

Appendix E

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-58), is arguably the most significant and influential evangelical Christian in the history of the United States. He is frequently identified with a sober Puritan image that characterized Massachusetts during the eighteenth century. Although a leading figure throughout the Great Awakening of that period, his most notable writings have tended to identify him as a Calvinist theologian/ philosopher, though certainly not in any mere academic or detached sense. On the one hand his *Freedom of the Will* is a most profound study of a much debated vital point of doctrine; on the other hand his *Religious Affections* penetrates to the very heart of experiential Christianity.

However, the more recent and comprehensive publication of Edwards' writings by *Yale University Press* has provided an expanded vision of what this man of God regarded to be of some importance. Notably, among many other matters, Edward's was a decided millennialist, somewhat following a revival of interest in this aspect of biblical eschatology that erupted in England during the middle of the seventeenth century. Stephen J. Stein, as the editor of the Yale Edition, Volume 5, *Apocalyptic Writings*, explains:

[T]he 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—a form of government that pleased God greatly. . . . In that glorious day, Edwards conjectured, a variety of forms of government may prevail, but none shall be contrary to “true liberty.” . . . 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 been only partially fulfilled. God intends the Jews to be “a visible monument” of his grace and power. The return to their traditional homeland, however, was premised by Edwards upon a conversion of the Jews to Christianity. . . . [Then] Canaan will be the spiritual center of the coming kingdom, and Israel will again be a truly distinct nation.¹

To be more specific, Edwards was a post-millennialist, and although this perspective differs somewhat from the premillennialism that this volume upholds, nevertheless with regard to the issue of Israel and the millennium, we find ourselves largely in happy agreement with his attitude and expectations concerning the Jews and the land of Israel.² And of course it ought to go without saying that Edward's was not remotely a dispensationalist! More specifically he believed that authentic Christian expansion through evangelism would effectively sweep the world to such an extent that a largely Christianized, millennial world would result. Only then, at such a triumphant world

¹ Stephen J. Stein, editor, “Introduction,” Jonathan Edwards, *Works, Apocalyptic Writings*, V. 8, pp. 17-19.

² It is interesting to note that at the urging of many for a Second American Bible and Prophetic Conference (premillennial) in Chicago, 1886, following the immensely successful First Conference (premillennial) in New York, 1878, the organizing secretary, Rev. George C. Needham commented that: “Many of postmillennial faith ratified the call, and were present at every session as interested listeners. *Prophetic Studies of the International Prophetic Conference*, p. 1. Specifically, classic postmillennialism is in mind here, and not the more recent revisionist, reconstructionist variety. Of course nonmillennialists would sense relatively little affinity in such a setting.

climax, would Jesus Christ return in universally acknowledged glory. Stein further explains the historic setting of Edwards' prophetic optimism as follows:

Since the Reformation, God has reversed the fortunes of the church by pouring out the vials of wrath upon his enemies. The memory of persecution and martyrdom will fade in the future as the knowledge of divinity spreads, injustices are rectified, the saints and martyrs vindicated, and men stimulated to greater holiness during the millennium. The promised triumph of the saints is the hope and encouragement of the church on earth.³

And who among us, if living in America during the eighteenth century, could avoid the encouraging force of circumstances in the world at that time, especially with regard to the stimulus of revival and the effective expansion of evangelical missionary endeavors. On the other hand, if Edwards were alive today, most likely he would write with a more disturbing perspective in mind. However, our focus being chiefly on his regard for the Jews and Israel, now let us consider several significant excerpts from Edwards' writings. The first is taken from his, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, posthumously published in 1773. Edwards concludes that as the millennium is inaugurated, following the overthrow of the Mohammedan kingdom,

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 their forefathers in crucifying [Christ]; 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, "And they shall look on him whom they [have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in

bitterness for his firstborn]" (Zech. 12:10, etc.). And then shall all Israel be saved [Rom. 11:26]. The Jews in all their dispersions shall cast away their old infidelity, and shall wonderfully 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 [Isa. 66:20; Jer. 50:4].

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews is in the eleventh chapter of Romans. And there are also many passages of the Old Testament that cannot be interpreted in any other sense, that I cannot 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 [nation] when in such a dispersed condition for above sixteen hundred years. The world affords nothing else like it—a remarkable hand of providence. When they shall be called, then shall that ancient people that were alone God's people for so long a time be God's people again, never to be rejected more, one fold with the Gentiles; and then also shall the remains of the ten tribes wherever they are, and though they have been rejected much longer than [the Jews], be brought in with their brethren, the Jews. The 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. 1:11), and so in the last chapter of Hosea, and other parts of his prophecy.

Though we don't know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass, yet this much we may determine by Scripture, that it will [be] before [the] glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished, because it is said that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12, 15) [Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world . . . how much more their fullness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what

³ Stein, Edwards, *Works, Apocalyptic Writings*, V. 8, p. 11.

shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"].⁴

It is already obvious that for Edwards, the conversion of ethnic Israel is related to the nation's promised return to the land of Israel. This man of acknowledged, profound spirituality, is wholly at rest with such a substantial triumph; to charge him with carnality would be absurd. Further, while Israel and the church comprise the people of God, yet there is national distinction within this unity, as Galatians 3:28 well illustrates. Hence, let us now consider Edwards' more detailed description of the millennial economy, both with regard to geography and the diversity within unity that will incorporate Jews and Gentiles.

That the land of Israel has distinct eschatological importance is indicated by Edwards consideration of its strategic location.

[T]he land of Canaan is the most advantageously posited of any spot of ground on the face [of the earth], 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 in the center of the old and principle continent, between Europe, Asia and Africa, but most in Asia, because it is abundantly the largest. And [it is] 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, that the Jews will return to their own land again, because they never have yet possessed one quarter of that land, which was so often promised them,

from the Red Sea to the river Euphrates (Exod. 23:31; Gen. 15:18; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4). Indeed, it was partly fulfilled in Solomon's time, when he governed all within those bounds for a short time; but so short, that it is not to be 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 it tributary.⁵

Hence both the Jew in the land of Israel and the Gentile in surrounding regions shall enjoy distinct yet harmonious relations.

We are not to suppose but that when the nation of the Jews are converted, other Christians will be as much God'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 Christ'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 God'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

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Works, A History of the Work of Redemption*, V. 9, pp. 469-70.

⁵ Edwards, *Works, Apocalyptic Writings*, V. 8, pp. 133-34.

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 themselves. For they shall look upon all the world to be their brethren, as much as the Christians in Boston and the Christians in other parts of New England look on each other as brethren.⁶

However, according to Edwards' postmillennial expectations, the definitive biblical account of this future state in Revelation 20 will be accomplished gradually, and not in an apocalyptic fashion.

The ruin of the popish interest is but a small part of what is requisite, in order to introduce and settle such a state of things, as the world is represented as being in, in that millennium that is described in Revelation 20, wherein Satan's visible kingdom is everywhere totally extirpated, and a perfect end put to all heresies, delusions and false religions whatsoever, through the whole earth, and Satan thenceforward "deceives the nations no more" [v. 3], and has no place anywhere but in hell. This is the sabbatism of the world; when all shall be in a holy rest, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and there shall be nothing to hurt or offend, and there shall be abundance of peace, and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covers the seas" [Isa. 11:9], and God's people shall dwell in quiet resting places. There is not the least reason to think, that all this will be brought to pass as it were in one stroke, or that from the present lamentable state of things, there should be

brought about and completed the destruction of the Church of Rome, the entire extirpation of all infidelity, heresies, superstitions and schisms, through all Christendom, and the conversion of all the Jews, and the full enlightening and con-version of all Mahometan and heathen nations, through the whole earth, on every side of the globe, and from the north to the south pole, and the full settlement of all in the pure Christian faith and order, all as it were in the issue of one great battle, and by means of the victory of the church in one great conflict with her enemies . . . If the Spirit of God should be immediately poured out, and that great work of God's power and grace should now begin, which in its progress and issue should complete this glorious effect; there must be an amazing and unparalleled progress of the work and manifestation of divine power to bring so much to pass, by the year 2000.⁷

As earlier indicated, surely if it was possible now for Edwards to survey this present turbulent, unspeakably wicked world in the year 2002, how likely it is that, while his basic expectations concerning the Jews and the land of Israel would indicate little fundamental change, yet his optimistic gradualism would be discarded. In its place there would be optimistic hope in God's apocalyptic intervention, that is "the great day of their wrath," the wrath of God the Father and His Son, "the Lamb" (Rev. 6:12-17), and the subsequent establishment of "new heavens and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness" (II Pet. 3:12).

⁶ Ibid., pp. 135.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 410-11.