

JONATHAN EDWARDS

AN OVERVIEW OF

HIS LIFE

AND

HIS

ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWS

Congregational Polity
C.F.T.S.
December 31, 1985
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I. INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards has been regarded by many as being America's most reknown Systematic Theologian. He was an organized, well-disciplined, prolific writer who was extremely interested in the proper interpretation of eschatological events. This subject was never far from his studies and thoughts as he was constantly reading other opinions, making notes and revising his view in this area.

"My heart," he wrote in his notebook in 1739, "has been much on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world...And my mind has been much entertained and delighted, with the Scripture promises and prophesies, of the future glorious advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth."¹

Jonathan Edwards' analysis of the eschatological events both recorded in the Bible and interpreted in history are complex and comprehensive. This author does not admit to being even near the scale of understanding the prophesies or even all of Jonathan Edwards understanding of them. The purpose of this paper is to make a overview of the life of Jonathan Edwards and his eschatological views, derive his possible sources and analysis his influence on theological thought I do not intend to give a complete biography of his life but by understanding his guiding principles it is easier to understand his attitude of eschatological events.

II. HIS EARLY LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

Jonathan Edwards was born in East Windsor, Conn., on October 5, 1703. He was the fifth child of Rev. and Mrs. Timothy Edwards. Jonathan entered Yale College in 1716, graduated in 1720, and stayed on for advanced work in theology for another two years. He left Yale for a brief ministry in a Presbyterian church in New York, and returned to Yale to receive his Master's of Arts degree in 1723.² He was appointed tutor at Yale in 1724, and he continued his theological studies. In 1726 he resigned his tutorship to accept a call as pastoral colleague to his aging maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, at Northampton, Massachusetts. In July, 1727, Edwards married Sarah Pierpoint of New Haven. They had eleven children together. In February, 1729, Solomon Stoddard died leaving the Northampton church entirely in the hands of Jonathan.³

Edwards was very busy during his Northampton ministry. Not only was he preaching five sermons per week but found time to write discourses, numerous notes, and kept up his diary. It was during this time he wrote "Treatise on Religious Affections". While He was here he also was involved in observing and writing about the Great Awakening being positively affected by the effect George Whitehead had on revival in New England.⁴

Edwards resigned from Northampton in 1750 and moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts to pastor a local church and be a missionary to the local Indians. He also found time to write his Freedom of the Will, Doctrine of Original Sin, and two essays: "The Nature of True Virture" and "The End for Which God Created the

World". In 1757 he was chosen to be the president of the College of New Jersey. He died of small-pox a few weeks after assuming that⁵ post.

III. HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE

Jonathan Edwards spiritual character developed at an early age as a result of the influence of his parents. At home he was not only taught to pray but developed a excitement for that discipline. He would pray by himself and he also encouraged other boys to pray with him. He lost those early childhood convictions, writing in his memoirs that his mind had been full of objections against the doctrines of God. It wasn't until January 12, 1723 at the age of 20 that he made a solemn dedication of himself to the Lord. From then on he made rapid progress in his spiritual development being away at college he was able to devote time to understanding his rediscovered faith. He writes,

I felt a burning desire to be, in all things, a complete Christian; and conform to the blessed image of Christ ; and that I may live, in all things according to the pure, sweet, and blessed rules of the gospel. I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things; which put me upon pursing and pressing after them. 6

After his college days he remained in much the same spiritual frame of mind. He had great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. His thoughts were taken up in large part by that topic. He was eager to read anything in the news that happened in that part of the world that would appear to be favorable on the interest's of Christ's kingdom. It is probably from these early desires that his life-long interest in eschatological events began.

