

“THE ONLY RULE OF OUR FAITH AND PRACTICE”:
JONATHAN EDWARDS’S INTERPRETATION OF THE
BOOK OF ISAIAH AS A CASE STUDY OF HIS
EXEGETICAL BOUNDARIES

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In addition to his many roles, including pastor, theologian, author, and missionary, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was also a devoted student of the Bible.¹ At age nineteen, he resolved “to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.”² His massive output of sermons expounding biblical passages and of treatises addressing theological matters using Scripture testifies to his dedication to this task, and his personal manuscripts on the Bible further demonstrate his unswerving discipline in studying the Old and New Testaments.

The nature of Edwards’s biblical interpretation, however, has attracted some debate over the liberty he used in making sense of the Scriptures. Stephen J. Stein, a leading scholar on Edwards and the Bible,³ argues that Edwards’s spiritual interpretation was boundless. He acknowledges that “Edwards shared certain assumptions with the Reformed tradition,” but qualifies that “in other ways he departed from prevailing patterns of Protestant exegesis.”⁴ Specifically,

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² Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings* (ed. George S. Claghorn; vol. 16 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 755. Henceforth, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* is abbreviated as *WJE*.

³ A sampling of Stein’s work on Edwards and the Bible includes “Jonathan Edwards and the Rainbow: Biblical Exegesis and Poetic Imagination,” *New England Quarterly* 47 (1974) 440–56; “Editor’s Introduction,” in Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; vol. 5 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) 1–93; “The Quest for the Spiritual Sense: The Biblical Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards,” *HTR* 70 (1977) 99–113; “‘Like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver’: The Portrait of Wisdom in Jonathan Edwards’s Commentary on the Book of Proverbs,” *CH* 54 (1985) 324–37; “The Spirit and the Word: Jonathan Edwards and Scriptural Exegesis,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 118–30; “Editor’s Introduction,” in Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; vol. 15 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 1–46; “Editor’s Introduction,” in Jonathan Edwards, *The “Blank Bible”* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; vol. 24 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 1–117; and “Edwards as Biblical Exegete,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 181–95.

⁴ Stein, “Quest” 100–101.

[i]n contrast to the Reformation accent upon the sufficiency of the singular literal sense of the Bible, he underscored the multiplicity of levels of meaning in the text and the primacy of the spiritual. Edwards spoke of the Bible as the source and the norm of his theology, but often it appears that the Scripture was more the occasion than the origin or measure of his reflections. For him the biblical principle was an open and expansive factor.⁵

Stein suggests that Edwards's "exegetical creativity was constrained only by the length of his attention." Given this "free reign" that Edwards allowed himself, Stein concludes that "the Bible did not function for him as a theological norm or source in any usual Protestant fashion because the literal sense of the text did not restrict him. On the contrary, the freedom and creative possibilities of the spiritual sense beckoned, and he pursued them with abandon."⁶

The severity of Stein's concluding charge raises questions. Did Edwards merely use the Bible as a platform for his own agenda? Did he truly break with mainstream Protestant forms of interpretation? What was his theological norm or source if not the Bible?

Stein restates his charge in his introduction to *The "Blank Bible"* volume in the Yale *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. In his discussion on the Wisdom Literature of the OT, he states that Edwards's "pursuit of spiritual meaning in the texts knew no bound. In that respect there can be no debate about the creative imagination he brought to the interpretive task."⁷ More subtly in his discussion on Edwards's interpretation of the Prophets, Stein points to Edwards's very words in his entry on Ezek 5:25ff. as evidence of "his repeated hermeneutical observation that the Holy Ghost in 'the words of prophecy' often has respect to 'two senses or translations entirely different and not dependent or related.'"⁸

Yet even at this point, Stein quotes Edwards selectively. Edwards more specifically limits this statement in a typological framework, that the two senses might not be "dependent or related *one to another as type and antitype*." The two senses are controlled by the Holy Spirit's intention. Edwards also gives three boundaries for interpretation in such cases: when both senses (1) fit with "what language properly allows"; (2) are "instructive"; and (3) are "agreeable to the analogy of faith." Only then, says Edwards, may we interpret both senses.⁹

Given these facets to the discussion, this essay uses the book of Isaiah as a case study to better understand Edwards's interpretive lens, examining how he construes this prophetic book generally by exploring the entries on Isaiah in both his "Notes on Scripture" and "Blank Bible" manuscripts. My thesis is that, in his reading of the book of Isaiah, Edwards did set boundaries on his interpretation, with Scripture functioning as a norm in his theology. More

⁵ Ibid. 101.

⁶ Ibid. 113.

⁷ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in *"Blank Bible"* 40.

⁸ Ibid. 44–45. For Edwards's entry on Ezek 5:24ff., see *"Blank Bible"* 764.

⁹ Edwards, *"Blank Bible"* 764 (emphasis added).

specifically, his harmonic method of interpretation, which includes typological and spiritual approaches, was based on a close study of the text, a conviction that Scripture interprets Scripture, and a belief in the doctrinal harmony of the Bible—all features of Post-Reformation Protestant exegesis. In this way, Edwards functioned largely within the accepted methods of the Protestant interpretive schemes he received. This study does not present definitive conclusions on Edwards’s interpretation of the entire canon, but offers a preliminary close study of his exegesis in one of his most frequented books of the Bible, the book of Isaiah.

I. EDWARDS AS EXEGETE

Douglas A. Sweeney notes that Edwards “maintained an exceptionally high view of the Bible’s inspiration,” and the unsurprising corollary was that “he believed the Bible to be ‘an infallible guide, a sure rule which if we follow we cannot err.’”¹⁰ In Miscellany Entry No. 160, Edwards calls Scripture “the only rule of our faith and practice.”¹¹ That is what makes it so odd that Edwards’s contributions as a biblical exegete have long received short shrift from scholars. The need for more study in Edwards’s interpretation of the Bible is pronounced. In a 1977 article, Stein explains that “few have taken seriously the place of the Bible in Edwards’s thought.” Instead, scholars have concentrated on “the philosophical side of his endeavors.”¹² Thirty years later Stein sees little change: “His biblical reflections—located in notebooks and commentaries, sermons and treatises—beg for closer examination than they have received to date. Much research remains to be done.”¹³

In Sweeney’s assessment, “Three hundred years after Edwards’s birth, and half a century into what some have called the Edwards renaissance, few have bothered to study Edwards’s extensive exegetical writings.” Scholars, he says, have often treated the fact of Edwards’s biblicism as “an embarrassing family secret, one that would damage our reputations if widely known.” Yet Sweeney argues that Edwards’s theology rested foundationally on how he interpreted Scripture.¹⁴

¹⁰ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Longing for More and More of It? The Strange Career of Jonathan Edwards’s Exegetical Exertions,” in *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Birth* (ed. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb J. D. Maskell; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005) 27.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”: Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500* (ed. Thomas A. Schafer; vol. 13 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 310. In his “Quest for the Spiritual Sense” article, Stein acknowledges this statement that Edwards made at the age of twenty, and he agrees that “[f]rom that perspective Edwards never deviated during his lifetime,” resisting many challenges “to displace the Bible from its position as the foundation of Christian theology” (p. 101). But Stein does not take Edwards’s position on the Bible’s authority to be a limiting factor in his interpretation, while I argue here that in the book of Isaiah, Edwards’s commitment to Scripture’s authority does constrain him.

¹² Stein, “Quest” 100.

¹³ Stein, “Edwards as Biblical Exegete” 193.

¹⁴ Sweeney, “Longing for More” 26.

Robert Brown provides a notable book-length treatment of Edwards's biblicalism in *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, but his monograph focuses more on Edwards's response to the rise of modern biblical criticism than his interpretation of particular biblical texts.¹⁵ Brown explains elsewhere the need for further study: "Jonathan Edwards's biblical interpretation is the subject most neglected in the study of his writings and intellectual pursuits, and the subject most deserving of attention by scholars and admirers alike." His exegetical writings are key to Edwards because the Bible was foundational in his writings: "Even his more properly theological and philosophical treatises rely heavily on the Bible for the substance of their arguments. . . . It is a real irony and curiosity, then, that his biblical interpretation has received so little attention."¹⁶

Glenn Kreider has written the only monograph on Edwards's interpretation of a defined section of Scripture, exploring Edwards's exegesis in Rev 4:1–8:1, and Kreider argues that "Edwards's hermeneutical method is quite similar to that of the early Fathers and Medieval exegetes."¹⁷ This article complements Kreider's study by providing a close examination of Edwards's method of biblical interpretation in an OT segment of the Bible, the book of Isaiah, and by focusing more narrowly on the Reformed Protestant influences.

It behooves scholars to understand Edwards's exegesis and use of Scripture if we are to assess correctly the meaning and import of his sermons and treatises. Because he wrote widely on Scripture, it makes the task vastly challenging, but worthwhile. The question of how Scripture functioned for Edwards and whether he was acting as a biblical maverick, a creative traditionalist, or some other category calls for further attention.

II. REFORMED TRADITIONS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Jonathan Edwards developed his method of biblical interpretation in the context of Puritan New England, inheriting the forms of literal and typological interpretation that characterized seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Puritan thinking. He worked out of his Calvinist theological grid, owing much to the exegetical patterns developed in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. John Calvin (1509–1564), one of the most influential of the Reformers, provides an indubitable example of mainstream Protestant interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin emphasized literal and historical interpretation of the biblical text, and as D. L. Puckett explains, he believed "[t]he exegete should neither up-

¹⁵ Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Robert E. Brown, "The Bible," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) 87.

¹⁷ Glenn R. Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1–8:1* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004) 18. Kreider's long study proposes that the best label for Edwards's interpretation is "Christological typology" (p. 289).

root a text from its immediate literary context nor neglect the historical environment in which the document was originally produced." Unfolding "the mind of the writer" was central to his method.¹⁸ But in his humanist complexity, he also held firmly to the unity of Scripture, and as Puckett puts it, "could not imagine sober historical interpretation of the Old Testament operating apart from the context provided by the New Testament writings."¹⁹ He thus recognized levels of meaning in the text, gave a place for spiritual and typological interpretation, and interpreted the OT at times through a Christological lens. Puckett calls Calvin's method "a middle way" between historical interpretation and mystical speculation, both of which had downfalls. Puckett explains:

He did not uproot the Old Testament from its historical soil, nor was he content to look only at the roots once the full flowering had taken place in Jesus Christ. He used the New Testament interpretation of the Old to establish the meaning of the Old Testament text. Yet he believed his Old Testament interpretations could be demonstrated to be correct through sound philological and historical reasoning as well.²⁰

Calvin also had a place, Puckett notes, for spiritual interpretation when an OT prophecy had not found literal fulfillment. He allowed for typology, too, since God used earthly symbols to accommodate his revelation to weak people in OT times, symbols that often pointed to "the redeemer who was to come." Calvin based his typology on two principles: that the NT guides us in interpreting the Old, and that OT language which does not fit an OT referent may perfectly correspond to Christ and his reign. In addition, Calvin refuted an either-or approach to the text and instead "advocated what he called the 'extended' meaning of the text," extending the historical fulfillment in OT times to "the complete fulfillment coming only in Jesus Christ or in the Christian church."²¹ To cite but one example, commenting on Isa 32:1, "Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice," Calvin said the passage "undoubtedly related to Hezekiah and his reign," but typologically, "as this ['prosperous condition'] cannot be attained without Christ, this description undoubtedly refers to Christ, of whom Hezekiah was a type, and whose kingdom he foreshadowed."²²

Calvin certainly would not have followed Edwards in all his exegetical moves, but both sought to cast Scripture in its historical-literary context and its canonical context and to use Scripture as its own constraint. More

¹⁸ D. L. Puckett, "Calvin, John," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007) 288, 291.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 293.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 290–91. For a similar assessment, see Randall C. Zachman, "John Calvin," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (ed. Justin S. Holcomb; New York: New York University Press, 2006) 127–28.

²¹ Puckett, "Calvin, John" 292.

²² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2 (trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 404–8. See also p. 413. Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations throughout the article are from the ESV.

than on Calvin, however, Edwards relied upon English Puritan sources, who both held to literal interpretation and frequently employed exegetical typology.²³ As Stein observes, “Edwards had been nurtured in a context saturated with typological exegesis, and he embraced it as a standard interpretative device.”²⁴

Edwards’s two most significant sources in interpreting the book of Isaiah were Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724) and Matthew Henry (1662–1714).²⁵ Humphrey Prideaux’s *The Old and New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighbouring Nations, from the Declension of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Time of Christ* (10th ed., 1729), which Edwards cited fourteen times, was his second-most cited source in his “Blank Bible” entries on Isaiah. Prideaux sought to show the unity of the two testaments from a historical standpoint, “focusing his attention especially on the transitional period between the two Testaments.”²⁶ Prideaux’s method pursued harmony both within the Bible and with extrabiblical history, giving Edwards a model to do the same in his interpretation of Isaiah.

Of all his sources for Isaiah, Edwards relied most heavily on Matthew Henry’s commentary, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, citing him sixteen times in his “Blank Bible” entries on Isaiah, and he also tended to quote him at length rather than merely cite a reference, as he often did with Matthew Poole.²⁷ Edwards was attracted to Henry, also a pastor, because he gave commentarial attention to devotional and pastoral concerns.²⁸ Hughes Oliphant Old claims that Henry’s six-volume commentary bears “a reputation for giving a solidly Protestant interpretation of Scripture useful in nurturing the Christian life.”²⁹ Edwards relied on Henry especially in his interpretation of the OT; Stein notes that all but one of Edwards’s 205 references to Henry were from the OT.³⁰

²³ Mason I. Lowance Jr., “Editor’s Introduction to ‘Types of the Messiah,’” in Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings* (ed. Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance Jr. with David H. Watters; vol. 11 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 165.

²⁴ Stein, “The Spirit and the Word” 120.

²⁵ Matthew Poole (1624–1679) had a great impact on Edwards’s interpretation of Scripture, but he was not as significant for Edwards’s interpretation of Isaiah and the prophets. Edwards cited Poole’s *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum* (1669–1676), a collection of annotations on the Bible, nearly eight hundred times in the “Blank Bible,” though only five times in all the prophets (Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 60). Poole’s method shows similarity with Edwards’s. As Gerald L. Bray explains, “Poole stays within the broad parameters of the literal exegesis of the text, comparing it both with nearby verses and with other parts of the Bible in order to understand its proper context,” a harmonic method of interpretation that mirrors Edwards’s harmonic approach. Furthermore, like Edwards, Poole “is not averse to recognizing the validity of the ancient spiritual interpretation” (“Poole, Matthew,” in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* 841–42).

²⁶ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 60, 70. See also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Apocalyptic Writings* 63–64.

²⁷ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 63.

²⁸ Hughes Oliphant Old, “Henry, Matthew,” in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* 522–23. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 63.

²⁹ Old, “Henry, Matthew” 521.

³⁰ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 63. Edwards may have relied less on the NT portion of the *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* because much of the NT commentary was

Henry’s education prepared him well to engage in historical, grammatical, and literary exegesis in the original languages, but as Old notes, he engaged in what Christians call the *sensus spiritualis*, seeking “to understand what Scripture says about transcendent reality, about saving faith and about the way of life that leads to eternity.”³¹ In Old’s assessment, Henry emphasized a “strong continuity” between the two Testaments, seeing Jesus the Messiah in the OT prophets and casting the church as the new Israel and the gospel as the law’s fulfillment. For Henry, “[a]ll through the Old Testament there are types, intimations and foreshadows of the New Testament.” Henry also often engaged in “the improving of biblical imagery,” by which he meant “the drawing out and elaborating of the metaphors, similes and illustrative figures found in Scripture.”³² Finally, Old explains that “[t]he interpretation of Scripture by Scripture was central to Henry’s approach. He was particularly successful in illuminating passages of Scripture by bringing to them parallel passages,” a principle Old identifies as commonly emphasized by both “the Protestant Reformers and the Fathers of the ancient church.”³³

One example is Henry’s interpretation of Isa 32:1–8. In identifying the king and princes in Isa 32:1, he gives three levels of meaning:

It may be taken as a directory both to magistrates and subjects, what both ought to do, or as a panegyric to Hezekiah, who ruled well and saw something of the happy effects of his good government, and it was designed to make the people sensible how happy they were under his administration and how careful they should be to improve the advantages of it, and withal to direct them to look for the kingdom of Christ, and the times of reformation which that kingdom should introduce.³⁴

Henry is later even more explicit in identifying Christ with the “shelter,” “streams,” and “shade” of Isa 32:2, which “the man Christ Jesus is to all the willing faithful subjects of his kingdom.”³⁵

At the macro-level approach to Isaiah, Edwards quotes Henry on his view that Isaiah 40–66 form a distinct section in the book. Henry explains, “As if this part of this book were designed for a prophetic summary of the New Testament, it begins with [that] which begins the gospels, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness’ (Is. 40:3), and concludes with that which concludes the book of the Revelation, ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ (Is. 66:22).”³⁶

Given the patterns of exegesis found in Calvin, more particularly in Prideaux, and most significantly in Henry, the Protestant tradition handed

not completed by Henry himself. Henry died while he was still working on the book of Acts, and his colleagues posthumously edited his notes and completed the work from Acts through the book of Revelation (Old, “Henry, Matthew” 523).

³¹ Old, “Henry, Matthew” 524.

³² Ibid. 523. See also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in “*Blank Bible*” 63.

³³ Old, “Henry, Matthew” 523.

³⁴ Matthew Henry, *Isaiah to Malachi*, vol. 4 of *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, n.d.) 177.

³⁵ Henry, *Isaiah to Malachi* 177–78.

³⁶ Henry, *Commentary* 211; Edwards, “*Blank Bible*” 672.

down to Edwards contains a clear element of spiritual interpretation when understood in light of the literal biblical text and brought into harmony and continuity with the rest of the Bible. The Puritan context, which embraced both literal and typological elements of interpretation, furnished Edwards with a method that does not look so different from his own interpretation of Isaiah.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISAIAH

Isaiah is significant in exploring Edwards's exegetical method because the book was of particular interest to this New England divine. In the "Blank Bible," Edwards devoted more entries to Isaiah (336) than every other book of the Bible except Psalms (388) and Genesis (352). Job received 293 entries, Matthew, 261, and the rest less than 220. The mere size of Isaiah accounts in part for this attention, but in comparison, the large prophetic book of Jeremiah received only 151 entries, showing Isaiah to be a major focus of Edwards's attention.³⁷

Of his extant sermon corpus, Edwards preached 78 sermons from the book of Isaiah throughout at least 1720–1755, making it one of his favorite books for the pulpit. In terms of the OT, he preached more sermons only from the book of Psalms (105). Proverbs ranks next, at only 59 sermons, and of the rest of the OT books, he preached 30 sermons or less per book. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke, from which he preached 139 and 103 sermons respectively, are the only NT books to provide more sermonic texts than Isaiah.³⁸

In his *Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of New-Hampshire in New-England*, which recounts the 1734–1735 Northampton awakening, Edwards's comment on his congregation's scriptural reading habits also illustrates his particular emphasis on Isaiah. He notes that among those experiencing the Spirit's presence, "there was no book so delighted in as the Bible; especially the Book of Psalms, the Prophecy of Isaiah, and the New Testament."³⁹ Edwards's interpretation of Isaiah deserves particular treatment.

IV. EDWARDS'S EXEGETICAL APPROACH TO ISAIAH

In this section, we explore how Edwards interpreted the book of Isaiah by examining his methods in his personal exegetical manuscripts, "Notes on Scripture" and the "Blank Bible." Stein explains that the "Blank Bible" "gradually took on the function of a general index to his exegetical reflec-

³⁷ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in *Blank Bible* 22.

³⁸ These figures were determined using The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University's resource, "A Chronological List of Jonathan Edwards's Sermons and Discourses" 2007.

³⁹ Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," in *The Great Awakening* (ed. C. C. Goen; vol. 4 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 184.

tions.”⁴⁰ It became, along with his “Notes on Scripture,” a foundation for his theological thought and a source for his sermons and works.⁴¹

1. *A harmonic method of interpretation.* Edwards tended not to comment on full chapters, but looked at single verses or short passages in light of the whole authoritative Bible, giving his exegesis a springing movement as he jumped from one section of Scripture to another to grasp its full meaning.⁴² But while Edwards’s biblical interpretive method lacks the systematic structure of modern commentaries, it was anything but haphazard. Edwards engaged intentionally in biblical study, and found himself drawn from text to text as the Bible unfolded what seemed to him to be its deep and profound harmony.

Edwards interpreted the Bible upon the foundation of its nature as harmony, that it is a beautiful reflection of the nature of God. Brown explains:

As the preeminent form of God’s communication to humanity, the Bible possesses all of the aesthetic qualities that emanate from God’s being: beauty, excellence, harmony, proportionality, etcetera. It does not just speak of these qualities, or communicate information about them through ideas; rather, it literally possesses them. In the same manner that the timbre of a human voice betrays the identity of its owner, so God’s identity—the beauty and excellence of God’s being—is revealed through his voice, impressed onto the pages of Scripture.⁴³

As the triune God perfectly embodies harmony, so we should expect to hear a harmonic voice through the diverse voices recorded in the Bible. In fact, this harmonic understanding of Scripture was a fundamental principle in Edwards’s interpretation. Shortly before his death, Edwards disclosed in a letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, in an attempt to turn down their call for him to fill the post of president, that he was preparing a work called *The Harmony of the Old and New Testament*. This work, Edwards

⁴⁰ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Blank Bible* 19.

⁴¹ For example, compare Jonathan Edwards, “Safety, Fullness, and sweet Refreshment, to be found in Christ” (Isa 32:2), in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight*, vol. 2 (ed. Edward Hickman; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1834) 929 (this sermon is not published in Yale’s *WJE*), and Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; vol. 15 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 144; and compare “All God’s Methods Are Most Reasonable” (Isa 1:18–20), in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742* (ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch with Kyle P. Farley; vol. 22 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 165–66; and Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 276.

⁴² As Conrad Cherry observes, Edwards was “preeminently a biblical theologian,” one who “consistently turned to the Bible of both testaments as the authoritative source of his critical and constructive reflections” (Conrad Cherry, “Symbols of Spiritual Truth: Jonathan Edwards as Biblical Interpreter,” *Int* 39 [1985] 263). Even in his comments on Isaiah, Edwards notes evidence in two places that the books of the prophets “were of divine authority” and “should be regarded by the church of God as part of the canon of sacred Scripture,” thus demonstrating Edwards’s Biblical basis for his belief in the authoritative nature and function of Scripture (Edwards, *Blank Bible* 661, 667).

⁴³ Brown, “The Bible” 93.

hoped, would feature a “method” that was “best tending to lead the mind to a view of the true spirit, design, life and soul of the Scriptures.”⁴⁴ The method would discuss messianic prophecies, OT types (a major interpretive approach for Edwards), and the doctrinal harmony of the Old and New Testaments.

Edwards’s “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 218 on Isa 30:27–31:9 demonstrates linguistically Edwards’s harmonic thought. He used forms of the word “agree” nine times throughout the two-page entry to show how the passage agrees historically, thematically, and theologically with other Scriptures and with historical and geographical background, illustrating his concern for the harmony and beauty of the Scriptures. For Edwards, interpreting the text necessitated attention to its interconnection, demanding interpreters immerse themselves not only in the immediate context, but in the canonical context, so they might see its encompassing harmony.⁴⁵

2. *A close study of the text.* Like his Protestant forebears, Edwards devoted himself to studying the text of Scripture and understanding its literal meaning, and that close textual reading depended heavily on reading it in the context of the rest of the Bible. He often explored geographical, historical, and literary background to shed light on the text’s meaning. For example, Edwards sometimes suggested adjustments to the KJV versification to better understand the literary structure of various passages, such as at Isa 2:22, which Edwards says should begin chapter 3. He makes similar structure notes on Isa 4:1; 10:1–4; 24; 42:1; 55:10; and 64.⁴⁶

On Isaiah’s literary structure, Edwards observes that Isa 3:10–11 begins a pattern of proclaiming blessing for the righteous and judgment for the wicked that lasts through Isaiah 35.⁴⁷ Isaiah 36–39 is inserted, he says, because its history is “a fulfillment of some of these prophecies, and is a specimen and earnest of other things, even the principal things contained in those foregoing prophecies.”⁴⁸ He notes, based on Henry, that Isaiah 40–66 is a distinct section of the book, featuring no instances of Isaiah’s name and characterized by “many blessings.” It speaks of Assyria as past and Babylon as “foretold.”⁴⁹ Edwards concludes that Isaiah seems to have had these revelations “at the latter part of Hezekiah’s reign, after those things had happened that we have the history of in the three foregoing chapters, when Isaiah was in his old age.” In Edwards’s harmonic vision, this historical comment finds resonance in the rest of Scripture, since other great biblical writers—for example, Moses, Isaiah, David, and John—also received glorious revelations in their old age: “all had their brightest and most glorious revelations

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings* 728–29.

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 151–53.

⁴⁶ Edwards, “*Blank Bible*” 631, 632, 641, 652, 675, 689, 693. Stein himself notes that Edwards addressed “technical textual issues” and made “[g]rammatical observations” on the biblical text in his “Notes on Scripture” entries (Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 44).

⁴⁷ Edwards, “*Blank Bible*” 631–32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 668.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 672. Henry, *Commentary* 211.

of the future good that God would accomplish for his church in their old age, and little before the death.”⁵⁰

Edwards also conducted lexical work on the biblical text when he saw significance. At times he discussed the Hebrew meaning, stating, “as it is in the original.”⁵¹ This interest in the original languages connects him with the Reformation’s humanist *ad fontes* framework of exegesis.⁵² For example, in his “Blank Bible” entry on Isa 32:14—“For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks”—Edwards shows that the word “forever” does not simply mean eternity, but can mean “for a limited time, or till the end of that age or course of things in providence, or that grand period the end of which in many respects resembles the end of the world.” In this passage, Edwards says it has all these senses, and each bears on different historical periods: the destructions under Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Rome, thus demonstrating Edwards’s interest in lexemes, history, and harmony.⁵³

Edwards also harmonized the historical-critical observations of his day with Scripture, as, for example, in “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 218 on Isa 30:27–31:9. Bedford’s dating of the passage to the Rabshakeh’s offense on Jerusalem fits well, Edwards argues, because the language of Isa 30:28, that God’s “breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck,” accords with his destruction of the Assyrian army in one night. Particularly, this image corresponds with Prideaux’s suggestion that God killed the army using “an hot pestilential wind.”⁵⁴ In addition, his “Blank Bible” notes on Isa 21:2; 21:3; 21:4; and 47:11 all show that what is prophesied there concerning Babylon “is very agreeable to the sudden and surprising manner in which Babylon was taken.”⁵⁵ Edwards was clearly concerned to utilize historical-critical background to find meaning and harmony in the text.

Edwards also showed an explicit focus on reading Scripture in its literary and historical context. For example, he reads Isa 43:21–28 in its context and also references another passage: “See Is. 48:9–11, with the context.”⁵⁶ On occasion, Edwards stayed completely within a passage’s context, making short comments on the imagery or meaning of passages that did not go beyond the

⁵⁰ Edwards, “Blank Bible” 672.

⁵¹ For example, see his entries on 9:6; 12:6; 49:24–25 (Edwards, “Blank Bible” 640, 644, 683).

⁵² While Edwards resisted filling the presidency of the College of New Jersey, as recorded in his letter to the Trustees, he did note that on the occasion he accepted the post, he would welcome an opportunity to perfect his Hebrew through teaching. Due to limited time and expertise, Edwards did not want to be “in a constant teaching of the languages; unless it be the Hebrew tongue, which I should be willing to improve myself in, by instructing others” (Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings* 729).

⁵³ Edwards, “Blank Bible” 664. See also pp. 688–89. For a comment on the significance of Israel’s geography and its relation to Rev 22:1, see his entry on Isa 33:21 (Edwards, “Blank Bible” 665).

⁵⁴ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 151. Several “Blank Bible” entries correspond with the Assyrian army’s fall: 8:8; 10:16–18; 10:24–34; 14:25; and 17:12–14 (Edwards, “Blank Bible” 639, 642, 645, 647).

⁵⁵ Edwards, “Blank Bible” 649–50, 682.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 677.

immediate verse (e.g. 3:15; 4:1).⁵⁷ Similarly, when Edwards comments in “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 108 on Isa 52:7, which reads, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns,’” he focuses on unearthing insight into Isaiah without referencing a Christological meaning and then simply notes the “like expression” in Nahum 1:15.⁵⁸

His “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 242 on Isa 7:17 displays his harmonization of the history and prophecy in Isaiah regarding the kings with the history of Israel recorded in the books of the Kings and Chronicles. This entry contains no spiritual interpretation.⁵⁹ Elsewhere he also seeks to harmonize Isaiah’s text with Israel’s history and pursues no NT interpretation.⁶⁰ It is sufficient for Edwards in these cases just to note how these prophecies fit together in Israel’s history for a better understanding of Scripture and of God.

Edwards focused his efforts on a close reading of the text of Scripture, yet he also saw levels of meaning in Scripture that rested on that textual basis. Typology in particular gave him a method for reading both a historical referent and a Christological, prophetic, or eschatological referent. On the judgment and “desolate waste” described in Isa 6:11–12, Edwards sees two referents: destruction by the Chaldeans and destruction by the Romans.⁶¹ Edwards also has three “Blank Bible” entries, written on Isa 1:9; 7:3; and 28:5, that interpret the “remnant” in the book of Isaiah first as a historical group either of “believing Jews” or as occurring in its “more immediate accomplishment” under the reign of Hezekiah, but also, based on Isa 11:11, 16, and 19:21, “a pledge of something further,” namely the elect in Matt 24:22 and Mark 13:20, the salvation from sin occurring “more fully in the days of the Messiah.”⁶²

Significantly, in his “Blank Bible” entry on Isa 7:14—“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel!”—Edwards does not jump immediately to a Christological interpretation. He rather acknowledges the levels of meaning in the text, and notes that the Isa 7:14 prophecy “doubtless” refers to the child in 8:1. But it also “denotes and is typical of the purity of Christ’s conception”—and here Edwards outlines how the virgin birth contrasted an undefiled woman to the “coition” that the Mosaic law marks as ceremonially unclean. For Edwards, these procreative features in the text have theological implications for Christ’s sinless nature since the propagation of the human race through the unclean parts of the body and with man’s seed, “a

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 632.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 196–97.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 153 (Entry No. 218 on Isa 30:27–31:9), 197 (Entry No. 243 on Isa 9:9–10ff.), 199 (Entry No. 246 on Isa 10:26); *idem*, “*Blank Bible*” 642 (Isa 10:20–22).

⁶¹ Edwards, “*Blank Bible*” 634.

⁶² *Ibid.* 629, 635, 655.

typical filthiness," is "typical of the original sin and corruption conveyed by generation."⁶³

In his "Notes on Scripture" Entry No. 214, Edwards comments on Isa 33:17, "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches afar." He distinguishes between the wicked and righteous and envisions Israel in its own history being "led away captive." He recalls the warning from Deut 28:49 and 64 that God would bring a nation against them and scatter them across the earth if they rebelled. On the other hand, the righteous "shall see the king in his beauty," a term which "is often put for glory and prosperity" in Scripture, as testified in Isa 28:1; Ezek 27:3-4, 11; 28:12, 17, and 20. Edwards compares this blessing to the happiness in Solomon's servants described by the queen of Sheba in 2 Chron 9:7. He concludes, in his harmonic approach, that the threat of Babylonian captivity is the "literal . . . meaning."⁶⁴

But he adds, "the things chiefly meant are spiritual things that are typified by those temporal things," and the historical evidence is that such peace never occurred in Israel, "for there never was literally any such distinction made between the wicked and righteous Israelites, as is here spoken of, for when the Jews were carried away into Babylon, there was no king left reigning in Zion in peace and prosperity, but it was a time of universal calamity throughout the whole land."⁶⁵ Ultimately, the king spoken of here is none other than Jesus Christ, "David their king," as Jer 30:9 and Hos 3:5 bear witness to his identity. Christ is "the king spoken of in the beginning of the foregoing chapter [32:1-2], and everywhere throughout this book." The emphasis here is on God's glory, beauty, and eternal eschatological kingdom: "They shall behold him in his beauty, and shall enjoy the blessings of his kingdom of grace here, and hereafter shall forever dwell in his presence, and see his face, and rejoice in his kingdom of glory."⁶⁶

For Edwards, the typological and "spiritual" readings of Scripture were not detached from the literal, but extended from and found their basis in it.⁶⁷ Edwards spent hours studying the literary, grammatical, historical, and geographical meaning of the biblical text, so that he could both grasp Scripture on its own terms and see its meaning on every level. Stein himself acknowledges that Edwards "underscored a multiplicity of levels of meaning in the text . . .," yet he suggests that such an affirmation did not confine Edwards, but rather freed him to pursue the spiritual with abandon.⁶⁸ But these observations raise the question that, if Edwards really jettisoned interpretive boundaries, why did he spend such great time in the text, examining the

⁶³ Ibid. 636-37.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 145-46.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 146.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For other examples of Edwards interpreting levels of meaning in Isaiah, see *Notes on Scripture* 52 (Entry No. 15 on Isa 53:12); 314-16 (Entry No. 331 on Isa 41:25); and "*Blank Bible*" 643-44 (Isa 11:10).

⁶⁸ Stein, "Quest" 101.

original languages, exploring the details, tracing history, making textual connections? The text of Scripture functioned rather as a limiting anchor in Edwards's exegesis of Isaiah.

3. *A conviction that Scripture interprets Scripture.* Edwards's interpretive method, in fact, functions on the foundational belief that Scripture itself provides boundaries, guides, and insights into determining meaning. Seen as a whole, the Bible comes forth from God and speaks in unity, and with such communicative concord we can rightly gain a fuller knowledge of one text by looking at the way it relates to the many. Therefore, Edwards engaged the Bible as an intertextual document and traversed the canon, so that Scripture informed his interpretation of individual texts. While to some this raises a charge that Edwards was detached from the literal meaning of the text, Edwards believed he was holding to Scripture as the only rule for faith and practice. But his robust view of Scripture gave him a method to read in context of the whole Bible, not one book or passage.

We have already observed this practice in Isaiah from the preceding examples because it is nearly impossible to read an Isaiah entry in the "Blank Bible" or "Notes on Scripture" without Edwards thrusting into another segment of Scripture. Examples abound in his manuscripts.⁶⁹ In his "Blank Bible" entry on Isa 50:11, for instance, Edwards interprets the statement "you shall lie down in sorrow" to mean "lying down in the grave (and so in hell)," and he connects it with Deut 31:16; Job 20:11; 21:26; 27:19–20; and Jer 3:24–25.⁷⁰

Another striking example is his interpretation of the "arm of the Lord" in Isa 51:8 from the "Blank Bible" and in Isa 53:1–2 from "Notes on Scripture" Entry No. 78. In both cases he interprets "arm" as "Son" because elsewhere the Bible uses "arm" or "hand" to refer to a son. In 1 Sam 2:31, "Eli's offspring are called his 'arm,'" so Edwards concludes the "arm of the Lord" refers to "the Son of God." Likewise, in Gen 35:18, Jacob names his son "Benjamin," which means "his right hand," and Edwards infers that in the same way God calls his Son his "arm."⁷¹

When Edwards reads Isa 9:6, a passage commonly interpreted Christologically, he does not just assume it refers to Christ; he demonstrates through textual connections of the term "wonderful" throughout the Bible that it here refers to God the Son. The text reads, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful [נִפְלְאָה], Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."⁷² Edwards notes that the Hebrew

⁶⁹ In addition to those provided here, see other notable examples of Edwards relating Isaiah with other biblical passages in Edwards, "Blank Bible" 633 (Isa 5:1); 638–39 (Isa 8:6); 688 (Isa 53:10); and *Notes on Scripture* 362–63 (Entry No. 378 on Isa 31:9).

⁷⁰ Edwards, "Blank Bible" 683.

⁷¹ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 73; idem, "Blank Bible" 684.

⁷² The KJV, which Edwards used, is quoted here because its punctuation differs slightly from the ESV at the point of the text in question. The ESV treats "Wonderful" as an adjectival modifier of "Counselor" and omits the comma, while the KJV treats "Wonderful" as a substantival term standing on its own and inserts a comma after it.

word נִלְבָּב, “wonderful,” is also used to describe the name of the “angel of the Lord” in Judg 13:18. Manoah asks the angel’s name, and the angel inquires why he asks his name when he sees “it is wonderful”—the Judges 13 context implies that the angel is God (Judg 13:18–23). The divine angel connection extends, for Edwards, to the angel who wrestled with Jacob. When Jacob demanded his name, the angel replied, “Why is it that you ask my name?” again implying that he is God (Gen 32:39). Proverbs 30:4 and Rev 19:12 also identify that the one whose name no one knows is God. These connections beginning with the word “wonderful” imply for Edwards that Isa 9:6 “is a prophecy of God’s being born, which agrees with the names that follow—the mighty God, the everlasting Father—and to the name that he is called by in the preceding chapter . . . Immanuel.” He then takes this passage one step further and argues that when the angel of the Lord in Judg 13:20 went up “in the flame of the altar,” it signified that “the child here intended is the person that was to be a sacrifice for sin.” Edwards thus sees textual concord in the broader canon and thematic agreement in the present context, which suggests the “wonderful” child should be identified with Christ.⁷³

This interrelated approach to the Bible explains his typological method. Since Scripture is best understood in light of other biblical passages, naturally the radical development of the Christ event recorded in the NT should guide the interpretation of OT books like Isaiah. Edwards employs typology to make that connection explicit—again because Scripture itself gives us the model of interpreting the OT typologically, an understanding he explains in his “Types of the Messiah” manuscript.⁷⁴

In “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 87 on Isa 25:11, for example, Edwards takes the image of “a swimmer [who] spreads his hands out to swim,” which in the Isaianic context is an image of Moab getting crushed in a dunghill, and applies it typologically to Christ since this was “the posture that Christ was crucified in.”⁷⁵ He unfortunately goes no further in examining the implications of this connection, but one wonders whether for Edwards this type foreshadows Christ enduring God’s wrath as Moab did, though unlike Moab, without the guilt of sin.

Edwards’s “Blank Bible” entry on Isa 37:30–31 illustrates how he understood types in Scripture. In 37:30 God gives a “sign” that the people will eat what grows by itself one year, and the next year will eat of what springs from that crop, and the third year will sow and reap. Verse 31 shows the significance of this sign, that “the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward.” Edwards observes

⁷³ Edwards, “Blank Bible” 640.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Edwards, “Types of the Messiah,” in *Typological Writings* (ed. Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance Jr. with David H. Watters; vol. 11 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 192. Edwards supports his thesis that typology is an appropriate form of biblical interpretation by pointing to the evidence that God has “from the beginning of the world” revealed “future things by symbolical representations, which were no other than types of the future things revealed.” God’s communication through visions, prophecies, divine speeches of instruction, and historical events is sure evidence for typology’s presence in the Bible (Edwards, “Types of the Messiah” 192–96).

⁷⁵ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 76.

a typological principle in the text: "The sign mentioned in the thirtieth verse is a type of what is promised in the thirty-first verse." And this historical remnant which revives again "as it were out of its own ashes" becomes a type as well: "These revivals of the church, they are all shadows and resemblances of the last resurrection, which is in Scripture represented by the springing of a plant out of the earth, from a seemingly dead root or seed." In other words, the imagery used of revival here mirrors the imagery used of resurrection elsewhere, specifically in Isa 26:19; 66:14; John 12:24; and 1 Cor 15:36–38.⁷⁶ The logic for Edwards is clear: He is not merely doing typology for typology's sake but because he sees Scripture doing it to itself. For Edwards the interpreter's method should follow the boundary of how Scripture shows itself to function.⁷⁷

Edwards also argued for restraint in typological interpretation. He acknowledged the danger of unbridled typology and warned that "persons ought to be exceeding careful in interpreting of types, that they do not give way to a wild fancy; not to fix an interpretation unless warranted by some hint in the New Testament of its being the true interpretation, or a lively figure and representation contained or warranted by an analogy to other types that we interpret on sure grounds." This "hint" may not provide as clear a guide as one might wish, yet what is clear for Edwards is that his approach demanded a biblical connection.⁷⁸ Thus his method required that "[g]reat care should be used" and that interpreters engage in disciplined study to understand Scripture's typological language.⁷⁹

Edwards relied heavily on the interrelated nature of Scripture that an interpretation of a passage of Isaiah gained greater weight in accordance with its parallels in other parts of the Bible. It was the interpreter's job to make explicit the resonance with other biblical passages. For Edwards, Scripture served as a boundary on interpretation; Isaiah could only be understood when the rest of Scripture spoke to it.

⁷⁶ Edwards, "Blank Bible" 669.

⁷⁷ See Edwards's "Blank Bible" entry on Isa 53:2, where he compares the "tender plant" as a descriptor of Christ to the "pomp and splendor" and "pride" of the mighty trees, which he establishes by citing Ezek 27:1–2, 10–11; 28:12, 17; 32:18–19; Job 40:10; Prov 31:29–32; Isa 28:1, 4–5; 33:17. Christ is often compared to a root, plant, or branch, not the great cedars, and Edwards points out that it was "a low bush and not a mighty tree that was seen burning at Mt. Sinai" in Exod 3:2, which was "a type of Jesus Christ" ("Blank Bible" 686–87).

⁷⁸ In Edwards's broader view of interpretation, he affirmed a critical role for the Holy Spirit in guiding the reader. Without help from the Spirit of God, who enlightens minds with spiritual light, interpreters would not be able to grasp the full meaning of the Bible. Sweeney describes the complementary role of the Scriptures and the Spirit: "for Edwards, God's Word and Spirit illuminate our worldly wisdom, enabling us to perceive its relationship to the supernatural order, and rendering our knowledge more clear, beautiful and real than ever before" (Sweeney, "Longing for More" 28). A person could not attain this light on their own, but only as God imparted it immediately, illuminating the content already revealed explicitly in the Scriptures. This understanding of the Spirit's role tempered his approach to typological interpretation. See Edwards's sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; vol. 17 of *WJE*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 405–26.

⁷⁹ Edwards, "Types of the Messiah" 148, 151. See also Janice Knight, "Typology," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) 207.

4. *Belief in the doctrinal harmony of the Bible.* Edwards arrived at his interpretation of Isaiah by his belief that the Bible presents a harmonic theology. Diverse books and passages stand together not in discord, but in doctrinal concord.⁸⁰ For example, in his “Blank Bible” entry on Isa 57:15, Edwards takes this theological statement of God “who inhabits glory” and casts it in light of Christian doctrine: “It is the eternal state of his own infinite glory and blessedness in which the persons of the Trinity dwell together, infinitely above heaven, and in which they ever did dwell.”⁸¹ Elsewhere, Edwards makes a connection for the doctrine of the resurrection between Isa 26:19, “With my dead body shall they arise,” and a key NT passage on the resurrection, 1 Cor 15:20–23—“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . .”⁸² And in his commentary on Isa 40:17, which reads, “All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness,” Edwards does not link the passage with any other text because in his mind, this verse is a distillation of the Bible’s theology of God’s infiniteness: “I know of no place in the Bible where the infiniteness of the Divine Being is more plainly asserted.”⁸³

In “Notes on Scripture” Entry No. 479 on Isa 42:8, Edwards harmonizes various Scriptures in a reflection on Christ’s divinity. He links Isa 42:8 with Isa 48:11, both stating that “Jehovah” will not give his glory to another. Edwards cites Ps 83:18, which says that only he “whose name alone is the Lord [Jehovah]” is “the Most High over all the earth,” and then shows that the name “Jehovah” is “often undeniably given to [Christ],” as in John 12:40–41, a passage that quotes Isa 6:10 and claims that Isaiah “saw [Christ’s] glory and spoke of him.” Edwards argues that in the OT Christ was often called the “angel of the Lord,” to whom God gave glory, which accords with the description of Christ in Heb 1:3 that he is “the brightness of God’s glory.”⁸⁴ Thus Edwards harmonizes this passage with others in doctrinal unity.

A final example comes in Isa 43:21–28, where Edwards develops the “doctrine of justification by free grace, without the works of the law or our own righteousness.” He shows textually that in 43:4, 7, 21, 25 and 44:1, “[t]he sovereign good pleasure of God and his electing love is represented as the grand original of all these blessings.” God does not redeem the Jews from Babylon because of their righteousness, but merely because they “are precious in my eyes” (43:4), “whom I created for my glory” (43:7), “the people whom I formed for myself” (43:21), “Israel whom I have chosen” (44:1). God says he “blots out . . . transgression for my own sake” (43:25), not for “any righteousness, or anything given, offered, or done by them, or anything whatsoever of their own,” Edwards explains, citing 43:26. This teaching accords

⁸⁰ In addition to the examples here of Edwards presenting a harmonic view of the Bible’s theology in his treatment of Isaiah, see “Blank Bible” 658–59 (Isa 28:23–29), 661 (Isa 30:2), 671 (Isa 38:18), and 695 (Isa 66:1); and *Notes on Scripture* 102–3 (Entry No. 175 on Isa 13:20–22) and 601–5 (Entry No. 503 on Isa 11:10).

⁸¹ Edwards, “Blank Bible” 691.

⁸² *Ibid.* 653.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 673.

⁸⁴ Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* 576–77.

with Israel's redemption out of Egypt and entrance into Canaan, which is "a great type of the gospel redemption," as is their redemption out of Babylon. And because these redemptions were not accomplished on account of their good deeds, these types also testify to the doctrine of justification by free grace taught by Paul.⁸⁵ Edwards thus finds textual harmony in the immediate context, typological associations within the Old and New Testaments, and doctrinal harmony throughout the whole of Scripture.

Isaiah 43 may not teach the doctrine of justification by free grace explicitly, but while this seems to go outside boundaries of literal interpretation, it stays within the boundary that the OT harmonizes with the theological teachings of the whole Bible. This is not boundless interpretation, but interpretation within a theological framework resting on Scripture. This framework gave Edwards the theological boundaries for interpretation, but also the license to interpret the text in theological ways that were not bound by immediate context or historical-critical methods. As Sweeney explains, "Edwards proved to be a dialectical biblical thinker, or one for whom Scripture yielded a theology that in turn he employed in interpretation."⁸⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

It is possible that Edwards pursued spiritual interpretation outside his Protestant tradition with "abandon" in another book or genre of the Bible, but this study of his two primary personal manuscripts on the Bible suggests, given Edwards's harmonic understanding of Scripture and close attention to the biblical text, that to describe his exegesis of the entire Bible as boundless does not hold up in the book of Isaiah—the book he gave the most attention in the prophetic genre.⁸⁷ Edwards seems more to be developing within

⁸⁵ Edwards, "Blank Bible" 677.

⁸⁶ Douglas A. Sweeney, "Edwards, Jonathan," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* 400.

⁸⁷ We could examine Edwards's sermons as well. Several of his sermons on Isaiah illustrate his interpretive method as discussed here from his manuscripts on Scripture, including "Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory" on Isa 62:6–7 in April 1741, in the throes of the New England awakening. On one level, it seems that Edwards used the text for his own purposes: since he preached it during the awakening; he aimed to rouse his people to prayer. Yet in his method of interpretation, Edwards believed this text truly taught this doctrine. Stein himself acknowledges that while Edwards's sermon doctrines might or might not precede his selection of the biblical text, "there was no doubt in his mind that the Bible provided the authoritative grounds for asserting the doctrine" ("Edwards as Biblical Exegete" 188). This approach was fitting for Edwards, because he viewed Scripture as harmonically agreeing in its diverse witness. Thus, he found textual reasons to see that here Christ is speaking. Identifying the speaker with Christ is probably his most contentious move, but it has textual basis (e.g. Luke 4:16–21) if one believes Scripture functions in a harmonic way with God unifying the Old and New Testaments into one cohesive witness, as Edwards—and the tradition before him—did. Thus, while Edwards appears at first glance to be using the passage to promote his revival, a closer look shows that he bases his exegesis on a broad study of Scripture and a harmonic presentation of its unified doctrine, a method akin to the criteria that drove Reformation exegesis and theology. Jonathan Edwards, "Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory," in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742* (ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch with Kyle P. Farley; vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 368. For other sermons that illustrate Edwards's simultaneously contextual

the Protestant framework than radically departing from it. More study must be done in other genres and books, but this examination argues for a more moderate and nuanced understanding of Edwards’s exegesis of Scripture and particularly of Isaiah. Edwards may have employed typology more frequently than biblical scholars do today, but that does not make him less Protestant or mean he worked outside interpretive limits; rather, he conducted exegesis of Isaiah in similar ways as those in Protestant-Puritan traditions. These findings demand clarity and care in how we discuss categories of past biblical interpreters and how we define streams of hermeneutics today. It also raises the call for closer examination of Edwards’s vast corpus of writings on Scripture so that we might better grasp Jonathan Edwards’s place in and contribution to the history of biblical interpretation.

and harmonic readings, see Edwards, “Safety, Fullness, and Sweet Refreshment” 929 (on Isa 32:2); Jonathan Edwards, “The Blowing of the Great Trumpet” (on Isa 27:13), in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742* (ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch with Kyle P. Farley; vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 438–39; and idem, “All God’s Methods Are Most Reasonable” 165–66 (on Isa 1:18–20).