


# Sermons of John Newton

Based on Scripture Passages  
Used in Handel's 'Messiah' Part 2

## Booklet Sixteen

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36. The Lord Reigneth - Revelation 19:6  
37. The Extent of Messiah's Spiritual Kingdom - Rev. 11:15  
38. King of Kings and Lord of Lords - Revelation 19:16

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- 36. The Lord Reigneth,  
37. The Extent of Messiah's Spiritual Kingdom and  
38. King of Kings and Lord of Lords**

### **36. The Lord Reigneth**

*“Hallelujah; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!”*  
**Revelation 19:6.**

The book of the Revelation, being chiefly prophetical, will not, perhaps, be fully understood, till the final accomplishment of the events shall draw near, and throw a stronger light upon the whole series. But while the learned commentators have been, hitherto, divided and perplexed in their attempts to illustrate many parts of it, there are other parts well adapted for the instruction and refreshment of plain Christians. Particularly, those passages in which the scenery and images seem designed to give us some representation of the happiness and worship of the heavenly state. Thus a plain unlettered believer, when reading with attention the fourth and fifth chapters, though he cannot give a reason why the elders are twenty four, and the number of their wings neither more nor less than six; yet, from the whole description of the Lamb upon the Throne, the songs of the redeemed, and the chorus of the angels, he receives such an impression of glory, as awakens his gratitude, desire and joy; and excites him likewise to take up the same song of praise, “to Him who has loved him, and washed him from his sins in His own blood.” He is content to leave the discussion of hard questions to learned men, while he feeds by faith upon those simple truths, which can only be relished by a spiritual taste; and which, where there is such a taste, make their way to the heart, without the assistance of critical disquisition [critical discussion].

The subject of the preceding chapter is the destruction of mystical Babylon, the head of the opposition against the

Kingdom of the Lord Christ. But Babylon sinks like a mill-stone in the mighty ocean, and is no more found. So must all His enemies perish. The catastrophe of Babylon, like that of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, is beheld by the saints and servants of the Lord with admiration, and furnishes them with a theme for a song of triumph to His praise. This may be properly styled sacred music indeed. It is commanded, inspired and regulated, by the Lord Himself. The performers are all interested in the subject, "they who fear God," and are devoted to His service and glory. And though persons of this character are comparatively few upon earth, hidden, and in a manner, lost among the crowd of mankind; they will be, when brought together at last, a very large company. Their united voices are here compared to the voice of many waters, and of mighty thunders, and this is the solemn close, the chorus of their song, "Hallelujah, for the LORD God Omnipotent reigneth."

The impression, which the performance of this passage in the Oratorio usually makes upon the audience, is well known. But however great the power of music may be, should we even allow the flights of poetry to be truth, that it "softens rocks, and bends the knotty oak," one thing we are sure it cannot do. It cannot soften and change the hard heart, it cannot bend the obdurate will of man. If all the people who successively hear the Messiah Oratorio, who are struck and astonished, for the moment, by this chorus in particular, were to bring away with them an abiding sense of the importance of the sentiment it contains, the nation would soon wear a new face. But do the professed lovers of sacred music in this enlightened age, generally live, as if they really believed that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth? Rather, do not the greater part of them live, as they might do, if they were sure of the contrary? as if they were satisfied to a demonstration, that either there is no God, or that His Providence is not concerned with human affairs? I appeal to conscience; I appeal to fact.

I apprehend that this passage, taken in the strictest sense, refers to a period not yet arrived. Babylon is not yet fallen. The servants

of God in the present day, will most probably fulfil their appointed time upon earth, like those who have lived before them, in a state of conflict. They must endure the cross, and sustain opposition for His sake. The people who shall live when “the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ,” when the “nations shall learn war no more,” are yet unborn. But even now we may rejoice that “the LORD God Omnipotent reigneth,” and that Jesus is “King of kings, and LORD of lords.” I must consider my text as referring to Him. Many of the heathens believed that God reigned. The Christian doctrine is, that the LORD God Omnipotent exercises His dominion and government in the person of Christ. “The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into His hands (John 3:35). And thus our Lord, after His resurrection, assured His disciples, “All power is committed unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). He has already taken to Himself His great power, and reigneth. His right of reigning over all, is essential to His divine nature; but the administration of government in the nature of man, is the effect and reward of His obedience unto death. But in the union of both natures, He is one person, Christ Jesus the Lord. All the riches and fullness of the Godhead, all the peculiar honours of the Mediator, centre in Him. They may be distinguished, but they are inseparable.

Happy are they who can, upon solid and Scriptural grounds, exult in the thought that the Lord reigns, and can make His government the subject of their hallelujahs and praises! Happy are they, who see, acknowledge and admire His management in the kingdom of providence, and are the willing subjects of His kingdom of grace. Let us take a brief survey of his reigning glory in these kingdoms.

1. Great and marvellous is this LORD God Omnipotent in His Kingdom of Universal Providence! His mighty arm sustains the vast fabric of the universe. He upholds the stars in their courses. If we attentively consider their multitude, their magnitudes, their distances from us and from one another, and the amazing

swiftness, variety and regularity of their motions, our minds are overwhelmed, our thoughts confounded, by the vastness and wonders of the scene. But He spoke them into being, and they are preserved in their stations and revolutions by His power and agency. If we fix our thoughts upon the earth, though in comparison of the immensity of His creation, it is but as a point, or a grain of sand, it is the object of His incessant care. All its various inhabitants derive their existence and their support from Him. He provides for the young ravens when unable to fly, and for the young lions that traverse the woods. The instinct of animals, whereby they are unerringly instructed, in whatever concerns the welfare and preservation of their species, so vastly exceeding the boasted wisdom of man, that he can neither imitate nor comprehend it, is communicated by Him. He teaches the birds to build their nests, the spider to weave his web, and instructs the communities of bees, and insignificant emmets [ants], to form their admirable policies and government among themselves. If we speak of intelligent beings, “He does what He pleases in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth.” He directs and overrules the counsels and purposes of men, so that though they act freely, the event of all their different interfering schemes, is only the accomplishment of His purposes. When they are employed as His instruments, from small beginnings, and in defiance of difficulties apparently insuperable, they succeed beyond their own expectations. When unhappily engaged against His designs, in vain they rage and plot. He takes the wise in their own craftiness, pours contempt upon their power and policy, and all their great preparations melt like a mist, or like snow before the sun, and leave no trace behind. Still more wonderful, to the eye of faith, is His control over Satan and the powers of darkness. Whatever He may permit them to do, for wise reasons, though unknown to us, they cannot detain one soul in their bondage (with all their subtlety or strength) longer than till His appointed time of release; nor recover one soul back to their dominion, of which He is pleased to undertake the care. On the contrary, He breaks the heads of these Leviathans in pieces,

turns their counsels against themselves, and makes them instrumental in purifying His people, and extending His Church, by the means they employ for the destruction of both. Thus they who dwell under His shadow are safe; for all things are in His power, and He always cares for them, and keeps them as the pupil of His eye. And therefore though they are exercised with trials, and suffer many things for their good, His eye being always upon them, and His ear open to their prayer, they are supported, supplied, relieved, delivered, and at last made more than conquerors.

2. He has a peculiar Kingdom, which He has established distinct from the kingdoms of this world, though diffused and extended among them, and which, in due time, like leaven, will pervade and assimilate them all to Himself. This is the Kingdom of the Gospel, His Church. It is founded upon a Rock, and though the gates of hell continually war against it, they cannot prevail. For He is “a wall of fire round about it, and a glory in the midst of it” (Zechariah 2:5).

Here He reigns upon a throne of grace. He possesses and exercises unlimited authority as a sovereign, to save whom He pleases, to pardon all manner of sins and offences, and to admit rebels and enemies, when they submit themselves and bow to His golden sceptre, into the number of His children and His friends. Seldom do the kings of the earth publish an act of grace in favour of those who have been guilty of rebellion, without clogging it with exceptions. Either they feel a resentment against some of the delinquents, which they have not magnanimity sufficient to conquer, or they dare not trust them. But His mercy is infinite. And He knows how to change their hearts when He pardons their sins.

Perhaps it may not be a digression, wholly un-useful and impertinent, if I take this occasion to point out the several senses in which the word Church may be understood, agreeable to the Scripture.

(1). It denotes the aggregate, the mystical Church, the whole

body of that spiritual kingdom, of which the Redeemer is the living and life-giving Head (Colossians 1:18). A succession of these has appeared upon earth in every age, from the days of righteous Abel whom Cain slew. And we have reason to believe, that the far greater part of them are yet unborn. They will all be assembled together before the Throne, in the great Day of His final appearance, and inherit the kingdom of glory prepared for them. This is the “Church which God hath bought with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Happy are those who belong to this society of the redeemed, whose names are written in heaven.

(2). The visible Church contains all those who bear and acknowledge the name of Christians, and who admit and enjoy the Gospel revelation. The Church, in this sense, includes many nations. But it is a small thing to belong only to the visible church, for it is compared to a corn-floor (Matthew 3:12) on which chaff is mingled with the wheat; to a field in which tares grow promiscuously with the good seed; to a fisher’s net enclosing both good and bad (Matthew 13:24, 47). But a time of discrimination will come. The chaff and the tares, and whatever is evil, will be consumed. Alas! what will it avail at last to say, “Lord, we have eaten and drank in Thy presence,” at Thy table with Thy true disciples, “and Thou hast taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26, 27), and we have heard in our own language of Thy wonderful works,” if you can say no more? My heart is pained with the apprehension, lest some of you who have joined in the same public worship with true believers, have sat in the same seat, and lived in the same families, should at last see them, with whom you have been very nearly connected in this world, received into the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves be shut out.

(3). The catholic [universal] Church, in one period, is part of the visible church which is united to the Lord by living faith. It comprises all who agree in the profession of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and whose conversation is regulated by its precepts, or, in the Apostle’s words, “All who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Ephesians 6:24). This catholic

[universal] Church, through the policy of Satan and the deceitfulness of the heart, is too much divided against itself. Prejudice, bigotry, and remaining ignorance, greatly prevent that desirable union amongst true Christians, which would promote their peace, comfort, and increase, and would contribute more than a thousand arguments to put their adversaries to shame and to silence. That shameful contention for denominations, parties, and favourite preachers, for which the Apostle reproved the Corinthians, is still greatly to be lamented (1 Corinthians 3:4). But, though they are too backward in acknowledging and assisting each other, the Lord is merciful to their weakness, and bears with them all. And as they grow in grace, and drink more into His Spirit, their hearts are enlarged, and they approach nearer to His pattern of long-suffering, patience and tenderness.

(4). The word church is applied to particular societies or Christians who are connected by a participation in the same ordinances of the Gospel, and who maintain a Scriptural separation from the sinful spirit and customs of the world. And though there may be pretenders among them, as there were among the apostolic churches, they are denominated by the better part. They belong to the catholic [universal] Church by their profession of the truth, and those of them that are in deed and in truth what they profess to be, are living members of the mystical Church, to which all the promises are made. By whatever name they are known or distinguished among men, they are “branches of the true vine,” they “have their fruits unto holiness, and their end, everlasting life.” But to return:

In this His Church, or spiritual Kingdom, He rules by wise and gracious laws and ordinances. He releases His subjects from all authority, in point of conscience, but His own, and enjoins them to call no one master, but Himself (Matthew 23:8-10). If they “stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has made them free” (Galatians 5:1), they will not give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of any man, nor follow him farther than he follows their Lord. And consequently, if they are influenced by His royal law of doing to others, as they would that others should do unto



them, they will not attempt to exert an undue authority, or wish to be called masters themselves; so as to assume a dogmatic carriage, or to expect a universal and absolute submission. But it must be owned, that in our present state of infirmity, this privilege is not sufficiently prized, nor this command duly complied with; there being scarcely a man who does not either arrogate too much to himself, or allow too much to others. A fault in the one or the other of these respects, may be assigned as a principal cause of most of the evils which deform the appearance, or injure the peace of the Church. But the design of His Gospel is to set His people at liberty from the yoke of men, from the fetters of custom and tradition, of superstition and will worship [self-imposed worship]; that they may enjoy, in His service, a state of perfect freedom.

For it is the principal glory of His Kingdom, that He reigns in the hearts of His people. There He writes His precepts, impresses His image, and erects His throne; ruling them, not merely by an outward law, but by an inward secret influence, breathing His own life and spirit into them, so that their obedience becomes, as it were, natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By the discoveries He affords them of His love, He wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from Him the “spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7), and run with alacrity in the way of His commandments.

It is impossible, therefore, to make this song our own, and cordially [sincerely; heartily] rejoice that “the LORD God Omnipotent reigneth,” unless we are the willing subjects of His government; unless we are really pleased with His appointed way of salvation, approve of His precepts, and, from a view of His wisdom and goodness, can cheerfully submit and resign ourselves to the disposal of His Providence. In all these respects we are by nature at variance with Him. We are too proud to be indebted to His grace, too wise in our own conceits to desire His instruction, too obstinately attached to the love and practice of sin, to be capable of relishing the beauty and spirituality of His

commandments. And our love of the world, and the things of it, is too strong and grasping, to permit us to be satisfied with the lot, and with the dispensations [circumstances; experiences] He appoints for us. We wish, if possible, and as far as possible we attempt, to be our own carvers. We are unthankful, when He bestows; impatient, if He withholds; and if He sees fit to resume the gifts of which we are unworthy, we repine and rebel against His will. This enmity must be subdued, before we can be pleased with His government. In other words, we must be changed, we must be made new creatures. To produce this change, this new creation, the Gospel is the only expedient; and when revealed and applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought. The sinner who is first convinced of his guilt and misery, and then reconciled to God by faith in the great atonement, willingly yields to His administration. He owns and feels the propriety of His proceedings, is ready to acknowledge, in his sharpest afflictions, that the Lord is gracious, and has not dealt with him according to the desert of his iniquities. He considers himself as no longer his own, but bought with a price, and brought under the strongest obligations, “to live no longer to himself, but to Him who loved him, and gave Himself for him.” And what was before his dread and dislike, becomes now the joy of his heart—the thought, that the Lord reigneth, and that all his concerns are in the hands of Him who does all things well.

Are there any among us, who say in their hearts, “We will not have this” Saviour “to rule over us?” The thought is no less vain than wicked. He must, He will “reign, till He has subdued all enemies under His feet.” You must either bend or break before Him.

### **37. The Extent of Messiah’s Spiritual Kingdom**

***“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!”***  
**Revelation 11:15**

The Kingdom of our Lord in the heart, and in the world, is

frequently compared to a building or house, of which He Himself is both the Foundation and the Architect (Isaiah 28:16 and 54:11, 12). A building advances by degrees (1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 2:20-22), and while it is in an unfinished state, a stranger cannot, by viewing its present appearance, form an accurate judgment of its design, and what the whole will be, when completed. For a time, the walls are of unequal height, it is disfigured by rubbish, which at the proper season will be taken away; and by scaffolding, which, though useful for carrying on the building, does not properly belong to it, but will likewise be removed when the present temporary service is answered. But the architect Himself proceeds according to a determinate plan, and His idea of the whole work is perfect from the beginning. It is thus the Lord views His people in the present life. He has begun a good work in them, but as yet every part of it is imperfect and unfinished; and there are not only defects to be supplied, but deformities and encumbrances that must be removed. Many of the dispensations [occurrences; experiences] and exercises, which contribute to form their religious character, do not properly belong to that work which is to abide, though they have a subservience to promote it. When that which is perfect is come, the rest shall be done away.

And thus, although the growth and extent of His Kingdom is the great scope and object of His Providence, to which all the revolutions that take place in the kingdoms of this world shall be finally subservient; yet the steps by which He is carrying forward His design, are, for the most part, remote from the common apprehensions of mankind; and, therefore, seldom engage their attention. His Kingdom, founded upon the Rock of Ages, is building, advancing, and the gates of hell shall not be able to withstand its progress. Only detached and inconsiderable parts of the plan are as yet visible, and the beauties are everywhere obscured by attendant blemishes. But His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. Princes and statesmen seldom think of Him, are seldom aware that in pronouncing their own schemes, they are eventually fulfilling His purposes, and

preparing the way to promote the cause which they despise, and often endeavour to suppress. But thus it is. Sometimes He employs them more directly as His instruments, and when they are thus engaged in His work, their success is secured. So Cyrus, whom Isaiah mentioned by name (Isaiah 45:1-5) long before his birth, as the appointed deliverer of Israel from their captivity, prospered in his enterprises, being guided and girded by Him whom he knew not, and established his own power upon the ruins of the Assyrian monarchy. The Roman Empire likewise increased and prospered from small beginnings, that a way might be opened, in the proper season, for the destruction of the Jewish economy, and for facilitating the preaching of the Gospel. And posterity will see that the principal events of the present age, in Asia and America, all have a tendency to bring forward the accomplishment of my text; and are leading to one grand point, the spreading and establishment of the Church and Kingdom of our Lord. His plan is unalterably fixed. He has said it, and it shall be done. Things will not always remain in their present disordered state. And though this desirable period may be yet at a distance, and appearances very dark and unpromising, the Word of the Lord shall prevail over all discouragements and opposition.

Prophecies which are not yet fulfilled will necessarily be obscure. Many learned men have laboured to explain the prophecies in this Book [Bible], to ascertain the facts which are foretold, and to fix the dates when they may be expected to take place. But they are so divided in their judgments, and with regard to several of the most eminent who thus differ, the support their opinions derive from the character and abilities of the proposers is so nearly equal, that those who consult them are more likely to be embarrassed, than satisfied. For myself, I think it becomes me to confess my ignorance and my inability, either to reconcile the conjectures of others, or to determine which is the more probable, or to propose better of my own. I do not, therefore, undertake to give the precise sense of this passage, as it stands connected with the rest of the chapter. Nor should I, perhaps, have attempted to preach from it, but upon this occasion. It is introduced with great

propriety in the Messiah Oratorio, as a close to the second part, which begins with a view of the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world, by the power of His priestly office; and concludes with an account of His glorious success as the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

My business is only to lead you to some pleasing and profitable reflections upon this subject, now it comes in my way. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that speak in magnificent strains of a kingdom which God would, in His appointed time, establish upon the earth; the sense of which is greatly weakened and narrowed, if restrained, as some commentators would restrain it to the restoration of Israel to their own land from their captivity in Babylon. Yet it must be allowed, that the highly figurative language in which many of these prophecies are expressed, a great part of which cannot be understood literally, renders the interpretation difficult.

What we read in the twentieth chapter of this book, of a period in which the saints shall reign with Christ during a thousand years, has given occasion to almost a thousand conjectures, concerning a Millennial state. Some persons suppose, that the present frame of nature shall be dissolved and changed, and expect a proper resurrection of the dead; after which, the Lord will personally reign with His people upon the earth, when purified by fire and restored to its primitive perfection and beauty. If so, earth will be heaven; for the state of happiness believers are taught to hope for, depends not upon local circumstances, but chiefly consists in the enjoyment of His unveiled immediate presence, and in beholding His glory. Others seem to conceive of the Millennium nearly in the same manner as the Jews formed their expectations of MESSIAH'S Kingdom. They think that temporal honours, dominion, prosperity, and wealth, will then be the portion of believers; the very portion, which they are now called upon to renounce and despise. But as I have hinted, large allowances must be made for the metaphorical language of prophecy. We read that the streets of the New Jerusalem are paved with gold, and that the twelve gates are

twelve pearls (Revelation 21:15, 21); but no person of sound judgment can suppose that this description is to be understood strictly according to the letter. The personal presence of MESSIAH with His people, is not necessary to such degrees of happiness, as are compatible with the present state of mortality and imperfection. It is sufficient, if He vouchsafes [graciously promises] to dwell with them by His Spirit. Much less are temporal dominion and wealth necessary to the prosperity and honour of His spiritual Kingdom. But what, then, are we encouraged to expect, beyond what has been hitherto known, with regard to this point? Let us consult the Scriptures, which alone can guide and determine our enquiry. I will select some express passages, a few out of many which might be adduced, but sufficient, I hope, by the rules of sober interpretation, to lead us to a satisfactory answer.

The glory and happiness of MESSIAH'S Kingdom, is described by the prophets in terms which cannot be justly applied to any period of the Church already past. They sometimes represent it by a variety of beautiful pastoral images, and sometimes in plainer language. Thus says Isaiah, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4). Again, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9). I might likewise transcribe the whole of the sixteenth chapter, but shall only offer you the latter part of it, "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time" (Isaiah 60:18-22). To the same purpose, the Prophet Ezekiel: "And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even my servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezekiel 34:23-26). And again, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:25-27). And the desolate

land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited (verses 34, 35). The Prophet Zechariah speaks to the same effect: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be My people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent Me unto thee . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and His name one” (Zechariah 2:10, 11 and 14:9).

Though the promises and prophecies of this import are addressed to the Church, under the names of Israel, Jacob, Zion, or Jerusalem, we are certain they were not fulfilled to the nation of Israel, while their civil government subsisted. Their national prosperity and glory were greatly diminished, before any of these prophecies were revealed. They were an inconstant and a suffering people, during the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, till at length their city and temple were destroyed by the Chaldeans. And though they returned from their captivity, and their city and temple were rebuilt; they continued tributary and dependent, and were successively subject to the Persian, Macedonian, and Roman power. Their obstinate rejection and crucifixion of MESSIAH filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought wrath upon them to the uttermost. They were soon afterwards exterminated from their land, their constitution, both of church and state, utterly subverted; and they remain, to this day, in a dispersed state, which renders the observance of the law impracticable.

It seems equally plain, that these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled to the Christian Church. The greater part of the earth, to this day, is unacquainted with the name of Jesus. And the general face of Christendom, whether in Popish or Protestant countries, exhibits little more of the spirit and character of the Gospel, than is to be found among the heathens. If Christianity be compatible



with pride or baseness, with avarice or profusion, with malice and envy, with scepticism in principle, and licentiousness of conduct, then Christians abound; but if humility, integrity, benevolence, and a spiritual mind are essential to a Christian; if we judge by the criterion which our Lord Himself appointed, and account only those His disciples, who live in the exercise of mutual love, it is to be feared that they are but few, even in the places which are most favoured with the light of the Gospel. But can the Scriptures be broken? Can the promises of the Lord fail? By no means. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle" of His word shall fail of accomplishment.

It is not necessary to suppose that every individual of mankind shall be savingly converted to the Lord, in this future day of His power; but I apprehend the current language of the prophecies warrants us hope that the prayers and desires of the Church, shall, in some future period, be signally answered in the following respects:

1. That the Gospel shall visit the nations which are at present involved in darkness. The heathen are given to MESSIAH for "His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession." At present (as I have formerly observed, booklet 14, sermon 32 the fourth and fifth paragraph) if the whole of Christendom was inhabited by real Christians, they would bear but a small proportion to the rest of mankind. Large countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, where the Gospel was once known, have been, for many ages, involved in Mohammedan darkness. The scattered remnant of the Greek church, in Turkey, are so miserably depraved and ignorant, that they scarcely deserve to be mentioned as an exception. The rest of Asia knows little of Christianity; unless they have learnt it in the eastern parts, from the cruelty and tyranny of men who bear the name of Christians. The like may be said of America, excepting the northern provinces of our late dominion there. For the zeal of the Spaniards and Portuguese has produced few other effects, than rapine, slavery, and deluges of human blood. The interior parts,

both of Africa and America, are unknown. The countries and islands, lately discovered in the Southern Hemisphere, are left as they were found, in gross ignorance. The exertions of our navigators to supply them with sheep and cows, and useful implements from Europe, were humane and laudable. But it does not appear that the least attempt was made, to impart to them the knowledge of our holy religion. The only missionary they have from us (if he be yet living) is, the much spoken of Omiah [Omaha - a native from Tahiti, brought to England in 1774 by Captain Cook after one of his voyages]. This man was brought to England, almost from the Antipodes; he spent some time among us, and was then sent back to tell his countrymen what he had seen and heard. But, if he gave a faithful account of our customs, morals, and religion, so far as they fell within the circle of his own observations, the relation would certainly be little to our honour, and, I am afraid, much to their hurt. In brief, a large part of Europe, almost the whole of the other three continents, with the Islands in the Eastern and Southern Oceans, are destitute of the true Gospel. But there is a time approaching, "called the fullness of the Gentiles," when the Redeemer's glory shall dawn and shine upon all nations. And though we cannot see when, or how this happy change shall be effected, yet, in the Lord's hour, mountains shall sink into plains. Nor is it more improbable to us now, than it would have seemed to an inhabitant of Rome, in the time of Julius Caesar, that the island of Great Britain should one day be distinguished by all those privileges which the Providence of God has since bestowed upon it.

2. That this Gospel shall prevail, not in word only, but in power. Even where the name of Christ is professed, but little of the power of it is known at present. The superstition and false worship, generally prevalent within the pale of Roman and Greek churches, may be mentioned without offence to Protestants. But the bulk of the Protestant countries are equally overspread with scepticism and wickedness. Few, comparatively, among Protestants, are friendly to that Gospel which the Apostles

preached; and much fewer are they who are influenced by it. Perhaps no nation is favoured with greater advantage for knowing the truth than our nation, nor any city more favoured than this city [London, England]. I doubt not but there are persons now living, who would have been thought eminent Christians, if they had lived in the first and happiest age of the Church; and I trust their number is greater than we are aware of. The Lord has a hidden people, little known to the world, or to each other. But if we judge by the standard of truth, we must acknowledge that the power of religious profession is very low. How little does it appear in the lives, tempers, and pursuits of the most who hear the Gospel? But the time will come when Christians shall again be known by their integrity, spiritual-mindedness, and benevolence, and by all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. The fall of mystical Babylon, and of Anti-Christ, in its various forms, and the calling of the Jews, are events which are positively foretold; and which, when they come to pass, will have great effects. Zion, as yet, is only building; but it shall be built.

3. That the animosities and disputes which prevail among Christians shall cease. The observation of a late ingenious writer, which, it is to be feared, he was confirmed in by his own experience, is too much founded in truth: "We have just religion enough to make us hate one another." The spirit of party, prejudice, bigotry, and interest, a zeal for systems, forms, modes, and denominations, furnish men with plausible pretences for indulging their unsanctified passions; and deceive them into an opinion that, while they are gratifying their pride and self-will, they are only labouring to promote the cause of God and truth. Hence often the feuds which obtain among religious people are pursued with greater violence and to greater lengths, and are productive of more mischievous consequences, than the quarrels of drunkards. The lovers of peace, who refuse to take part in these contentions, but rather weep over them in secret, are

censured and despised as neutrals and cowards, by the angry combatants on both sides, while the world despises and laughs at them all. It was not so in the beginning, nor will it be so always. The hour is coming when believers shall be united in love; shall agree in all that is essential to a life of faith and holiness, and shall live in the exercise of forbearance and tenderness towards each other, if, in some points of smaller importance, they cannot think exactly alike; which possibly may be the case in the best times, in the present imperfect state of human nature. “Ephraim then shall no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:13).

4. That it will be a time of general peace. At present, the kingdoms which, by their profession, should be subjects of the Prince of Peace, are perpetually disturbing, invading, and destroying each other. They live in habits of mutual fear and jealousy, and maintain great armies on all sides; that each nation may be prepared, if occasion offers, to strike the first blow. War is followed as a trade, and cultivated as a science; and they who, with the greatest diligence and success, spread devastation and ruin far and wide, and deluge the earth with human blood, acquire the title of heroes and conquerors. Can there be a stronger confirmation of what we read in Scripture, concerning the depravity of man? Can we conceive an employment more suited to gratify the malignity of Satan and the powers of darkness, if they were permitted to appear and act amongst us in human shapes? Could such enormities possibly obtain, if the mild and merciful spirit of the Gospel generally prevailed? But it shall prevail at last, and then “the nations shall learn war no more” (Isaiah 2:4).

How transporting the thought! That a time shall yet arrive, when the love of God and man, of truth and righteousness, shall obtain [shall prevail] through the earth. The evils (and these are the greatest evils of human life) which men bring upon themselves, and upon each other, by their wickedness, shall cease; and we may believe that the evils in the natural world will

be greatly abated. Sin will no longer call down the tokens of God's displeasure, by such public calamities as hurricanes, earthquakes, pestilence, and famine. And if some natural evils, as pain and sickness, should remain, submission to the will of God, and the compassion and tenderness of men towards the afflicted, will render them tolerable.

If this prospect be desirable to us, surely it will be the object of our prayers. The Lord will do great things, but He will be enquired of by His people for the performance.

But to many persons, the extension of dominion and commerce appears much more desirable. The glory and extent of the British government has been eagerly pursued; and the late diminution of our national grandeur and influence, has been much laid to heart; while the glory of the Redeemer's Kingdom, and the conversion of the heathens, are considered by the politicians and merchants of the earth, as trivial concerns, unworthy of their notice; or rather, as obstacles to the views and ambition of avarice. But it is said of MESSIAH, and of His Church, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee, shall perish" (Isaiah 60:12). The Word of God may be slighted, but it cannot be annulled. And it is more a subject for lamentation than wonder that our national prosperity should decline; when we are indifferent, yea, adverse to that cause which the great Governor of the world has engaged to promote and establish.

### **38. King of Kings and Lord of Lords**

*"And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"*  
**Revelation 19:16.**

The description of the administration and glory of the Redeemer's Kingdom, in defiance of all opposition, concludes the second part of Messiah Oratorio. Three different passages from the book of Revelation are selected to form a grand chorus, of which Handel's title in this verse is the close—a title which has been sometimes vainly usurped by proud worms of this earth.

Eastern monarchs, in particular, have affected to style themselves King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. In the Scriptural language, men, whether high or low, rich or poor, one with another, are compared to worms and potsherds of the earth; but they are by nature so strongly infected by pride, that they cannot invent titles of honour answerable to the idea they have of their own importance, without intrenching [infringing] upon the divine prerogative. Thus sovereignty, majesty, holiness and grace, and other attributes which properly belong to God alone, are parcelled out among the Great. But let the great and mighty know, that wherein they speak proudly, MESSIAH is above them. The whole verse (of which the latter clause only is in the Oratorio) offers two points to our meditations.

1. How He is represented as wearing His title. It is written, or inscribed, upon His vesture dipped in blood, and upon His thigh. Either upon that part of His vesture which covers His thigh; or, upon the upper part of His vesture, and upon His thigh likewise.

2. The title itself. “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” Whatever power the kings and lords among mankind possess, is derived from Him, and absolutely subject to His control.

1. The manner in which He wears His name or title. It is written upon His vesture, and upon His thigh.

(1). This name being written upon His “vesture,” denotes the manifestation, and the ground of His authority. It is written upon His outward garment, to be read, known, and acknowledged by all beholders. And it is upon His bloody garment, upon the vesture stained with His own blood, and the blood of His enemies; which intimates to us, that His government is founded upon the success of His great undertaking. In the passage from whence this verse is selected, there are three names attributed to MESSIAH. He has “a name which no one knows but Himself” (Revelation 19:12), agreeable to what He declared when upon earth. No man, no one, (neither man or angel) knoweth the Son, but the Father; this refers to His eternal power and Godhead. A second name, “the Word of God” (Revelation

19:13), denotes the mystery of the divine personality. The name in my text imports His glory, as the Mediator between God and man, in our nature, which, when He resumed it from the grave, became the seat of all power and authority; which power, we are now taught to consider—not merely as the power of God, to whom it essentially belongs, but as the power of God exercised in and by that Man who died upon the cross for our sins. In consequence of His obedience unto death, He received “a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). In the present life, His own people read this inscription by the eye of faith, and it inspires them with confidence and joy, under the many tribulations they pass through in the course of their profession. Hereafter, it shall be openly known and read by all men. Every eye shall see it, and every heart must either bow or break before Him.

(2). It is written upon His “thigh.” The thigh is the emblem of power, and is the part of the body on which the sword is girded (Psalm 45:3). By this emblem we are taught that He will assuredly maintain and exercise the right which He has acquired. As He has a just claim to the title, He will act accordingly. Many titles among men are merely titular. So the king of Great Britain is styled likewise king of France, though he has neither authority nor possessions in that kingdom. But this name which MESSIAH bears is full of life, truth and influence. He is styled “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” because He really is so. Because He actually rules and reigns over them, and does according to His own pleasure “in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,” with an absolute and uncontrollable sway, so that none can stay His hand, or “say unto Him, What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35).

2. The title itself is “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” He is the “Prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5). Too many of them imagine a vain thing. They take counsel together, and set themselves against Him saying, “Let us break His bands asunder.” But “He sitteth in the heavens, and has them

in derision” (Psalm 2:3, 4). He has His hook in their nose, and His bridle in their lips, and the result of all their contrivances is neither more nor less than the accomplishment of His will.

(1). The rage they discover, and the resistance they make, cannot weaken this truth, but rather render it more evident. If it be asked, Why does He permit them to resist? we may give an answer, in point, from the case of Pharaoh—he resisted, and he perished. He was often warned and rebuked, but he still hardened his neck, and continued stubborn under repeated judgments, till at length he was destroyed without remedy. Thus the God of Israel was more magnified, and the people of Israel were more honoured, in the view of the surrounding nations, when they were brought from Egypt with a high hand and with a stretched out arm; and when Pharaoh and his armies were overthrown in the Red Sea, than the nature of the case would have been admitted, if Pharaoh had made no opposition to their departure. Yet the obstinacy of Pharaoh was properly his own. It is true, we are assured that God hardened his heart; but we are not thereby warranted to suppose that God is the author of the sin, which He hates and forbids. It is written again, that “God cannot be tempted by evil, neither tempteth He any man” (James 1:13), and the Scripture is to be interpreted consistently with itself. It would be absurd to ascribe darkness, or ice, to the agency of the sun; though both inevitably follow, if the light and heat of the sun be withdrawn to a certain degree. A degree of heat is necessary to keep water in that state of fluidity which we commonly suppose essential to its nature; but it is rather essential to the nature of water to harden into ice, if it be derived of the heat which is necessary to preserve it in a fluid state; and the hardest metals will melt and flow like water, if heat be proportionably [proportionally] increased. Thus it is with the heart of fallen man. In whatever degree it is soft and impressionable, capable of feeling and tenderness, we must attribute it to the secret influence of the Father and Fountain of Light; and if He is pleased to withdraw His influence, nothing more is needful to its complete induration [hardening].



(2). The kings of the earth are continually disturbing the world with their schemes of ambition. They expect to carry everything before them, and have seldom any higher aim in view, than the gratification of their own passions. But in all they do, they are but servants of this great King and Lord, and fulfil His purposes as the instruments He employs to inflict prescribed punishment upon transgressors against Him, or to open a way for the spread of His Gospel. Thus under the Old Testament dispensation [order] (for He was King from everlasting) the successes of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and the exaltation of Cyrus, were entirely owing to their being employed by Him, as an axe or a saw in the hands of a workman (Isaiah 10:15). And they acted under a limited commission, beyond which they could not go. They had one thing in view, He had another; and when His design was accomplished, we hear of them no more. Time would not suffice, were I to adduce the many striking instances of the like kind, which offer to observation from the perusal of modern history. It is well known, with respect to that great event, the Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth Century, and especially in our own land, that many of the principal persons who contributed to its establishment, hated it in their hearts. But their ambition, appetites, and worldly policy, engaged them in such measures, as the King of kings overruled to produce consequences which they neither intended, nor could foresee; and which, when they did apprehend, they would have prevented if they could, but it was too late. Future writers, I doubt not, will make the like reflection on the late \* American war: in the origin and progress of which, there was such an evident disproportion between the apparent causes, and the effects produced by them; between the first designs and expectations of the principal actors on both sides, and the final event; that I think they who do not perceive a superintending Providence conducting the whole affair, as a preparation to still greater and more important revolutions, must be quite at a loss to account for what has already happened, upon any principles of human policy or foresight.

\* The American Revolution (1775-1783)

(3). That He is King of kings, and Governor among the nations, is farther evident from the preservation of His people; for the world is against them, and they have no protector but Him. The wrath of man, like the waves of the sea, has bounds prescribed to it, which it cannot pass. So far as He is pleased to overrule it, to His own praise, He will permit it to operate; but the remainder, that is not subservient to the accomplishment of His purpose, He will restrain (Psalm 76:10). But He works so secretly, though powerfully, by the agency of second causes, that only they who are enlightened by His Word and Spirit can perceive His interference. He permitted Ahithophel to give that counsel to Absalom, which though wicked, was, in the political sense of the word, prudent; that is, it was the probable method of putting David into the power of his rebellious son. David had prayed that the Lord would “turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness” (2 Samuel 15:31). Had the Lord instantly deprived Ahithophel of his reason, this prayer would have been more visibly, but not more effectually, answered, than by the counter-advice of Hushai, which, though rash and extravagant, being suited to gratify the vanity and folly of Absalom rendered the other abortive (2 Samuel 17:14). Sometimes the enemies of His Church divide and wrangle among themselves, and then one party, to mortify and oppose the other, will protect those whom, otherwise, they wish to destroy. Thus Paul escaped from the malice of the Jewish council, by the sudden disagreement which arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Acts 23:7), though they came together equally determined to destroy him. At other times, kings and statesmen act so inconsistently with their professed aims, and take steps, so directly calculated, to prevent what they wish to obtain, or to bring upon themselves what they mean to avoid, that we can only say, they are infatuated. A very small compliance, seemed likely to have secured the affection of the twelve tribes to Rehoboam. We are ready to wonder that he could not be prevailed on to speak mildly to the people, for one day, with a view of engaging them to be his servants forever. But

when we read that the cause was from the Lord (1 Kings 12:15), and that, in this way, His purpose of separating the kingdoms of Israel and Judah was effected, the wonder ceases. Very observable, likewise, was the coincidence of circumstances which preserved the Jews in Persia from the destructive designs of their adversary Haman. If the king (Esther 6:1) had slept that night, as usual, or if his attendant had read to him in any book but the Chronicle of the empire, or in any part of that chronicle but the very passage in which the service of Mordecai had been recorded, humanly speaking, Haman would have carried his point. In this manner, by a concurrence of circumstances, each of them, if considered singly, apparently trivial, and all of them, contingent, with respect to any human foresight or prevention, the Lord often pours contempt upon the wise and the mighty, and defeats their deepest laid and best concerted schemes, in the moment when they promise themselves success.

Many salutary and comfortable inferences may be drawn from the consideration of this subject. Some of them I may perhaps have formerly mentioned, but they will bear a repetition. We have need to be reminded of what we already know.

1. It should inspire us with confidence. If the LORD of hosts, the Lord of lords be for us, what weapon or counsel can prosper against us? However dark and threatening appearances may be, we need not tremble for the ark of God. The concerns of His Church are in safe hands. The cause so dear to us, is still more dear to Him. He has power to support it, when it is opposed, and grace to revive it when it is drooping. It has often been brought low, but never has been, never shall be forsaken. When He will work none can hinder. Nor need you fear for yourself, if you have committed yourself, and your all to Him. "The very hairs of your head are numbered" (Matthew 10:30). There is a hedge of protection (Job 1:10) around you, which none can break through without His permission; nor will He permit you to be touched, except when He designs to make a temporary and seeming evil, conducive to your real and permanent advantage.

2. It should affect us with an admiring and thankful sense of His condescension. “Lord, what is man, that Thou shouldest be so mindful of him? He humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven” (Psalm 113:6). But He stoops still lower. He affords His attention and favour to sinful men. His eye is always upon His people, His ear open to their prayers. Not a sigh or falling tear escapes His notice. He pities them, as a father pities his children; He proportions their trials to their strength, or strength to their trials, and so adjusts His dispensations [orders] to their state, that they never suffer unnecessarily, nor in vain.

3. How great is the dignity and privilege of true believers. Is the man congratulated or envied whom the king delights to honour? Believers are more frequently despised, than envied, in this world. But they may congratulate one another. The King of kings is their Friend. They have honours and pleasures which the world knows nothing of. Their titles are high, they are the “sons and the daughters of the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). Their possessions are great for “all things are theirs” (1 Corinthians 3:21). They are assured of what is best for them in this life, and of life eternal hereafter. They are now nearly [closely] related to the King of kings, and shall ere long be acknowledged and owned by Him, before assembled worlds. They who now account the proud happy, will be astonished and confounded when they shall see the righteous, whom they once undervalued, “shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of God.”

4. We may lastly infer the extreme folly and danger of those, who persist in their rebellion and opposition to this King of kings, and Lord of lords. Though He exercises much patience and long-suffering towards them for a season, the hour is approaching when His wrath will burn like fire. It is written, and must be fulfilled, “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17). Oh the solemnities of that great day, when the frame of nature shall be dissolved, when the Judge shall appear, the books be opened, and all mankind shall be summoned to His tribunal! Will not you yet tremble and bow

before Him, ye careless ones, while He is seated upon a throne of grace, and while the door of mercy stands open? Once more I call, I warn, I charge you, to repent and believe the Gospel. If today you will hear His voice, it is not yet too late. But who can answer for tomorrow? Perhaps “this night your soul may be required of you” (Luke 12:20). Are you prepared for the summons? If not, seize the present opportunity. Attend to the “one thing needful.” Seek His face that your soul may live. If not, remember that you are warned, your blood will be upon your own head. We have delivered our message, and if you finally reject it, you must answer for yourselves, to Him whose message it is.

The sixteenth of twenty booklets.

