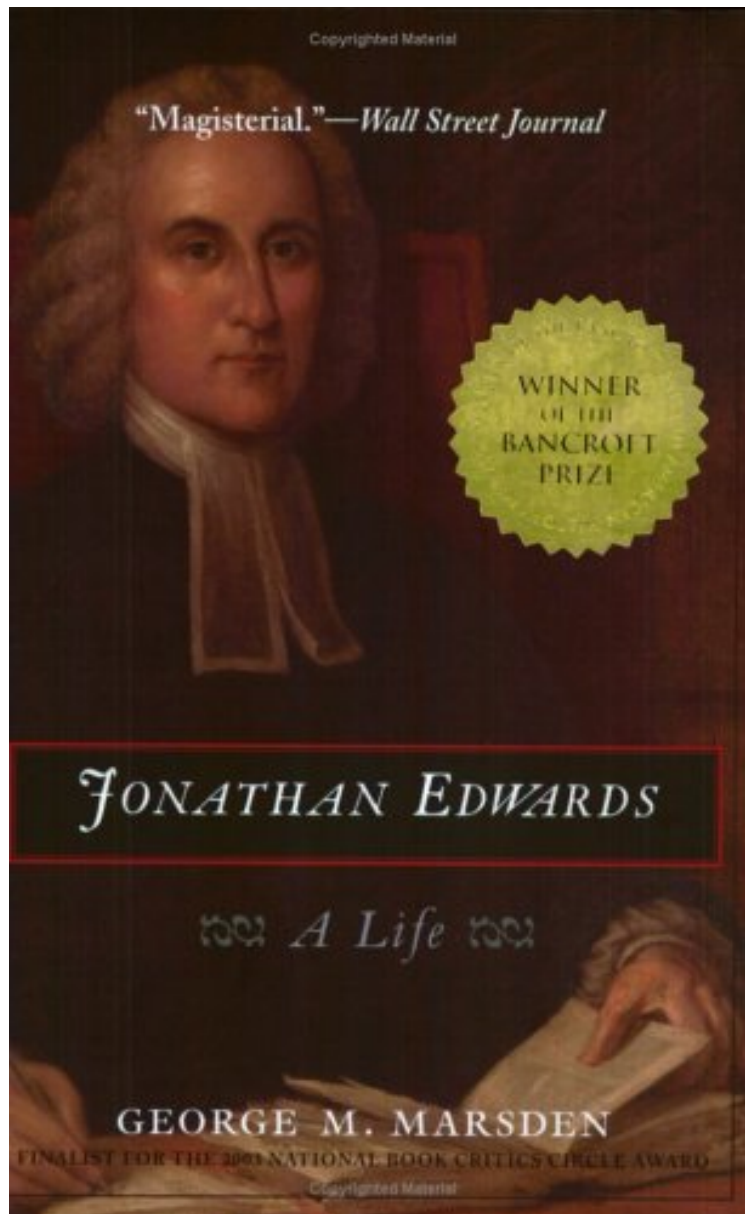


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Jonathan Edwards: A Life

George M. Marsden

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George M. Marsden : Jonathan Edwards: A Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jonathan Edwards: A Life:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. biography as exquisite artBy D. T. KlevenI have heard this book

highly praised by anyone who has read it. It's been called "one of the best biographies ever written." I've read a fair amount of Edwards lately, and decided it was time to get the full picture of his life. What an incredible experience! Marsden says, "one of my goals has been to understand him as a real person in his own time." (p. 2) He succeeds marvelously. I am guilty of gross historical inaccuracies in my thinking. I generally read my own circumstances back into the events of the past in more ways than I can even begin to realize: geography, population, theology, politics, education, etc. Marsden brings 18th century New England alive, and it is very different from what we are used to. In particular, he highlights the Englishness of pre-revolutionary New England, in contrast to our own Americanism. They had family based hierarchies. Boston was the hub, New York was just getting going. Schools that we view as ancient (Princeton) were just being born. The western edge of Massachusetts was the western edge of the "civilized world"! People were literally being kidnapped and killed by Indians, and the wars with the French were a constant tension. After reading this biography, I feel like I know the history of the period like I never have before. I understand the founding era of our country like I never have before. Combined with *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders*), I feel like I have a grasp of the facts, not just the popular simplifications of today. More important than early New England history, though, is that I now know Edwards, and he is inspiring. Marsden portrays him in all his depths. The depth and development of his thought is explored at length, in particular his philosophy and his theology. I was stretched intellectually by this treatment of Edwards's intellect. But this is not at all at the expense of the depth of his heart and his affections. I was moved to rapturous worship reading this biography. Edwards combined deep thinking about God with equally deep love and delight in God, and this shines through in this biography. The events of his life are given full detailed treatment all the way through. Even if you are familiar with most of the key events, this brings them to life like no conference message can. His character is displayed. He was a great christian, but he was also a sinner. This is no hagiography. The good shines forth brilliantly, and the sin (which Edwards himself deeply lamented!) is shown as well. Lastly, I must comment on Marsden's writing, which overlaps with his scholarship as well. This is an example of historical biography as exquisite art. Reading this book was at times a deeply aesthetic experience to be savored the whole way through. This is one of those books where 50 pages in you wish the book was twice as long, and realize that you will need to take care to relish every page. On so many levels, these and others as well, this book is a masterpiece. One of the best books I have ever read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is also a good look at the inside and outsides of how Churches ...By KenI just completed this book about 3 am this morning. This is an outstanding read on Jonathan Edwards as a Pastor, Evangelist, Theologian, and Very Caring Person. This is also a good look at the inside and outsides of how Churches sometimes operates (even within protestant circles). This is a book that every Church Leader, Teacher or Christian will benefit from reading. As an additional note, it is also insightful to the road to this country we live in today. This book will increase your faith, motivate you to grow, and help you understand the religious context Jonathan Edwards lived in and how he and his followers impacted the development of religious thought to this day. A GREAT read! This book also shows that as in the past, so often is the present: (Living in a Religious Culture and YET being so irreligious).

5 + Stars3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Must Have Biography for Jonathan EdwardsBy Scott FillmerJonathan Edwards: A Life by George M. Marsden, published by Yale in 2003, is the latest in a comprehensive biographical look at the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards, who perhaps preached, "what became to be [known as] American's most famous sermon" is now seen by many as one of America's greatest theologians.[1] In *A Life*, Marsden takes on the incredible task of presenting the life of a patriarch, preacher, theologian, philosopher, missionary, and prolific writer, in an almost overly objective manner, through what had to be one of the most exhaustive research projects to date on the study of Edwards' life. Marsden's compilation of previous biographical works, primary and secondary sources, even letters and correspondence between Edwards, his family, friends, and opponents, which Edwards interacted with throughout his daily life, has made for a new benchmark in Edwardsean study. In a highly annotated biography, Marsden has not only completed an outstanding examination of the life of Jonathan Edwards but also a detailed look at late 17th to mid 18th century history, and all the complexities of a country passing through the Great Awakening about to be thrust into the American Revolution.

Brief Summary and CritiqueEdwards was certainly a product of late 17th and early 18th century history. In "American political and social terms, he was pre-Revolutionary" and considered himself a citizen of Great Britain. Edwards grew up in the colonial time of the New World that provided the groundwork for the First Great Awakening, which Edwards came to view as God's way of intervening into the history of His people.[2] Marsden from the introductory overview of Edwards life to the to the summary of the Edwards legacy, systematically goes through this history in such detail that the reader will sometimes contemplate if this publication is a historical work or a biography. The historical time in which Edwards lived was certainly worthy of this extensive treatment and Marsden's exhaustive research and study is apparent throughout the text. Through thirty chapters, Marsden presents Edwards' life in basically three different parts or sections. First, Marsden looks at Edwards' childhood or early years including his family lineage with backgrounds on both his parents and siblings. Marsden at times seems to speak almost from the mind of Edwards when recalling diary entries of prayer prior to Edwards' conversion to Christianity, (something that took place not in an instant but through a process of spiritual growth that took many years to develop) and into the excitement about his first preaching

assignment in New York when he was 19.[3]Next, Marsden continues his chronological method going through what would be a time of growth, reflection, and eventually hardship for Edwards and his family, the years in Northampton. Among many events over the years, this includes the time of David Brainerd and the births of several children. This was also the time of the Great Awakening and several revivals in Northampton and was a time of spiritual growth for much of the protestant world. As Marsden explains in various places in the text, even Edwards, at times, possibly overstated the full extent of the awakenings in Northampton but it was certainly another example of a larger historical event going on in the world, in which Edwards was able to materially participate.[4] Third, Marsden looks at the elder, perhaps wiser Edwards of Stockbridge and his move from the prominent pastor of Northampton to a missionary to the Indians and an even more prolific writer. One of the more daunting tasks of the biographer in a case like Edwards is the overwhelming volume of written material, published and non-published, most still in existence today. Edwards, the author, was another, possibly fourth part or theme that Marsden examines in detail, and runs throughout the text. Chronologically, as Edwards wrote and published, Marsden would break away from the biographical life and look at Edwards the author. He took an in depth look at the more important publications from Edwards, providing an essay summary of each with smaller discussions about his lesser known works and notebooks. A difficult task all the prior biographers of Edwards had to address and not something that could be overlooked when it came to his life.

Examination and ConclusionIn what is sure to be a classic biography on Jonathan Edwards, Marsden presents what has to be one of the most researched and historical biographies of an extremely complex individual. Even with a work that seems to be as exhaustive as *A Life* appears, Marsden had to choose a direction and inevitably had to also choose what to leave out, many times it was details other biographers have previously captured. Marsden himself notes in the preface that this biography is limited in scope and the attempt is made to take an objective look at Edwards where many in the past have had a strong bias for or against Edwards.[5] Marsden achieves this un-bias view in such that he leaves the reader to reach his or her own conclusions on such matters like Edwards removal from Northampton. As extensive as his trials in Northampton came to be, no moral conclusion was reached in the text and the reader is transitioned into Stockbridge.

In *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, Marsden presents Edwards from a historical point of view, but in no way completes an exhaustive look at Edwards' life. As much as Edwards wrote in his notebooks for future generations to study, little seems to be known about his personal life. To fully know Edwards' life today one must examine him in the way Marsden's research suggests. It might be all but impossible to take a life as rich as Jonathan Edwards' and present it in one comprehensive volume, but Marsden does this to the extent that it is possible and leaves us with a unique look into the life a 17th to 18th century Puritan pastor.[1] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.[2] *Ibid*, 259, 467.[3] *Ibid*, 59, 113.[4] Throughout the revivals, the first Great Awakening, and years afterwards Edwards was constantly battling between excesses and genuine awakenings. He often took the cautious middle ground between Chauncy, who was anti-awakening and Whitefield's view, though Edwards was always pro-spiritual-awakening, see also Marsden, 267, 284-285.[5] *Ibid*, xvii, xviii

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is a towering figure in American history. A controversial theologian and the author of the famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, he ignited the momentous Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. In this definitive and long-awaited biography, Jonathan Edwards emerges as both a great American and a brilliant Christian. George Marsden evokes the world of colonial New England in which Edwards was reared a frontier civilization at the center of a conflict between Native Americans, French Catholics, and English Protestants. Drawing on newly available sources, Marsden demonstrates how these cultural and religious battles shaped Edwards's life and thought. Marsden reveals Edwards as a complex thinker and human being who struggled to reconcile his Puritan heritage with the secular, modern world emerging out of the Enlightenment. In this, Edwards's life anticipated the deep contradictions of our American culture. Meticulously researched and beautifully composed, this biography offers a compelling portrait of an eminent American.

From Publishers Weekly Although probably best known for his fire-and-brimstone sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Jonathan Edwards led a rich intellectual and spiritual life that took him far beyond the pulpit in his contributions to colonial America. In this first critical biography in over 60 years, Marsden, a professor of history at Notre Dame, places Edwards squarely within the context of his times. Drawing on newly available sources in the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, he elegantly traces the details of Edwards's life, from his precocious childhood of observing God's handiwork in the natural world and his adolescent struggles with his faith to his powerful preaching in the revivals that dominated the Connecticut Valley in the First Great Awakening to his later modestly successful mission to the Indians. From his childhood, Edwards struggled to understand the sovereignty of God, and as he later developed his theology he placed the "religious affections" at the center of his notions about God's sovereignty. Marsden reminds us that Edwards struggled with his faith as he labored to write his treatises on the freedom of the will, the religious affections and the nature of true virtue. Marsden's elegant prose and vivid, vivacious storytelling brings Edwards to life. This magisterial and definitive biography reveals the complexities of Edwards's life and provides new appreciation for his commitment to fostering religious sensibilities in the increasingly secular world

of his time. This is a beautifully written book about one of America's most important thinkers. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist In the first full critical biography of Edwards in 60 years, a distinguished Notre Dame scholar humanizes America's greatest colonial clergyman, a man highly esteemed in his own time but since singled out for decades of abuse by Puritan-bashers. To be sure, Edwards' brimstone pulpit rhetoric (most famously deployed in his 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") offends modern sensibilities. But Marsden--drawing heavily on recent scholarship--restores Edwards to an eighteenth-century New England where most shared his doctrines, though few could rival him in the power with which he preached them. Exceptional insight shines through a felicitous style as Marsden recounts how Edwards acquired that power, the intellectual rigor of his Yale studies gradually lending force to his intense spiritual vision. His rare gifts enabled Edwards to kindle the Great Awakening, emblazoning his name on the pages of American history. But in narrating Edwards' luminous achievements, Marsden also scrutinizes the periods of deep personal depression and probes the dark drama of jealousy that cost him his position of ecclesiastical prominence. The man who emerges from this tangle of triumph and travail defies the easy stereotypes of the hellfire preacher: tender in his pastoral care, passionate in his conjugal loyalty, joyous in his celebration of divine love, unintentionally democratic in his New Light theology. Neither alabaster saint nor cardboard hypocrite, the Edwards Marsden delivers will fascinate serious students of American culture and history. Bryce Christensen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "This universally lauded biography portrays Americas greatest theologian, 300 years after his birth." Richard N. Ostling, Associated Press