



# BIBLIA AMERICANA

## Cotton Mather

### **Volume 8: JOHN – ACTS**

*Edited with Annotations by Rick Kennedy, Harry Clark Maddux,  
and Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos*

*Cotton Mather.*

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

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Volume 8





Cotton Mather

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

America's First Bible Commentary

A Synoptic Commentary on the  
Old and New Testaments

Volume 8  
JOHN – ACTS and  
THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS

Edited with Annotations

by

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*To Reiner Smolinski*



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## List of Abbreviations

|                          |                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ADB</i>               | <i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i>                                             |
| <i>AHR</i>               | <i>American Historical Review</i>                                                 |
| <i>ALH</i>               | <i>American Literary History</i>                                                  |
| <i>BA</i>                | <i>Biblia Americana</i>                                                           |
| <i>BDB</i>               | <i>Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon</i>                                   |
| <i>BLNP</i>              | <i>Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlands Protestantisme</i> |
| <i>CBTE</i>              | <i>Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature</i>        |
| <i>CCCM</i>              | <i>Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Medievals.</i>                               |
| <i>CCSL</i>              | <i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca.</i>                                       |
| <i>CE</i>                | <i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i>                                                      |
| <i>CHJ</i>               | <i>Cambridge History of Judaism</i>                                               |
| <i>CCJR</i>              | <i>Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion</i>                                   |
| <i>CSEL</i>              | <i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>                               |
| <i>DEAB</i>              | <i>Dictionary of Early American Philosophers</i>                                  |
| <i>DPL</i>               | <i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i>                                         |
| <i>DNB</i>               | <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>                                           |
| <i>EAGR</i>              | <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome</i>                             |
| <i>ED</i>                | <i>Enciclopedia Dantesca</i>                                                      |
| <i>EDSS</i>              | <i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i>                                       |
| <i>EI</i>                | <i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i>                                                      |
| <i>EJ</i>                | <i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>                                                       |
| <i>EMA</i>               | <i>Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages</i>                                            |
| <i>FoC</i>               | <i>Fathers of the Church. A New Translation</i>                                   |
| <i>GCS</i>               | <i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i>       |
| <i>HDRC</i>              | <i>Historical Dictionary of the Reformed Churches (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)</i>         |
| <i>JE</i>                | <i>Jewish Encyclopedia</i>                                                        |
| <i>KBC</i>               | <i>Kitto's Biblical Cyclopaedia</i>                                               |
| <i>LCL</i>               | <i>Loeb Classical Library</i>                                                     |
| <i>LC</i>                | <i>Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800</i>                                     |
| <i>LD</i>                | <i>Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary (1879)</i>                                    |
| <i>LSJ</i>               | <i>Liddell, Scott, and Jones Greek-English Lexicon (9th edition)</i>              |
| <i>MGH</i>               | <i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>                                              |
| <i>MW</i>                | <i>Merriam Webster Dictionary</i>                                                 |
| <i>MRM</i>               | translation by Mark Miner                                                         |
| <i>NAU</i>               | <i>The New American Standard Bible Updated Edition</i>                            |
| <i>NDB</i>               | <i>Neue Deutsche Biographie</i>                                                   |
| <i>NPNF<sub>i</sub></i>  | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series one.</i>        |
| <i>NPNF<sub>ii</sub></i> | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series two.</i>        |
| <i>OCB</i>               | <i>Oxford Companion to the Bible</i>                                              |

|             |                                                                        |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>OCBH</i> | <i>Oxford Companion to British History</i>                             |
| <i>OCBo</i> | <i>Oxford Companion to the Book</i>                                    |
| <i>OCeL</i> | <i>Oxford Companion to English Literature</i>                          |
| <i>OCp</i>  | <i>Oxford Companion to Philosophy</i>                                  |
| <i>OCd</i>  | <i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>                                     |
| <i>OCJR</i> | <i>Oxford Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion</i>                 |
| <i>ODB</i>  | <i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>                                  |
| <i>ODCC</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>                       |
| <i>ODJR</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion</i>                        |
| <i>ODMA</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages</i>                            |
| <i>ODP</i>  | <i>Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy</i>                                 |
| <i>ODPo</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of Popes</i>                                      |
| <i>ODR</i>  | <i>Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance</i>                            |
| <i>ODS</i>  | <i>Oxford Dictionary of Scientists</i>                                 |
| <i>ODSa</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of Saints</i>                                     |
| <i>ODWR</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of World Religions</i>                            |
| <i>OED</i>  | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>                                       |
| <i>OEE</i>  | <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment</i>                        |
| <i>OER</i>  | <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation</i>                          |
| <i>PG</i>   | <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>                                               |
| <i>PL</i>   | <i>Patrologia Latina</i>                                               |
| <i>PTS</i>  | <i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i>                                  |
| <i>SC</i>   | <i>Sources Chrétiennes.</i>                                            |
| <i>SL</i>   | <i>Selected Letters of Cotton Mather. Edited by Kenneth Silverman.</i> |
| <i>SH</i>   | <i>Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i>               |
| <i>TWOT</i> | <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>                       |

PART 1

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:  
Cotton Mather's Creative Erudition

by Rick Kennedy



## Preface

In 1719, Cotton Mather (1663–1728) wrote of his befuddlement at the “unaccountable contempt” shown to “Our *Biblia Americana*” by those in London he hoped would pay for its publication.<sup>1</sup> He went on to criticize those Londoners for not seeing how the *Biblia* was “more than a little serviceable to the best of interests.”<sup>2</sup> Three centuries later, it behooves those of us who are finally publishing and reading the *Biblia Americana* to see what Mather thought was serviceable in the book. Here I propose its serviceability is best seen in its creativity. Cotton Mather’s intent was to dramatize Bible study that is social, wise, and literal, while also being epistemologically expansive, intellectually translational, and prudently kabbalistic. In this volume, the addition of a *History of the Jews* promotes the new historiographical perspectives and methods developed by the Huguenots and Jews in the Netherlands.

Mitchell Breitweiser writes, “The Bible is for Mather what the whale was for Melville, a locus of seemingly infinite opportunity, a platform from which to launch numberless forays.”<sup>3</sup> Linking Mather to Melville is absurd at one level; however, it encourages us to look for the creativity in the work. Mather depicts Bible study as long voyage full of diverse people and conversations. Instead of being at workplace drama on a boat, the *Biblia Americana* is a dinner party. Like Herman Melville, Mather submerges his own authorial voice in an Ishmael, a rather passive, congenial, and attentive conversation-guide.<sup>4</sup> It is not uncommon in the *Biblia*, when there is a lull in the conversation, for this Ishmael to urge his guests to continue the conversation with, “Is there a mystery in this passage?” The *Biblia Americana*, like *Moby-Dick*, is a voyage not a destination, a conversation not a lesson, a social drama not one-scholar’s disquisition. It is an epic packed into an extended banquet. The main characters, mostly contemporary or near-contemporary scholars, are the dinner guests. Scholarship, over two thousand years of it, is both the conversation and the feast. Mather’s host invites

---

1 Cotton Mather, *Selected Letters* (1971), 273. Reiner Smolinski describes the origin, growth, and significance of the *Biblia* along with the full extent of Mather’s struggles to have it published in *BA* 1:17–41.

2 C. Mather, *Selected Letters*, 273.

3 Mitchell Breitweiser, “All on an American Table: Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana*.”

4 The host sometimes is obviously Mather himself, as when he refers specifically to his grandfather, father, or uncle.

readers to listen in on the surprisingly ecumenical dialogue.<sup>5</sup> Like Ishmael on the *Pequod*, the host does not put himself at the center of the narrative nor make himself the arbiter of truth. Like Ishmael on the *Pequod*, the host is respectful, thoughtful, and encouraging.

Kristen Silva Gruesz, in *Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons: A Story of Language, Race, and Belonging in the Early Americas* (2022), recently described Mather as "postnational and multiethnic."<sup>6</sup> Mather, for her, is "translational," a model for our times.<sup>7</sup> As for the *Americana* in the book's title, Gruesz thinks that when Mather calls himself an American, he is often thinking of himself in what she calls "creolean terms."<sup>8</sup> He is a creole, a half-breed, an American-born European wanting to facilitate communication between two continents. He doesn't fit easy categories. Robert Calef (1648–1719) scorned Mather as "perfectly *Ambidexter*."<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Silverman described him as "at once toweringly self-aggrandizing and utterly self-effacing."<sup>10</sup> Perry Miller, after citing eulogies for Cotton Mather in the epilogue of his own magisterial two-volume *The New England Mind* (1939, 1953) confessed he had "trouble imagining" why contemporaries thought so much of the man.<sup>11</sup> Confusion arises when Mather is merely thought of as transitional, as fitting between categories assumed to be developing from one to the other. Hans Frei's widely influential book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974) asserted that, among Protestants at the time of Mather, the ancient and medieval ways of layered, chronologically entangled, and logically challenged reading gave way in the Enlightenment to Lockean empiricism's more straightforward, plain-reading of the Bible. Michael J. Lee in *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* (2013) describes Cotton Mather making "concessions" to the Enlightenment in hope of crafting plausible apologetics for biblical infallibility. Such models are problematic.<sup>12</sup> Mather does not easily fit a transitional model. Bruce Hindmarsh, for example, in a recent essay on evangelical ways of reading the Bible during the eighteenth-century, shows that Frei overstates the eclipse. Hindmarsh, along with works by Jan Stievermann and Doug Sweeney, have shown that the complex reading methods of typology, allegory, allusions, and figures were revived by Mather, Edwards, and other early evangelicals.<sup>13</sup>

5 Jan Stievermann (BA 10:15) describes the writing of the *Biblia Americana* as "a complex multilateral process of intertextual composition between Mather and very diverse sources." He describes the *Biblia* as having a "polyphonous character" and believes the authorial intent arose from an "ecumenical impulse." Robert Brown describes Mather as "referee" in "Introduction" (BA 9:29).

6 Kristen Silva Gruesz, *Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons* (2022), 7.

7 Gruesz, *Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons*, 9.

8 Gruesz, *Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons*, 40.

9 Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700), 153.

10 Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (1984), 201.

11 Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), 482.

12 Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* (2013), 5.

13 See Bruce Hindmarsh, "*Lectio Evangelica*: Figural Interpretation and Early Evangelical

If we see Mather as translational more than transitional, his creativity in the *Biblia Americana* becomes more apparent. The *Biblia* models not a transition toward scientific reasoning; rather, it dramatizes jurisprudential reasoning, a form of social reasonableness, involving testifiers, prosecutors, defenders, judges, and juries concerned with intuition, credibility, assent, rules of authority, as well as “benefit of the doubt,” and “beyond reasonable doubt.” Wisdom, in this form of reasoning, is often more important than intelligence. Reasonableness is the highest goal, not certainty. Jurisprudential reasonableness appreciates the role of the human will, especially sin, pride, faith and humility, in the art of thinking. Reasonableness is an active pursuit, but it can also be a craft of passive obedience, even submission. Barbara Shapiro spent much of her career as a Law Professor at UC Berkeley showing how the jurisprudential reasoning of the seventeenth century had its own trajectory in history and was only tangentially linked to the pursuit of objectivity that characterized the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> Steven Shapin, a sociologist at Harvard, likewise, has shown that the scientific revolution of the late seventeenth century was very much a rhetorical movement attempting to distinguish itself from jurisprudential reasoning.<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, a professor of philosophical theology at Yale, has shown how this social reasonableness tradition flourished in the thought of Thomas Reid (1710–1796) and describes the way that tradition has been rhetorically undermined in modern universities.<sup>16</sup> Rens Bod in *A New History of the Humanities* (2013) exemplifies this undermining by depicting early modern Christian traditionalism, such as Mather’s, being replaced in modern biblical studies by the power of the critical individual. “Now one single historian,” he writes, “could make or break a source provided that the strict philological method was used.”<sup>17</sup> By harkening back to pre-modern arts of thinking, Shapiro, Shapin, and Wolterstorff are now considered forerunners to the new twenty-first century field of Social Epistemology, an academic field of study more accommodating to jurisprudential forms of

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Bible Reading” (2021), Jan Stievermann, *Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity* (2016), and Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (2016). See also Reiner Smolinski, “The Figures or Types of the Pentateuch” (*BA* 2:15–51), and Rick Kennedy, “How Shall We Then Read the Bible,” a review essay of Stievermann’s *Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity* and Sweeney’s *Edwards the Exegete*.”

14 See Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England 1550–1720* (2000), “Beyond Reasonable Doubt” and “Probable Cause”: *Historical Perspectives on the Anglo-American Law of Evidence* (1991), and *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (1983). See also Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (2007).

15 See Steven Shapin, *The Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (1984), *Scientific Revolution* (1996), and *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science* (2020).

16 See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (2001) and *Religion in the University* (2019).

17 Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, 183, see 140–83.

reasonableness.<sup>18</sup> Anthony Grafton, in books such as *Defenders of the Text* (1991), *The Footnote* (1994), *What Was History For* (2007), and *Worlds Made of Words* (2009), encourages new appreciation of the creativity in scholarship that was later overshadowed by the methods of Germanic universities. C. S. Lewis in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1966) compared older methods of “shared authorship” to the century-long building of cathedrals. He adds that books created in this way have the advantage of having a “reviser” that can “improve or correct (and of course misunderstand)” previous work.<sup>19</sup> If we understand the eighteenth century as dividing between epistemologies and methods rather than one superseding the other, we can see that Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana* fits among the translational works carrying a more social biblicism into the eighteenth century. As a translational work, the *Biblia Americana* is Colonial America’s most monumental example of creative erudition.<sup>20</sup>

Gruesz’s description in *Cotton Mather’s Spanish Lessons* of Mather as translational captures better the creativity and serviceability of the *Biblia Americana*. Richard Muller in his four volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, 1520–1725* (1987–2003) gives a framework for situating the *Biblia Americana* among the creative works of Reformed Orthodoxy, a flowering of Biblical thought that remains strong today.<sup>21</sup> Catherine Albanese in *The Delight Makers: Anglo-American Metaphysical Religion in the Pursuit of Happiness* (2023) describes Mather’s “splendid complexity” and focuses on “the hints he provided for a later American culture of delight makers and their quest for abundance.”<sup>22</sup> Albanese revives the view of Richard Lovelace that Mather was a “leading synthesist” of his era in New England with Albanese herself emphasizing the way Mather revived a deep Augustinian tradition that

18 See *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, eds. Alvin I Goldman & Dennis Whitcomb (2011). The leading ideas of social epistemology appear fully expressed first in C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (1992). For the long tradition of jurisprudential reasonableness, see Rick Kennedy, *A History of Reasonableness: Testimony and Authority in the Art of Thinking* (2004).

19 C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1966), 38–39.

20 Similar in size and method is the “Bee-Hive,” a large three volume manuscript by Francis Daniel Pastorius (1651–1720), the German-born pietist founder of Germantown, Pennsylvania. “Filling thousands of pages with excerpts from and reflections on classical, Renaissance, humanist, Quaker and non-Quaker religious, secular, and even scientific books,” writes Patrick Erben in the introduction to *The Francis Daniel Pastorius Reader* (2020), “Pastorius seemed to hold on to the erudite traditions of his elite European past” (11). See also, Anthony Grafton, “The Republic of Letters in the American Colonies: Francis Daniel Pastorius Makes a Notebook.”

21 See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (1987–2003), and, for example, Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed: A Journalist Journey with the New Calvinists* (2008).

22 Catherine L. Albanese, *The Delight Makers: Anglo-American Metaphysical Religion and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2023), 5, 18.

emphasizes divine communication through a wide range of signs and symbols.<sup>23</sup> The *Biblia Americana* is creative erudition that cannot be categorized easily into the genre of biblical studies before it, after it, or even during its own time. It offers to its readers the drama of evangelical biblicism, a drama that promotes a jurisprudentially reasonable, epistemologically social, expansively literal, creolean views of the Bible.

Assuming the reader's familiarity with the introductions to other volumes of the *Biblia Americana*, in this introduction to volume eight, I emphasize evidence of Mather's creative erudition. First, using evidence primarily from *John* and *Acts*, it is important to see the way the whole of the *Biblia* dramatizes a Biblicist-oriented social epistemology and social historiography. Second, the *Gospel of John* offered a special opportunity for him to soar, to fly higher than what was normal among his peers, promoting what he considered a prudently biblical *Spiritual Kabala*. Finally, the long *History of the Jews*, offered as an appendix to *Acts*, links him to distinctly sophisticated aspects of Baylean and Sephardic historiography. All three of these are evidence of creative erudition at the founding of what will later be identified as Anglo-American evangelicalism.

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23 Albanese, *The Delight Makers*, 22. See Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of Evangelicalism* (1979).

## Section 1

### Biblicist-Oriented Social Epistemology

The *Biblia Americana* is relentlessly social. It combines a “polyphonous character” with an “ecumenical impulse.”<sup>1</sup> The *Biblia* works against the individualism commonly associated with American Protestantism and the Enlightenment. This fact gives pause and heightens interest in Mark Noll’s statement in *In the Beginning was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life*, that the *Biblia Americana* pointed “toward the future of the Bible in America,” a future that “would continue to witness a great dedication to biblicist principles.”<sup>2</sup> What are the biblicist principles that Mather taught in the *Biblia Americana*? The most interesting one is the one hidden in plain sight. Readers of the Bible need help. They need the support of a community of believing scholars. If Muller is right that during the High Period of Reformed Orthodoxy scholars were questioning the role of the “individual Christian exegete,” then Mather offers one of the most creative, certainly the most monumental, role-plays of readers avoiding individualism.<sup>3</sup>

Cotton Mather begins his sermon *Brethren Dwelling together in Unity* (1718) by praising the Reformation for protesting “Church-Tyranny” and focusing on the Bible, especially teaching that “there are plain Scriptures enow<sup>4</sup> to explain the obscure ones, and every Christian has the Right of Explaining for himself.”<sup>5</sup> However, Mather then pulls back from over-individualistic interpretation: “*Private Judgement* set up! What! *Every Man to Judge for himself!*” Mather recognizes private judgement is problematic. There is “*Disorder*,” “*Confusion*,” “*Anarchy*,” and “*Bedlam ... broke loose upon us!*”<sup>6</sup> Mather hopes for “a *New Reformation*” when “our Holy LORD will form a *New People* of the *Good Men*, who shall Unite in the Articles of the Goodness, and sweetly bear with one

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1 BA 10:15.

2 Mark Noll, *In the Beginning was the Word* (2016), 144.

3 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.14–15, 2. 466. See also Ryan Hoselton on “Biblical Authority and Scholarship in Seventeenth-Century Protestantism,” in *Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and the Quest for Evangelical Enlightenment* (2023), 41–50.

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5 Cotton Mather, *Brethren Dwelling together in Unity* (1718), 26.

6 C. Mather, *Brethren Dwelling together in Unity*, 27.

another in their *Lesser Differences*.<sup>7</sup> The sermon does not deny the importance of private judgement; however, it warns of its dangers. The *Biblia* does not model private judgement run amok. It models believing scholars, uniting with good intent, in dialogue with one another, bearing with each other's lesser differences, helping each other read well the Word of God. When Mather wrote that his *Biblia* was "more than a little serviceable to the best of interests," he most likely was thinking how his *Biblia* modeled a less individualistic way of reading Scripture, especially a way of reading that supported the core traditions recognized in authoritative creeds and confessions.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1 A Feast, A Sodality, Dinner Theater

Mather, in promotional literature for the *Biblia*, described himself as a dinner host offering "a Feast of *Fat Things full of Marrow, of Wines in the Lees well refined*."<sup>9</sup> In the *Magnalia Christi Americana* he promoted the *Biblia* as offering "delicious *Curiosities*."<sup>10</sup> In his *Diary*, he named a core-group of contemporary authors who supply the food for the feast. "Certainly," he wrote, potential readers will want "to have delicious *Curiosities* of *Grotius*, and *Bochart*, and *Mede*, and *Lightfoot*, and *Selden*, and *Spencer*, and many more *Giants* in Knowledge, all sett upon *one Table*."<sup>11</sup> His readers would have understood the image. Being called to a great banquet is a recurring theme in the Bible, even a feast where scholarship is consumed. All would have known of the angel who, in the Bible, tells Ezekiel and later John, to eat a scroll. In *The Angel of Bethesda*, Mather declares, "The Word of God is that Food. O Find it, and Eat it, and Lett it be the Rejoicing of thy Heart."<sup>12</sup> In the *Biblia*, Mather depicts Bible study as a scholarly feast where authors hear/eat each other's thoughts about the Bible. The *Biblia* offers a dramatic script for its readers to participate in the feast. This is supposed to be fun as well as supportive of a *New Reformation*. Mather describes his final entry for the *Gospel of John* as "the last Dish of our Entertainment" (BA 8:350). Three more times in volume eight, the host refers to an entry as an "Entertainment" (BA 8:171, 222, 525).

<sup>7</sup> C. Mather, *Brethren Dwelling together in Unity*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> C. Mather, *Selected Letters*, 273.

<sup>9</sup> Cotton Mather, *New Offering* (1714), 5–6. The reference is to Isaiah 25:6 (KJV) where the Lord prepares a banquet as part of the restoration of creation. Compare with BA 5:699–700.

<sup>10</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1977), 105.

<sup>11</sup> Cotton Mather, *Diary* (1911–12), 1,230 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda* (1972), 13. "Eat the scriptures" is a reference to Ezekiel 3:1–4 and Revelation 10:1–9. Compare with BA 10:550 and Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (2009). See also Andrew Chambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (2011).

Conviviality is essential to the *Biblia Americana*. The book is an extension of Cotton Mather's appreciation of the Bible as communication from a conversational God who encourages conversation. Mather was not a pedant, aloof and alone, who preferred books to people; rather, he was the kind of scholar who was out-and-about during afternoons, whose study welcomed other pastors, students from Harvard, members of his church, and visiting ship captains and sailors. Benjamin Coleman (1673–1747), minister of the nearby Brattle Street Church, praised Mather as an excellent conversationalist.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Prince (1689–1758), a close friend and minister of the nearby Old South Church, remembered Mather not only for his private “PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE” but also for “the Social Part of his Life, the continual Resort of Visitants, with his gentle and easy Entertainment of ‘em at all Hours.”<sup>14</sup> Prince goes so far as to say “It seem’d as if almost all his Time were swallowed up with CONVERSATION.”<sup>15</sup> Mather's private diary, it is true, shows him late at night to be melancholic and self-absorbed; however, the *Biblia Americana* is evidence of his more public and social side. The author of the *Biblia Americana* was writing something completely opposite to what gets called his *Diary*.<sup>16</sup>

The key to understanding the *Biblia* is to picture it as a dramatized sodality, a script of a sodality best read out loud among members of a sodality. In the seventeenth century, the term *sodality* was used widely to describe fellowship groups of various kinds. In *Manuductio ad Ministerium: Directions for a Candidate of the Ministry* (1726), Mather advises readers to,

Form a SODALITY. What I mean, is, Prevail with a Fit Number, [*Six or Seven* may be a Competency, or Fewer, if you can't find so many] of Sober, Ingenious, and Industrious Young Men to Associate with you, and meet *One Evening in a Week*, for the spending of Two or Three Hours in a *Profitable Conversation*.<sup>17</sup>

Conversation about the Bible was expected: “What *Illustrations* of the *Sacred Scriptures*; or, *Biblical Curiosities*? Let each Person, in what Order they all agree upon, give his Report as *Concisely* as may be.”<sup>18</sup> Polemics should be avoided: “All *Altercations*, and all *Impertinencies*, are to be forever banished from these *communications* of the *Sodality*.”<sup>19</sup> To keep the discussion on track, there needs to be a host, an interlocutor, a conversation guide:

13 Benjamin Colman, *The Holy Walk* (1728), 24.

14 Thomas Prince, “Preface,” Samuel Mather, *The Life of . . . Cotton Mather* (1729), sign. a<sup>2</sup>.

15 Prince, “Preface,” sign. a<sup>2</sup>.

16 What is titled Mather's *Diary* was re-written every year on his birthday. See David Levin, “Cotton Mather's Misnamed Diary: Reserved Memorials of a Representative Christian.”

17 Cotton Mather, *Manuductio* (1726), 73.

18 C. Mather, *Manuductio*, 73.

19 C. Mather, *Manuductio*, 73.

# Index of Biblical Passage

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