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*Jonathan Edwards and World Mission*

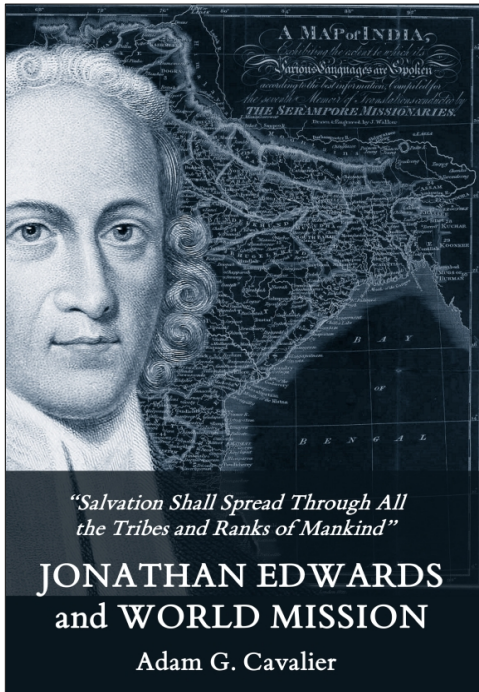
by Adam G. Cavalier

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## New Title by Adam G. Cavalier *Jonathan Edwards and World Mission*



“NOW THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST shall in the most strict and literal sense extend to all nations and the whole earth.” Jonathan Edwards’s bold assertion envisioned a future in which the gospel of Jesus Christ would progress into non-Christian lands and eventually the glory of God would encompass the entire earth. The gospel will make steady progress out in the world, as the world would “look to Christ and be saved.” The *telos* of human history will be God’s glorification in the redemption of the world. Just as the waters cover the seas, God will communicate his glory to the nations by the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. Edwards wrote, “There shall be no part of the world of mankind but that shall be covered with the knowledge of God.” This abiding hope of the advancement of the Christian religion proved to be a major facet of Edwards’s theology. This hope has inspired countless pastors, missionaries, and theologians throughout church history. Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott note that Edwards’s massive influence has led some to call him the “grandfather of modern Protestant missions.”

While numerous projects have shed light on related areas, this book seeks to fill a lacuna in Edwards studies by presenting a historical-theological construction of Jonathan Edwards’s theology of world mission. The major weakness of the current research is that most of the studies have not seen Edwards as a theologian of mission. They have merely presented him as a missionary or as a theologian. While these studies are extraordinarily helpful, they have not taken up extensive historical-theological analyses of the theme of world mission within Edwards’s wider theology. But what was Edwards’s theology of mission? How can it be identified? This book argues that upon a reading of key texts within the Edwardsian corpus, a coherent theology of mission emerges.

**ADAM G. CAVALIER** holds a PhD in Church History from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a BA in English from Louisiana State University. Adam lives in El Paso, TX with his wife and four daughters.



### Interview with Adam G. Cavalier

**How did you become interested in Jonathan Edwards?**

**Cavalier:** After reading John Piper’s *Desiring God* and *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, my curiosity in Jonathan Edwards was piqued. Intrigued, I set out to find more about Edwards—the man and his theology. This led me to read George Marsden’s magisterial biography, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. I spent long nights reading, enraptured

by its pages. I was surprised to learn that the life and times of Edwards was not boring. Although he is often revered as America's greatest philosopher and theologian, his life was not spent holed up in a study, divorced from the problems of the real world. There were stories of violent conflicts with the Native Americans, bitter disputes within the church, and frontier missionary work. Reading Marsden's work opened a new world of engaging the primary sources. I started with works and sermons that I could read in one or two sittings—like *Distinguishing Marks*, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, and *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Then, I made my way into slightly larger works like *Charity and Its Fruits* and *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. At that point, I began to start to see a theology arising from Edwards's works which I saw as very unique and compelling.

### **Why did you choose Edwards and World Mission?**

**Cavalier:** From the early stages of my Christian life, I was told that Reformed theology was not entirely compatible with a desire for world missions. If God was entirely sovereign over man and his choices, what hope could there be for sinners accepting Christ? If God foreordained our choices, why would one even bother sharing the gospel? Yet, I intuitively felt that there was something wrong to this logic, but I could not fully articulate why there was not incongruity for me. I did not feel that tension. On the contrary, I felt that Reformed theology fueled and expanded my desire for world mission. As I read Edwards, I began to see a vision of mission that naturally arose out of his theology. This led me on a quest to see the extent, scope, and clarity of that vision.

### **Did you make any surprising discoveries or have any “Ah ha!” moments?**

**Cavalier:** After performing simple word searches of Edwards's writings, I was stunned to see how many references there were to missional themes. I expected to see some during his later years (as he was a cross-cultural missionary). However, I found them in both his public and private writings over the course of his entire life—not simply at the end. Although explicit at times, these themes were often below the surface.

At first, I was hesitant to confirm these missional themes. I did not want to be guilty of imposing 21st-century ideas into an 18th-century text. Yet, I found it necessary to move past buzz-words and slogans of today and get to the root idea of world mission—the global expansion of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Once I could identify the essence of the ideas being communicated within the Edwardsian corpus, the missional themes naturally arose from the text.

### **An Excerpt from *Jonathan Edwards and World Mission***

First, Edwards's theology of mission begins with a view of the sovereignty of God. This aspect proves to be the basis on which all the other doctrines we list are built upon. In other words, the sovereignty of God is the *foundation* for world mission. Fundamental to Edwards's doctrine is a trinitarian framework. Flowing out of an intra-Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son that is held together by the bond of the Holy Spirit, divine grace is communicated to the elect. God is the source and fountain of salvation, and he sovereignly dispenses that grace to whomever he will. Moreover, God acts in human history to actualize his plan of redemption. From the beginning to the end of creation, the plan of God is to bring about a global salvation. That is, the purpose and destiny of creation is that God would be glorified in the redemption of a people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Second, Edwards believes that while God is sovereign over all things, humanity is not. The sinfulness of humankind creates a universal *need* for world mission. Edwards's doctrine of the depravity of humankind stresses the universality of sin and its effects. Every person—regardless of their background, race, ethnicity, or gender—is born in sin and in need of God's forgiveness. God maintains his supreme priority in the redemption of the world is the vindication of his name among the nations. The world has profaned his name due to their idolatry and wickedness. They deserve the just penalty for their sin. God judges the nations and he also extends his saving *hand* of mercy. In spite of man's innate depravity, there still remains a hope for the world. Edwards's creative doctrine of the *prisca theologia* casts a hopeful optimism for the progress of the gospel into non-Christian nations.

Third, Edwards creates a distinction that allows for the *possibility* of world mission. This doctrine of the universal ability and inability of humankind holds the two aforementioned doctrines together while also creating a prospect for world mission. While humankind is completely free from any natural hindrance that might prevent them from faith in Christ, they

are morally unwilling to place their faith in him. They willfully reject God and choose to rebel against him. This doctrine creates the possibility for conversion in that human beings have the all of the natural capacities to turn to Christ for salvation. They only need to turn their hearts away from sin and rely wholly on the grace of God for salvation. Throughout his articulation of his doctrine, Edwards draws implications for world mission.

Fourth, people must hear the gospel message proclaimed. The verbal proclamation of the gospel is the *method* of world mission. This proclamation is the church's primary task in the world. Moreover, this task of world mission is one that will be met with success. Scripture prophesies that the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. Yet, the only way this ultimate end will be achieved is through a verbal proclamation of the gospel. Not only does Scripture's imperatives and prophecies make this clear, but also biblical typology does as well. Edwards creatively employed the use of typology to show how the gospel must be verbally proclaimed in the nations for the kingdom of Christ to advance in the world.

Fifth and finally, it is not enough to simply have a notional awareness of the gospel message. It is possible to hear the preaching of the gospel and not be transformed by it. One must necessarily experience a conversion of the heart. This is the essential *nature* of world mission. The kingdom of Christ does not advance on earth through political or military might. It also does not advance by false religious experiences or moral virtue alone. The only way that the gospel truly makes its progress in the world is by a conversion of the heart.

As we have seen throughout the writings of Edwards, these missional themes emerge in varying degrees. When the entire Edwardsian corpus is taken together, the five major themes are all clearly displayed and form a coherent theology of world mission. (141–43)

### Praise for *Jonathan Edwards and World Mission*

In view of the abundance of literature presenting Jonathan Edwards as a “missionary or a “theologian,” it is rare to find a lacuna in this terrain. Nonetheless, this book makes a fresh contribution by insightfully amalgamating these two dimensions—analyzing Edwards as a theologian of world mission. Adam Cavalier's innovative missional emphasis on familiar treatises such as, *The End for Which God Created the World*, *Original Sin*, *Freedom of the Will*, *An Humble Attempt*, and *Religious Affections* makes not only for a fascinating read but an inspiring one as well.

—Chris Chun, PhD, Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center and Professor of Church History at Gateway Seminary

This new work by Dr. Cavalier on the missiological vision of Jonathan Edwards, who has been rightly described as “America's Augustine,” provides an important monograph on one of the key ways that Edwards' legacy has impacted the church. English Baptists around William Carey were led, for instance, by their reading of Edwards' literary corpus available to them, to launch out into a bold plan of crosscultural missions. They disagreed with Edwards on a few details, but his passionate interest in the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth that gripped him in turn came to inform powerfully their missional thinking. This compact monograph incisively details the scope of Edwards' thought and its contours and is a very welcome addition to the secondary literature of Edwardsiana.

—Michael A. G. Haykin, FRHistS, Chair and Professor of Church History and Director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Even though Edwards lived before the great century of Protestant missions, his theology is filled with missional instincts which sought the spread of the gospel around the world. Missionary and historical theologian Adam Cavalier skillfully draws together the pertinent texts in Edwards's corpus to demonstrate the missional thrust of his theological vision. He does so in such a way that is both faithful to Edwards and motivational to the missionary cause in the twenty first century.

—Robert W. Caldwell III, PhD, Professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

