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BOOK REVIEW

Stephen R. C. Nichols. *Jonathan Edwards's Bible: The Relationship of the Old and New Testaments*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013. xvii + 229 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978161977678.

In the recent resurgence of scholarship on Jonathan Edwards nearly every facet of his complex ministry has been explored. Edwards has been studied as a philosopher, scientist, religious psychologist, and revivalist; however Jonathan Edwards's ministry as an interpreter of Scripture has largely been left unexplored. Stephen Nichols's study, *Jonathan Edwards's Bible: The Relationship of the Old and New Testaments*, seeks to fill this gap in Edwardsean scholarship by giving attention the largely neglected, "The Harmony of the Old and New Testament."

When Edwards replied to the invitation of the trustees of the College of New Jersey to become its new president, he outlined two major works that he intended to complete while serving as the college's president: "A History of the Work of Redemption" and "The Harmony of the Old and New Testament." Although the latter work remained unwritten at the time of his death, Edwards left copious notes. Within these notes he proposed a three-fold structure for the arrangement of this study: (1) prophecy and fulfillment; (2) types and their antitypes; (3) doctrine and precept. Stephen Nichols follows Edwards's proposed structure, devoting a chapter to each one of these sections. These three chapters are followed by a case study that addresses the nature of Old Testament faith. He concludes with some critical observations regarding Edwards's hermeneutics.

Nichols's chapter on prophecy and fulfillment explores the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in terms of messianic prophecies. Nichols argues that this section of Edwards's work is best understood within the context of objections

brought up against Christianity by the deist Anthony Collins. Collins argued that the fulfillment of prophecy is the sole criterion for judging the truthfulness of Christianity. Following Locke's philosophy of language, Collins argues that texts cannot refer to more than one thing at once, thus the New Testament writers are either applying Old Testament prophecies incorrectly or they are following non-literal rules of interpretation. Nichols argues that Edwards would agree with Locke in saying that, in general, propositions have one referent; however, Edwards would say that since Scripture has more than one author (a human author and a divine author) it can have multiple referents. Since this is the case, Old Testament prophecies can refer to events that have both an immediate material referent, e.g., an Old Testament event, and an ultimate spiritual referent, e.g., a messianic event. Edwards's one caveat regarding seeing multiple referents in Old Testament prophecies is that only those who have the Spirit-given "new sense" can see the polyvalence of prophecy.

In his chapter on Edwards's typology Nichols takes on several popular interpretations of Edwards's typology. Arguing against interpreters who see Edwards's typology as being conservative like that of Cotton Mather and interpreters who see Edwards's typology as being liberal, throwing off all biblical constraints, Nichols argues that Edwards's understanding of typology in both Scripture and history is unified by his philosophical commitments and that it follows biblical principles. Nichols makes the point that God is a communicative being and that creation is full of types designed by God to communicate to the saints. However, Scripture acts like a sort of grammar book, teaching the saints who possess the Spirit-given "new sense" to see and understand these types.

In the third chapter Nichols examines Edwards's harmony of doctrine and precept. Here Nichols argues that Edwards sees God's work of redemption as two-fold; encompassing God's grand scheme in history for God to be glorified, and human individuals to be saved. Since God's glory through the redemption of individuals is the theme of the entire Bible, it seems inevitable to Edwards that there is a great continuity in how the covenant of

grace is expressed in redemption history. In addition to there being substantial continuity in the administration of the covenant of grace in the Old and New Testaments, there is a substantial amount of continuity between the precepts given in the Old and New Testaments as well.

Nichols's final chapter draws together the threads of the previous three chapters in order to perform a case study on Edwards's soteriology. This chapter focuses primarily on the question, "How are the Old Testament saints saved?" Here Nichols interacts primarily with Anri Morimoto's dispositional soteriology. Morimoto argues that what is necessary and sufficient for salvation is merely a "saving disposition." Morimoto's dispositional soteriology allows him to answer the question about the salvation of Old Testament saints. Morimoto argues that the Old Testament saints were given a disposition but that their disposition was not realized in conscious faith in Christ because the gospel was not preached to them. Nichols argues that Morimoto misunderstands what Edwards means by "disposition." He argues that the disposition given to the Old Testament saints is the same thing as the "new sense" given by the Spirit. Edwards, according to Nichols, believed that the Old Testament saints were in fact able to hear the gospel. These saints heard the gospel through messianic prophecies and types, however, only those with the Spirit-given "new sense" were able to "hear" the gospel preached through these prophecies and types. The upshot of Nichols's position is that to Edwards, saving faith, even in the Old Testament, is always directed towards Christ.

Nichols concludes his study of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in Edwards's thought by critiquing Edwards's understanding of the Spirit-given "new sense." Nichols makes it clear throughout the book that the "new sense" is necessary to interpret Scripture but that other factors also play into Edwards's hermeneutics, namely, personal and ecclesial spiritual maturity. Nichols's primary critique is that given these factors "it seems less likely that his exegesis could be perfectly replicated by another saint" (15). This critique seems to imply that Edwards's exegesis is far too subjective, and is in danger of becoming eisegesis.

Stephen Nichols has done the academy and the church an excellent service by addressing Edwards's conception of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments in this book. First, this book fills a glaring gap in the secondary literature regarding Edwards's interpretation of Scripture. It is far too easy to forget that Edwards was "first and foremost a pastor-theologian, an interpreter of the Bible" (1). This study will surely remind Edwards scholars of this fact, and hopefully this will encourage them to pay more attention to this aspect of Edwards's ministry. This book will also help those who find that their primary ministry is not in the academy but in the local church. In recent years there has been a resurgence in the call for Christ-centered preaching; there seems to be no end to the publishing of books that teach how to preach Christ from the Old Testament. This book establishes the validity of such preaching from a historical and theological standpoint. *Jonathan Edwards's Bible* will be very useful for pastors who are either trying to formulate their own theology of how the Old and New Testaments fit together or who are looking for a better way to show their congregation that Christ really is found in the Old Testament.

Despite the fact that there is much to appreciate in this book, it is difficult to agree with Nichols's conclusion regarding Edwards's hermeneutics. As I mentioned above, Nichols's critique of Edwards is that he leans too heavily on the Spirit-given "new sense" as well as personal and ecclesial maturity in his interpretation of the Old Testament. Because of this, Nichols believes that Edwards's "exegesis could not be perfectly replicated." This is not a critique; it is just a statement of fact. At this point the reader might want to ask an important question, "Why should we desire to perfectly replicate Edwards's exegesis?" Nichols's desire to be able to perfectly replicate Edwards's exegesis overlooks two important aspects of biblical interpretation. First, differences in context will always prevent precisely the same interpretation of Scripture by any two people. Every reader of Scripture will bring his or her own baggage to the table when reading the Bible; thus exegesis without presuppositions is impossible. This does not mean that there is indeterminacy in meaning. Texts do have meaning, however the meaning that

texts have is not simply reproduced; it is also produced by the reader. Keeping this in mind undercuts Nichols's critique that Edwards leans too heavily on personal and ecclesial maturity in his interpretation of Scripture. Second, Nichols's critique ignores the fact that the Holy Spirit, through whom the "new sense" is given to the saints, always takes Scripture and applies it to our hearts in ways that are specific to our current needs. This means that we should expect the Spirit to speak different things to different people out of the same passage. Once again, this does not controvert the fact that there is meaning in the text, it merely asserts the fact that when believers read Scripture they are engaging with a God who delights to communicate in a personal manner. Given these two facts, it is not clear why we would desire to come up with the exact same interpretation as Edwards.

Despite my disagreement with Nichols's conclusion regarding Edwards's hermeneutics, *Jonathan Edwards's Bible* is an invaluable contribution to a much-neglected subject in Edwardsian studies. This book will surely become a necessary point of engagement for anybody attempting to study Edwards's notes on "The Harmony of the Old and New Testament."

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