JAN STIEVERMANN

Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity

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Mohr Siebeck

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Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures in Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana*

Mohr Siebeck

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And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14.

Acknowledgments

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Throughout this study I also draw on the material and information contained in the other three volumes of the *Biblia Americana* that have been published so far. For this I tip my hat to the editors of these volumes, Reiner Smolinski, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Harry Clark Maddux. For his role as general editor of the *Biblia* project and his pioneering scholarship on Mather Reiner Smolinski deserves special praise.

Finally I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Albrecht Beutel for including my book in this prestigious series, and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki at Mohr Siebeck for his unflagging support of the *Biblia Americana* edition. What I owe to my family is beyond words.

Heidelberg, January 2016 *Jan Stievermann*

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*
ANB	*American National Biography*
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
BA	*Biblia Americana*
BBK	*Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*
CCCM	*Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis*
CCSG	*Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca*
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
ESV	*English Standard Version*
FC	*The Fathers of the Church*
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*
GNO	*Gregorii Nysseni Opera*
HCBD	*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*
JE	*Jewish Encyclopedia*
KJV	*King James Version of the English Bible* (1769)
LCL	*Loeb Classical Library*
LXX	*Vetus Testamentum Graece* (1935)
NAU	*The New American Standard Bible Updated Edition*
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*
NT	New Testament
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary Online*
OT	Old Testament
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
RGG	*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Fourth edition.)
TRE	*Theologische Realenzyklopädie*
VUL	*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*
WA	*Weimarer Ausgabe/Weimar Edition of Martin Luther's Works. Schriften/Werke*
WA DB	*Weimarer Ausgabe/Weimar edition of Martin Luther's Works. Deutsche Bibel*

Introduction

Wee must not, like the *Marcionites* and *Manichees* of Old, nor like the *Munsterians* and *Mennonites* of late, nor like the *Socinians*, despise the *Old Testament*. It is not merely a *Fellow*, but a *Father* to the *New*. Our Lord, and His Apostles, brought all their Arguments for the *Christian Faith* out of it. For the First Hundred Years of *Christianity*, it was the only *Canon* that was Universally Received. Nor do wee find any other Book, mentioned in all the *New Testament*, under the name of *Scriptures*. The *New Testament* is indeed a Comment, & a Sermon on the *Old*. … The *New Testament* would bee a very little Book without the *Old*. Now tis Impossible to render Thanks unto Heaven, for a *Key* that shall open to us, the Treasuries in those Heavenly Oracles.

From Cotton Mather's Commentary on Genesis (*BA* 1:702–03)

Until quite recently it was not widely known – even among scholars of early America – that a massive and learned Bible commentary had been produced in colonial New England around the turn of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was generally assumed to have been the most prolific and profound exegete in the American Puritan tradition. Only a few specialists were even aware that Cotton Mather (1663–1728) left an unpublished manuscript of more than 4,500 folio pages entitled "Biblia Americana: The Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament Illustrated."[1] After the American Revolution, Mather's heirs bequeathed the manuscript to the Massachusetts Historical Society, where it has slumbered in the archives almost untouched for over two centuries.

Since 2010, Mohr Siebeck has started to publish what will be a ten-volume scholarly edition, amounting to about 10,000 pages in print. The scholarly edition is not only making the "Biblia Americana" readily available in transcription for the first time, but also, by virtue of extensive introductions, annotations, and translations, is facilitating access to its rich contents. In the past, the work had been largely unapproachable to most modern readers due to Mather's frequent use of (sometimes arcane) Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and because he was engaging in dialogue with very specific, now often forgotten, debates and traditions. Led by Reiner Smolinski (General Editor) and I (Executive Editor), the *Biblia Americana* edition thus resembles an archeological project in early American religious and intellectual history. In this extensive project, an international team of experts is recovering and piecing together, shard by shard, the lost world of Mather's biblical interpretation, attempting to bring his thoughts back to life

[1] When speaking of Mather's manuscript work, I will refer to the "Biblia Americana" in quotation marks; in references to the printed edition the title will be italicized.

by placing it within the larger discursive environment and historical contexts in which it was written. Four volumes have been published so far: *Genesis* (2010, ed. Reiner Smolinski), *Joshua-Chronicles* (2013, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema), *Ezra-Psalms* (2014, ed. Harry Clark Maddux), and now *Proverbs-Jeremiah* (2015, ed. Jan Stievermann).

The positive reception of the published volumes is an encouraging sign that the scholarly community is beginning to recognize the importance of the "Biblia Americana" manuscript as a great untapped resource. This holds true not only for early American studies. Reviewers have acknowledged that Mather's commentary is a treasure trove for scholars interested in the development of Protestant theology and biblical interpretation during a decisive period of intellectual change in the early modern Atlantic world. The "Biblia" holds special potential since it is the first serious engagement of an American exegete with critical-historical methods in biblical scholarship. Mather's commentary is also an early attempt to reconcile a traditional Protestant biblicism with the emerging natural sciences and the philosophical challenges of the early Enlightenment. Moreover, the "Biblia" can contribute much to a deeper understanding of the transformations of New England Puritanism into early evangelicalism, which took place as part of an emerging transatlantic Protestant awakening that also included Reformed and Lutheran Pietists from Continental Europe. So far, however, the promises inherent in the "Biblia" still need to be realized as more and more of the text becomes available. The actual research done on the "Biblia" has still been fairly limited so far, both in quantity and in scope. When compared to the burgeoning scholarly production on the exegetical works of Jonathan Edwards, Mather's famous successor in the tradition of New England theology, the "Biblia Americana" is largely a *terra incognita*.

Mather's annotations on the New Testament will come out over the next few years. But even his recently accessible commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures await fuller investigation. By far the most significant contribution towards understanding Mather's exegesis so far has been Smolinski's extensive and magisterial introduction to volume one of the edition, followed by the shorter but insightful introductions to volume three and four from Minkema and Maddux, respectively. There has also been a collection of essays on Cotton Mather and the "Biblia America" (2010) that came out of a conference marking the launching of the editorial project.[2] All of these works have shed light on important aspects of Mather's exegetical work. Besides offering a detailed account of the history of composition of the "Biblia" in the context of Mather's life, Smolinski's study is especially helpful in exploring his complex response to the questions arising about the Pentateuch's Mosaic authorship and his attempts to harmonize an orthodox

[2] Reiner Smolinski and Jan Stievermann, eds., *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana – America's First Bible Commentary: Essays in Reappraisal* (2010).

reading of Genesis with new scientific cosmologies. Minkema and Maddux have done much toward demonstrating Mather's immersion in the burgeoning literature of his day that explored the cultural and religious history of the ancient Near East in which the books of the Old Testament were embedded. These findings are complemented by several essays in the collection (and a few earlier studies) that also deal with Mather's interest in the scientific and historical methods and how these relate to his interpretation of the Bible.

Building on these studies and especially the research done by the other editors of the series, this book seeks to address some of the larger questions that have arisen from Mather's commentaries on the Hebrew Bible. This will be done mostly by drawing on fresh material from the volume I have edited, which contains the sections on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles (Song of Songs), Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In many respects, this monograph therefore serves as a kind of companion piece to volume five of the edition. It examines in detail Mather's annotations on the biblical books covered in volume five and discusses specific subjects and hermeneutical problems that figure prominently there. At the same time, I undertake the first interpretative synthesis and overall appraisal of Mather's engagement with the Hebrew Scriptures. In the first part, readers will be introduced to the main characteristics, recurring topics, and features of the "Biblia Americana," as well as to the principal tendencies and lacunae of the existing scholarship. This introductory section also ventures to provide a more comprehensive assessment of how Mather's exegetical work can be situated in the history of biblical interpretation, specifically in the history of the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Moreover, some reflections are offered in this context on how the findings from the "Biblia" challenge the established views of Mather and American Puritanism more generally.

The subsequent parts of the book are primarily focused on the Wisdom Books, the Song of Songs, and the two major prophets, but make a consistent effort to move from the specific to the more general. Based on close readings of examples from volume five, I discuss some of the overarching themes and underlying issues in the "Biblia" commentaries on the Old Testament, the methods and approaches that Mather consistently employs, as well his responses to and interventions in the larger theological and scholarly debates of his time. Throughout, cross-references are also made to the other edited volumes, hitherto unpublished material from the "Biblia" manuscript, as well as to the *Triparadisus* (written 1726/27; ed. 1995), Mather's final work on eschatology that deals extensively with Old Testament prophecy. In this way a rich picture emerges of Mather as an exegete of the Hebrew Bible, who deeply immersed himself in ancient interpretative traditions as well as in the latest scholarship, even where it challenged traditional assumptions and the authority of the Scriptures. He always did this in the service of Christian apologetics, however, and for the ultimate purpose of helping his intended readers grow in faith and piety.

The title of this book, "Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity," alludes to what I regard as the most important overarching themes and underlying issues. At the turn of the eighteenth century, traditional Christian understandings of the prophetic and, more broadly the prefigurative, character of the Hebrew Bible had come under critical interrogation in unprecedented ways. After the struggles over the canon in the early days of the church there had been a broad consensus that the Old Testament, as Mather puts it in our introductory citation (taken from a gloss on Gen. 10), "is not merely a *Fellow*, but a *Father* to the *New*." Few questioned that the Hebrew Scriptures predicted and foreshadowed Christ and the gospel promise, and that "Our Lord, and His Apostles, brought all their Arguments for the *Christian Faith* out of it." Mather polemically gestures toward the Socinians and Anabaptists who, in very different ways, had dissented from this majority opinion during the Reformation age without ever making too much of an impact.

Yet during the seventeenth century, this age-old consensus had come under increasing pressure from new forms of biblical criticism that were simultaneously informed by and contributed to a rising awareness of what we today would call the historicity of the Scriptures. The term, on the one hand, implies heightened attention to how the contents of the Bible are inextricably tied into ancient histories and cultures and thus to the human dimension of Scripture. On the other hand, it implies intensified scrutiny of the history of the scriptural texts as texts – that is, of their original composition, provenance, transmission, and canonization. This new approach to the Bible participated in important ways in the historical revolution of the period.[3] It not only initiated the rise of historical-critical theology, in Klaus Scholder's phrase, but it also helped to give birth to the "beginnings of historicism" more generally.[4] Among many biblical scholars of Mather's period, there was a marked increase in the breadth and depth of historical knowledge, as well as a heightened willingness and "ability to judge past societies by their own standards" and "to understand past events in their bewilderingly intricate relationships to one another." Biblical exegetes – and especially scholars of the Hebrew Bible – who began to debate questions such as the Jewish particularity of the Christian Old Testament, the textual history of the Pentateuch, and its scientific value as an account of the world's beginning played no small role in this shift.

Over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, these debates would reach a new quality and intensity with the emergence of "Higher Criticism" that relied on a "comprehensive method of historical study" and operated

[3] On the notion of the historical revolution of the seventeenth century, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (1986), esp. pp. 241–43.

[4] Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology* (1990), pp. 1–8. Peter G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabla: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age* (1994), p. 220. On the rise of myth criticism, see Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (1952).

with more thoroughly secular or naturalistic modes of interpreteting the Bible, notably a concept of myth based on "the systematic distinction of *fabula* and *historia*."[5] This wholesale historicization of the Bible would eventually also lead to a rejection of the ancient hermeneutical principle of assuming manifold senses of Scripture, at least among the more radical representatives of "Higher Criticism." For them, philology and historical analysis constituted the only legitimate approaches of a truly scholarly and critical form of exegesis. Biblical interpretation was to be freed from dogmatic presuppositions; no principal distinction was to be made anymore between studying the Scriptures and other ancient texts. To be sure, there was no teleological development leading from the historical revolution of Mather's day to the establishment of "Higher Criticism." And although a full-fledged historicist viewpoint came to dominate in leading centers of academic biblical scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic, the ascendancy of "Higher Criticism," was, of course, never complete or uncontested. Not least in the world of Anglo-American evangelical Protestantism, its ultimate conclusions always met with resistance.

When Mather died in 1728 these outcomes were still far away. However, Mather belonged to a generation of exegetes that was already confronted with far-reaching historical challenges to the authority of the Bible, and the Hebrew Scriptures in particular. Some of the uneasy questions about authorship or the factual realism of the scriptural narratives that later came to be more rigorously brought to bear on the Bible as a whole, were being tentatively formulated with regard to the Hebrew Scriptures. This does not mean that Mather and his contemporaries ought to be regarded as (mere) forerunners, whose work eventually culminated in the triumph of "Higher Criticism." Such a Whiggish view of history is one thing this book tries to avoid. Instead, it seeks to meet early eighteenth-century biblical scholarship on its own terms, which often eludes black-and-white categorizations as either critical or precritical. The book also seeks to avoid creating a simple opposition between skeptical critics, on the one hand, and orthodox apologists, on the other. Rather, it tries to do justice to the many nuances between these poles and is especially interested in the work of what will be called "apologetically-oriented critics." This group of critics, as Mather's example shows, was wrestling as much with the emerging issues of historicity as their more skeptical opponents, even though they did so in the name of defending the authority and integrity of the Bible as well as the legitimacy of traditional, theologically-determined, approaches, including the assumption of Scripture's manifold senses.

Besides more specific questions relating to authorship, the provenance of the biblical texts, and their historical realism, these apologetically-oriented critics faced one very fundamental issue: Although for very different reasons than in earlier centuries, they saw the necessity of defining and defending what rightful

[5] Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabla*, p. 220.

uses could be made of the Hebrew Scriptures for Christian faith and piety. They aimed to show not only how the *New Testament* is "indeed a Comment, & a Sermon on the *Old*" but also that these intertextual relations were undergirded by an absolute ontological continuity constituted by the progressive self-revelation of God. In the simplest terms, this book is about Cotton Mather's struggle to read the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture in ways that he thought were intellectually justifiable as a highly-educated scholar and which also felt satisfying and nurturing as a devout believer.

While many different intellectual developments contributed to the new awareness of historicity, it was most directly an outgrowth of how post-Reformation Protestant exegesis, especially Reformed exegesis, had combined its prioritization of the literal sense with a humanistic hermeneutics. Together with philological analysis, this new type of exegesis made inquiries into authorial intention and the original historical-communicative contexts they keys to determining the meaning of scriptural texts. By the mid-seventeenth century some scholars, notably the Dutch Arminian Hugo Grotius (Hugo/Huig de Groot; 1583–1645), had found that such inquiries led them to question the soundness of many of the standard methods through which Christian interpreters had laid claim to the Hebrew Scriptures, because these methods appeared to disregard the religious and cultural particularity of the Old Testament texts and what they intended to communicate to their original Jewish audience in specific historical situations. Half a century later, early English Deists such as Anthony Collins (1676–1729) pushed these arguments in a much more radical direction, criticizing traditional Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible as *ex post facto* impositions of an alien, dogmatically-predetermined meaning, which amounted to little but arbitrary allegorizations. In its final reach this criticism threatened the foundations of the Christian conceptualization of Scripture as the integrated unity of Old and New Testament.

When Mather began his "Biblia Americana," the basic legitimacy of time-honored methods of interpreting Old Testament texts as prophetically, typologically, and mystically prefiguring Christ and the gospel could no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, at least in intellectual circles, the problem of historicity was beginning to call into question the very status of the Hebrew Bible as the Christian Old Testament. Although Mather himself had not the slightest doubt about this status, he, like many other theologian-scholars of his generation, felt the need to make new apologetical arguments in support of the traditional view. He also practiced the traditional modes of prefigurative interpretation with a newly self-conscious attention to the historical dimension of the original texts. Parts four and five of this book will thus look at Mather's programmatic or theoretical understanding of – as well as his actual exegetical approach to – typology, christological allegory, and most importantly, predictive prophecy. The latter is given special prominence because one of the crucial debates in early eighteenth-century hermeneutics centered on the value of prophetic evidence – that is, the

demonstration of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the histories of the New – for substantiating the truth-claims of Christianity.

Essential aspects of humanistic attention to the historicity of Scripture included, of course, not only inquiry into the original meaning of biblical texts for their intended audiences but also the history of the texts themselves: their composition, transmission, variants, and canonization. At the turn of the eighteenth century, an Old Testament exegete such as Mather would have faced the rapidly-proliferating, highly-specialized philological scholarship of Hebraists and Orientalists. In their discussion of the received Masoretic text, alongside the Septuagint and other ancient and modern translations, these specialists raised a number of uneasy questions about the "givenness" of the Hebrew Bible, or Christian Old Testament. Their research drew attention to the instability of the text and the uncertainty of its meaning in many places. Moreover, as scholars scrutinized the processes of composition and transmission, they began to cast doubt on long-established assumptions about the historical authorship and provenance of several books of the Old Testament. Thus, another central concern of this book, addressed in parts one and two, is to examine how Mather – who, though learned in the biblical languages and well-read in the relevant literature, was not an expert Hebraist – sought to reconcile engagement with this scholarship with apologetical concerns and pious interests.

However, the problem of historicity reached even deeper, as the concept of the literal-historical sense itself underwent a transformation in Mather's period. Many scholars moved away from simply identifying the historical sense with the literal, grammatical meaning of a text. Under the influence of burgeoning scholarship on ancient history and the natural sciences, they increasingly searched for a historical and natural reality behind or antecedent to the text. They came to understand and judge the veracity of different scriptural passages in terms of their accurate representation of this extra-biblical reality. This intellectual detachment of the "real" historical and natural world from the scriptural narratives profoundly changed the debates over the Bible and its authority as the inspired Word of God. Even scholars such as Mather, who as a matter of principle assumed the absolute veracity and infallibility of the biblical narratives, more and more moved toward such a representational-factualist model of biblical realism. They developed a new kind of evidentialism invested in demonstrating how Scripture in its literal sense corresponded with the facts established by the historical and natural sciences.

This new kind of evidentialism – with its reliance on extra-biblical sources and its tendency toward conceiving of the Bible as a "storehouse of facts" (to use Charles Hodges's famous phrase) – had, as this book will also try to show, far-reaching consequences. Especially in part three of this study, I will discuss how Mather's desire to establish the representational realism of the Hebrew Scriptures frequently pushes him toward a rather extreme form of literalism. He felt compelled to argue for the factual veracity of many scriptural passages in meticulous

detail, which, understood in this way, were not easily harmonized with historical knowledge and new scientific theories. In many cases, this stance leads Mather to a heightened supernaturalism, which seeks to factualize miracles, angels, and eschatological events in the same manner as chronological or topographical references in the biblical narratives. In some cases this stance even forces Mather onto the slippery slope of cultural-accommodationist explanations, where a hyperliteralist reading seemingly could not be reconciled with the findings of modern science, as in the case of the shadow going backwards on Ahaz's sundial (Isa. 38:8).

Beyond the obvious difficulties involved in such a quest for biblical realism, the strong emphasis on the historical-factual meaning of the text potentially also created tensions with traditional modes of prefigurative interpretation, especially allegory, on which the Christian claim to the Hebrew Bible depended. A crucial preoccupation of this book is to understand whether Mather himself perceived these tensions and how he responded to them. In this context I am also interested in the development of pious experience and practice as a way of accessing the Christian promises contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and how this alternative, more subjective hermeneutics of experimental piety, as Mather called it, relates to his quest for objective realism. This will be the subject of the last part of this book.

Volume five of the *Biblia Americana* lends itself very well to a broader analysis of Mather's scholarly engagement with the Hebrew Bible and his struggle to read it as Christian Scripture. The commentaries contained in this volume are diverse but still speak to each other as well as Mather's annotations on other books of the Hebrew Bible in very productive ways. Needless to say, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, Jeremiah, and Isaiah do not constitute a natural whole in either the Jewish or Christian traditions of ordering the canon. Mather's commentaries on these books came to be subsumed into one volume for organizational and editorial rather than historical reasons. In the Tanakh, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles belong to the third and final section which is called the *Ketuvim* ("Writings"). Proverbs (with Psalms and Job) belongs to the subsection of the Writings called *Sifrei Emet* ("Books of Truth"). Ecclesiastes or Koheleth and the Song of Solomon (with Ruth, Lamentations, and Esther) are grouped under the *Hamesh Megillot* ("The Five Scrolls"). In the Old Testament, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are commonly grouped together with Psalms and Job as belonging to the "Wisdom Books," while Canticles has mostly been regarded as *sui generis* in the Christian tradition. Within these larger groupings of the canon, both Jewish and Christian exegetes in Mather's day generally understood Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles as being tied together not just by their overarching theme of moral and spiritual instruction but also by their common Solomonic authorship. For these reasons, Mather's contemporaries often approached them together and published commentaries that contained annotations on more than one of them. Mather himself clearly worked on the three "Solomonic books" during the same periods of time and did the bulk of entries in the same rounds of annotations.

Thus, the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles, in Mather's mind, would have formed an interpretative unit but had no special connection to the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. According to both Jewish and Christian traditions, Isaiah and Jeremiah belong to a different section of Scripture: the *Nevi'im Aharonim* ("Latter Prophets") of the Tanakh and the "Major Prophets" of the Old Testament. They are also, at least *prima facie*, concerned with quite different subjects, centered around God's particular relationship and dealings with Israel during specific parts of its history and, from a Christian point of view, the new covenant with the church and the promises of Christ. Within the larger groupings of prophetic writings, Jewish and Christian exegesis traditionally saw close affinities between Isaiah and Jeremiah, not only because of their special eminence, but also because of their assumed succession as God's foremost prophets before the Babylonian exile and their shared themes of warning and comfort. Just as many scholars before Mather had written commentaries on both Isaiah and Jeremiah, he also seems to have viewed the two prophets in close conversation with each other, even though he clearly gave priority to Isaiah. He appears to have gone back and forth between the respective sections of the "Biblia" when making his annotations.

The three Solomonic books and the two major prophets therefore provide a fairly wide cross-section from the Hebrew Bible in terms of genre, subject matter, and historical context. That the above-mentioned overarching themes and underlying issues pertain to all of them shows their general relevance for all of Mather's Old Testament commentaries. At the same time, both "units" come with particular questions, interpretative challenges, and debates attached to them, which connects them in particular ways with some of the other Old Testament commentaries contained in different volumes of the *Biblia Americana* edition. Mather's commentaries on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, for instance, have much in common with those on Psalms and Job in how he conceptualizes the spiritual wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures in relation to the Christian gospel. But Mather's Christian understanding of Solomonic wisdom also owes much to his interpretation of Solomon himself in the commentaries on the books of Chronicles and Kings. In contrast to the prophetic writings, the authorship of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (traditionally ascribed to Solomon) was already being hotly debated at the time, which links these commentaries to those on Job, Psalms, and especially the Pentateuch, whose provenance was similarly discussed by Mather and his contemporaries. Furthermore, Mather's annotations on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and in particular Canticles have considerable overlap with those on Job and Psalms in how they struggle to reconcile traditional forms of prefigurative exegesis, specifically allegory, and pious christocentric applications with the new attention to the historicity of the Hebrew Scriptures. Mather's commentaries on Canticles, and to a lesser extent on Proverbs, also showcase his use of a historico-prophetic or salvation-history approach to parts of the Hebrew Bible that were

not prophetical writings in the narrower sense of the term. This, too, is something that we repeatedly see in the sections on Job and Psalms as well.

In turn, Mather's commentaries on Isaiah and Jeremiah share much with his other commentaries on the other Old Testament prophets. They contain the essence of his theology of substitution, his conceptualization of the relationship between law and gospel, the old and new covenant, and between ethnic Israel and the new spiritual Israel of the church. They illustrate Mather's understanding of Christ's pre-incarnate presence in ancient Jewish history, his heavy involvement in the debate over prophetic evidence, and his priorization of predictive prophecy as the essential historical tie between Old and New Testament. They show how Mather, in response to historical critics, worked out a hermeneutics of multiple fulfillments, according to which the prophecies could be understood as literally predicting the coming of Christ, the gospel promises, and the eschaton, even where many of them were also referring to events in the Old Testament period. Hence, there is a special concern visible in these annotations with establishing the exact historical referents of the prophecies, the factuality of their accomplishments in the past, and with identifying the future events in which they would likely also be fulfilled. In their attempt to anchor a Christian interpretation of the Hebrew prophecies in the factual grounding of ancient history, the commentaries on the two major prophets are inextricably intertwined with the massive antiquarian reconstructions that Mather undertakes in the "Biblia" sections on the Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, the annotations on Isaiah and Jeremiah reveal his strong investment in a specific form of millennialist eschatology, informed by a radical literalism, which casts the latter-day events in factual, quasi-scientific terms. All of these are also consistent themes in the sections on Daniel, Ezekiel, and the "Minor Prophets", which will be covered in volume six of the *Biblia*. Mather's discussion of the end of the world in quasi-scientific terms also connects to his similarly-oriented discussion of the beginning of the world in the Genesis commentary.

The book thus seeks to offer a threefold metonymic perspective. First of all, the commentaries on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are examined *pars pro toto* for Mather's engagement with the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. Second, Mather's work as an Old Testament exegete yields broader new insights into the development of New England theology and its engagement with the Bible, as well as the often misunderstood biblical orientations of American Puritan identity and culture during a crucial period of change. Third, the "Biblia" commentaries on these five books of the Old Testament provide a window into an understudied and underappreciated phase in the Protestant history of biblical interpretation situated before the rise of German "Higher Criticism" but in which critical concerns and historical-textual methods were already well developed. In this phase the legacies of the Reformation and the age of Protestant Orthodoxy were brought together with the forces of the early Enlightenment

and the Pietist-evangelical renewal, yielding forms of biblical exegesis that were at once traditionalist and innovative, and characterized by unique accomplishments as well as conflicts.

However, some caveats need to be added to the interpretative claims of all three metonymic perspectives. Volume five, it should be emphasized, is fairly though not completely representative of Mather's exegetical work, even on the Hebrew Bible. While the main characteristics and tendencies of his exegesis clearly come to the fore in the commentaries on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and many recurring topics and features are addressed, other important subjects figure only marginally. For instance, Mather's strong interests in cosmology, astronomy, and geology, which appear in his massive commentary on Genesis and have been treated in depth by Smolinski, are hardly present in volume five and thus are only hinted at in this monograph. Mather's fascination with euhemeristic explanations of pagan religious traditions, so pronounced in volumes one to four, figures much less prominently in the commentaries on Proverbs through Isaiah and are not treated here. More items could be added to this list.

Then there is the issue of Mather's representativeness. All too often, Mather has served as an emblem for third-generation Puritan theology and even New England culture as a whole. This is not what I seek to do here. Rather, I follow scholars such as Robert Middlekauff and Richard Lovelace, who have convincingly argued that Mather is typical only of one particular but important strand in New England Puritan theology, which had always combined the scholastic tendencies of Reformed Orthodoxy and its commitment to Renaissance learning with a vigorously experimental brand of piety, accentuating spiritual rebirth, holy living, and Christian activism in the expectation of Christ's coming kingdom. In the early eighteenth century, this strand developed into a form of revivalism strongly rooted in Calvinism. As a representative of this strand, Mather took up elements inherited from the generation of his grandfathers, John Cotton and Richard Mather, and the generation of his father, Increase, and, under dramatically altered circumstances and international influences, transformed them into what he himself called an "American Pietism." He then passed them on to a cohort of slightly younger clergymen, including Thomas Prince (1687–1758) and Jonathan Edwards. These men, who were the key moderate figures of the First Great Awakening and whom we now recognize as the founding generation of American evangelicalism, appreciated Mather's legacy as a theologian and reformer. Indeed, had Mather lived another twenty years he undoubtedly would have joined their cause and stood against the rise of early liberalism with its emphases on the power of reason and human ability, which had first asserted itself in his own day through men such as John Leverett (1662–1724) and subsequently gained prominence with Charles Chauncy (1705–1787) and Jonathan Mayhew (1720–1766).

Mather's affiliation with this particular strand of New England theology clearly shows in his biblical interpretations. As this book will demonstrate, Mather the

exegete was simultaneously a staunch defender of the basic doctrines of Reformed Orthodoxy, a learned scholar deeply committed to all branches of contemporary scholarship, and a devout believer and pastor. On the one hand, a strong academic ambition is evident in his project. On the other hand, he intended his "Biblia Americana" to be an instrument of piety directed toward individual regeneration as well as communal renewal. Its annotations have a pronounced experiential and practical dimension. These characteristics and orientations reveal very significant transatlantic connections between Mather and his "Biblia" and a number of religious and intellectual movements as well as trends in the Protestant history of biblical interpretation at the turn of the eighteenth century. Indeed, it is one of the central contentions of this book that Mather as a theologian and exegete cannot be adequately understood against the background of native New England traditions; he must also be seen in a wider international and interdenominational context. Mather's commentaries are partly, but always only partly, representative of developments in Puritanism. They also partially reflect the ongoing work of Reformed theologians more generally, as well as orthodox Lutheran scholars, Anglican apologists, Christian Hebraists, early Enlightenment philosophers and scientists, and, maybe most importantly, German and Dutch Pietists. The "Biblia" also reflects Mather's fascination with more esoteric pursuits, such as Christian Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and alchemy, again linking him into larger transatlantic circles of like-minded intellectuals.

Having said all this, it should be pointed out that in many ways, Mather's biblical interpretations are not really representative of anything other than his own sometimes idiosyncratic interests and inclinations as well as his unique life story and quirky personality. One thing that keeps me going in the sometimes dreary work of editing the "Biblia" is that Mather never ceases to surprise with his choice of materials and the twists he adds. To cite just one curious example, Mather had a predilection for biblical poetry and hymns, from which he often quotes at considerable length in his annotations. While his passion for Isaac Watts (1674–1748) is not wholly surprising, some of his selections are truly unusual. Who would have expected to find Mather making extensive citations from the medieval *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* by Williram of Ebersberg (fl. between 1048–1085), apparently just because he was enamored with the beauty of the Latin poetic paraphrase of the Song of Songs? Mather also had a habit of interpreting Scripture through the lens of his own biography, which sometimes leads to unanticipated turns, as when he suddenly breaks away from his scholarly explications of Isa. 66 to talk about the meaning of the recent death of his beloved mother. So too, his infamous anxieties sometimes peek through, as does his lifelong battle against his personal sins of anger and pride.

In a late entry on Ecc. 6:2 (regarding "The Man to whom God hath given Riches," but not "Power to eat thereof"), Mather suddenly launches into a very personal reflection and expresses deep-seated concern over his academic pursuits

and his enormous output of texts. He apparently feared his scholarly work could ultimately not be to his own spiritual benefit, should he prove unable to live by what he preached, and become too driven by the desire to make a name for himself in the republic of letters. Thus, in the middle of the great amassment of learning that the "Biblia" is we find this strange prayer for humility and obedience:

> One who ha's written more than Two Hundred Books, & addressed the World with more than Two Hundred Publications, now makes it his humble Prayer to the God of all Grace, that he may not be left unto the least Degree of this Unhappiness.
>
> *Lord, præserve thy Servant in the most spotless Purity, and lett me most of all myself conform to the Maxims of Piety, in the Books which thou hast helped me to write, & which I hope, thou wilt bring many others to be the better for.* (*BA* 5:400)

Convinced as he was that learning that remained "head knowledge" only and brought forth no fruits in life was ultimately without value, Mather was genuinely worried, it would seem. But he was also obviously proud of his publication record. This peculiar mixture of academic ambition and Christian self-denial, of immense and often ostentatious learning and heartfelt piety also informs the "Biblia Americana" as a whole. In these and other regards the "Biblia Americana" is uniquely Matherian, even though it also reflects the general development of New England theology, has so much in common with many other apologetically-oriented biblical scholarship from contemporary Europe, and is, for the most part, composed of materials by other authors, both ancient and modern. The study of the "Biblia" is thus the study of a very particular and specific mind. At the same time, this book is the study of larger questions about a transition in Protestant theology and biblical scholarship and will touch upon some basic issues that have always surrounded the reading of the Bible.

Part I

1. Cotton Mather and the Character and Composition of the "Biblia Americana"

Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana" project is one of the great accomplishments and tragedies of early American cultural history.[1] Aside from his family and a small group of friends, no one ever saw what Mather had achieved: the first complete Bible commentary composed in British North America, in which he attempted to reconcile new insights emerging from the nascent fields of textual-historical criticism, the natural sciences, and revolutionary philosophical ideas of the early Enlightenment with the biblicism, piety, and doctrinal teachings of his forebears. As such, the "Biblia" constitutes a portal into the central intellectual debates of the time period. Had Mather managed to publish this work it might have had a significant influence on the development of biblical interpretation and the Christian Enlightenment in the colonial period and beyond. It might also have presented Puritan intellectual culture in a somewhat different light to its nineteenth- and twentieth-century students. Further, it might have helped to show Cotton Mather as the learned, venturesome, and prolific scholar that he was aside from all the other, not always well-chosen, roles that he played in his life.

It is not that Mather failed to leave behind any scholarly legacy. His prodigious print output was often noted in his day. Although he was always busy as a devoted pastor tending one of the largest congregations in New England, Mather published over 400 works during his lifetime, making him the most published author of the entire colonial period.[2] Learned in all fields of contemporary knowledge,

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[1] A note on bibliographic references: Unless otherwise noted, basic biographical information for figures from the English-speaking world is derived from the online version of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*), or *American National Biography Online*; for Continental figures the source is the online version of the *Biographisch-Bibliographische Kirchenlexikon* (*BBLK*). Entries and authors from these sources are only cited in full in cases of more detailed discussion.

[2] The NAIP (North American Imprints Program), the database maintained by the American Antiquarian Society, identifies 3,519 authors up to the Revolution, the vast majority (2,073) represented by a single record and another 543 by two. According to the NAIP, Cotton Mather accounts for 335 records alone, making him by far the most prolific author of British North America during the entire colonial period. See David D. Hall and Russell L. Martin, "Appendix 2. A Note on Popular and Durable Authors and Titles" (2000), p. 520. At the height of Mather's career, between 1701 and 1720, his publications account for roughly fifteen percent of all NAIP records, and roughly twenty-five percent of all works of personal authorship. See Hugh Armory, "Appendix 1. A Note on Statistics" (2000), p. 517. In his work, *Cotton Mather: A Bibliography of His Work* (1940), T.J. Holmes states that Mather's "known printed works total 444" (1:viii).