

God's Law in the Millennium: Where A-, Pre- and Postmillennialists Should Agree

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While there is a broad variety of opinion concerning the so called Millennium one is astonished that more or less the same texts are used by all parties.

The following article does not seek to discuss the question of the millennium itself. It does not give exegetical arguments for any position. Instead it shows that there is a vital aspect of the millennium which often is lost in the heat of the chronological and general debate on the millennium.

If someone does not believe in any millennium on earth at all but in heavenly millennium he still believes in a millennium and should read this article. (The term “amillennialist”, from Greek “a” = “without”/“no”, was coined by the enemies of this position. Most amillennialists would emphasise that they also have a millennium and do believe in texts like Rev 20:1-9 but that they have a different understanding of the millennium than pre- and postmillennialists.

What I want to emphasise here is the central role of the law of God in the millennium. Normally it is those postmillennialists who believe in God's sanctions in history according to the law (e. g. Dtn. 27-30) who emphasise this. But all other positions also must explain when, where and how the law of God will play such a prominent role among all the nations. Take the best known text on the millennium (“sword into ploughshares”), Mic 4:1-4 and Isa 2:2-4

“But in the last days it will come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established in the top of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills; and people will flow unto it. And many nations will come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: **for the law will go forth of Zion**, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears

into pruning-hooks: nation will not lift up a sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. But they will sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none will make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it” (Mic 4:1-4). (With the exception of the last two sentences the same text is found in Isa 2:2-4)

The postmillennialist *believing in God's sanctions in history will argue that here two things are the result of the spreading of the law through evangelism. There will be political and personal peace and there will be just, safe and widespread personal ownership (which by the way always go together).*

Other texts on the millennium also teach the central role of the law of God in the millennium. (I use texts which normally are used by a-, pre-, and postmillennialists alike to prove their position. If you judge that one of the texts speaks about eternity or the present church etc., just use your own texts on the millennium mentioning the law of God. Even within each position there is no final agreement on every text concerning the question, which texts speak about which time.)

Take for example the following two texts:

“Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: **for the law will proceed from me**, and I will make my judgement to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms will judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm they will trust” (Isa 51:4-5)

“And David my servant will be king over them; and they all will have one shepherd: **they will also walk in my judgements, and observe my statutes, and do them**” (Ez 37:24)

Other postmillennialists do not believe in God's sanctions in history and see the millennium as a result of evangelism only. But those other postmillennialists have to explain the same text. Why is it that it is the preaching and acceptance of the law that will change the world? If peace will come if people accept God as Saviour and His law, does this not explain why there is no peace now? And if the law is the only thing that can and will bring peace in the future, does this not bear on the present time too? If a postmillennialist does not accept the political aspect of the millennium, he still has to see that the millennium means that God will teach all nations His law. If He does this personally one by one only, He still does it. Let those postmillennialists teach the individual person every aspect of God's law and watch the results!

If postmillennialists do not take into account the role of the law in the millennium and its bearing on the character and purpose of the law in history in general, they cannot argue that they do not want to become postmillennialists believing in God's sanctions in history.

They rather have to deal with their antinomian (from Greek “anti” = “against” and “nomos” = “law”) position, which does not allow them to realize the central role of the law in the millennium, even if their favourite texts on the millennium teach it.

Premillennialists mostly argue against postmillennialists that the millennium is the result of God's grace, not of men's work. If Jesus comes back before the millennium, He will be the one who inaugurates the millennium. If He comes after the millennium, they argue, it is men who inaugurate the millennium. Although no postmillennialist would accept this description of his position and would prove God to be the central figure of the millennium just by the very texts we are discussing in the moment, our topic here is not to discuss these matters. If Jesus comes back before the millennium, Isa 2:2-4 still means the same. For a premillennialist they mean that Christ will spread the law (here the Old Testament law, as we discuss Old Testament texts). It is through the law that Christ will change the lives of the nations. It is through the law that Christ will bring peace and wealth to the earth. The millennium does not appear through a miracle in the sense that there will be peace without anybody knowing how it came, but the millennium comes through the miracle that God spreads His law to all peoples and makes their hearts to accept the law.

If premillennialists do not take into account the role of the law in the millennium and its bearing on the character and purpose of the law in history in general, they cannot argue validly that they do not want to become postmillennialists. They rather have to deal with their antinomian position, which does not allow them to realize the central role of the law in the millennium, even if their favourite texts on the millennium teach it.

Amillennialists will argue that the millennium either is a description of the heavenly state of the church, or is to be understood spiritually as description of the church on earth. If this is true our texts have an important message: the mark of the church out of all nations on earth or in heaven is that God teaches His law to it and it obeys! If the millennium is to be understood spiritually the lesson of the texts is that to be spiritual means to be changed by God and His law and to live according to His law!

If amillennialists do not take into account the role of the law in the millennium and its bearing on the character and purpose of the law in history in general, they cannot argue that they do not want to become pre- or postmillennialists. They rather have to deal with their antinomian position, which does not allow them to realize the central role of the law in the millennium, even if their favourite texts on the millennium teach it.

In the discussions about chronological questions (which I judge to be important in the right place), the central role of God's eternal law has often been forgotten. Take as example Isa 42:

“... He will bring forth judgement unto truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has set judgement in the earth: **and the isles will wait for**

His law. ... the Lord ... will keep thee for a covenant of the people , for a light of the Gentiles ...” (Isa 32:3b, 4, 6b).

“The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He **will magnify the law, and make it honourable**” (Isa 42:21).

Are Isaiah and God speaking here about the present church age or of some time still in the future today? Has Jesus, “my servant” (Isa 42:1), fulfilled this on the cross completely; did He start the fulfilment or will He start the fulfilment in the millennium or can you find all elements here? The question is important (and I believe in the last position finding several elements here and teaching a growing fulfilment between the cross and Great Judgement Day), but this chronological questions may not eliminate the overall message of the text: Through His "servant" Jesus Christ, God will bring His law to the last islands of the earth. Through Jesus God brings His lawful judgement to all nations. Through Jesus God magnifies the law and makes it honourable. If this is the task of Jesus Christ, it is His task in all ages.

If someone believes that this took place completely through the Cross and the Resurrection: How can he still think that Jesus is the end of the law? Must he not realize that God magnified His law through Jesus and wants it to be spread to the most distant islands? The same is true if someone believes that Isa 42 concerns the present church age. Where are his books on the law and its details if the church has to bring it everywhere?

If someone believes that Isa 42 speaks about heaven, why does he not teach that heaven will be a place where the law of God will be done perfectly and provide a perfect world, showing that the law is eternal and 'does work'? If someone believes this to take place during the millennium he should take into account everything we said on the millennium in this article.

If an eschatological text is speaking about the law of God, we should be very careful that no antinomian principles lead us to discuss every aspect of the text except the centrality of the law and its bearing on Christian ethics. *The law of God and God's righteousness, judgement and vengeance have a central place in all eschatological texts. This has to be explained by a-, pre- and postmillennialists (and all their subdivisions) alike. Whoever does not speak about the law when he speaks about (realized or future) eschatology is missing the point, no matter which position he holds.*