is plain that the heavens and earth, that now are, are not as they always were, and will be, but are reserved and prepared for burning; and that things are ripening apace, as men’s sins also are, for the general conflagration.⁶⁷

How should Christians then live in light of this forthcoming conflagration? Gill says they should live “as men, who have their loins girt, and their lights burning, waiting for their Lord’s coming; being continually in the exercise of grace, and in the discharge of their religious duties, watching, praying, hearing, reading; living soberly, righteously, and godly; guarding against intemperance and

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worldlymindedness, and every worldly and hurtful lust." And they should be looking for the coming of the day of God

by faith ... look[ing] for it, and keeping looking out for it, as what will be quickly; and though it is not as soon as they desire and expect, yet should still look wistly for it, and with patience and cheerfulness wait for it: yea they should be hasting unto it, or hastening it; for though the day is fixed for the coming of Christ...yet it becomes the saints to pray earnestly for it, that it may be quickly, and for the accomplishment of all things that go before it, prepare for it, and lead unto it; such as the conversion of the Jews, and the bringing in of the fulness of the Gentiles; and by putting him in mind of and pleading with him, his promises concerning these things, and giving no rest until they are accomplished.⁶⁸

New heavens and new earth⁶⁹

As is taught in 2 Peter the new heavens and earth are created after the conflagration. And as the conflagration will be literal so will the new heavens and earth. The new heavens according to Gill are not the starry heavens but the airy heavens (our atmosphere), for the starry heavens are not burned up in the conflagration, only the airy heavens where wicked spirits fill the air. The new earth will be restored to its paradisaical estate, free from the curse. And as is depicted in Revelation 21 and 22 there will be no unbelievers, no temple, no worship as in the gospel-church-state, and no death in them, but God will dwell with His people.⁷⁰ This is the millennium of Revelation 20. Who will then live on this new earth? Gill believed that the inhabitants will be the whole general assembly and church of the firstborn, millions and millions of believers, Old

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and New Testament saints who are the righteous ones through Christ.⁷¹ These ones who are inherently holy and righteous, immortal and perfect will feed on God's love in this place; God will dwell with them and the glory of God will be upon them. This is the fulfilment of those promises of God that the saints will inherit the land (Isaiah 60:21; Psalm 37:29; Matthew 5:5).⁷²

The millennium⁷³

After the formation of the new heavens and earth Christ will personally reign on this new earth in "a special, peculiar, glorious, and visible kingdom." Gill believed it to be "special" and "peculiar" because it would be "different from other kingdoms of Christ," that is, from Christ's kingdom of nature and providence, and from "his spiritual kingdom, which belongs to him as Mediator; which rule he had exercised in the hearts of his people from the beginning of the world." According to Gill this personal reign of Christ will last for a literal thousand years. For scripture proof for this millennial reign Gill turned to a wide array of texts ranging from the Psalms and major prophets to the Gospel writers and the Book of Revelation.⁷⁴ The entirety of Old and New Testament saints will share in this kingdom and reign with Christ. This reign is to be clearly distinguished from Christ's spiritual reign since the order of civil government will be completely changed (in the latter-day glory, the spiritual reign of Christ, there will be no alteration in this order).⁷⁵ In addition, in this personal reign Christ will reign "with his saints" whereas in his spiritual reign He reigns "in them." Gill describes these saints as those who have a part in the first resurrection, that is, those saints who were raised from the dead

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and those saints who are living at Christ's Second Coming. Gill further describes them as those over whom the second death has no power, and who are the priests of God and of Christ, truly blessed and holy. During these thousand years Satan will be bound and utterly unable to deceive the nations, that is, he will be unable "to draw the nations into idolatry, to fill them with bad principles, and lead them into bad practices, and to stir them to make war with the saints and persecute them" (Gill's reading of Revelation 20). On the other hand, the saints will be in "a state of perfect purity and peace; free from being disturbed and distressed by idolaters, heretics, and persecutors." They will share in the glories of Christ's kingdom; there will be thrones and judgment for them; and they will have dominion over all their enemies, freed from sin, Satan, tribulation, the wicked, and death. At the end of thousand years Satan will be loosed and the wicked dead will be raised. They will make war against Christ and His saints and be defeated.⁷⁶ Following this will come the general judgment of the wicked.

Obviously Gill was a premillennialist. In a day when postmillennialism was on the rise and premillennialism's heyday of the seventeenth century was waning, Gill in his *Body of Divinity* continued to argue extensively for a future millennium, and answer objections to his position.

The last and general judgment⁷⁷

Gill was convinced there was a two-fold judgment of God, one at death where a person's soul experienced happiness or woe, and

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the other after the resurrection of the dead. He argued for the latter with proof from reason and divine revelation.⁷⁸ The Judge will be the Triune God and, in particular, the God-man Christ Jesus who will judge both angels and humans. All of humanity, good and evil, will be judged, with the former being judged first. By Gill's reckoning this judgment of the saints will actually take place at the beginning of the millennium after they are all raised. At that time they will "receive the distribution of rewards, made in the kingdom state." The judgment of the wicked will take place after their resurrection at

the close of the millennium. According to Gill's reading of scripture, the righteous and the wicked will be judged according to all of their works and words, as well as every thought. The rule of judgment will be according to what Gill calls the book of omniscience, the book of remembrance, the book of creation, and the book of life and other such books. According to Gill the wicked will be "judged *out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works, Rev. xx. 12*" and the righteous

will be judged according to their works; but not adjudged to eternal life according to them; for there is no proportion between the best works of men, and *eternal life; eternal life is the free gift of God through Christ*; but upon the judgment of them, the distribution of rewards, or of peculiar and distinguished favours, more or less, in the kingdom-state, will be according to every man's works.⁷⁹

Gill believed that the righteous would receive rewards in the kingdom state (the millennium) but not in the eternal state. He did, however, assert that there will be degrees of punishment for

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the wicked in hell.⁸⁰

Final state of the wicked in hell

After the general judgment the wicked and the righteous take their places in their final and eternal states, the wicked in hell and the righteous in heaven. According to Gill the wicked, soul and resurrected body, will go into everlasting punishment. Again Gill had a wide range of scriptures from which to argue his point.⁸¹

Contrary to some divines, he maintained that Hell was not only a state but a place that goes by the names of Abaddon (destruction but not extinction), Sheol, Tophet, Gehinnon, the bottomless pit (abyss), Hades, and Tartarus. It is represented in the Bible by a number of horror-inducing images: a prison, a state of darkness, the second death, in which there is “weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, through grief, malice and envy.” For Gill, this punishment would involve both a loss of the divine presence and a sense of the wrath of God. This loss includes all good things—both God and Christ, the grace, peace & joy of the Holy Spirit as well as the holy company of angels & saints. The punishment of sense entails the body’s experience of “material fire” and the soul’s experience of God’s wrath. Gill did not waver in his conviction that this punishment will “always continue and never have an end”, a conviction he proves from various Scriptures.⁸² Moreover, Gill believed there would be degrees of punishment for the wicked in Hell

“according to their evil works, whether more or fewer, greater or lesser.” The degree of punishment will depend on knowledge and actions. For example, those who have heard the gospel and been

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disobedient to it will aggravate their condemnation. Then the guilt and punishment for actual transgressions will be in proportion to their number and heinousness. According to Gill these degrees of punishment do not concern the punishment of loss but only of sense. Obviously one cannot “lose more or less than another” for “all are equally excluded from the presence and communion of God and of Christ, and of the Spirit.”⁸³

Final state of the saints in heaven

The final state of the righteous in heaven Gill designated as a state of happiness. He argues for this from the light of nature and reason, and from divine revelation.⁸⁴ This state of happiness is variously denominated in scripture: heaven, paradise, a place of light, a house in which to dwell, a city of God’s preparing, a crown of righteousness and glory, as well as glory, peace, rest, and the joy of the Lord. In this happiness there will be freedom from all evils for both body and soul. The soul will not only be free from sin, but temptations to sin, the dominion of sin, the very being of sin, as well as the evil one, and evil men will be forever gone. The body will be free from pains and disease, hunger and thirst, disappointment and death.

From a positive angle, in this happiness there will be the enjoyment of all that is good—God and Christ, the company of angels and saints, perfect holiness, and unending joy and felicity. As the punishment of the wicked will last forever, so this happiness will never end.⁸⁵ Gill did not, however, believe that there would be degrees of blessedness in heaven. He felt that this idea of degrees in glory seemed “to incline to the popish notion” of “the merit of

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men,” and that the Scriptural proofs used for it belonged “to the kingdom-state, and not to the ultimate glory.” He was assured that the arguments against degrees outweighed those for them. Some of these arguments include the fact that all of God’s people are loved with the same love of God, all are chosen together in Christ, all are redeemed with Christ’s blood, and all are equally the sons of God.⁸⁶

II. John Gill’s and Andrew Fuller’s eschatology compared

James De Jong stated that at the end of the eighteenth century Baptists followed either John Gill’s or Andrew Fuller’s eschatology.⁸⁷ How did Fuller’s eschatology differ from Gill’s, and what effect did it have on Calvinistic Baptists at that time?

Fuller’s eschatology differed significantly on a number of points. Most importantly, Fuller’s eschatology was a postmillennialist one. He believed that Christ would come with spiritual power to inaugurate the millennium or latter-day glory.⁸⁸ At the end of this period Christ would return personally and visibly, and the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and entrance of the saints into heaven would follow quickly upon his personal return.⁸⁹ Moreover, Fuller believed that the witnesses had already been slain and raised,⁹⁰ that Antichrist was in the process of falling,⁹¹ and that the vials were being poured out in his day.⁹² Fuller maintained that from the rising of the witnesses at the Reformation, and even while the vials were being poured out, the gospel would be spreading around the world.⁹³ He believed his day was a special time for the spread of the gospel.⁹⁴ As he wrote:

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Two hundred years have been thought to be the utmost point to which the pouring out of the vials can extend: they may terminate in less time: but if not, there is great encouragement for the friends of Christ in the promised progress of his cause during this period. We shall not have to wait for the Millennium, I say, ere we see glorious days in respect of the success of the gospel.... At the same time that her [church's] enemies are bleeding under the strokes of heaven, the 'kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.'⁹⁵

In fact, he seems to have believed that Christians could encourage the dawning of the millennium by missionary activity.⁹⁶ And that he expected the millennium to dawn shortly.⁹⁷ Finally, Fuller did not believe it was the design of Scripture prophecies to determine the exact time of the fall of Antichrist. Rather he believed this fall would probably be gradual.⁹⁸

Gill, on the other hand and as has been noted, believed that the latter-day glory would not begin until the two witnesses were slain and risen, and until Antichrist (eastern and western) had fallen at the time of the pouring out of the vials upon them. These things he thought might take place around 1866 or thereafter.⁹⁹ For Gill no effective spreading of the gospel to the heathen would take place until these things were fulfilled. As he stated in 1750:

We are in the Sardinian church-state, in the latter part of it, which ... 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 reformed churches, but without the life and power of true

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religion ... and yet it is not totally dark ... it is a sort of twilight with us,... between day and night. As to what of the night is yet to come, or what will befall the churches,... they are, the slaying of the witnesses, and the universal spread of popery all over Christendom.¹⁰⁰

Concerning the universal spread of popery, he maintained:

The papists have got ground... 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 ... 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 gained over, then they will be slain, and not till then. Moreover, the witnesses have not yet finished their testimony; they are still prophesying... 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.¹⁰¹

Concerning the spread of the gospel to places in the East like India, Gill stated in his comment on the sixth vial (Rev. 16:12):

To me it seems, that, through the fall of the Ottoman empire, way will be made for the kings and princes of the east, literally understood, to have and embrace the Gospel of Christ; for the Turks being destroyed, the Mahometan religion will decline, the Gospel will be carried into the eastern parts of the world into the those vast kingdoms and countries which lie in those parts,... so that the ruin of this

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monarchy will pave the way for the spread of Christ's kingdom from sea to sea, and from river to river, the river Euphrates, to the ends of the earth.¹⁰²

In light of Gill's eschatology one can easily understand why some Gillite Baptists would consider the missionary activity of the Fullerites an impertinent enterprise.¹⁰³ On the other hand, one can see why the Fullerites looked at the recent history of the salvation of the heathen (e.g. David Brainerd's ministry in North America) as a precursor to the dawning of the millennium. There seems little doubt that eschatological conviction can have concrete influence on evangelism or missionary activity in the world. Be this as it may, eschatology needs to be in harmony with the central message of the gospel—the salvation of sinners, Jews and Gentiles. The preaching of the gospel and evangelism ought to be motivated by Matthew 28:18-20, regardless of what contemporary events might appear to have been fulfilled.

III. Conclusion

After surveying Gill's eschatology and comparing it to that of Fuller, at least two unusual, if not unique, aspects of his teaching emerge. The first is his conflation of postmillennialism with premillennialism. Gill believed as did Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691), Daniel Whitby (1637-1726) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) that there would be a period of time prior to Christ's Second Coming in which Christ would reign spiritually on earth called his "spiritual reign". The postmillennialists called this the "latter-day glory" or the millennial age. However, unlike them Gill also believed in a literal millennium after Christ's Second Coming in

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which Christ would personally reign on earth. Gill believed that earlier interpreters had confounded the two periods, making them one instead of two. Prior to Gill's day, this interpretation does not appear to have existed in the history of eschatological thought.

A second unusual aspect has to do with Gill's date-setting of the events preceding the spiritual reign of Christ. What was unique in Gill's eschatology was his setting a date for the spiritual reign of Christ so far ahead of his day (1866, over one hundred years), joined with his belief that the fall of Antichrist (eastern and western) would not take place until around that time.¹⁰⁴ This effectively stifled any idea of missionary endeavours to the east where the eastern Antichrist still reigned. For Gillites William Carey's idea of missions to India was overstepping God's timetable. It is true that many seventeenth-century expositors speculated on dates for Christ's return, and saw end-time events surrounding those dates. However, their dates were sufficiently close to their time that they believed the events were being fulfilled in their day. In other words, their date-setting did not hinder their obedience to spread the gospel to every creature as it did in Gill's time.¹⁰⁵

ENDNOTES

¹I want to thank Dr. Michael Haykin for his careful reading of this essay and for offering some helpful suggestions.

²Robert Edward Seymour, "John Gill, Baptist Theologian (1697-1771)" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1954); Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1983); Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological

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Seminary, 1989); B.R. White, "John Gill in London, 1719-1729: A Biographical Fragment," *The Baptist Quarterly*, 22 (1967-1968), 72-79; Richard A. Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the Pactum Salutis," *Foundations*, 24 (1981), 4-14; Olin C. Robison, "The Legacy of John Gill," *The Baptist Quarterly*, 24 (1971-1972), 111-125; Eric Williams, "John Gill (1697-1771): Some Bicentenary Thoughts, especially on his Work on the song of Solomon," *The Evangelical Library Bulletin*, 47 (Autumn, 1971), 2-7; Robert Oliver, "John Gill: Orthodox Dissenter," *The Strict Baptist Historical Society Bulletin*, 23 (1996), 3-18; Graham Harrison, *Dr. John Gill and His Teaching* (London: The Evangelical Library, 1971); John R. Broome, *Dr. John Gill* (Harpenden, Hertfordshire: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 1991); John W. Brush, "John Gill's Doctrine of the Church" in Winthrop Still Hudson, ed., *Baptist Concepts of the Church* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 53-70; and George Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Eggleston, Co. Durham: Go Publications, 1995).

³ *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

⁴ This essay on Gill's eschatology was to be a part of this publication, but due to page restrictions by the publisher, it was excluded.

⁵ "John Gill and Puritan Eschatology," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 73 (2001), 311-326.

⁶ The Anglican Daniel Whitby has been considered the father of postmillennialism. His postmillennialist thought appeared in an essay in 1703 entitled, "A Treatise of the Millennium: Shewing That It Is Not a Reign of Persons Raised from the Dead, but of the Church Flourishing Gloriously for a Thousand Years After the Conversion of the Jews, and the Flowing-In of All Nations to them Thus Converted to the Christian Faith." This essay was appended to his widely-read book *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament*. Le Roy Edwin Froom in his important four volume history of prophecy [*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1948), 651-655] has argued that Whitby is the father of postmillennialism. This view is somewhat perpetuated by a present-day writer on eschatology, Stanley Grenz [*The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 68-69]. There is no doubt that Whitby was a popularizer of postmillennialism in the eighteenth century but he certainly was not the originator. Its origins can be traced to Thomas Brightman, and its development in the seventeenth century to such men as the Congregationalist John Cotton and the Particular Baptist Hanserd Knollys.

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Postmillennial eschatology can also be found in the works of John Owen and John Howe, and in the Congregationalist confession, the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658. For some of this history see Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971); Bryan Ball, *The Great Expectation* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 168-170; Peter Toon, "The Latter-Day Glory," in his ed., *Puritans, The Millennium & The Future of Israel* (Cambridge & London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1970), 23-41; and James De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640-1810* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970).

⁷ See De Jong, *As the Waters*, 177-181.

⁸ For seventeenth-century England, see, for example, Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: The Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution 1640-1660* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the reformation to the eve of the civil war* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). For the eighteenth century, see, for example, the essays on the pre-revolutionary period in D. G. Hart, ed. *Reckoning with the Past* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 61-128; Ruth Block, *Visionary Millennium: Millennial Themes in American thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁹ For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consider the Baptist William Miller who believed Christ was going to return in 1843, and so made preparations for it. Or think of the prophetic influence on American policies and actions toward Israel.

¹⁰ De Jong, *As the Waters*, 175-181.

¹¹ De Jong, *As the Waters*, 156-157, 176. Interestingly, Gribben implies that Gill did not have an anti-missionary bias when he writes, "Despite numerous accusations of an anti-missionary bias, it seems clear that Gill expected the gospel to sweep the earth" ("John Gill", 317). But for Gill this "sweep of the earth" will take place only after the destruction of antichrist and the call of the Jews which Gill predicted would not occur for at least one hundred to a hundred and fifty years after his writing. Consequently, the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles around the world would have to wait that time. Is this not, at least, an anti-missionary bias with regard to the latter half of the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth?

¹² De Jong, *As the Waters*, 162, 164, 176. Gribben, "John Gill", 326.

¹³ This a revision of Ryland's statement by Fuller.

¹⁴ For the historical background to this event, and discussion on the

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historicity of the comment by Ryland see Michael A.G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends and his times* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), 189-197. De Jong suggests that Gill's eschatology was a reason why Carey's word concerning missions to the heathen, spoken at the Northamptonshire Association meeting, was challenged (*As the Waters*, 157).

¹⁵ John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D.D.* (n.d.; rpt. Harrisonburg: Gano Books, 1992), 74.

¹⁶ De Jong, *As the Waters*, 202. Following this last reason a fourth is that eschatology was very important to Gill himself. Rippon tells us that when Gill visited with people "he would seldom converse on trifles; but, touch the string of prophecy—the calling of the Jews—the latter-day glory ... he was engaged at once, and out of the abundance of knowledge and grace, treasured in his heart, his mouth freely spake." This is confirmed by his discussion of prophecy in the preface of his two-volume commentary on the Old Testament Prophets as well as numerous sermons that were published on eschatological subjects. Some of the published sermons include *The doctrine of the resurrection stated and defended in two sermons* (1731); *The Watchman's answer to the question, What of the Night?* (1751); *The glory of the church in the latter day* (1753); *The glorious state of the saints in heaven* (1756); *The superior happiness of the righteous dead to that of living saints* (1763).

¹⁷ The primary sources for our understanding of Gill's eschatology will be his *Body of Divinity* (1839; rpt. Atlanta: Turner Lassatter, 1957) and his commentaries. His sermons and tracts will be supplemental. Gill addresses both individual and future eschatology in his *Body of Divinity*. This essay only deals with the latter.

¹⁸ For an overview of Gill's commentary on Revelation see my unpublished "A Survey of John Gill's Commentary of the Book of Revelation." Gill continues the historicist and symbolic-figurative interpretation of this Book that was espoused by the most eminent British interpreters of the seventeenth century including John Napier, Arthur Dent, Thomas Brightman, Thomas Goodwin, and Joseph Mede as well as the Calvinistic Baptist Hanserd Knollys. For Knollys' eschatology see my *Erroneous and schismatical opinions: The Question of Orthodoxy in the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹⁹ This initial Church-age began with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and was still present in Gill's day. It would end when Christ began His "spiritual reign" (one of the two future historical epochs).

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²⁰ *Body of Divinity*, 448.

²¹ See Gribben, "John Gill", 317-319.

²¹ From his sermon, *The Glory of the Church in the Latter Day* (1752) in *Sermons and Tracts* (London: W. Hardcastle, 1814), I, 93. According to Gill this reign would begin after the "time of trouble" prophesied in Daniel 12:1 that will "come upon the whole world, Rev. iii. 10. as it may concern the church and the people of God, it is the last struggle of the beast, of antichrist, at the time of his downfall and ruin, when he will make his last effort; this will be the last persecution of the saints, which will be short and sharp" [*Gill's Commentary*, 6 vols. (1852-54; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), IV, 568-569].

²² *Body of Divinity*, 448. Gill believed that Zechariah 14:6-9 is a prophecy of this spiritual reign. He believed that a dark day would precede the spiritual reign of Christ "a sort of twilight, both with respect to the light of doctrine, and spiritual joy, comfort, and experience; which is much our case now." This is when the witnesses will be slain and "great coldness and lukewarmness will seize upon professors; great darkness of error will spread itself everywhere; great sleepiness and security will fall upon all the virgins, and there will be great distress of nations." However, it is during this time that "light will break forth; deliverance and salvation from Popish darkness and tyranny will be wrought; the light of the Gospel will break forth, and spread itself everywhere; the light of joy and gladness will arise to all saints, and it will be a time of great spiritual peace, prosperity, and happiness." During this time "the Gospel shall be carried from east to west, and preached all the world over, to the conversion of Jews and Gentiles." According to Gill verse nine, which states "the Lord shall be King over all the earth," refers to the spiritual reign of Christ where "upon the success of the Gospel everywhere, there will be great conversions in all places; Gospel churches will be set up and ordinances administered everywhere; the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord; his kingdom will be from sea to sea, from the eastern to the western one, and his dominion will reach to the ends of the earth; Popish nations, Mahometan kingdoms, Pagan ones, and all the kings of the earth, will become Christian, and submit to the sceptre of Christ's kingdom" (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 871-72).

²³ Gill says of Zechariah 14:9, "There will be one true, spiritual, uniform worship and religion; there will be no different sentiments and principles in religion; nor different practices and modes of worship; nor different sects; but all agreeing in the same faith and practice, under one Lord and King, Christ Jesus" (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 872).

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²⁴ *Body of Divinity*, 448-449. One of the chief passages he uses is Zechariah 14:6-9.

²⁵ *Body of Divinity*, 449-450.

²⁶ See his extended comment on the “little horn” as the Pope of Rome in Daniel 7:8.

²⁷ This man of sin according to Gill is “a succession of men ... the whole hierarchy of Rome, monks, friars, priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and especially popes, who may well be called the man of sin, because notoriously sinful; not only sinners, but sin itself, a sink of sin, monsters of iniquity, spiritual wickedness in high places” (*Gill’s Commentary*, VI, 576). He goes on in the next verse to show that popes have considered themselves God on earth.

²⁸ For the rise and fall of the pope as Antichrist, see Gill’s comment on Daniel 7:24-26. For a further detailed description of the Pope of Rome as Antichrist, and of his claims and teachings, see Gill’s comment on Daniel 11:36-39.

²⁹ Gill, commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2:8, writes, “As [by the Gospel] sinners are cut to the heart, hewn and slain, convicted and converted, so by this likewise antichrist will be consumed, and is consuming.” This began at the Reformation “and [he] is sensibly wasting in his power and glory every day and will ere long come to utter destruction.” He shall be destroyed with the brightness of Christ’s coming either in a spiritual way, when he comes in his spiritual kingdom and glory [the latter-day], by the light of the Gospel and the illuminations of his Spirit...or in a personal manner, when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead [Second Coming]” (*Gill’s Commentary*, VI, 578).

³⁰ The destruction of Antichrist and the anti-christian states is looked at in Gill’s comment on Zechariah 14:12-15, Daniel 7:11, and the judgment of God on them in Daniel 7:9-10.

³¹ *Body of Divinity*, 450-451.

³² Gill believed that this future conversion of the Jews in the latter day is prophesied in Ezekiel 39:25-29 (*Gill’s Commentary*, IV, 436-437). A key passage in the New Testament for Gill that deals with the conversion of the Jews in Romans 11:11-29. They will be grafted into their own olive tree and their conversion will be the reviving work of God among the Gentiles churches (*Gill’s Commentary*, VI, 100-103).

³³ For a prophecy concerning the eastern Antichrist (the Turk), his power, wealth and riches, fall and ruin see Daniel 11:40-45 (*Gill’s Commentary*, IV, 566-568). When the Jews are preparing to return to their land the Turk will be enraged and provoked, will march with an

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army to Judea, and will come to his end. This is also prophesied in Ezekiel 38:2-12, 39:1-20.

³⁴ *Body of Divinity*, 451-452. See Gill's comment on Ezekiel 39:21.

³⁵ In his sermon entitled, *The Glory of the Church in the Latter Day* (1752), he stated, "This period of time...will be remarkable for his spiritual presence among his people; when he will come down, in the communications of his grace, like rain upon the mowen grass, as showers water the earth; when there will be a large and plentiful effusion of this spirit; when his people in general will be more spiritual in the temper of their souls, and in the frames of their mind; more spiritual and savoury in their discourses, and in the whole of their behaviour and conversation, and will eminently worship God in spirit and truth: not that they will arrive to a perfection of spirituality; though there will be a great deal of light and glory break out, yet there will be a mixture of darkness, obscurity, and imperfection; in which this state will differ from the personal reign of Christ in the new Jerusalem" (*Sermons and Tracts*, I, 91-92).

³⁶ *Body of Divinity*, 452-453.

³⁷ Gill commenting on Daniel 12:1 (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 568-569).

³⁸ See *Gill's Commentary*, V, 247, where he says, "There will be a general expectation of Christ being near at hand sometime before his second coming; and because such an expectation will not be answered, or Christ will not come so soon as was hoped for, and expected, a general drowsiness, and security, and unconcernedness, especially about the coming of Christ, will fall upon the churches." In addition, he states that the last days of 2 Tim. 3:1-5, "may take in the general defection and apostacy of the church of Rome, as well as those times which followed the apostles, and those which will usher in the second coming of Christ" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 637). Concerning this Laodicean church state Gill says, "There will be little left but external gifts, and outward riches and honour, upon which great stress will be laid; and there will be great boasting and bragging of them,...the wise as well as the foolish virgins will slumber and sleep;... Immorality and profaneness will again spread in the world" (From his sermon, *The Glory of the Church in the Latter Day* in *Sermons and Tracts*, I, 108).

³⁹ *Body of Divinity*, 624.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that Gill sees several comings of Christ: His coming in the flesh (His Incarnation), His coming in the spiritual and personal reigns (His Second Coming) but also His coming powerfully in 70 AD in the destruction of Jerusalem. According to Gill the whole discourse

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of Matthew 24 essentially deals with this latter coming. In this passage Gill believes that verses 1-41 answer the disciples' question about the destruction of Jerusalem (*Gill's Commentary*, V, 231-242). In addition, the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24 begin with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem 483 BC. (Nehemiah 2:1,6,7,8) and conclude with its destruction in 70 AD (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 547-550).

⁴¹ See Gill's commentary on these verses (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 531).

⁴² See 1 Thessalonians 4:16 in *Gill's Commentary*, VI, 560, where he says, "He descends...in Person, in his human nature, in soul and body; in like manner as went up to heaven will he descend from thence, so as to be visible, to be seen and heard of all: he will come down from the third heaven, whither he was carried up, into which he was received, and where he is retained, until the time of the restitution of all things, and from whence the saints expect him."

⁴³ See his comments on 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 562-565). The second coming will be "sudden, and at unawares." The righteous, however, being "enlightened by the Spirit of God...[are] not ignorant of these things, nor liable to be surprised unawares hereby" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 562).

⁴⁴ *Body of Divinity*, 616-622. See his comment on Zechariah 14:4 where he says, "It seems very probable that he will descend upon that very spot of ground from whence he ascended" (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 870).

⁴⁵ Gill says in his comment on 1 Thessalonians 5:1, "[For Paul] to write to them about the time of these things would be trifling and unnecessary; would be an idle speculation, and indulging a vain curiosity; and, besides, was impracticable: for that day and hour knows no man: the times and seasons the Father hath put in his own power" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 562).

⁴⁶ According to Gill this is the "falling away" spoken of in 2 Thess. 2:3, "The general defection in the times of the Papacy; when not only the eastern churches were perverted and corrupted by Mohamet, and drawn off to his religion, but the western churches were most sadly depraved by the man of sin, by bringing in errors of all sorts in doctrine, making innovations in every ordinance, and appointing new ones, and introducing both Judaism and Paganism into the churches; which general defection continued until the times of the reformation, and is what the apostle has respect to in 1 Tim. iv. 1,2,3" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 575).

⁴⁷ See Gill's comment on 2 Thessalonians 2:8 in *Gill's Commentary*, VI, 578.

⁴⁸ *Body of Divinity*, 623-624. In his sermon *The Practical Improvement of*

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the Watchman's Answer (1752) Gill states concerning the fulfilment of the 1260 years, "Though we can come at no certainty as to the precise time when these things shall be, yet some degree of understanding of these things may be come at; and from the circumstances of things it may be concluded, that these dates cannot reach beyond an hundred and fifty years more, and it may be they expire much sooner" (*Sermons and Tracts*, I, 67).

⁴⁹ *Body of Divinity*, 624-625.

⁵⁰ Concerning imminency Gill says in his comment on 2 Thessalonians 2:2, "For though the coming of Christ is sometimes said to be drawing nigh and to be quickly, yet so it might be, and not at that instant: besides, such expressions are used with respect to God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years; and because the Gospel times, or times of the Messiah, are the last days, there will be no other dispensation of things until the second coming of Christ; and chiefly they are used to keep up the faith, and awaken the hope and expectation of the saints with respect to it" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 575).

⁵¹ *Gill's Commentary*, V, 243.

⁵² *Gill's Commentary*, V, 251. This is his comment on Matt 25:13. In the same verse he goes on to say, "This is the use and application of the whole parable, and shows the general design of it." See also his comment on 1 Thessalonians 5:6 (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 563) and 1 John 3:3 (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 893).

⁵³ *Gill's Commentary*, V, 247. In 1752 Gill preached a sermon entitled, *The Practical Improvement of the Watchman's Answer* (*Sermons and Tracts*, I, 60-87) from 1 Chronicles 12:32 as a practical application to his sermon on prophecy entitled, *The Watchman's Answer to the Question, What of the Night? In the Practical Improvement* he seeks to help believers know how they ought to live in light of the present time and that of the Second Coming. He states, "[They] ought ... to do; even every good work, which they should always be ready unto, and should pray to God to perfect and fit them for, and make them fruitful and establish them in" (*The Practical Improvement*, 68) He goes on to tell them they ought: to be watchful; to strengthen the things that remain; to remember how they have received and heard, and hold fast and repent; to stand fast in the faith; to quit ye like men; to be strong; to keep close to the Word of God; to abide with the churches of Christ, and ministers of the Gospel, in the worship of God, and in the ordinances of his house; to prepare to meet their God; and to not be discouraged, for though the affliction will be sharp, it will be short" (*The Practical Improvement*, 77-

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87).

⁵⁴ See Gribben, "John Gill", 319-20.

⁵⁵ For his comments on the resurrection of the dead see also Dan. 12:2-3 (*Gill's Commentary*, IV, 569).

⁵⁶ See *Gill's Commentary*, VI, 559-562. According to Gill the catching up of the living saints and the raising of the dead saints occur at the same time to meet the Lord. It is interesting to note that Gill in several places calls this resurrection of living and dead saints "the rapture" of all the saints (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 561, 562).

⁵⁷ For more on this resurrected body see his comments on 1 Corinthians 15:35-54 and 1 John 3:2.

⁵⁸ *Body of Divinity*, 602-615. Another practical application of this doctrine according to Gill is "it may direct us to a due and proper care of our bodies, whilst living, that they are not abused through avarice nor intemperance; and to provide or give orders for the descent interment of them after death" (*Body of Divinity*, 615). It should be noted that Gill preached a funeral sermon from this text for his daughter.

⁵⁹ *Body of Divinity*, 512-515. For more on the resurrection of the dead see Gill's tract entitled, *The Doctrine of the Resurrection, Stated and Defended in Two Sermons in Sermons and Tracts*, III, 335-403. In this detailed study of the resurrection of the dead Gill gives an account of those who deny this doctrine such as philosophers. He also shows that some heathen had notions of it. He then goes on to show the credibility of the resurrection and its certainty from the Scriptures. Following this Gill enquires into who shall be raised from the dead and what it is that will be raised. He proves from Scripture that the wicked will be raised, and answers objections to this truth. He also proves the immortality of the soul when answering the question of what will be raised; and he also confutes soul sleep. He goes on to prove that it is the body that died that will be raised, and then shows how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in this resurrection. And finally he shows the importance and use of the doctrine; it is useful for instruction and consolation.

⁶⁰ Gill believed that after Christ meets the saints in the air He will take them to heaven while the conflagration of the earth and heavens takes place (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 562).

⁶¹ *Body of Divinity*, 319.

⁶² Gill commenting on 2 Peter 3:7 states, "The bodies of those that will be alive at the general conflagration will be burnt in it, though not annihilated, and will be raised again, and both soul and body will be destroyed in hell" (*Gill's Commentary*, VI, 871).