



# BIBLIA AMERICANA

Cotton Mather

**Volume 4: EZRA – PSALMS**

*Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations, by Harry Clark Maddux*

*Cotton Mather, Sr.*

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

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Volume 4



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Cotton Mather

# BIBLIA AMERICANA

America's First Bible Commentary

A Synoptic Commentary on the  
Old and New Testaments

Volume 4  
EZRA – PSALMS

Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations,

by

Harry Clark Maddux

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*To Connie,  
Who makes scholarship an act of love.*



*Laelius Mancinus* has an unhappy Passage, which I hope will not carry the Fate of our Illustrations in it.

*Dum Scribo, præ oculis Araneola est, quæ totam se eviscerat, neque aliud meditatur, quam telam illam suam, unde Muscas capiat. Adest ancilla, quæ scopis subito et telam et Muscam, et Doctum animal in humum detrahit, conterit eos pede. Apte MOSES Anni nostri sicut Aranea Meditabuntur, h.e. reputabuntur, et inter meditandum satagendumque abrumpentur. Muscas aucupamur cuncti: sic Ego, qui texo Libros: sic Alii: scopas quotidie cernimus nec credimus.*

“Biblia Americana” Psalms 90:9

“As I write, there is a small spider before my eyes that is disemboweling itself entirely, and it considers nothing other than its own web, from which it may seize flies. A maidservant is at hand who, suddenly with a broom, sweeps both web and fly and the skilled animal onto the ground, and grinds them with her foot. Rightly Moses says, our years will be considered, i. e. will be reckoned, as a spider’s web, and amidst the thinking and the doing they will be torn apart. We all lie in wait for flies: so I who weave books, so others – every day we see the broom but do not take it into account.”

Laelius Mancinus (Lelio Mancini Poliziano)





## Acknowledgments

Unlike Mather and many other polymaths of the early modern period, I could not have completed this work without a great deal of assistance, support, and encouragement. My primary professional debt belongs to the man who has been my mentor in this work and throughout my academic career: the general editor of the *Biblia Americana*, Reiner Smolinski. Reiner's encyclopedic knowledge of Mather and his times, fierce dedication to this project, and unflagging belief in my own ability sustained me when I doubted that this volume would be completed.

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find a reference that had long eluded me deserve much more recognition than I can here give them.

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Indeed, all of those that I have identified, and others, deserve a credit that is beyond my ability to give. If there is any good herein, it belongs to them. Any errors, omissions, or flaws are mine alone.



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## List of Abbreviations

<i>AC</i>	Alumni Cantabrigienses
<i>ADB</i>	Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie
<i>ANF</i>	Ante-Nicene Fathers
<i>AO</i>	Alumni Oxonienses
<i>BBK</i>	Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon
<i>BU</i>	Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne
<i>CB</i>	Chalmer's Biography
<i>CBL</i>	Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature
<i>CE</i>	Catholic Encyclopedia
<i>CHEAL</i>	Cambridge History of English and American Literature
<i>DALA</i>	Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
<i>DB</i>	Dictionnaire Bouillet
<i>DBH</i>	Oxford Dictionary of British History
<i>DNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
<i>EAH</i>	Encyclopedia of African History
<i>EB</i>	Encyclopedia Britannica
<i>EE</i>	Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment
<i>EJ</i>	Encyclopaedia Judaica
<i>EMA</i>	Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages
<i>JE</i>	Jewish Encyclopedia
<i>OCAL</i>	Oxford Companion to American Literature
<i>OCB</i>	Oxford Companion to the Bible
<i>OCCL</i>	Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization
<i>OCCL</i>	Oxford Companion to Classical Literature
<i> OCD</i>	Oxford Classical Dictionary
<i>OCG</i>	Oxford Companion to the Garden
<i>OCHMS</i>	Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science
<i>OCIH</i>	Oxford Companion to Irish History
<i>ODB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
<i>ODCC</i>	Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
<i>ODCW</i>	Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World
<i>ODP</i>	Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy
<i>ODR</i>	Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance



<i>ODS</i>	Oxford Dictionary of Scientists
<i>ODWR</i>	Oxford Dictionary of World Religions
<i>OEBL</i>	Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature
<i>OED</i>	Oxford English Dictionary
<i>OER</i>	Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation
<i>PG</i>	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca
<i>PL</i>	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina
<i>SH</i>	Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge
<i>SHG</i>	Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University (Sibley's Harvard Graduates)
<i>TWOT</i>	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

## PART 1

### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



## Section 1

### “Biblia Americana” Ezra through Psalms: Aims and Contexts<sup>1</sup>

On the most general level of abstraction, we might say that Cotton Mather’s “Biblia Americana,” like much biblical criticism of the period, was guided by two very basic principles. First, Mather assumed that academic learning and experiential religion need to be mutually supportive endeavors. Just as interpreting the Bible must not be made a matter of pious intuition but requires extensive preparation, proper guidance, caution, as well as great skills and knowledge, so learning unsupported by faith and devotion becomes vain pretension. Secondly, Mather and his peers understood biblical criticism as a collaborative and cumulative project, in which scholars freely drew on tradition and the works of colleagues, while also serving as counterbalances or correctives to each other’s interpretations on disputed issues. From this principle grew Mather’s synoptic method of composition as well as his willingness to let conflicting readings stand next to each other in the “Biblia” where a matter was not to be resolved with any certainty. A striking example for how these two principles play out in practice can be found in Mather’s annotations on Esther 3:2, in which he confronts the question of why Mordecai should have refused to bow to Haman in spite of the emperor’s decree.

As he often does in “Biblia Americana” when some matter is particularly complex, Mather considers various possible explanations, of which the first one is offered in an entry directly on that particular verse while the other appears in his summary comments at the end of his annotations on Esther. Mather’s first answer implies that Mordecai’s refusal was an act of conscience in response to Haman’s scheming: “the Minion of the *Persian* Court, had by his Brigues, obtained from the Emperour a Commission & Priviledge, to require a more than common Reverence, from the Courtiers, then about the Palace; but *Mordecai* found it against his Conscience to take such a Notice of such a Miscreant.”<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Mather here suggests, Mordecai’s decision was informed by cultic and historical animosities. After all, Haman’s entrance into the story told

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1 A portion of this work appeared as “Euhemerism and Ancient Theology in Cotton Mather’s ‘Biblia Americana,’” in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana: America’s First Bible Commentary*, eds. Reiner Smolinski and Jan Stievermann (337–59).

2 Esth. 3:2; Esther, 7r. “Brigue” signifies “strife, quarrel, or contention” (*OED*).

by the book of Esther is as the son of Hammedatha the Agagite (Esth. 3:1). Agag, of course, was the King of the Amalekites, who had been ordered destroyed along with his people in 1 Samuel 15 for their attack upon Israel (Exod. 17), but who was perversely saved by Saul. This act of apparent mercy, for which Saul is ultimately cursed and denied the monarchical succession (which will pass to David), also has crucial political as well as theological overtones. When Samuel rebukes Saul, he tells him that “rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from [being] king” (1 Sam. 15:23).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Mordecai's reason to scorn Haman might have been simply because he was of that people “whom *Samuel* slew; & so of a Generation, both *Accursed* of God, & no less Justly than Greatly *Abhorred* by the Israel of God.”<sup>4</sup> Even as he proposes this possibility, though, Mather rejects it, perhaps because he remembers the lesson of 1 Samuel 15:23:

Had it been a meer *Civil* Respect, which was here demanded, it would have been very *Superfluous*, & well-nigh *Ridiculous*, to have given Express Command unto all the *King's Servants that were in the Court*, concerning it; Good Manners were Doubtless enough used there. . . . It seems not a Reason weighty enough, that because the *Jews* were to cultivate no Friendship with the *Amalekites*, therefore *Mordecai* should not pay *Haman* the Civil Respect which was given to all Men in great Place; especially since by denying it, he might expose the whole Nation to Danger.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of following standard interpretations, Mather calls on the Targumim, the 1<sup>st</sup>-century CE Aramaic paraphrases of Hebrew Scripture, and the apocryphal additions to Esther (Esth. 13:12–14) to suggest that the decree entailed something other than courtly manners:

Accordingly the Author of the *Apocryphal* Additions to this Book understood it. He represents *Mordecai*, as praying after this Manner. *Thou knowest, O Lord, that it is not Contumacy or Pride, nor Desire of Vainglory, that makes me not to worship Haman; for I would willingly kiss his Feet for the Safety of Israel; but I do it, that I may not prefer the Glory of a Man to the Glory of God: nor adore any one, but thee, my Lord, alone.*<sup>6</sup>

The “*Former Targum*” supports this interpretation when it asserts that the Persians “*in the King's Gate bowed down to his Image, which he had sett up, & worshipped Haman,*” and prostrated themselves before him as to a god. The “*Latter Targum*” likewise

Explains it. When they asked him, why he did not obey the King? He answered, *What is the Son of Man, that he should exalt himself? What is he that is born of Woman,*

<sup>3</sup> Throughout, in quoting from the Bible, I have relied upon the Authorized Version based on the 1611 King James.

<sup>4</sup> Esth. 3:2; Esther, 7r.

<sup>5</sup> Esth. 3:2; Esther, 7r.

<sup>6</sup> Esth. 3:2; Esther, 7r.

*who comes lamenting into the World, & is of few Dayes, and then returns to his Earth, that I should worship him? No; I worship God, the living God, who endures forever! So he goes on, describing very well, the Majesty of God, the Lord of Heaven & Earth; & thus concludes; He is to be praised by us, & before Him, we ought to bow down ourselves.*

The fact that the largest portion of this note relies directly on Simon Patrick's much-admired and much-copied *Commentary upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament* gives us occasion to reflect for a moment on some of Mather's main sources and his use of them.<sup>7</sup>

Simon, or Symon, Patrick (1626–1707), was Bishop of Ely and well-known for his latitudinarian views. He held many opinions that were consonant with the Cambridge Platonists, but he was best known for his numerous devotional and exegetical works (*DNB*), several of which were held by the Harvard Library. Despite his broad-church outlook, he was evidently and expressly admired not only by Mather, but also by Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), French churchman and Bishop of Soissons (*EB*), and the even more famous Presbyterian clergyman, Matthew Henry (1662–1714), whose own *Exposition of All the Books of the Old and New Testament* (originally published between 1707 and 1714) is still in print (*DNB*). In keeping with the scholarly methods of the period, Henry, like Mather, reproduces much of Patrick's own commentary in large part because both esteem Patrick's voluminous learning and his profound seriousness toward matters of religion.<sup>8</sup> The fact that both Henry and Mather directly copy Patrick, and that Huet closely paraphrases him in several of his works, shows how early modern exegesis was practiced as a collaborative enterprise.

The other primary source for this entry is *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum* (1669–76), by the biblical commentator Matthew Poole (1624–79). Much like Mather's own "Biblia Americana," it is a critical digest of biblical interpretation. *Synopsis* was tremendously popular from the date of its publication, so much so that toward the end of his life Poole undertook to digest his great Latin work and provide an English translation for lay readers. Although he died before this work could be completed, it was finished by his friends and published in two volumes as *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (1683–85), a work which Mather studied closely. John Pearson's *Critici Sacri Sive Doctissimorum Virorum in SS. Biblia Annotationes & Tractatus*, first published in London in nine volumes in 1660, is another of the monuments of early modern biblical studies that makes a frequent appearance in the "Biblia." It collected large portions of the commentaries of Hugo Grotius, Sebastian Münster, Francis Vatablus, Isidore Clarius, Johannes Drusius and dozens of others and presented their interpretations in a chapter-by-chapter study. The *Critici Sacri*

<sup>7</sup> Simon Patrick, *A Commentary upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (2:715).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of All the Books of the Old and New Testament* (2:650).

was so popular that it was twice published in a reprinted and expanded edition on the continent.

When Mather returns to the issue of Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman, however, he does not draw on Poole, Patrick, or Pearson for the alternative explanation that he offers the reader. He notes that the Greeks, like Mordecai, "would not pay this Respect unto the Kings of *Persia*; but it was out of Pride."<sup>9</sup> The direct source for this extended annotation that follows is Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724). Dean of Norwich and a staunch Whig, Prideaux was best known for his work that linked the history of the Jews with that of the Christians, *The Old and New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighbouring Nations, From the Declension of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Time of Christ*, originally published between 1716 and 1718.

Prideaux, like Mather, was a master at digesting gargantuan quantities of information, a primary technique of learned discourse at the time that gave the works of many contemporary writers their characteristically massive style, including those of Thomas Browne (1605–82) and of Robert Burton (1577–1640), not to mention Poole and Pearson. In contrast to Patrick, Prideaux believed that Mordecai's rebellion *must* have had its roots in the antipathy of the ancient Hebrews toward the Amalekites. Prideaux's own primary source for many materials related to ancient Persia, acknowledged in his Preface, was the *De Religione Veterum Persarum* of Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), although Prideaux appears not to depend upon Hyde for this information.<sup>10</sup> Still, Prideaux would have learned from Hyde and other Orientalists that what Haman expected was nothing more than

the same Adoration, that was paid unto the Kings of *Persia*, a Bowing of the Knee, & a Prostration of the Body to the Ground; and that *Mordecai* declined it as Idolatrous. But this being the common Complement, which was constantly paid unto the Kings of *Persia*, by all that were admitted into their Presence, it was, no doubt, paid unto this very King, by *Ezra* and by *Nehemiah*, when they had Access unto him, and afterwards by *Mordecai* himself. And if this Homage might be paid unto the King, there was no Idolatry in paying of it unto *Haman* too.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Mordecai had a deeper reason for his refusal: "Probably, it was because *Haman* was of the race of the *Amalekites*, and under the Curse denounced by GOD upon that Nation; and therefore, he thought it not proper to give that Honour unto him. And if all the rest of the Jews thought the same, we may see, why he would also Revenge himself upon all the Nation."<sup>12</sup> Prideaux's explanation not only preserves Mordecai's piety, but also accounts for Haman's

<sup>9</sup> Esth. 10:3; Esther 22v.

<sup>10</sup> This is the title given by Prideaux. It was a popular shorthand reference to the actual work, *Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum Eorumque Magorum* (1700).

<sup>11</sup> Esth. 10:3; Esther 22v; Prideaux, pt. 1, bk. 5, p. 246.

<sup>12</sup> Esth. 10:3; Esther 22v.

bloodlust both toward Mordecai and the entire nation of the Jews. Thus, the reader is left to weigh two possible explanations for Mordecai's rebellion, both of them equally supported by learned arguments. Neither one of these explanations points to contumacy or pride as the reason for Mordecai's action. Whether the refusal was rooted in respect of God's injunction against idolatry or reflected His condemnation of the Amalekites, Mordecai's purpose was pious and his action therefore irreproachable. Mather thus allowed for different readings to stand as they are, obviously wishing us to mine them for the single truth that each contains.

This is a recurring pattern in the annotations on Ezra through the Psalms and indeed throughout the "Biblia Americana." Further examples would be the differing accounts of those who returned from exile in Ezra and Nehemiah, the differing opinions presented on the lawfulness of usury or the identities of Leviathan and Behemoth in Job, and the diverging contradictory readings of the Psalms. The method per se has been amply investigated by Reiner Smolinski in his essays and in his general introduction to the *Biblia* series, particularly as they relate to Mather's commentaries on the Pentateuch.<sup>13</sup> I want to emphasize here what seems to me the rationale behind it: for Mather understanding the Bible was a continuing and endlessly complex process that required the use of the best learning and all available sources of knowledge, even where this meant that sometimes one had to accept, at least for the time being, the possibility of conflicting interpretations.

In following this rationale, Mather is also operating well within the cultural presumptions of Puritan ministry as they are ably outlined by Lisa Gordis. Puritan clerics, like other reformers, did expect their congregants to read the scripture for themselves. The difficulty lay in skilled interpretation: Trained ministers were needed to navigate the rocky shoals of scripture and it was for this reason that Harvard itself was founded. As the cases of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams made plain, even the most sincere "attempts to use the biblical text as a guide were ... complicated" and tendentious.<sup>14</sup> William Perkins, the exemplary Puritan minister, found many "dark" places in scripture that could only be illuminated by those with adequate training in language and learning.<sup>15</sup> In like manner, Mather admits in his commentary on Ezra that "Our *Bible*, is a Book of *Mysteries*; it is very much a *Seal'd Book* unto us, until wee come at those *Mysteries*."<sup>16</sup> Approaching those mysteries evidently requires the guidance of one provided with learning that others often do not have.

Mather does appear to depart from his ministerial (and familial) forebears in one important regard. While the first generation of colonial clerics operated

<sup>13</sup> For more detail, see Smolinski's introduction to the first volume (*BA* 1:113–74).

<sup>14</sup> Gordis, *Opening Scripture* 178.

<sup>15</sup> Gordis 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra 5r.



under the assumption that the art of their learning should not be visible as art, and that therefore their sermons should seem “plain” even when they were not,<sup>17</sup> Cotton Mather was famous for the ostentatious erudition of his sermons and his writing. He always intimates, even when he does not expressly indicate, the formidable training required to adequately interpret scripture.<sup>18</sup> Still, the *leitmotif* of “learning” in *A New Offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning* (c. 1714) announces that Mather is doing more in his vast work than defending the faith against those who would destroy it: he is also buttressing it against those who, with the best intentions, might harm it.

Puritans were not alone in their belief that untutored biblical interpretation was fraught with peril. Kevin Killeen, in his recent monograph on Thomas Browne, points out how many contemporaries and near contemporaries of Mather expressed similar anxieties about lax approaches to scripture. John Selden (1584–1654), in his much admired *Table Talk*, lamented how “*Scrutamini Scripturas* – These two words have undone the world.”<sup>19</sup> Later in this same work, Selden avers that the problem often has to do with a cavalier treatment of context: “we pick out a Text here and there to make it serve our turn; whereas if we take it altogether, and consider’d what went before, and what followed after, we should find it meant no such thing.”<sup>20</sup> The Anglican minister and anti-Puritan controversialist, Richard Hooker (1554–1600), wary of radical agitation, would also in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie* (London, 1611) censure the belief that “access to the Bible is open to every vulgar intellect: ‘When they and their Bibles were alone together, what strange fantastical opinion soever at any time entered into their heads, their use was to think the Spirit taught it them.’”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Edward Stillingfleet (1635–99), another fierce defender of Anglicanism and episcopacy, in *A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practised in the Church of Rome* (London, 1671), opined that the Bible “in the hands of an arrogant and presumptuous Spirit, that hath no Guide to interpret it, but its own fancy or passion, it is a dangerous Weapon, with which he will wound both himself and others.”<sup>22</sup>

Many of the writers who gave voice to such fears were, of course, Anglican and staunch proponents of episcopacy. Nonetheless, they expressed an attitude held in common with Puritans that examining the Bible was no easy task. Recognizing this shared stance allows Kevin Killeen to go to the core of Thomas Browne’s otherwise almost impenetrably dense works, especially *Pseudodoxia*

17 See Gordis 34.

18 For more on this issue, see Mather’s discussion of style and displays of erudition in his *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), pp. 44–47.

19 Qtd. in Killeen, *Biblical Scholarship, Science, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 16; Selden, *Table Talk*, p. 7.

20 Selden, p. 9.

21 Killeen 16.

22 Qtd. in Killeen 16; Stillingfleet, *Discourse*, p. 30.

*Epidemica*, first published in London in 1646, and revised and appended through several later editions. The *Pseudodoxia*, Killeen asserts, "engages in a historicism that is at once consummately trivial, in its exploration of scriptural minutiae, and highly political." Browne and, it should be said, many of the same authorities that Mather also employs "are exercised with reclaiming interpretative authority in the face of a perceived hermeneutic anarchy."<sup>23</sup> Mather is clearly not modeling his work on the *Pseudodoxia*, but the two works are similar in that they "exemplify an important innovation in exegetical method, an approach to reading the Bible that focused on the culture of biblical objects and customs." Much biblical scholarship of the period, including the *Synopsis Criticorum* and the *Critici Sacri*, display what might be seen as an inordinate interest in minor matters, but if this is pedantry, it is a "purposeful pedantry, [designed] to pre-empt the appropriation and misuse of the text." Those who would misuse holy writ with their dilettantish readings are countered with an "insistence on a cultural, historical, and linguistic expertise that serves as a prerequisite to exegetical competence."<sup>24</sup>

It is in this context that we should see Mather's copious method so often remarked upon. Most famously observed in his history of New England, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), the same peripatetic mind obviously informs most of Mather's writings. Jan Stievermann has analyzed Mather's ambitions in the *Magnalia* and rightly recognizes that Mather through this technique hoped to unite all branches of knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Such breadth of vision was in no way unusual in the early modern period: it was, as Walter Ong noted, inherent in the Ramistic schemes of thought that would come to dominate early New English culture and learning.<sup>26</sup> From a post-Romantic viewpoint, the copious writing at which Mather excelled might seem to evince a lack of originality. However, we should remember the standard of learned discourse in the Baroque period was not originality but breadth. The form of much early modern writing, from *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621) to *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* to *Synopsis Criticorum* and Samuel Bochart's (1599–1667) oft-cited *Geographia Sacra seu*

23 Killeen 46.

24 Killeen 47.

25 See Jan Stievermann, "Writing 'to Conquer All Things': Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* and the Quandary of *Copia*," 264. Also helpful in understanding Mather's rhetorical method is Winton Solberg's introduction to his edition of *The Christian Philosopher* (see especially xix–xxii), Kenneth Murdock's introductory essay to books I and II of *Magnalia Christi Americana*, particularly 34–42, and Rick Kennedy's "Historians as Flower Pickers and Honey Bees: Cotton Mather and the Commonplace-Book Tradition of History," in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana* (261–76). Gustaaf Van Cromphout, in "*Manuductio Ad Ministerium*: Cotton Mather as Neoclassicist," examines Mather's shift toward a more identifiable "Cartesian" style of rhetoric in his later work but as Cromphout himself recognizes appropriation of other stylistic techniques does not mean that Mather gave up entirely on the approaches that had served him so well for so long, and which made him famous as a minister and a writer (363).

26 See Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (208).

*Phaleg et Canaan* (Caen, 1646) and its companion, *Hierozoicon* (London, 1663) grows from this assumption. To combine such breadth of learning with depth of experiential piety was what Mather ultimately aimed for, and it is this aim by which we should measure his success.

## Ezra and Nehemiah

Mather, operating in an ancient tradition of hermeneutics, considers the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as a continuation of Chronicles. The rabbis believed that Ezra wrote not only the eponymous book in scripture but the Chronicles as well, and that Nehemiah finished this work.<sup>27</sup> While Mather, like most early modern commentators, did not challenge this opinion, he found no shortage of other interpretive problems to occupy him.

Foremost among these are the differing accounts of those who returned from exile contained in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 8, respectively. Mather confronts this discrepancy with characteristic forthrightness. He does not mention the problem in his annotations on Ezra 2, perhaps because he knows that the incongruity will not become apparent until one reads Nehemiah carefully. There, however, the issue cannot be ignored and so he candidly summarizes the case in his query:

Q. *Nehemiah* gives an Account of the Number & Kindred, by whom *Judea* was planted, after the Captivity; But you will find a wonderful Difference from the Catalogue in the Second of *Ezra*: Tho' the Text here seems to affirm, that it is the very same, *I found a Book of the Genealogy of them, that came up at the first, & found written therein.* v. 5. How is this Matter to be apprehended?<sup>28</sup>

Initially, Mather offers the supposition of his trusted Patrick that Nehemiah must have found the original census of Ezra and compared it with his own enumeration of the people in order “to observe, by comparing the List, what Progress the Plantation had made.”<sup>29</sup> In keeping with the shared nature of the exegetical enterprise of the period, Patrick at this point is quoting from the work of the renowned harmonist, John Lightfoot (1602–75), in his work *Chronicle of the Times and Order of the Texts of the Old Testament*, originally published in 1647.<sup>30</sup>

It is characteristic of Mather, however, that despite his obvious respect for Patrick, he does not hesitate to question him when his conclusions appear open to interrogation. Mather ultimately decides in favor of the perhaps more creative but certainly more systematic analysis of James (Jacob) Altting (1618–79).

<sup>27</sup> Baba Bathra, 15a.

<sup>28</sup> Neh. 7:1; Nehemiah, 13r.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick, *Commentary* (2:688).

<sup>30</sup> See Lightfoot, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 145–46.



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