Jonathan Edwards on the Millennium and the future of Israel - posted by docs (), on: 2009/1/10 8:53

In a book I have recently read I have found some information on Jonathan Edwards that has surprised me. He was perhaps the most influential evangelical Christian in the history of the United States and is known as a Calvinist theologian of supreme reputation. I don't know what I really thought he would be as far as the subject of the Millennium goes. I probably thought he would be a amillennialist. But it seems he was a definite Millennialist (minus the modern rapture theory) but of the post-millennial persuasion. He believed that the Christian world would expand through evangelism and eventually would influence the world to such a degree that a Christianized millennium would emerge. I'm of a pre-millennial persuasion myself but there is a lot in Edwards' expectations concerning the future of the Jews and the land of Canaan that I find worth consideration and that is somewhat surprising to me. It seems he believed in a definite future conversion of the Jews and a literal return by them to their ancient land in Palestine renamed Canaan. Which would mean to me he saw Old Testament prophecies relating to this to not be so much of a spiritual or allegorical nature whose meaning can only be found by believing these prophecies of conversion and return are fulfilled in the absorption of Jews into the Christian church etc. All very interesting.

Stephen J. Stein, editor of the Yale Edition, Volume 5 of Edwards' "Apocalyptic Writings", has explained and expanded into greater detail what Edwards considered important. In his (Stein's) "Introduction", he writes of Edwards:

The millennium remained a matter of consuming private interest for him...During the millennium kings will be like the judges who ruled ancient Israel before the monarchy was established Â– a form of government that pleased God greatly...In that glorious day Edwards conjectured, a variety of forms of governments may prevail, but none shall be contrary to Â‘true liberty.Â’...The geography of the millennium, another issue that divided commentators, attracted his exegetical attention. Edwards found scriptural warrant for placing the land of Canaan at the center of the coming kingdom of Christ...In like manner, he speculated that the return of the Jews to their homeland is inevitable because of the promises of land made to them have only partially been fulfilled. God intends the Jews to be Â‘a visible monumentÂ’ of his grace and power. The return to their traditional homeland, however, was premised by Edwards upon a conversion of the Jews to Christianity...Canaan will be the spiritual center of the coming kingdom, and Israel will again be a truly distinct nation. (END)

In his "Apocalyptic Wrings", Edwards makes statements concerning the stragetic and important eschatological location of Israel:

The land of Canaan is the most advantageously posited of any spot of ground on the face, to be the place from whence the truth should shine forth, and true religion spread around into all parts of the world. There are three continents of the earth: the old continent, America and Terra Australis. This land is right and center of the old and principle continent, between Europe, Asia and Africa, but most in Asia, because it is abundantly ther largest. And lying at the end of the Mediterranean Sea, which opens the way from Canaan directly to America, and having the Red Sea and Persian Gulf touching its borders as much as the Mediterranean, according to Exodus 23:31 and other places, opening the way straight to Terra Australis, the third continent....

That God did take care of the situation of his people Israel, upon their account, for the advantage of spreading the truth and diffusing the influences of religion, I think is evident from Deuteronomy 32:8-9, and from Acts 17:26-27 and from Habakkuk 3:6....

And it is the more evident, the Jews will return to their own land again, because they never yet possessed one quarter of the land, which was so often promised them, from the Red Sea to the river Euphrates (Exod. 23:31; Geen. 15:18, Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4). Indeed, it was partly fulfilled in SolomonÂ’s time, when he governed all within those bounds for a short time; but so short, that it is not thought that this is all the fulfillment of the promise that is to be. And besides, that was not a fulfillment of the promise, because they did not possess it, though they made the nations of its tributary. (Volume 5, pg 134-35)

And, from "A History of the Work of Redemption", Edwards concluded that as the Millennium is inaugurated, following the overthrow of the Mohammedan kingdom, there will be gradual conversion of the Jewish Diaspora:
Jewish infidelity shall then be overthrown. However obstinate they have now been for above seventeen hundred years in their rejecting Christ, and instances of conversion of any of that nation have been so very rare ever since the destruction of Jerusalem, but they have against the plain teachings of their own prophets continued to approve of the cruelty of the ir forefathers in crucifying; yet when this day comes the thick veil that blinds their eyes shall be removed (II Cor. 3:16), and divine grace shall melt and renew their hard hearts, Â“And they shall look upon him whom they Â“(Zech. 12:10 etc.) . And then shall all Israel be saved. The Jews in all their dispensations shall cast away their old infidelity, and shall wonder fully have their hearts changed, and abhor themselves for their past unbelief and obstinacy; and shall flow together to the blessed Jesus, penitently, humbly, and joyfully owning him as their glorious king and only savior, and shall with all their hearts as with one heart and voice declare his praises unto other nations. (pg 469)

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews in the eleventh chapter of Romans. And there are also many passages of the Old Testament that canÂ’t be interpreted any other sense, that I canÂ’t now stand to mention. Besides the prophecies of the calling of the Jews, we have a remarkable seal of the fulfillment of this great event in providence by a thing that is a kind of continual miracle, viz. the preserving them a distinct when in such a dispersed condition for above sixteen hundred years. The world affords nothing else like it Â– a remarkable hand of providence. When they shall be called, then shall the ancient people that were alone GodÂ’s people for so long a time be called GodÂ’s people again, never to be rejected more, one fold with the Gentiles; and then shall also the remains of the ten tribes wherever they are, and though they have been rejected much longer than , be brought in with their brethren, the Jews. Those prophecies of Hosea especially seem to hold this forth, and that in the future glorious times of the church both Judah and Ephraim, or Judah and the ten tribes, shall be brought in together, and shall be united as one people as they formerly were under David and Solomon (Hos. 1:1), and so in the last chapter of Hosea, and other parts of the prophecy. (pg 469-70)

Also, from his "A History of the Work of Redemption", Edwards writes on the conversion of the Jews:

We are not to suppose but that when the nation of the Jews are converted, other Christians will be as much GodÂ’s Israel as they, and will have in every respect the same privileges. Neither can we suppose that their church will have any manner of superiority over other parts of ChristÂ’s church, any otherwise than as that part of the church will be more glorious. Religion and learning will be there at the highest; more excellent books will be there written, etc. Without doubt, they will return to their own land; because, when their unbelief ceases, their dispersion, the dreadful and signal punishment of their unbelief, will cease too. As they have continued hitherto, with one consent to dishonor Christ by rejecting the gospel, so shall they meet together to honor him, by openly professing of it with one mouth, and practice it with one heart and one soul, together lamenting their obstinacy, as it is said they shall (Zech. 12:11-12), and together praising God for his grace in enlightening them. And as they have hitherto continued a distinct nation, that they might continue a visible monument of his displeasure, for their rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, so after their conversion will they still be a distinct nation, that they may be a visible monument of GodÂ’s wonderful grace and power in their calling and conversion. But we cannot suppose they will remain a distinct nation, any more than the primitive Jewish Christians, if they continue dispersed among other nations.

But yet, we are not to imagine that the old walls of separation will be set up again. But all nations will be as free to come to Judea, or to dwell in Jerusalem, as into any other city or country, and may have the same privilege there as they them selves. For they shall look upon all the world to be their brethren, as much as Christians in Boston and the Christians in other parts of New England look on each other as brethren. (Volume 5, pg 135)

Edwards was a great one and I don't think he can be as well known for his views above as some of his other writings and beliefs. Although not of the post-millennial belief myself like I said before, I find much of Edwards' beliefs and expectations concerning the Millennium and the future of Israel to be very interesting.

Re: Jonathan Edwards on the Millennium and the future of Israel - posted by Taylor Otwell, on: 2009/1/10 14:15

If you read David Brainerd's diary, you will find that the post-millenial hope of Christ's kingdom greatly triumphing on this earth very much encouraged and strengthened him to persevere. He spent his dying days in Jonathan Edwards' home.

I think those in the Puritanical vein viewed Christianity in a much more epic sense than many today. They literally viewed themselves as warring with Antichrist, and pressing forward Christ's kingdom with the sword that protrudes from his mouth, the Scriptures.

With care in Christ,
Indeed, much of the 19th century European mission effort was fueled by those who held a post-millennial view and saw their efforts as a part of Christ establishing His reigning kingdom in every nation. I just finished reading John Paton's autobiography and I HIGHLY recommend it. He was Presbyterian and held a post-millennial view.

William Booth, John Wesley, and Charles Finney were all post-millenialists so was Spurgeon if I am not mistaken.

Most missionaries during the 19th century were also postmillenial. (David Livingstone, etc)

http://www.fwonline.cc/v25n1/The%20Hope%20of%20a%20ChristianWorld.html


Their eschatology had a lot to do with their success.

I appreciate the replies I have gotten. Thank you for the time in your effort. It's curious how we see and think of men of God and sometimes may not know how they believed in this area of the Millennium and Israel. I think for my part I just unknowingly assumed that a person of Edwards Reformed credentials would have probably been amill in his belief. But here he was believing the millennium was still future and that a future Israel would be right in the thick of things. Versus Israel is no longer any more important than any other nation and promises of a glorious and redeemed future for it are largely fulfilled by Jews entering the Gentile church etc. I'm trying to study it all anew but I don't think I'm wrong in saying that seems to be somewhat of a common belief in the amill perspective. Therefore, Edwards' belief of a literally regathered Israel and a future for a redeemed nation of Israel surprised me.

Thanks again for the replies. I am pre-millennial myself minus the dispensational aspect and minus the pre-trib rapture theory. I read the replies and I read the links provided. It brought up some questions I have concerning the post millennial view and if I get time maybe I can ask a few of those questions.

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