



**BIBLIA AMERICANA**  
**Cotton Mather**

**Volume 3: JOSHUA – 2 CHRONICLES**

*Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations, by Kenneth P. Minkema*

*Cotton Mather, Sr.*

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

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Volume 3



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Cotton Mather

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

America's First Bible Commentary

A Synoptic Commentary on the  
Old and New Testaments

Volume 3  
JOSHUA – 2 CHRONICLES

Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations,

by

Kenneth P. Minkema

Mohr Siebeck  
Baker Academic

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*To the Mather team*



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Kenneth P. Minkema  
New Haven, Connecticut  
February 2013





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## List of Abbreviations

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <i>ANF</i>    | <i>Anti-Nicene Fathers</i> (10 vols.)  |
| <i>BA</i>     | <i>Biblia Americana</i> , vols. 1 ff. (Mohr-Siebeck/Baker Academic)                        |
| <i>BDB</i>    | Brown-Driver-Briggs, eds., <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>        |
| <i>CCEL</i>   | Christian Classics Ethereal Library  |
| <i>HOL</i>    | William A. Holladay, ed., <i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>KJV</i>    | King James Version (1611)  |
| <i>LXX</i>    | Septuaginta  |
| <i>ODNB</i>   | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>   |
| <i>NAU</i>    | <i>New American Standard Bible Updated</i> (1995)  |
| <i>NJB</i>    | <i>The New Jerusalem Bible</i>   |
| <i>NPNFi</i>  | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . (First Series). 14 vols.                           |
| <i>NPNFii</i> | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . (Second Series). 14 vols.                          |
| <i>PG</i>     | <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>   |
| <i>PL</i>     | <i>Patrologia Latina</i>   |



# PART 1

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



## Section 1

### Mather on Joshua-Chronicles

In his entry on 2 Kings 2:22 in the “Biblia Americana,” Cotton Mather writes, “Lett it be Remembred, That the *Miraculous* and *Extraordinary* Occurrences, Ever now & then mentioned in the Bible, are designed for Prælibations and Exhibitions of what shall be more notably & more commonly done, in the *New Heavens*, and the *New Earth*, and *World of Righteousness*, and *Land of Rectitude*, which *according to His Promise we look for.*” Mather loved to provide his readers with this sort of insight, or “key,” into how to read the Bible, how to understand everything from the height of Goliath to the nature of biblical poetry, from the locations of biblical sites to the “Hebrew Elegancy” in the name of Solomon. Mather admitted in his entry on 1 Chron. 29:19, “There are thousands of such elegant Allusions, in the Language of the Bible; which I cannot propose to Collect and Insert in our *Biblia Americana.*” But the vast array of passages and topics that Mather addresses here conveys his conviction that Scripture contains in its narratives the past, present, and future, prophecy and fulfillment.

### The Historical Books

This, the third volume of the “Biblia Americana,” contains some 1250 of Mather’s “illustrations,” as he called them, on the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. It follows volumes presenting Mather’s extensive commentaries on Genesis (vol. 1) and on Exodus through Deuteronomy (vol. 2), both edited by Reiner Smolinski. Traditionally called, in combination with the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, “The Historical Books,” as if they composed a deliberate unit, these writings have over time actually been grouped in different ways and given different names. Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, for example, were by early commentators (such as Augustine and Procopius Gazaeus) combined with the five books of the Torah, otherwise known as the writings of Moses or the Pentateuch, to form The Octateuch, or Eight Books. Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings in the Jewish commentarial tradition are called the “The Former Prophets” or “The First Prophets.” And Samuel and Kings, which were divided into two parts each only when they were translated

into Greek from the Hebrew Scriptures in the centuries immediately preceding the beginning of the Common Era, have been called Kings (Latinized as *Regum*), books one to four. Although Chronicles is customarily viewed within Christian circles as a complementary text to Samuel and Kings, of the same genre, it is viewed in the Jewish commentarial tradition as belonging to a different category of writings. Whereas Samuel and Kings are part of the First or Former Prophets, Chronicles is one of the *Chetubim*, or “Hagiographa.” With the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, Chronicles is supposed by scholars to have been written after the return from the Babylonian Captivity.

In the 1940s, German scholar Martin Noth famously proposed that the books of Joshua through Kings comprise what he called the “Deuteronomistic History.” He argued that these books, written by several scribes and historians sometime in or around the seventh century BCE, share a common theological perspective that drew on earlier materials.<sup>1</sup>

Writing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Mather would of course have had no inkling of this twentieth-century modern critical thesis. Certainly the school of historical criticism was on the rise in Mather’s day, and he addressed some aspects of it. But in regards to the Historical Books – a term Mather did not use – he subscribed for the most part to the accepted wisdom about the titular authors and textual histories of the various books. Therefore, the contemporary assumptions for each of the books provides an important context for understanding Mather’s methods and conclusions regarding these pieces of the sacred canon. Entering into the Historical Books, Mather would no longer have to engage in the contemporary controversy over the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He did, however, have to enter into different kinds of controversies, such as harmonizing seemingly contradictory chronologies and accounts, a topic that saw renewed interest beginning in the sixteenth and extending into the early seventeenth centuries at the hands of scholars such as Sebastian Münster (1488–1552), Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), and David Pareus (1548–1622).<sup>2</sup> Regardless, these Hebrew texts were part of divine revelation, and for Mather a tantamount concern was to convey and

1 Martin Roth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (1943); transl. *The Deuteronomistic History* (1961). For continuing scholarship, see Linda S. Scheearing & Steven L. McKenzie, eds., *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (1999); Thomas Römer, ed., *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (2000); and Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History* (2005).

2 On harmonizing Scripture accounts, see, for example, entries on: 2 Kings 1; 8:16, 26; 17:1; 18:9 (length of kings’ reigns); 2 Kings 25:17 (height of temple); 1 Chron. 1 (inconsistencies in histories); 1 Chron. 13:5 (on David’s numbering the people); 2 Chron. 9:25 (number of horses in Solomon’s stable); 2 Chron. 16:1 (Baasha and Asa); 2 Chron. 22:2 (Jehoram and Ahaziah); 2 Chron. 35:24 (Josiah); and 2 Chron. 36:9 (Jehoiachin). See Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, “*I have always loved the Holy Tongue*” (198–99).

uphold that status to his reader and to the learned community. Towards that end he employed a great variety of methods.

### *Joshua*

While Joshua's early life was described in the Pentateuch, the book bearing his name recounts his role as the leader of the Hebrews in conquering the "promised land" of Canaan, his governance of the people, and his final words and death, according to the biblical account, at the age of one hundred and ten. The authorship and textual history of the book of Joshua were not greatly debated in Mather's time, and he himself did not comment on these issues for this particular book. In his commentary, John Calvin said the author of the whole book may have been Eliazar the priest, but ultimately it remains a mystery, and "it is better to suspend our judgment than to make random assertions." Mather, however, characteristically sought a bit more certainty. His view is represented by an exegete whose name appears with great regularity in the pages below, Bishop Simon Patrick (1626–1707).<sup>3</sup> Patrick wrote, "there wants not arguments to prove that *Joshua* was the Author of this Book," as ancient Talmudists asserted, excepting the last five verses of the book. To Patrick, as to Mather, it seemed reasonable to deduce from the supposed example of Moses that Joshua "would not neglect to write himself, as *Moses* did what passed in his time."<sup>4</sup>

### *Judges*

The *Sepher Shophetim*, as it is called in the Hebrew, gives the collective biographies of the majority of the judges of the commonwealth of Israel over a period of about three hundred years, roughly the fourteenth to the eleventh century BCE. Structurally, the book of Judges is in two parts. Chapters 1–16 are chronological, telling the stories of the judges, male and female, from Othniel, the first judge, to Samson. Chapters 17–21 relate miscellaneous accounts of the days "when there was no king in Israel." Patrick, Mather's primary interlocutor for the Historical Books, argued that the author of this book was Samuel, the last of the Judges. For his part, Mather in his entry on Judges 1:21 echoes the supposition of "The Hebrewes," as taken from Patrick, that Samuel was indeed "the Writer of the Book of *Judges*."

### *Ruth*

This "novella" tells of the trials of the Moabitess Ruth, the widow of a Hebrew who decides to leave her native land and go with her mother-in-law Naomi to make her home among the Israelites. Arriving in Palestine, they are

<sup>3</sup> On Patrick, see below, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Joshua*, Preface, p. 1; Simon Patrick, *A Commentary upon the Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (1702), 1–2.



impoverished, so Ruth gleanes stubble from the field. Boaz, a landowner, notices her, shows her kindness, and eventually marries her. Patrick says of this short history that it “is a kind of Appendix to the Book of *JUDGES*, and Manuduction to the Book of *SAMUEL*; and therefore fitly placed between them.” As with Judges, he attributes the writing of it to Samuel, as was traditionally the case.<sup>5</sup> Ruth, a “stranger,” becomes one of the ancestors of David, and, consequently for Christians, of Jesus of Nazareth.

### *1 and 2 Samuel*

Because they narrate the commencement of the monarchy, these books are known in Jewish tradition as the first and second book of the Kings. They continue and conclude the history of the period of the Judges, ending with Samuel, and take up the reigns of Saul and David, approximately in the eleventh century BCE. In Mather's time, the common assumption among biblical commentators was that Samuel authored the first twenty-four chapters of 1 Samuel, and Nathan the Prophet and Gad the Seer the remainder.<sup>6</sup>

### *1 and 2 Kings*

Alternatively titled the third and fourth books of the Kings, in these texts the kingdom of Israel reaches its zenith during the reign of Solomon, but thereafter the tale is one of decline and dissipation, including the division of the kingdom into the two tribes of Judah and the ten tribes of Israel. The account ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the captivity of the Israelites, under Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the seventh century BCE – “*a Melancholy Conclusion*,” sighs Matthew Henry (1662–1714), the famous English commentator.<sup>7</sup> But it also includes the works of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who “out-shone” the rulers and kept the word and works of Jehovah before the people.

Mather's entries on Kings account for nearly one third of the total in this volume. Samuel and Chronicles each warrant about three-quarters of the entries devoted to Kings. Where Mather commits to the “Biblia” about 300 entries each on Samuel and Chronicles, he writes 400 for Kings, despite the fact that Kings is the shortest of these three “twinned” books.

### *1 and 2 Chronicles*

The Chronicles, or *Paraleipomenon* in the Greek, covers much the same ground as Samuel and Kings, but also contains some unique materials, such as a genealogy from Adam to David, as well as historical details and events not

<sup>5</sup> Patrick, *A Commentary* (634).

<sup>6</sup> Simon Patrick, *A Commentary upon the two Books of Samuel* (1703), 1–2.

<sup>7</sup> Henry, *An Exposition of the historical Books of the Old Testament; Viz. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I. & II. Samuel. I. & II. Kings, I. & II. Chronicles Ezra* (1717), Preface to 2 Kings, unpaginated.

related elsewhere. It provides a rehearsal of the glory days of kings David and Solomon, more details on the building of the temple, and the sorry history of the monarchy until its extinction.

Chronicles is the only biblical book in this section for which Mather queries who the penman may have been. In the entries on 1 Chronicles 1, he acknowledges that the “Common Conjecture, for *Ezra*, is well known,” following his return from captivity. Here Mather agrees with writers such as Patrick and French scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), who exemplified the turn to the Hebrew sources and interpreters among Christian exegetes during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the end, however, Mather acknowledges it could have been an anonymous scribe with access to the writings of the Former Prophets.

While some commentators, such as the English theologian and historian William Whiston (1667–1752),<sup>8</sup> pointed to Chronicles as having the greatest number of textual inaccuracies of any book in the Hebrew Testament, Mather does his best to explain some of the apparent, and sometimes real, discrepancies between Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. In the end, Mather asserted that if some of the wording was possibly confused through human error (or, alternatively, that human understanding of the text was and is inadequate), the lessons of Israel’s rise and fall, and therefore the accuracy of God’s Word and the truths that history conveys, remain firm and everlasting.

### Method of the “Biblia Americana”

The customary method used by scripture commentators in the Jewish and Christian traditions for millennia, and readily accessible to a polyglot such as Mather in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and several European languages, was fairly straightforward. Glosses on the sacred text would be provided seriatim, following canonical order, and arranged sometimes in conjunction with or surrounding the sacred text, arranged as marginalia. Alternatively, expecting readers to have access to a copy of the original text in their preferred translation(s), a commentator provided merely an indication of the verse number or a portion of the verse, allowing for segmentation of commentary on a verse. The latter format was utilized in the most recent and regarded publications in Mather’s lifetime, as those by the seventeenth-century commentators Matthew Poole (1624–79) in Latin or Matthew Henry in English, and thus was the most accustomed and popular format for Mather to emulate.

But he did not do so – and here is where Mather’s inventiveness, his liveliness, and his acquaintance with current trends come into play. While he

<sup>8</sup> On Whiston, *see* below, p. 17.

undoubtedly would have had his “Biblia,” had he been able to have it printed, follow traditional chapter and verse order, he used a dialogic format of questions-and-answers, reflecting both a Socratic as well as a catechetical method.<sup>9</sup> This method reflected shifting views on the use of memorization as a means of acquiring and retaining knowledge and on pedagogical practices in general. Beginning during the Renaissance, scholars increasingly downplayed the efficacy of memorization as a means of organizing information in favor of writing out references, original-source excerpts, and ideas.

This scribal approach found its way into teaching, as educational reformers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries criticized rote memorization. They advocated instead a “familiar” method, involving conversational exchange between teacher and student, often based on a student’s written work.<sup>10</sup> During the third quarter of the seventeenth century, instructional and educational manuals boasting “a plain, and familiar method of instructing” the young or those of “meaner capacities” began to issue from the press, treating subjects as varied as learning the catechism, arithmetic, the bass viol, even do-it-yourself “surgery.”<sup>11</sup> As if aware of this epistemic shift, Mather incorporated the language of accessibility for all ages and intelligences into his own publications, such as his *Much in a little: Or, Three brief essayes, to sum up the whole Christian religion, for the more easy, & pleasant instruction of the weakest capacities* (1702). In the “Biblia,” most importantly for our consideration here, he began each illustration with a question followed by comments couched as an answer, a response or series of responses. The result was to make the “Biblia” a process of inquiry, learning, and discovery, with the reader, like Dante, being led by Mather, in the roles of Virgil or Beatrice, through the Divine Comedy.

9 For more on Mather’s didactic technique, see *BA* 1:62–64. The Q & A approach was also efficient for Mather because it limited the need to rewrite previous annotations when he added new material.

10 Ann M. Blair, *Too much to know* (2010), 75–80; Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Education and His Educational Legacy” (31–49).

11 See, for example, on educational methods, Samuel Hoadly, *The natural Method of teaching* (1688) and Thomas Lye, *A plain and familiar Method of instructing the younger Sort* (1672); on learning arithmetic, Edmund Wingate, *Mr. Wingate’s Arithmetick containing a plain and familiar Method for attaining the Knowledge and Practice of common Arithmetick* (1670), and Edward Cocker, *Cockers Arithmetick being a plain and familiar Method suitable to the meanest Capacity* (1678); on learning musical instruments, Benjamin Hely, *The compleat Violist, or, An Introduction to ye Art of playing on ye Bass Viol wherein the necessary Rules & Directions are laid down in a plain & familiar Method* (c. 1700); on medical procedures, M. Le Clerc, *The compleat Surgeon or, the whole Art of Surgery explain’d in a most familiar Method* (1696); and on mythology, François Pomey, *The Pantheon representing the fabulous Histories of the beathen Gods and most illustrious Heroes in a short, plain and familiar Method by way of Dialogue* (1698).

## Biblia Americana: Composition, Structure, and Sources

The holograph manuscript of the “Biblia Americana” reveals Mather drafting, rethinking, and reshaping his ideas over a period of thirty-five years. Reiner Smolinski, following a lengthy and extensive study, has discerned four recognizable stages or phases of Mather’s composition and revision process, each with its own characteristic features:<sup>12</sup>

Stage I: August 1693 to May 1706

Stage II: May 1706 to the end of 1711

Stage III: 1711 to Feb. 1713/14, 1716

Stage IV: February 1713/14, 1716 to end of 1728

*Stage I.* During this initial phase, Mather created fascicles of blank folio leaves, creased down the middle and at the margins. To these fascicles, organized by scripture books and chapters, he committed extracts from hundreds of publications. He also assigned Arabic numbers to each new entry in the left- or right-hand margins of the leaves. These numerals are important to determining the dating of entries, since he discontinued the practice in the spring of 1706. Only about a third of the entries in the “Biblia” have a number, so we can state with some certainty that they were made during this stage, which ends with Mather’s first effort to have the whole published. Many of the entries drawn from Simon Patrick’s commentaries had their origins in the latter part of this stage, with termini a quo for entries on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth no earlier than 1702, and entries on subsequent books no earlier than the years from 1703 to 1706.

*Stage II.* After a hiatus of about five years, Mather began to add daily or nearly daily illustrations to the whole. He discontinued numbering entries, crossing out in many instances the existing numerals where they could still be seen after stitching. He also excised portions of old entries and even removed entire pages at points to allow for new thoughts and more expansive entries on particular passages. Moreover, he interleaved additional sheets or half-sheets as needed to accommodate longer supplementary entries for which no room was left on the original leaf. However, entries written on quarto-sized sheets do not automatically date from this stage.

*Stage III.* This phase, more difficult to determine, probably commenced sometime in 1711 and ended in 1716, when Mather realized that the “Biblia” would not be published. During these years, he made some major changes, mainly having to do with his eschatology and his millennial views, changes that affected his thoughts on the major prophets and on some New Testament texts, and culminated in the development of his *Trip paradisu* out of the “Biblia.”

<sup>12</sup> This section condenses Smolinski’s discussion of the stages in *BA* 1:51–61.

*Stage IV.* This final phase comprehends the last dozen or so years of Mather's life. During this time, he adds significant new content regarding chronologies of both the Old and New Testaments, as well as philological and textual issues. The most intense concentrations of Mather's re-working of the "Biblia" during these years occurred sometime after 1715 and again after 1724, when he modified his views on the history of the Jewish diaspora, their conversion, and future return to the Holy Land. He also apparently culled from a "considerable Article" in the "Biblia" what would become *The Christian Philosopher*, published in 1721.

### Mather's Interlocutors

In his illustrations on the Historical Books, Mather cites a wealth of scholars, commentators, observers, and narrators. There are, however, a choice number of names that appear again and again, on whose work Mather drew, sometimes naming his source, but mostly – in a time when conscientious annotation had not become the norm – not. While we cannot treat every individual or work that Mather utilized, a survey of some of the chief figures will help the reader ascertain the circle on which Mather primarily depended, presumably because he regarded their work most highly.

A survey of the authors highlighted here provides some revealing clues about Mather's preferences. He was geographically expansive, drawing on scholars from a number of countries and traditions, reflecting, as he aged, his increasingly non-provincial perspective in favor of a multinational pan-Protestantism. But if Mather was fully current on the latest scientific knowledge coming out of Europe, the scripture commentators he chose as his fellow travelers for commentary on the Historical Books were, for the most part, from a generation or more before him. The majority were born in the period from the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. Very few of the English exegetes he cites were born after 1640, having come of age during the Cromwellian period and negotiated the Restoration.<sup>13</sup> Whether this reflects a certain identification with figures from this trying period, or some other factor, is a matter for further study.

#### *Simon Patrick (1626–1707)*

Unquestionably, the single-most cited author in the pages below is the English Bishop of Ely, Simon Patrick. Although raised in a puritan household, Patrick's years at Cambridge brought him off from Calvinist doctrines and towards more latitudinarian beliefs and the legitimacy of episcopal ordination.

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<sup>13</sup> In the final decade or so of this life, it seems that Mather gravitated to French Protestant writers that were more his contemporaries, including Pierre-Daniel Huet, Pierre Jurieu, Jacques Basnage, Louis Du Pin, and Charles Le Cène, among others.

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