

# 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

<sup>1</sup> Martin Roth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (1943); transl. *The Deuteronomistic History* (1961). For continuing scholarship, see Linda S. Schearing & 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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 Moabiteess 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 gleans 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

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<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 essays, 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 heathen 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 Paradise* out of the “Biblia.”

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<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.

He went on to earn his doctorate at Oxford in 1666, and so it is that Mather, a fellow D. D., refers to him throughout the “Biblia” as “our Dr. *Patrick*.” Patrick’s high-church Anglicanism was no barrier to the scion of the New England dissenting tradition, because of the broad-based ecumenism that Mather came to espouse as he matured. Early in his career, Patrick became known on the one hand as a severe critic of Catholicism (to the consternation of King James) and on the other for his efforts to bring dissenters into the fold of the Church of England, though as he aged he became more respectful of dissenters. He was confirmed as Bishop of Chichester in 1689, and two years later as Bishop of Ely, dying at Ely at the age of eighty.<sup>14</sup>

Although Patrick wrote on a wide range of topics, devotional, moral, homiletical and polemical, he is most known for his exegetical writings. His commentaries on the Old Testament books from Genesis through Esther, first collected and published together in 1727, constituted the source that Mather uses most in his own exposition of the Historical Books. This gathering, however, came too late for Mather; he used the commentaries as they came out of the London press in pieces, first on Joshua, Judges and Ruth (1702), then on the books of Samuel (1703), Kings (1705), and Chronicles (1706). Patrick seems to have appealed to Mather, not only for his latitudinarianism and his toleration of dissenters, but for his thorough-going scholarship, his basically conservative approach to scriptural interpretation, and his knowledge of languages, the Church Fathers, and later authors. From Patrick, too, Mather was able to reap a rich harvest of other commentators from different traditions and countries, including Huet, Scaliger, the German Protestant theologian Conrad Pellican (1478–1556), the Dutch polymath Hugo de Groot (1583–1645), and the German Lutheran philosopher Victor Strigel (1524–69).

#### *Samuel Bochart (1599–1667)*

Bochart was a Huguenot, a French protestant pastor, academy member, and biblical scholar who, like many of Mather’s interlocutors, and like Mather himself to a significant degree, was part of the post-Reformation “sacred antiquarian” movement whose participants, including Johann Buxtorf in his *Juden Schul* (1603), examined the details of ancient objects, sites, and texts for clues to understanding the biblical narratives.<sup>15</sup> Bochart, despite his many duties as the pastor of a Protestant church at Caen in Basse-Normandie, made time to become an accomplished linguist, specializing in the Oriental tongues. Such was his reputation that he was invited to Sweden to study Arabic manuscripts in the queen’s collections, after which he became a member of the academy at Caen.

<sup>14</sup> ODNB.

<sup>15</sup> On antiquarianism, see Grafton and Weinberg, “*I have always loved the Holy Tongue*” (127–28). Buxtorf’s work was translated into Latin and published as *Synagoga Judaica* (1603).

Mather made numerous direct or, more often, indirect references to the “rare” Bochart’s two principal works, the *Geographia Sacra* (1646) and the *Hieroicon* (1663), copies of both of which were in Mather’s library. The former is a study of the topography, places, and place names of the Holy Land, an indispensable resource to Mather, who delved into issues surrounding geography at a fairly constant rate in the “Biblia.” The latter is nothing less than a consideration of all the animals mentioned in scripture, replete with a wealth of information on related topics. Although Mather in the range of these entries often cites Bochart second-hand, and mostly from Patrick, he is worth noting as an important source for the “Biblia” because of the frequency with which Mather bothered to copy out Patrick’s references, perhaps to capitalize on Bochart’s caché as an authority among biblical commentators for his work on biblical geography, flora, and fauna.<sup>16</sup>

*John Selden (1584–1654)*

In the “Biblia” entry on 1 Kings 17:12, Mather calls him “the most accomplished *Selden*.” And accomplished he was. Graduate of Oxford, member of the Inner Temple, he spent his career as a barrister but was also a widely known historian and linguist. He associated with the members of the metaphysical circle of poets, including John Donne and George Herbert, and even wrote poetry himself. Selden learned over a dozen languages, including Oriental ones, which served his interests in ancient culture. He published in legal history, both about England and biblical times, and served as a member of Parliament.<sup>17</sup>

As a young man, Selden had dismissed rabbinic interpretations of Scripture as fictitious. But as he aged, he came to have great respect for the integrity of this tradition and applied himself both to learning it and to espousing its wisdom. Several of Selden’s books in this vein were important for Mather. An extensive treatment of the gods of the ancient Middle East, *De Diis Syris* (1617), was perhaps most useful to Mather, as the Historical Books mention a panoply of deities worshipped by the Israelites’ neighbors, and occasionally by the Israelites themselves.<sup>18</sup> In this treatise, Selden made particular reference to medieval rabbinical sources, which Mather freely borrowed and amplified. Other works by Selden and used by Mather that further explored Hebraic language and sources included *De Successionibus* (1636), in which he derived basic moral principles; and *Uxor Hebraica* (1646), a treatise on Jewish marriage law, which proved especially relevant to Mather in his consideration of the relationship of Ruth and Boaz.

16 On Bochart, see William Whittingham, “Essay on the Life and Writings of Samuel Bochart” (107–68); Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds* (2012).

17 See ODNB; G. J. Toomer, *John Selden* (2009); Reid Barber, *John Selden* (2003).

18 On this theme, see below, pp. 19–22.

*Sebastian Münster (1488–1552)*

Educated at Tübingen and Heidelberg, Münster initially entered the Franciscan order, but converted to Lutheranism in 1529, thereafter becoming one of the most significant scholars of his time. He was the first German to publish a geography of the world (*Cosmographia* [1544]) and to edit the Hebrew Bible. He also compiled Hebrew and Chaldean grammars and dictionaries. His erudition in Hebrew earned him a professorship at Basel, where he died of the plague.<sup>19</sup>

Mather used Münster's knowledge of Hebrew to explore the multivalent meanings of the original texts, as in Münster's translation of the late twelfth/early thirteenth century French-born rabbi and commentator David Kimhi's Hebrew grammar. For example, in the entry on Judges 4:1, Mather noted, "What we render, *Harosheth of the Gentiles*, is by *Munster* translated, *The Woods of the Gentiles*." These sorts of variants were found either in Münster's *Hebraica Biblia* (1534), or as anthologized in Brian Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (1654–57), in which Münster was one of the five featured commentators on the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

*John Lightfoot (1602–1675)*

Rector, member of the Westminster Assembly, and master of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, Lightfoot was one of the preeminent English Hebraists and biblical scholars of his time. He was active in religious matters leading up to and during the Interregnum, and was sympathetic to Presbyterian doctrines and forms. He was outspoken in some respects – such as his rejection of millenarianism, his stance against Independency, and his views on state control of religion – but he worked assiduously in affairs of church and state.<sup>21</sup>

Mather drew upon Lightfoot's comprehensive biblical study, *Horae Hebraicae & Talmudicae*, which came out in six parts starting in 1658. Lightfoot's *Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the Old Testament* (1647), arranged chart-like and similar in conception to James Ussher's *Annals*, provided reputedly precise dates for incidents recorded in the Historical Books. And for passages in the books of Kings and Chronicles that rehearse the building of Solomon's Temple, Mather had recourse to Lightfoot's *Temple Service as it stood in the Dayes of our Saviour* (1649).

*Brian Walton (1600–1661)*

Graduate of Cambridge, cleric, and bishop of Chester, Walton supported the anti-puritan policies of Archbishop Laud and feuded with parishioners who

<sup>19</sup> For a study of Münster, see Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster* (2007).

<sup>20</sup> On Walton, see below, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard A. Muller, "John Lightfoot" (208–212); Jace R. Broadhurst, "The via media approach to sensus literalis in the hermeneutic of John Lightfoot" (2010).

were sympathetic to church reform. For his royalist opinions during the English Civil War he was deprived of his position and fined when he was among the party of the Duke of York that surrendered in 1646.

If Walton's career was inauspicious, his lasting contribution to scholarship was the great London Polyglot bible, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*.<sup>22</sup> He began work on it in 1652, and it was printed in six volumes from 1654 to 1657, an edition of which was in the Mather library. Carrying on the tradition of sacred-source gathering, previously epitomized in works such as the sixteenth-century Complutensian Polyglot, Walton's update was one of the earliest works in England published by subscription; it was regarded as a signal that the English intellectual community had come into its own. Walton, who was at Oxford at a time when Oriental studies were flourishing, acquired a number of languages and put that knowledge to use in his new polyglot. Here, he marshaled different versions together for ease-of-reference. For someone like Mather who explored the original texts and comparative translations of Scripture, Walton provided at one's fingertips the Hebrew and Chaldee Paraphrase, the Vulgate and Septuagint, the Syriac and Arabic, even the Samaritan and the Persic versions, rendered in the original and in Latin.

*John Pearson (1613–1686)*

Like many of the English figures on whom Mather relied, Pearson was active during the Interregnum and Restoration periods. A steadfast apologist for the Church of England, his career suffered during the Civil War; he was deprived of his living and his work towards a doctorate was postponed till after 1660 because of the "late irregularities." In 1672, he was elevated to the bishopric of Chester.

Whatever challenges his early career and his declining bodily and mental health offered him, Pearson was a thorough scholar. His great contribution to biblical commentary was his *Critici Sacri* (1660), actually a gathering of commentary by five eminent interpreters: Sebastian Münster, Hugo Grotius, French Hebraist and theologian Franciscus Vatablus (d. 1547), Italian translator Isidorius Clarius (1495–1555), and Flemish divine Joannes Drusius (1550–1616).<sup>23</sup> Complementing Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* for its collection of scripture texts in the original translations, Pearson's compilation of secondary literature was a great boon to scholars such as Mather who might not have had access to all of the individual commentaries.

<sup>22</sup> Peter N. Miller, "The 'Antiquarianization' of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57)" (463–82).

<sup>23</sup> *ODNB*.



*Matthew Poole (1624–1679)*

Conspicuous for its absence from Mather's long list of authors and works in this section of the "Biblia" is the name of a rough contemporary of Pearson's, and a rival chronicler of biblical commentary, Matthew Poole. An English Nonconformist, Poole had a rather unremarkable career as a sometime rector and preacher. But the great work that secured his fame, one of the most renowned commentaries of the early modern period, was his *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum*, published in five folio volumes in London from 1669 to 1676. The *Synopsis* was a digest of biblical commentary, bringing together the thoughts of some one hundred and fifty different figures from across a range of periods and traditions.<sup>24</sup>

In his lengthy entry on 1 Chron. 1:1, Mather writes, "I have, in composing this Collection, all along studiously avoided, ever to look into our *Polans* [i.e., Poole's] Annotations; nor can I call to Mind, that I have above once look'd into them, for an Illustration; (except when we come to *Ezekiels* Prophecies)." Mather may have been a bit disingenuous in declaring his freedom from Poole, since entries throughout the "Biblia" have similarities to Poole's glosses, but this likeness may have been unavoidable since Poole and other writers ultimately referenced the same sources. Perhaps Mather avoided Poole, or at least claimed to avoid him, because his work was so widely cited, or because Poole was his major competitor in the English market, and Mather wished to set his work apart. Whatever the reason, Poole's opus forms a major counterpoint for Mather's project.

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These, then, were just a few of the figures in a network of theologians, exegetes, and philologists that Mather regularly referenced and that formed part of his intellectual world. But he also drew on certain writers for extended treatments of select topics, including the Jewish diaspora, the nature of prophecy, Solomon's Temple, and discrepancies among details in the Historical Books. Let us therefore turn to examine several of these writers.

*Hermann Witsius (1636–1708)*

This Dutch graduate of the universities of Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht began his career as the pastor of several towns. He was then appointed professor of divinity at the University of Franeker in 1675 and at Utrecht five years later. He ended his career at the University of Leiden as the successor of Friedrich Spanheim the younger. Caught between two factions within Dutch Reformed theology lead by Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–

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<sup>24</sup> ODNB.

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