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“PERHAPS NO ONE GENERAL ANSWER WILL DO”: COTTON MATHER’S 
COMMENTARY ON THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS IN “BIBLIA AMERICANA”

by

GRACE SARA HARWOOD
Under the Direction of Reiner Smolinski, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Bible began to lose its privileged place in Western society when skeptics found its contradictions irreconcilable. Cotton Mather (1663-1728) witnessed the integration of radical ideas into mainstream hermeneutics and attempted to respond honestly in his “Biblia Americana.” Although Mather never left New England, his exegesis was shaped almost entirely by European radicalism and its conservative responses. His remarks on the Synoptic Gospels reveal that as he tried to weigh radical arguments objectively, so he often accepted the radical conclusions that undermined the Bible’s authority. While Mather seemingly did not recognize the significance of the concessions he made, examination of his commentary on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals that Mather was a wholehearted participant in Enlightenment discourse and its radicalizing tendencies.

INDEX WORDS: American studies, Enlightenment, Religion, Bible studies, Colonial America, Historical Jesus
“PERHAPS NO ONE GENERAL ANSWER WILL DO”: COTTON MATHER’S
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GRACE SARA HARWOOD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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in the College of Arts and Sciences
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“PERHAPS NO ONE GENERAL ANSWER WILL DO”: COTTON MATHER’S
COMMENTARY ON THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS IN “BIBLIA AMERICANA”

by

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DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, Tom, Carley, and Sandy.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Ushering in a philosophical revolution at the forefront of the European Enlightenment, seventeenth-century scholars used new criteria to examine the Bible. Their textual analyses considered translation issues, contradictions, and inconsistencies, ultimately causing some commentators to no longer view the Bible as a flawless divinely-inspired work, but as a compilation of sources, written and edited by flawed and sometimes poorly-educated people, no more or less worthy of being analyzed critically than any other text. The Bible began to lose its privileged place in Western society as skeptics found its contradictions irreconcilable.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728), a minister in Boston, Massachusetts, witnessed the integration of radical ideas into mainstream hermeneutics. Although Mather never left New England, “Biblia Americana,” the Bible commentary on which Mather labored for more than thirty years, was shaped almost entirely by European radicalism and its conservative responses. In his recent appraisal of “Biblia Americana,”¹ Jan Stievermann rightly states: “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” (12). Whereas Stievermann, following the innovative scholarship of Reiner Smolinski,² provides this context in his analysis of Mather’s commentary on sections of the Hebrew Bible, my dissertation similarly does so regarding the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mather’s sources are indicative of Mather’s own as well as the orthodoxy’s stretching and ultimately recognizing and surpassing the limits of their own credulity. A survey of Mather’s

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¹ See Section 1.1, Why Study “Biblia Americana”? for fuller information on current scholarship regarding Mather.
sources reveals the extent to which Mather was ensconced in European Enlightenment thought. He cited the most prominent and respected Western thinkers of the era – Nehemiah Grew, Hugo Grotius, Norton Knatchbull, William Whiston – as well as minor figures like John Green. The works Mather used were shaped by, and in turn themselves shaped, a broader epistemological transformation occurring during the Enlightenment. In a manner continuing the humanism of the Reformation, the rise of rationalism in the seventeenth century reflected a turn towards individuality that encouraged readings of the Bible inherently and sometimes blatantly in opposition to the orthodox readings fostered by the church.

1.1 Why Study “Biblia Americana”?

The value of Mather’s commentary cannot be overstated. As the oldest Bible commentary written in America, Mather’s “Biblia Americana” is a beneficial source for many scholars. This study primarily analyzes Mather within the context of Enlightenment intellectual history but it also intends to illuminate the many opportunities for study presented by the publication of this commentary.

First, for historians of the Enlightenment, intellectual history, and religious studies, Mather’s engagement with radical hermeneutics exemplifies the fracturing of a Bible-centered understanding of the world. Mather confronts Newtonian science, with its acknowledgement of natural laws, while upholding the seemingly contradictory stories of miracles in the Gospels. Mather also assesses the existence of alternative histories of both world history and early Christian dogma that began to gain popular recognition in the early eighteenth century. Most significantly for Mather, he addresses the rise of proto-Unitarianism that threatened not only the authority of the Bible but belief in the divinity of Jesus. Of all of Mather’s works, this commentary reveals most clearly Mather’s entrance into Enlightenment hermeneutics. Mather
lived and wrote in one of the most important periods in Christian history; he witnessed the splintering of science and faith. Historians of the Enlightenment and of Bible criticism have assessed the unfolding of these conversations in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in America in the nineteenth century, but Mather’s commentary fills a gap in this scholarship as it presents an American contribution in the early years of the Enlightenment.

Furthermore, for historians and American studies scholars, “Biblia Americana” provides a window into colonial American exegesis. While many of Mather’s contemporaries in Massachusetts Bay published their interpretations of Biblical texts, only “Biblia Americana” approaches the Bible holistically and exhaustively, in a format that was popular in England at the time. Mather’s approach as an exegete can be contrasted with his – and his colonial contemporaries’ – interpretations of Bible passages preserved in sermons and private meditations. Mather’s influence in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, both as pastor of the largest congregation in North America and most voluminous author on the continent, also sets him aside as a significant figure whose ideas would not have been contained just to his published written words. Similarly, Mather ministered to colonists at all socio-economic levels, including widows, enslaved persons, and Native Americans. These interactions, which he describes in his diary, would have influenced his exegesis. The publication of “Biblia Americana” begs for a historian to examine the impact of marginalized individuals on Mather’s hermeneutics.

Similarly, for transatlantic scholars, this commentary illustrates how European ideas, however radical, were received by and interpreted for American readership. Mather’s awareness

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3 Like other Bible commentaries of the period, “Biblia Americana” comments on every book of the Bible, in order, using the common “interlocutor” form. A student asks a question and the teacher answers it. The question and answer are usually focused on a specific verse. The teacher’s answer is referred to as a “gloss.”
of and engagement with contemporary debates indicates the strength of the book trade as well as the firm connection between colonial Massachusetts and Europe. “Biblia Americana” proves that Boston was neither culturally or ideologically isolated from Europe. Much as some American scholars would like to believe in American exceptionalism and colonial hegemony, in reality even Puritans interacted with – and, most importantly, were influenced by – decidedly non-puritanical European ideas. In “Biblia Americana” especially, as this study will demonstrate, the response to these ideas was not merely polemical or reactionary.

Hopefully, “Biblia Americana” will change how scholars view transatlantic interaction during the early Enlightenment. For example, remarking on Mather’s international correspondence, historian W.R. Ward states: “The unlikely admiration in New England of Mather and his son for August Hermann Francke spoke of an understanding on the fringes of the Protestant world for the problems of the centre, of some regrouping of sentiment, of a willingness to try new contractual methods of action” (Ward, Early, 6). Although Mather’s assessment of doctrines certainly changed over the course of his lifetime, as he indeed began with an insular self-righteous view of faith and ultimately arrived at a Christian union based on simple shared principles, “Biblia Americana” illustrates the following: first, that Mather’s admiration of Francke was far from “unlikely,” and second, that American scholarship was hardly the “fringes” of the Protestant world. More accurately, biographer Richard Lovelace says that Mather’s embrace of ideologies such as rationalism indicates his honesty as a scholar: Mather “represents not the tired end of an outworn intellectual fashion but a new mutation in an old tradition within Christendom” (Lovelace, Pietism, 4). Mather was an active participant in a transatlantic and pancontinental set of conversations about the nature of reason, faith, and Biblical authority.
Reiner Smolinski has had the greatest influence on recent Mather scholarship, as he has championed the reassessment of Mather’s exegetical works, revealing Mather’s talent, labor, and fully engaged participation in early Enlightenment epistemological conversation. Smolinski has himself labored tirelessly to encourage other scholars to see the value in studying Mather’s contributions to early Enlightenment thought.⁴ He serves as general editor of the ten-volume Biblia Americana publication project⁵ as well as volume editor of two of the volumes and co-editor of and contributor to a volume of essays reassessing Mather in light of “Biblia Americana.”⁶ His general introduction to the first volume of Biblia Americana has guided my interpretation of Mather’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. Likewise, Jan Stievermann, co-editor with Smolinski of the volume of essays, editor of the fifth volume of Biblia Americana, and author of an assessment of Mather’s commentary on the Hebrew Bible prophets,⁷ has been inspired by Smolinski’s scholarship and has in turn influenced mine. Stievermann observes in Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity that “Biblia Americana” illustrates the beginning of historical criticism in America, an engagement with European exegesis not repeated until the nineteenth century (82).

The publication of “Biblia Americana,” Jan Stievermann remarks, now “offers countless new possibilities for studying the development of biblical interpretation in America, and

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⁵ Cotton Mather’s Biblia Americana (1693-1728), 10 vols, Baker Academic and Mohr Siebeck, 2010-.


Mather’s intellectual, cultural, and ecclesial world more broadly” (82). As Smolinski and Stievermann have both suggested, studies of Bible commentaries touch wider spheres than just exegesis. In the introduction to a collection of essays celebrating accomplished exegete David Steinmetz, editors Richard Muller and John Thompson discuss the importance of studying Bible commentaries: “Exegetical literature can serve as a sensitive radar to spot ‘obvious’ perceptions and apperceptions reflecting the experience of daily life” (xii). Bible commentaries are windows to history. For that reason, too, commentaries should be approached with interdisciplinarity. Mather especially was heavily impacted by his involvement in the colony around him and the wider world of Christendom. Studies such as this one fill an important gap in the current scholarship. As Richard Muller proclaimed in 2003, “for the reappraisal [of Calvinists after Calvin] to move forward, there is much to be done in the way of cross-disciplinary study and examination of writers whose work has been neglected, in some case for centuries” (Muller, After Calvin, 193). Mather himself can hardly be called neglected, but his Bible commentary is another matter. This study will begin the necessary work of looking at “Biblia Americana” through an interdisciplinary lens; although this study is solidly based in literary studies, it considers the impact of Mather’s lived experience as well and especially the development of his thought. To assess Mather, one must consider him as a producer of literature, a participant in religious tradition, and a historic actor.

1.2 Mather Outside the Church

Cotton Mather was “a neurotic dynamo” (Noll 21). Born in Boston in 1663 to Increase Mather and Maria Cotton, Cotton Mather was accepted to Harvard when he at eleven years old, already fluent in Latin and Greek. He studied first to be a physician because he feared that his stuttering would stunt his progress as a minister. Following his graduation, he was called to the
North Church, a prestigious congregation near the harbor in Boston. His father served as minister to the same church. Both Mathers also, sometimes unwisely, involved themselves in politics. After King James II revoked the colony’s charter, Increase traveled to England to try and negotiate a new charter. When news came in 1689 that King James II had been overthrown, Cotton wrote the declaration on behalf of colonial authorities criticizing the royal government for violating the liberties of colonists. In 1692, as is well known, Mather publicly defended the colonial court’s actions during the Salem witchcraft trials. He began his Bible commentary the following year.

He authored over 400 works, and while some fell into obscurity almost immediately, others remained in print for centuries and have somewhat mitigated the impact of the witchcraft trials on his reputation. He famously wrote one of the earliest histories of New England, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), a popular work into the nineteenth century. His *Bonifacius* (1710) provides directions on how to live a good, moral life; it was inspired by German Pietism, as was his movement to form intimate Bible study and volunteer groups in Boston. His *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726) offered guidance to young ministers and remained a standard into the nineteenth century.

He also had a significant impact outside his library. Although it does not play a significant role in this study’s examination of his treatment of the Gospels, Mather’s prowess as a natural philosopher deserves recognition. Mather was, according to editor Gordon Jones, the first American to declare that disease could be caused by microscopic organisms; his recognition of these “animalcula” was not followed by another American until 1811 (Jones xi). His noble support of inoculation for smallpox in 1721 helped to get recognition for that method in England.

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8 *The Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston, and the countrey adjacent.* Boston, 1689.
and led to its further development in the late eighteenth century (xviii). Mather bravely supported inoculation even though this stance meant challenging the views of its local critic, William Douglass, who was the only M.D. in Boston at that time and who had studied with prestigious doctors in Europe (xxxiii). Douglass, fairly, criticized Mather’s “meddling” despite lack of credentials (xxxiii). History has, however, proven Mather right. Even Boston in 1721 proved Mather right: the natural mortality rate of smallpox was fifteen percent, but the mortality rate among the inoculated in the 1721 epidemic was only two percent (xxxiv).

He married three times and had fifteen children, thirteen of whom died before him. Mather believed in raising children responsibly by being a compassionate parent and encouraging rationalism and fairness. He explains in *A Christian at His Calling* (1701) that because everyone is different, parents should not compel their children to pursue specific careers: “See to it, *O Parents*, that when you chuse *Callings* for your *Children*, you wisely consult their *Capacities*, and their *Inclinations*; lest you Ruine them” (45). If Mather felt forced by his parents to become a minister, he obviously put his heart and soul into the work. Kenneth Murdock explains that according to Samuel Mather’s biography of his father, Cotton felt pressured because of his family’s fame (Murdock, *Magnalia*, 3). As the son of a minister and the grandson of two famous Boston-area ministers, Richard Mather and John Cotton, Mather himself likely had little choice regarding his “calling.” Nevertheless, through his scholarship, his community engagement, and his preaching, Mather poured all of his energy into his ministerial role.

Despite Mather’s attempts to make life better for everyone around him, he died feeling like a failure. Mather’s editor, Gordon Jones, sympathetically observes: “In his last years this man who had seen the deaths of so many loved ones, who had struggled so fiercely for what he considered in his somewhat autocratic way the best, had worked so hard, had seen so much
disappointment, had felt the malice of so many, often noted in his diary that he welcomed death” (Jones xvi). Scholars have largely failed to render the fullness of Mather’s personality. He often appears as a one-dimensional stock character that represents the fire-and-ice Puritan, thanks especially to Charles Upham, whose seminal Salem Witchcraft (1867) made Mather the scapegoat for the Salem witchcraft trials. Fortunately, Kenneth Silverman’s biography, The Life and Times of Cotton Mather (1985), brilliantly captures Mather’s complex character, contrasting Mather’s tireless and often thankless hard work and genuine compassion for fellow colonists with his remarkable vanity, political mischief, and at times heartbreaking desperation. Mather’s personality shines through frequently in “Biblia Americana,” but this study, recognizing the fuller work completed by Silverman on the topic, devotes minimal attention to addressing Mather’s fascinating character. Mather remains a controversial figure, particularly because of his role in the witchcraft trials, but he died in 1728 having devoted his entire life to serving others and trying, however misguidedly at times, to improve the world around him.

1.3 Reformation Roots

Scholarly conversations about hermeneutics changed dramatically over the course of Mather’s lifetime. Although Mather himself would not have applied the label “Enlightenment” to the era in which he lived,9 he recognized the significance of developments in both natural science and philosophy. In “Biblia Americana,” Mather draws on what he considered the best scholarship of all time in order to address how these developments impacted Bible studies. Even though in his analysis of the Synoptic Gospels Mather depends primarily on his contemporaries, he also saw that the conversations in which he and fellow exegetes participated had deep roots.

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9 Mather died well before the term “Enlightenment” was coined in 1784 by Immanuel Kant.
Modern scholars likewise appreciate that the development of critical Enlightenment hermeneutics originated prior to the seventeenth century.

Some scholars suggest that the focus on individual interpretation of the Bible, which ultimately led to the Enlightenment’s anti-clerical radicalism, began in the Reformation. Scholar H.J.M. Nellen observes that as Protestants emphasized literal – instead of allegorical – readings of the Bible, Catholic interpreters “pointed at the deficiencies in the transmission of the text” (803). Catholic clerics encouraged trusting tradition as well as the Bible, claiming that the Church gave the Bible its authority, while Reformation Protestants such as John Calvin countered that the Bible grants authority to the church (Harrison 95). While for Catholics, the authority of the Bible did not stand at the heart of Christianity, individualized study of the Bible became fundamental to Protestant theology (Harrison 114).

One of the most famous Catholic critics to demonstrate the fallibility of the Bible, Richard Simon (1638-1712), states in the preface to his critical history of the Bible that, without tradition, “we can hardly affirm any thing for certain in Religion” (Simon, *Old Testament*, n.p.). Although, as he admitted, such was a conventional Roman Catholic doctrine, by moving beyond the authority of the Church Fathers and using Jewish sources to interpret prophecies in his Bible commentary, Simon broadens his definition of “tradition.” To determine the truest reading, he explains, scholars should consult specialists, even those of a different faith:

> When we meet with words whose signification we do not precisely know, because they belong to some Art, or Custom, which Translators are not always acquainted with, we may then consult some one of the same Art… because they may very much help to clear the Scripture way of speaking, which agrees not always with ours. (Simon, *Old Testament*, 3:12)
Simon, a priest, wrote two comprehensive critiques, one on each testament. They were translated into English in the 1680s and heavily impacted English exegesis. He drew special attention to some Old Testament prophecies’ lack of abrogation in the New Testament. Modern critic John Barton assesses the issue, noting the influence of Henning Reventlow on current scholarship. In *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (1984), Reventlow argues that modern criticism arose with interpreters like Simon applying the criticism of anti-clerical radicals but from an orthodox standpoint (Barton 125). John Barton counters that Simon treats the Bible as the ancient document that it was, agreeing with scholar Patrick Lambe that Simon wanted to determine how the Old Testament developed (Barton 125). Simon’s work ultimately emphasized the flaws in the Bible, because, modern scholar Giovanni Tarantino remarks, “Simon argues that allegory alone cannot represent positive proof of the truth of Christianity, unless this allegorical interpretation is backed up and handed down by the Catholic tradition” (233). The impact this argument would have on biblical authority was of less concern to Simon, since he did not subscribe to *sola scriptura*, than it was to his Protestant readers.

One of the Protestant exegetes to respond to Simon, Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), charged Simon with deliberately trying to undermine the authority of the Bible. In *Five letters concerning the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures translated out of the French* (1690),

10 Le Clerc raged that Simon meant “to represent the many Difficulties that are amongst the Learned concerning the Text of the Scriptures, and thereby to infer the necessity of receiving the Roman Doctrine of Oral Tradition” (Le Clerc, *Five Letters*, 4). Simon’s works drew many responses, perhaps none

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more significant than that by William Whiston,\textsuperscript{11} who acknowledged the lack of abrogation between prophecies and fulfillments but charged that second-century Jews had deliberately changed the Hebrew Bible so that it would not match the New Testament. The sixth chapter, Typology, addresses this matter at greater length. That chapter will discuss how Mather responded to the debate that was at its height during his lifetime.

Although some scholars attribute anti-clerical Bible criticism to the Reformation, historian Richard Muller notes the significant difference between anti-Catholic exegesis and the work done by modern scholars. He remarks that historians have erroneously assumed that Reformation exegesis was “a prologue to modern critical exegesis” (“Biblical,” 8). While Protestants sought literal meaning, intending to receive spiritual fulfillment from their study, Reformation exegesis, Muller explains, “asks that the exegete move past the rather bare grammatical meaning of the text to the doctrine, morality, and hope” (“Biblical,” 11). As an exegete, Mather asks the same of himself. While claiming to seek the literal sense of the text, Mather nevertheless wants to find a reading that supports the Bible’s authority. He even drops the literal reading he would otherwise cherish when it does not support his aims. The seventh chapter, Evidentialism, explores how Mather treads a line between Reformation and Enlightenment ideas of objectivity.

1.4 Anti-Clerical Radicalism

The Enlightenment has been particularly characterized by popular historians\textsuperscript{12} for its spirit of individualism, insistence on liberty, and opposition to authority. Although, understandably, the revolutions of the eighteenth century have captured the public imagination

\textsuperscript{11} See Section 1.12, Mather’s Sources, for biographical information about Whiston.
more readily than the political coups of the seventeenth century, the rise of self-reliance, stemming initially from the humanism of the Reformation, gained significant ground during Mather’s lifetime, especially as it took an anti-clerical stance.

Historian Gerard Reedy proposes that the focus on the individual’s right to use reason in Bible study came not from Simon’s anti-Protestant exegesis but from an older source, the rationalist philosophy of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Reedy explains that in *Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes demonstrates “the inviolability of the natural ideas that God has given to the human mind” (Reedy 17). Descartes argues that, because people are born with innate ideas, they can use their inherent ability to reason – without consulting the five senses – to prove the existence of God. Another famous seventeenth-century philosopher, Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), helped popularize Descartes’s work with his critical response, *Renati des Cartes Principiorum* (1663). Cartesian philosophy, which eventually found its way into colleges, inspired individuals to believe in their innate abilities. By the close of the century, heightened belief in the individual’s ability to discern truth caused the Bible to be viewed critically. Unwilling to accept interpretations of the Bible that were not compatible with natural human reason, rationalists insisted upon their own power to read and understand religious literature, regardless of the clerical authority of exegetes (Reedy 17).

Some conservative Protestant commentators refused to agree with rationalists regarding the mind’s abilities. For example, in *The unreasonableness of Infidelity* (1655), Independent minister Richard Baxter (1615-1691) argues that human reason is flawed and incapable of discerning the truth (Wojcik 63). He explains that the Bible appears to contain contradictions, but because God is not self-contradictory, neither is the Bible (Wojcik 64). Apparent contradictions in nature, and especially the Bible, are not indications of errors in the objects themselves but
rather in the mind of the observer. If a reader thought a passage was illogical, the problem was the reader’s interpretation, not the Bible. Such inherent distrust of the human mind fit orthodox Protestantism. As Mather biographer Robert Middlekauff summarizes: “A man had to be assisted to the right frame of mind, and no matter how great his rational power he could never attain it from his own efforts” (297). The fall of Adam had permanently weakened humanity, orthodox exegetes argued, so without God’s direct help, they could no longer achieve perfect reasoning.

Historian Margaret Jacob considers Enlightenment “radicalism” well-represented by John Toland (1670-1722). He was a critic not only of institutional religion but of bureaucracy and monarchy (Jacob 5). Mather may not have read Toland directly, but he does cite Toland’s critics: John Norris, Edward Stillingfleet, Samuel Clarke, and Jeremiah Jones. He also mentions Christianity Not Mysterious in Icono-Clastes (1717) (Lee 34). As scholar of the Enlightenment Justin Champion writes of Toland, “His account of reason and faith suggested that true conviction was achieved by an individual understanding of the Bible, unhampered by clerical doctrine and metaphysical mystery” (Champion, Toland, 83). Supporters and critics alike recognized Toland’s anti-establishment embrace of individuality.

According to Justin Champion, Toland’s emphasis on individual interpretation was primarily political and anti-clerical. In Christianity Not Mysterious (1696), Toland argues that people should not need to depend on revelation, especially that which comes second-hand through ecclesiastical authority, to comprehend God’s commands: “Reason is not less from God than Revelation; ‘tis the Candle, the Guide, the Judge [sic] he has lodg’d within every Man that cometh into this World” (Toland 146). Toland effectively meant to equalize authority by making no one interpreter of Scripture more accurate than another. As Champion observes, Toland was an admirer of John Locke’s philosophy and applied it to the Bible “to engage, not with the details
of any specific theological doctrine, but with a more fundamental discussion of the politics of knowledge” (Champion, Toland, 79). While Locke had sought to gain a deeper understanding of Christianity, Toland intended to destabilize it. Champion suggests that Toland’s target was the authority of the English clergy because his argument that “the Bible was a non-mysterious book accessible to all vocational readers” inevitably “compromised the social power claimed by the church over their exclusive rights of interpreting revelation” (Champion 69). On a similar token, Stephen Nye\(^\text{13}\) charged in Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians (1687) that the entire Christian church was fraudulent (Champion, Pillars, 109). He alleges that the ancient Nazarenes had been Unitarians and that the doctrine of the Trinity was falsely established by the Council of Nicaea (109). Mather’s erstwhile hero William Whiston\(^\text{14}\) agreed with Nye on this point (Sheehan 34). Such seditious reasoning, needless to say, threatened clerical power in the Church of England.

As a powerful minister himself, Mather likely saw the inherent threat to the church in individual interpretation. He certainly took that stance in his view of the 1637 Antinomian Controversy in Boston. Claiming to be directly inspired by God, Anne Hutchinson famously began preaching messages countering those of the ministers who she felt focused too much on works instead of on faith. The provincial court ultimately brought her to trial for her heresies and expelled her from the colony. Relating the story in Magnalia Christi Americana (1702), Mather

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\(^{13}\) Stephen Nye (1647-1719), Church of England clergyman in Hertfordshire, graduated Cambridge with his B.A. in 1666 (McLachlan). He is credited with coining the term “Unitarian” in this work and with later defending fellow clergymen who struggled with Trinitarian doctrine (McLachlan). His biographer observes that “Nye is notable for propounding the principle common to unitarians and the Dutch and Irish remonstrants, that consciences ought to be free in matters of faith’” (McLachlan).

\(^{14}\) Although Mather took Whiston’s ideas with a grain of salt after the latter publicly announced his Arianism, “Biblia Americana,” is nevertheless peppered with praise for Whiston’s scholarship. For example, Mather compliments Whiston’s A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament as “a Treasure of Good Thoughts” that came to him through “the Favour of Heaven” (BA I: The Old Testament).
accuses famous Hutchinson of having “abused” the “candour” of minister John Cotton in order to get his support for her preaching (2:517). Behind Cotton’s back, she “did set herself ‘most perfectly to confound’ all the interest of Christianity” (2:517). Mather describes Hutchinson’s preaching as “seditions” that “procured the animadversions of the court, as well as the church upon her” (2:518). He celebrates the court’s decision against her. Still, historian Michael Lee comments that Puritans distrusted human intervention in Biblical interpretation, preferring to interpret the Bible individually (27). Instead of depending on reason to inform their interpretation, though, they considered reading itself to be inspired (27). On the surface, they may have seemed anti-clerical, but in practice, as seen in 1637, they harshly judged any anti-establishment theology that could endanger the colonial government.

1.5 Anti-Revelation Radicalism

Today, John Toland’s Christianity Not Mysterious is most famous for its criticism of revelation. His ideas reflect Enlightenment theology remarkably, but they would not have developed, of course, without the influence of other Bible critics. Before the publication of his work, Toland was a friend and employee of John Locke and was probably inspired by Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) (Champion, Toland, 73). Toland’s notion of ideas is reminiscent of Locke’s, even though Locke’s admiration of reason was intended to defend Christianity and he distanced himself from Toland after Christianity Not Mysterious was published (Champion, Toland, 7). The same embrace of reason appeared in moderate responses to Toland from ministers who tried to absorb philosophical rationalism into the Church of England. Historian Norman Fiering paraphrases their arguments: “Since every command must be in the interest of someone, and God’s command can hardly be in His own interest, then they must be in the interest of mankind” (“Enlightenment,” 340). The natural conclusion reached by
these writers – and Toland – was that “what is not in the evident interest of mankind cannot be a command from God” (Fiering, “Enlightenment,” 340). This admission, which effectively dismissed centuries of tradition by providing an excuse to discard doctrines, perhaps was the most damning stroke to the Church’s authority. As Samuel Preus observes: “What we see in the course of this discussion is devout Protestant literalism self-destructing” (Preus, “Part II,” 19, italics his).

Mather’s “Biblia Americana” reflects this greater trend. Like radicals and their moderate supporters, Mather also admired Locke’s philosophy on reason, and the title of one of his books reflected what he considered Christianity to be: *Reasonable Religion* (1700). The twentieth century’s influential American studies scholar Perry Miller, considering Mather’s interest in reason, assessed rationalism as an early Enlightenment fad. In *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), Miller writes, “The magic word in the new mode was ‘Reason.’ As soon as the charter brought Boston closer to the orbit of London, New England heard that reason had become, as never before, the passport to respectability” (420). Mather agrees that all people possess reason; he separates it from revelation as an innate natural tool (Lee 28). As Miller paraphrases, “The notion of God springs from an innate faculty which is natural to the reason” (420). Mather agrees that even without revelation, people could use reason to prove God’s existence and to see the faultiness of sin (Lee 29).

Scholar Michael Lee suggests that Mather applied rationalism to his interpretation of the Bible as well. For example, Mather accepted other scholars’ arguments that parts of the Bible appeared illogical and needed to be explained; he rejected blind faith in incoherent words. However, by accepting Cartesian philosophy that elevated reason above revelation, “Mather seemed to be seeking a way to ground his interpretation of the Bible on a basis of knowledge
independent of the Bible and spiritual experience” (Lee 37). Lee suggests that by using extra-biblical accounts to clarify details in the Bible, such as the age of maturity in ancient Middle Eastern people, Mather acknowledges that the Bible was not self-explanatory but instead it was “accountable to these external authorities” (Lee 48). Certainly Mather’s agreement with mainstream exegetes reflects a certain privileging of reason, but more demonstrably it indicates Mather’s engagement with radicalism and the full entrance of American scholarship into that debate. Although, as will be discussed, Mather often rejected radical readings of the Gospels, he nevertheless usually weighed and contemplated them fairly. He rarely dismisses ideas without first giving them thoughtful consideration. In fact, as will be seen, his contemporaries frequently changed his mind and, as his work on “Biblia Americana” progressed, he increasingly became more amenable to non-traditional exegesis.

Well before Toland shook the conservative world, Thomas Hobbes had also asserted the value of reason over revelation in _Leviathan_ (1651). Michael Lee summarizes Hobbes’ position eloquently: “He discounted private intuitions and sought to ground revelation on universally accessible criteria such as history, textual analysis, and natural reason” (Lee 18). Hobbes is famous for proposing an absolute monarchy as the best form of government, but in the seventeenth century, his attack on the authority of the Bible also drew major attention, and that impact is the greater concern for this study. Although Hobbes may be most famous today for his political ideas, monarchists in the seventeenth century hesitated to accept him. As Margaret Jacob writes, “Hobbes was an extreme embarrassment to the royalist camp” (76). Alternatively, radicals like Toland embraced his anti-clerical arguments, but they “stripped Hobbes of his royalism” (76).
Inspired by Hobbesian philosophy, Toland explains in *Christianity Not Mysterious* that reason alone is certain as humanity’s innate ability to reason is guaranteed, since reason allows people to form ideas and comprehend things (Toland 12). Reason, he argues, “is the only Foundation of all Certitude” (6). It seems logical, he notes, that God would want to be understood, and since people need reasonable ideas in order to understand things, God must present himself to humanity in logical ideas that people can interpret properly. According to the Church, however, God reveals himself through mysteries, and instead of being able to understand them, believers are supposed to “adore what we cannot comprehend” (23). This notion cannot work, Toland charges: “For what I don’t conceive, can no more give me right Notions of God… than a Prayer deliver’d in an unknown Tongue” (28). Toland refuses to accept that God would so mislead his people. Religion needs to make sense, he mutters: “The very Supposition, that Reason might authorize one thing… and the Spirit of God another, throws us into inevitable Scepticism; for we shall be in a perpetual Uncertainty which to obey” (30).

Because reason and mystery are inherently incompatible, God must speak to humanity through one or the other, and the former is the means that all people can access. Therefore, the premise of Toland’s book is that “there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d a Mystery” (6). It is to this challenge that Mather’s commentary on the Gospels responds. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, Rationalism, some of Jesus’s actions and sayings raised eyebrows because they did not make sense to Enlightenment readers. To clarify that the Bible does not contradict reason, Mather attempts to explain Jesus’s confusing behavior.

Similarly, by the time Benedict Spinoza published *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), critics already questioned whether the Bible could be considered a reliable source on
natural science since the Old Testament presents a geocentric solar system that was only five thousand years old (Preus, _Spinoza_, 29). As biographer Samuel Preus observes, Spinoza undermined the Bible’s authority further by demonstrating that “the book and its authors had nothing authoritative to say to the intellectual and political world in which Spinoza and his contemporaries lived: from end to end, scripture was entirely conditioned by and in conformity with the times in which it was written” (Preus, _Spinoza_, 32). Spinoza wrote primarily about the Hebrew Bible with focus on the books of the prophets, but his arguments held implications for the New Testament as well.

To deduce the purpose of biblical stories, Spinoza remarks, the exegete must “know the opinions of those who first related them” (Spinoza 93). In order to understand the viewpoint of the biblical writers, Spinoza adds, the exegete must be familiar with the context of the book. He proposes a “universal rule” for reading the Bible: “to accept nothing as an authoritative Scriptural statement which we do not perceive very clearly when we examine it in the light of its history” (Spinoza 101). In other words, true comprehension of Scripture requires thorough consideration of its context and perhaps consultation of extra-biblical historical records. Michael Lee comments that, given the limited historical records, “Spinoza was implicitly suggesting that a total recovery of the true meaning of the Bible remained beyond reach” (Lee 20). At any rate, Spinoza was challenging orthodox commentators to defend their interpretations of Scripture by presenting empirical evidence that illustrated the intentions of the biblical authors. Richard Simon himself indicates the significance of Spinoza’s arguments. In his preface, Simon explains that he wishes to “answer all the false and pernicious consequences drawn by _Spinoza_” (Simon, _Old Testament_, n.p.). By responding to skeptics’ textual criticism, Simon hoped to illustrate the integrity of the Church and defend its authority (Simon n.p.).
Interestingly, Preus has shown that Spinoza wrote his *Tractatus* in response to the now much lesser known *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae Interpres* (1666) by Ludwig Meyer (Preus, *Spinoza*, xi). Meyer argues that the Bible depends on the reader to construct meaning, and he illustrates his point by listing some of the Bible’s textual ambiguities (Preus, *Spinoza*, 37, 44). He adds that the Bible does not clarify if a reader should use one passage to interpret another (48). Even external ancient sources, he observes, cannot clarify meaning since they are just as foreign and distant in time (47). Preus summarizes the problem, which parallels that of late twentieth-century postmodernism: “How does one derive the true meaning of the scriptural writer?” (51). Meyer concludes that the only way is through the Spirit as directed and intended by God (53). That method itself, he suggests, is true philosophy (58). Conservatives like Peter Serarius, in *Responsio ad Exercitationem Paradoxem Anonami* (1667) dismissed Meyer by claiming that readers depend only on the Spirit, not natural reason (Preus, *Spinoza*, 89). As Preus charges, “Their view radically disengaged the theological enterprise from the general pursuit of knowledge; religious claims become unabashedly self-authenticating and self-referential” (105).

Following Cartesian and Spinozist philosophy, John Toland argued that religion must be reasonable. Since the mind makes sense of ideas, an idea that the mind cannot conceive or understand simply cannot exist (Toland 27). It is impossible, then, for people to believe in things that they cannot imagine, because to believe in an idea is to understand it (28). Truth, as far as the mind can discern, must be discovered through provable, external facts.

Unlike Peter Serarius and other conservative commentators, Mather did prove willing to engage with these ideas. Like them, though, he maintained fundamentally that the Bible was privileged and he inherently subordinated reason to faith.

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15 Ludwig Meyer (1629-1681), a physician in Amsterdam, had earned degrees in medicine and philosophy from Leyden (Preus, *Spinoza*, 34).
1.6 Ecumenism

Hand-in-hand with individualism came freedom of expression and openness to new ideas. Where critics questioned the rationality of the Bible and the authority of the church, they also challenged the role of the Bible as the defining record of history and religion. John Toland, in particular, observed that even in early Christianity, numerous works, no longer considered authoritative, had been given the same weight by the Church Fathers as had the canonical texts. In *Amyntor* (1699), Toland catalogued seventy apocryphal works (Champion, *Toland*, 193). He explained that the Church Fathers had accepted these apocryphal works as authoritative (202). Samuel Clarke refuted Toland’s work with *Some reflections on that part of a book called Amyntor* (1699), in which he charged that the number of apocrypha was irrelevant and that Toland misrepresented the Church Fathers (203). Works such as Clarke’s helped spread Toland’s message, Justin Champion argues: Toland “was thought to deliberately contradict received learned opinion, and in consequence such learned men self-consciously animadverted upon his arguments, projecting their significance to a broader audience” (192). Mather himself formed part of this “broader audience,” since he appears to have come across radicalism mostly by way of its critics. Instead of responding directly to people like Toland, Mather quotes the orthodox writers who had. These conservative critics used their opponents’ methods to try to defend Scriptural authority. As historian Michael Lee explains, one way of appropriating radical criticism was to defend the Bible with historical evidence (26). Michael Lee suggests that by Mather’s time, most Protestants agreed with the radicals that the Bible “needed to be subject to the rules of interpretation and verification common to any text” (26). Mather tried to do so, as will be discussed in the chapter on evidentialism, but he failed, because he continued to privilege
the Bible as the meter of truth, even if he thought he was being objective. Furthermore, his commentary consistently seeks predetermined answers.

Michael Lee argues that by consulting external sources to prove the Bible’s accuracy, Mather was “treating it like any historical document” (44). More accurately, Mason Lowance suggests that Mather’s methods represent his “concern to utilize every available epistemological means for the accommodation of spiritual truth” (30). Mather thoroughly believed that Puritan theology was the real, objective truth. His reading of the Bible seeks to make the Bible support that truth. His motives were pure, but he had an agenda.

While Mather accepted the authority of the Bible, he recognized that the preserved versions contained imperfections. Exegetes had recognized for years that the Gospels tell conflicting stories. Hugo Grotius, in The Truth of the Christian Religion (1682, first English ed. 1632), notes that critics claim the books are “repugnant” to each other (97). Grotius responds to this challenge by distinguishing between material and irrelevant statements in the Bible. He claims that the books all agree on “any weighty point” of doctrine or history (97). Although some exegetes saw Grotius as “a dangerous innovator,” he had a significant influence on Mather’s commentary (Nellen 816). On points of doctrine, Mather was similarly willing to bend, eventually. His biographer sighs: “There is no area in which Mather approached greatness so nearly – and offered so assuredly a lead toward the future – as in his ecumenism” (Lovelace, Pietism, 251). Mather first wrote about establishing a Christian unity based on shared “maxims of piety” in his Things to be more thought upon (1713) (Stievermann 94). Stievermann explains that “the maxims were supposed to serve as the basis for ecumenical cooperation or even union among the Protestant churches of Europe and North America” (94). The maxims appear also in his Manuductio ad Ministerium (1726), where he proposes three main beliefs “that cannot be
shaken… wherein all good and wise men are united; and all men become good and wise, when they come into that union with them” (208). The three beliefs are that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be served; that Christ, “the eternal Son of God,” was incarnate in the body of Jesus; and that people must love their neighbors (211-212). He asserts that with these three maxims, “you behold all controversies in religion as coming to an amicable and a comfortable period” (213). Still, William Whiston, Samuel Clarke, and Daniel Whitby, three of Mather’s favorite authors, all of whom questioned the divinity of Jesus, evidently were not welcome in the union.

Although it bore resemblance to Grotius’s point, this simplified doctrine came most directly from Pietism, which favored moral living. Pietism was influenced partly by Johann Arndt's *Four Books on True Christianity* (1605-1610) (Wallmann 903). The movement officially began with the *collegium pietatis*, founded in 1670 in Frankfurt by Philipp Jakob Spener (903). Mather in particular admired Spener’s student, August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), who wrote about the agreement of the Old Testament and New Testament and opened a school at the University of Halle in 1702 to teach classical languages (910). Historian W.R. Ward suggests that Mather felt interested in Pietism because it could serve as another way to gain international recognition for the work of the New England churches (Ward, *Awakening*, 274). Mather arranged to have his *Magnalia Christi Americana* sent to Halle, and he wrote to Francke directly (274). Francke proposed a three-fold method of scriptural interpretation: historical, grammatical, and logical (Wallmann 922). Francke does not play a major role directly in Mather’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, but Mather too applied these three methods. The historical

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used external sources, the grammatical examined biblical Greek and Hebrew, and the logical considered overall coherence of the scriptural book (922-923). These three methods parallel the approaches of modern Bible studies scholars using high criticism.

Cambridge Platonists,\textsuperscript{17} also called Latitudinarians, similarly may have impacted Mather’s view on doctrine. Latitudinarianism developed in the Church of England during the Restoration and emphasized tolerance (Fiering, “Enlightenment,” 318). Martin Mulsow notes that some Renaissance scholars had considered Plato a proto-Christian since his triads had “Trinitarian premonitions of the Logos doctrine from the Gospel of John” (Mulsow 175). Cambridge Platonists tried to bring this viewpoint back (183). They earned the name Cambridge Platonists from their ecumenical line of reasoning: observing similarities between Christianity and paganism, they charged that Platonism had valuable lessons for Christians (Grafton 17).

Historian Norman Fiering explains that Latitudinarians supported a “unified Protestantism on broad principles, a rationalized conception of Christianity allowing for liberty of conscience and tolerance” (318). Mather’s maxims of piety seem to echo this concept.

Despite his eventual embrace of ecumenism, Mather showed much less flexibility in “Biblia Americana.” Grotius argues that the “small circumstances, which make nothing to the main matter,” could be reconciled, but even when they could not, they should not lose their credit simply because of “small differences” (98). For Mather, no difference was small and no conflict was irreconcilable. The fifth chapter, Harmony, examines how Mather strives to reconcile all differences in the Gospel narratives, regardless of how trivial they might appear.

\textsuperscript{17} Led by Benjamin Whichcote, this informal philosophical school formed at Cambridge and asserted the rationalism of morality (“Cambridge Platonists”). Privileging morals over dogma, Latitudinarians also supported freedom of conscience (“Cambridge Platonists”). Followers included, most notably, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, Joseph Glanville, and John Norris (“Cambridge Platonists”).
1.7 Radical Attacks on Typology

Traditionally, Christians believed that Christianity was the fulfillment of promises made to ancient Jews. Christians recognized foreshadowing in the prophecies of the Old Testament, which were put forward as proof that Christianity corresponded to the promises in Judaism. John Calvin, for example, claimed that the Mosaic Law was a shadow of the Christian morality taught by Jesus and his apostles. Typology is the linking of biblical figures. Believers in typology held that figures in the Old Testament, “types,” foreshadowed figures – usually Jesus – in the New Testament, “antitypes.” Mason Lowance describes this system: “For Mather the ‘type’ was a very particular kind of symbol, historically true and eternally verifiable because it was instituted to perform a specific function in the historical scheme of things” (16). Skeptical critics examined typology carefully and drew attention to fulfillments that did not appear logical. These critics revealed that some of the fulfilled prophecies, especially those mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, stemmed from an entirely different context, were phrased very differently, or, in some cases, did not even appear to be extant by the seventeenth century. While conservative commentators, such as Mather’s uncle, Samuel, found a variety of means to explain why the Old Testament and the New Testament did not always match, skeptics began to argue that Christianity simply did not have a solid foundation in the Jewish tradition. The fracturing of traditional interpretation began a process that ultimately caused a splintering into apposite arguments from faith and arguments from reason.19

18 Calvin argues that the Mosaic Law is a “type” of Christian law and it “shows that God did not enjoin sacrifice, in order that he might occupy his worshippers with earthly exercises, but rather that he might raise their minds to something higher” (1:300).
19 Another somewhat related issue was the rise of “single fulfillment.” Until Whiston heavily criticized it, some exegetes believed in the “double fulfillment” of prophecies. For example, a prophecy in Isaiah might have had an initial fulfillment in Isaiah’s own time and a second fulfillment in the person of Jesus.
One of the most famous skeptics, Anthony Collins, belittled typology in *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724). Historians often regard Anthony Collins as one of the fathers of early modern skepticism. Hans Frei’s influential *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* attributes the decline of a Bible-centered worldview to Collins’s decisive attack on typology: the last half of the eighteenth century, after Collins’s ideas had permeated mainstream exegesis, revealed “the breakup of the cohesion between the literal meaning of the biblical narratives and their reference to actual events” (Frei 4). As the relationship between the Old and New Testaments became increasingly difficult to prove with empirical evidence, particularly in light of the challenges presented by Collins, the Bible itself was seen as an allegorical book on morality rather than a literally accurate record of historical events. Historian David Ruderman summarizes Frei’s position: “Collins’s work and the issues it raised were significant in that they proclaimed the triumph of the historical-critical interpretation of the Bible” (Ruderman, *Connecting the covenants*, 68). Throughout the seventeenth century, Frei argues, literal interpretations of typology become increasingly difficult to defend and commentators began to offer allegorical explanations to resolve contradictions. The continuous revising of tradition, however, only illustrated to skeptics that the Bible could not be defended using modern empirical methods.

In a study of Collins’s library, historian Giovanni Tarantino reveals that Collins utilized the works of Richard Simon (231). Of the five major prophetic texts from Matthew that Collins assesses, three were also discussed in Simon’s historical-critical commentary and “none of them, according to Collins, prove that the biblical prophecies occurred literally in the life of Jesus”

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Collins was no doubt ideologically influenced by John Toland, whose *Nazarenus* (1718) was in his library, too (Tarantino 234).

Collins embraced the empirical evidence that could be used to destabilize biblical authority. Simon’s works provided ample material, Tarantino argues: “He used Simon’s texts to lend weight to his strategy of demolishing the authority of the Scripture and of tradition, and drew on them for rigorous scholarship and philology” (231). As Tarantino implies, Collins’s strength was not hermeneutical analysis, but witty rhetoric. David Ney observes that, unlike other commentators, Collins was not interested in authorial intent: “Whereas appeals to authorial intent are rooted in acknowledgement of the opacity of language, Collins’ account is dominated by confidence in the transparency of language” (Ney 99). He undermined biblical authority not primarily by firsthand study of its weaknesses, but by exploiting the weaknesses of its conservative defenders. Collins depended heavily on William Surenhusius\(^{21}\) (Ruderman, *Connecting*, 63). Like Simon, Surenhusius wrote with the intention of defending Christianity (Ruderman, *Connecting*, 75). He did so by consulting rabbis and learning about traditional Jewish methods of exposition and interpretation in order to understand the intention of the Old Testament writers and of Matthew, who wrote for a Jewish audience (Ruderman, *Connecting*, 72).

The turn to extra-biblical sources was part of the hermeneutical shift sparked by the rise of empirical philosophy and biblical criticism. David Ruderman suggests that, even though Collins ridiculed Surenhusius’s method, the study of rabbinic interpretations was becoming mainstream in Christianity by the early eighteenth century (Ruderman, *Connecting*, 76). David

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\(^{21}\) William or Guilielmus Surenhusius (1664-1729), a highly reputed Hebraist in Amsterdam, was a teacher who studied Greek as well as the history of the Bible (van der Aa). He wrote a 6-volume commentary on the *Mishnah*, which was used not only by exegetes like Mather but by deists to mock orthodox interpreters (Ruderman 134).
Ney agrees with Hans Frei that by the end of the seventeenth century, allegorical reasoning was dismissed as fanatical – a perspective that would become problematic after Collins’s publication (Ney 88). However, Ney proposes that “the notion that the literal meaning of a word is its one-to-one ‘correspondence with external reality’ can be traced, at the very least, to earlier work done by Collins’ opponent, William Whiston” (Ney 86).

Ney argues that Whiston’s focus on single fulfillment of prophecies underlined the association of literal meaning with external reality (86). Perry Miller has observed that the philosophical view that ideas can only have one corresponding reality is reminiscent of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), wherein Locke argues that all ideas are definable and based on sensory experiences (Miller, *Errand*, 173). Miller suggests that this concept was “Locke’s major contribution to the Enlightenment, his weapon against enthusiasm, incantation, and priestcraft” (Miller, *Errand*, 172). Ney adds that the application of Lockean principles challenged typology “by forcing interpreters to assign but one referent to each prophetic sign” (86). Frei attributes this shift to Collins, which Ney suggests exaggerates Collins’s influence (Ney 98). Collins himself was exploiting the arguments of Simon, Surenhusius, and Whiston.

While Mather uses many of Whiston’s works, the most significant for this debate on typology was Whiston’s *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament* (1722). As the title implies, Whiston argues that the Old Testament had remained essentially the same from antiquity until the second century C.E. (19). During the rise of Christianity, Whiston complains, Jews deliberately changed text in the prophets so that copies being dispersed would
not match the quotations of prophets in the New Testament (228). He says “Inconsistencies” are not major problems because they are only “bare Mistakes of our present Copies” (33). His work goes through many examples of New Testament quotations and citations that do not match an Old Testament text. Instead of agreeing with Surenhusius that the New Testament fulfillment could be allegorical, Whiston mutters that the Hebraist had been “driven” to propose an “absurd and ridiculous Hypothesis” (289). Whiston concludes that, since the Hebrew Bible had been corrupted by Jews, “We ought faithfully to use all the Helps and Assistances we already have, in order to so truly noble Design as is this, of restoring the True Text of the Old Testament, to its original Purity” (333). Mather did not openly support this plan, since he ultimately agreed with one of the orthodox responses to the debate. However, the examples raised by Whiston inevitably factored into Mather’s exegesis. Ney observes that:

by insisting on the literal correspondence of prophetic texts the defenders of Christianity had made things easy for Collins. Whiston had already done the hard work of demonstrating that many decisive messianic texts of the New Testament did not agree with their supposed antecedents in the Old. (Ney 100)

Collins had only to recognize the implications of Whiston’s findings. Frei explains that, in the wake of Collins, commentators had only two options: accept either that the Gospels’ interpretations of the prophecies were incorrect or that the Old Testament must be read allegorically and therefore is not verifiable (Frei 70). Collins summarizes his bottom line well:

22 Whiston had recognized the weakness in his earlier Boyle lecture on single and double fulfillment. He revised his exegesis for his Essay, where he alleges that “the Jews seem to have corrupted or dislocated their Copies here” in order to make the context misleading (Whiston, Essay, 232). The prophecy itself is clear, Whiston claims, but “the Coherence and Context do now look much disorder’d” and the blame should be placed on “the Corruptions and Dislocations of the later Jews,” not on the texts (232).
If the proofs for Christianity from the Old Testament be not valid; if the arguments
founded on those books be not conclusive; and the Prophesies cited from thence be not
fulfill’d; then has Christianity no just foundation: for the foundation on which JESUS and
his Apostles built it is then invalid and false. (Collins 31)

Commentators had already become increasingly radicalized in response to skeptics’ criticism,
but Whiston and Collins left little room for conservative argument. Conservative Christians
struggled to meet Collins’s challenge to prove that the Old Testament contains “a compleat,
internal, divine demonstration of the truth of Christianity” (Collins 30).

One of Collins’s fiercest critics was Edward Chandler,23 who, in A Defence of
Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament (1725), responded to Collins’s charges by
utilizing Jewish methods of interpretation and placing the prophecies and the Gospel of Matthew
within their historical and hermeneutical context. Protesting too much, Chandler claims that
typology was not fundamental to Christianity (Chandler ix). He remarks that Christianity had
been proven by Jesus’s miracles, prophecies, and gifts, so Christianity would be just as strong
even if the prophets “had not said, a tittle of the Messias” (ix). Having established that his
response defending typology is basically unnecessary, Chandler proceeds with it anyway. David
Ruderman remarks that Chandler, as a scholar of Jewish hermeneutics, “openly approved the
typological and allegorical readings of biblical prophecy dismissed by Whiston, and
acknowledged, without any hesitation, that they were similarly understood by Jews” (Ruderman
68). Ney adds that, unlike earlier commentators, Chandler explores the context of the prophecies
in order to comprehend and prove the intention of the prophets (Ney 106). By authoring one of
the first major replies to Collins’s Discourse, Chandler became the “spokesman” of Collins’s

23 Edward Chandler (1668-1750), bishop of Coventry and Lichfield (Ruderman 68). Chandler was also a
scholar of Judaism and felt qualified to comment on Collins’s interpretation of Surenhusius (Ruderman
68).
opponents (Ney 104). His search for empirical evidence, Ney suggests, inspired the rise of Jewish studies in English (Ney 111). Mather, after years of struggling with this issue as the debate unfolded, sided with Chandler.

Cotton Mather’s exegesis reflects the tempestuous era in which he wrote. He incorporated ideas from the Church Fathers, medieval exegetes, and contemporary Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Anglican writers. With his Bible commentary, he endeavored to provide a guide to interpretation that maintained the traditional authority of the Bible while weighing the challenges of skeptics seriously. The breadth of explanations he offers to resolve the apparent conflicts between traditional and skeptical interpretation reflects both his earnestness and the small leeway conservative commentators had to make convincing literal arguments.

Even when he essentially describes typology, he does not always expressly use the term “type.” Mather routinely seeks opportunities to demonstrate the harmony between the Old and New Testaments without resorting to typology. Scholar Hans Frei has shown that while typology had been a favored means of interpreting human history prior to the Enlightenment, it had waned by the eighteenth century (Frei 2). Mather might have avoided using typological terms because this method had fallen out of vogue. According to Frei, typology “was now bound to look to historical-critical eyes like a rather preposterous historical argument, and it rapidly lost credibility” (7). Mather probably would not have gone that far in his skepticism of it, but the arguments of Whiston about the foolishness of double fulfillment, which are discussed in

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24 Ironically, however, in BA I and especially with regard to Noah, Mather blatantly makes numerous typological references and relies particularly on his uncle’s The Figures or Types of the Old Testament. Dublin, 1683. For example, Cotton agrees with Samuel that the Noahic ark has “Typical Importance” (BA I: Gen. 6:22). He also asserts that he “cannot but suspect, that the Four Monarchs conquered by Abraham, were Types of the Four Monarchies in the World” (BA I: Gen. 14:18).
Chapter Six, Typology, likely went a long way towards changing Mather’s mind about traditional methods of interpretation.25

1.8 Radicalism in Mather’s America

Although these debates on individual interpretation, revelation, the canon, and typology, took place in Europe, they did not pass New England unnoticed. Colonists in Massachusetts Bay traveled to and from England, read works shipped from Europe, and followed English ecclesiastical politics carefully. In all of these ways, the debates reached American libraries and colleges. In his seminal work, The Hunting of Leviathan, historian Samuel Mintz discusses the conservative writers who brought rationalism into mainstream biblical exegesis. Mintz focuses primarily on Hobbes’s critics, as these authors, Mintz suggests, were drawn into a snare. Because Hobbes critiqued the Bible in Leviathan, his rationalism did not come across as harmlessly theoretical (43). Instead, Hobbes applied the philosophy of rationalism to both politics and Bible studies, provoking clergy, professors, and lawyers, all of whom had a “vested interest” in the institutions Hobbes appeared to undermine (53). The effect of Hobbes’s work, Mintz explains eloquently, was that it drew defenders of the status quo into the philosophical debate about rationalism, in turn bringing the language of rationalism into the English church: “Hobbes’ impact was subtle: he provoked intense hostility, but he also obliged his critics to employ his own method of rational argument. Their absorption of his method while they resisted his ideas is an extremely interesting feature of seventeenth-century rationalism” (viii). Hobbes focused on the Hebrew Bible rather than the Gospels, but his method inevitably impacted study of the New

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25 Mason Lowance observes that although Mather often used his uncle’s book, he nevertheless demonstrated the influence of his own time period by adjusting some ideas to meet contemporary challenges. While Samuel felt comfortable with traditional typology, Cotton occasionally used allegory to try to capture “every available epistemological means for the accommodation of spiritual truth” (Lowance 30). For example, wishing to illustrate the soul’s need for Christ, Lowance relates, Cotton identified the Flood as a type of baptism, with Noah’s Ark a type of Christ (Lowance 36).

Rationalism also entered the Church of England through the Latitudinarians. The most prominent were Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), the master of Trinity College; Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), the bishop of Worcester; and John Tillotson (1630-1694), the archbishop of Canterbury (Reedy 12). Replying to Hobbes’s implication that reason and revelation serve different aims, Latitudinarians argued that faith could come from reason (Reedy 31). For example, John Tillotson’s sermons indicate the extent to which he believed reason was compatible with Christianity. In Sermon 28, “Objections against the true RELIGION Answer’d,” (c. 1680), he remarks that God commands nothing unreasonable (Fiering, “Enlightenment,” 340). Tillotson explains that despite humanity’s degeneracy, “the Law written in God’s Word is not contrary to the Law written upon our Hearts. . . . Our Judgment still dictates the very same things which the Law of God doth enjoin” (Tillotson 330). The universe itself provided rational evidence of God’s existence, Latitudinarians noted (Reedy 33). Consequently, ethics could be learned from natural inclination (Holifield 59). Latitudinarians also agreed that external evidence was unnecessary for faith because reason itself was participating in the divine mind (Reedy 47).

Tillotson had the most direct influence on Mather’s colonial peers. A study of library lists by Norman Fiering indicates that Tillotson’s sermons were among the most read in the American colonies during the first half of the eighteenth century (“Enlightenment,” 309). Ben Franklin’s
“Silence Dogood” joked in 1722 that students attended Harvard just to learn how to plagiarize Tillotson (Fiering, “Enlightenment,” 312). Mather would have been an observant witness of this pedagogical shift. Fiering suggests that the appointment of John Leverett to Harvard’s presidency in 1707 marked the school’s acceptance of Tillotson’s scholarship (“Enlightenment,” 309). Mather himself had his eye on Harvard because it was his alma mater and because his father, Increase Mather, was its longtime president. Increase clung to traditional Puritan pedagogy even as more liberal tutors, like Leverett, tried to introduce Latitudinarian ideas. A political maneuver in 1700 forced Increase to decide between living in Cambridge and resigning his post as president of Harvard; he chose the latter (Silverman 178). Cotton himself hoped to become its president eventually, and when Leverett died in 1724, Mather anticipated an appointment (385). To his disappointment, the college chose a much younger and less experienced man to preside over Harvard (385).

Perhaps most shockingly for Mather, in 1722, the rector of Yale and three tutors declared that they had converted to the Church of England and went to England to be ordained as Episcopal ministers (Clap 31). The rector was subsequently relieved of his duties at Yale (Clap 32). Mather himself had been instrumental in establishing Yale, as he had convinced Elihu Yale, a native Bostonian who had become a merchant in London, to donate £800, resulting in the school changing its name in 1718 to honor him (Silverman 299).

New England had seen major theological rifts before, but not in its seminaries, and not away from Calvinism, but rather in further refinement of it. Stephen Foster has shown that this transition during Mather’s lifetime illustrates not the end of Puritanism in America, but another

26 Although Mather obviously had some openness to Tillotson, Kenneth Silverman suggests that Mather considered Leverett an “enemy” (Silverman 224). In 1710, when Mather tried to sue a detractor for libel, Leverett intervened unsuccessfully to try to squash the lawsuit (224). Even when Leverett died, Mather remained bitter, writing to the Overseers of the college to suggest that they investigate his administration (384). They did, but they upheld it (384).
stage of it. In *The Long Argument* (1991), Foster explains that Puritanism was a movement rather than a set of ideas. He criticizes the earlier historiography of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch, who yielded to “the inevitable temptation” to “single out as definitive some one characteristic or another of a much broader movement and to tie the fate of a protean phenomenon to purely temporary arrangements” (4). To truly understand the Puritans, one must take a “longer view that fuses the American and English histories of the Puritans and thereby locates enduring commitments and points of accord in decade after decade of reverses, internal divisions, and lamentations of decline” (4). While Foster admits that there is “a real and continuing historical entity out there,” the Puritans failed to self-define or self-organize (5). He therefore defines the Puritan movement as “a loose and incomplete alliance of progressive Protestants, lay and clerical, aristocratic and humble, who were never quite sure whether they were the vanguard or the remnant” (5). In a sense, Mather’s transition to a more moderate reading of the Bible exemplifies the Puritans’ traditional inclination towards response.

Mather and his neighbors had access to European works because of Boston’s position as a port city. Boston was no London or Amsterdam, but it nevertheless had a literate population with interest in the latest ideas. By 1710, Boston not only had five presses, but nineteen bookshops (Cohen 4). Mather also could have accessed European works by borrowing from other ministers. Fiering notes that in 1717, Boston minister Ebenezer Pemberton’s library included Isaac Barrow, John Tillotson, Rene Descartes, Henry More, and John Norris, writers that interested Mather (Fiering 330). Mather himself owned around 4000 books by the time he died (Murdock 22).  

Some he received as gifts, including forty books from the library of Charles Chauncey, given to Mather by Chauncey’s widow (Silverman 172). There were also

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27 See the impressively researched bibliography and provenance of the Mather libraries: Julius Herbert Tuttle, *The Libraries of the Mathers*. The Davis Press, 1910. Tuttle observes that the administration of Cotton Mather’s estate – and therefore of his library – is “surrounded with some mystery” (30).
specialists who could be consulted by letter or sometimes face-to-face. The first American Hebrew grammar book was produced by Judah Monis (1683-1764), a Jewish immigrant who arrived in Boston from Italy in 1720 (Hertzberg 109). After converting to Christianity in 1722, Monis taught Hebrew at Harvard (Kohut 218). Mather noted in his diary in 1724 that he wanted to consult Monis about some passages in the Old Testament (Hertzberg 109).

Historian Daniel Cohen observes that the book trade in New England was nevertheless limited compared to England and the Continent. He explains that ministers “dominated” local print and had the power to somewhat censor circulating works (ix). Although David Hall has suggested that profane works circulated in New England, Cohen notes that printed material produced in New England was mostly religious (Cohen 57). Mather’s father authored one of the first American responses to deism with A Discourse Proving that the Christian Religion is the Only True Religion (1702) (Holifield 70). Therefore, even if deist works did not circulate in New England, orthodox responses did.

Initially, Mather resisted the rationalism movement. The founding of the Brattle Street Church in Boston in 1698 caused what historian Michael Winship calls “a nasty little pamphlet war” involving the Mathers (Winship, Seers, 78). The Brattle Street Church did not require a public spiritual conversion narrative for admission to membership. A person therefore did not need to have the validity of his or her faith tried before the congregation in order to receive communion as was done at the other churches in Boston (Lovelace, Pietism, 21). Similarly, at this church, any Christian – not just a member – could have his or her children baptized (21). For Mather, as for many other Puritans, conversion narratives had cultural significance. Mather himself claimed that the requirement of a narrative for church membership, to keep churches

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28 Using the North American Imprints Program, Hugh Amory was able to produce a table indicating the most-published colonial authors. Mather tops the list from 1700-1730 (BA 1: 43).
pure, began in the 1630s (Morgan 94). Thomas Shepherd and Michael Wigglesworth, ministers in neighboring Cambridge, even kept records of conversion stories, collecting around fifty narratives, much to the joy of modern historians (Morgan 91).

However, shortly after resolving his differences with the Brattle Street Church, Mather optimistically decided to employ rationalism in defense of orthodoxy. Imitating Tillotson, Mather wrote *Reasonable Religion* (1700), a defense of Christianity’s reasonableness and the credibility of miracles (Winship, *Seers*, 79). Winship explains that “in following the Anglicans, Mather shifted the weight of persuasion from dogmatic certainty and private illumination to a moral, probabilistic certainty arrived at from weighing matters of public documentation” (79). He stopped short of full Latitudinarianism, of course. His *Reasonable Religion* still takes for granted that total depravity weakened the faculties and that only grace can restore the ability to reason properly (80).

In “Biblia Americana,” Mather weaves together radical and conservative readings of the Bible. Michael Lee notes that orthodox exegetes, who had begun to adopt critics’ methods to respond to challenges, were unable to come up with concrete support: “The Anglicans who defended the Bible by use of historical evidence argued that the evidence could lead to high probability but not absolute certainty” (Lee 33). Lee suggests that “Mather never picked up this nuance” (Lee 33). However, it may have been awareness of this trend that caused Mather to maintain traditional methods of exegesis in some cases while endorsing radical readings in others. He wished to demonstrate the wealth of information available in the Bible and illustrate how vastly skeptics undervalued its authority. Mather’s belief in the Bible’s credibility never changed, and his embrace of numerous hermeneutical methods reflects the broadening of his
description of evidence at the same time as other commentators’ perception of evidence was shrinking.

1.9 Mather’s Bible

The King James Version, the standard Bible used by the English in the seventeenth century, was commissioned by King James I to replace the popular sixteenth-century Geneva Bible (Wansbrough 550). Translators used Erasmus’s Greek text, which was based on relatively late manuscripts dating possibly to the sixth century or later (552). The translators scrapped the interpretive notes in the Geneva Bible and depended heavily on other translations, including Tyndale’s and Coverdale’s (551). Critic Henry Wansbrough notes that “since the panels [of translators] worked independently of one another, quotations of the Old Testament in the New often differ from the version in their original position” (551). Modern translators have access to more manuscripts and scholarship in translating has advanced significantly (552). Whiston himself published a new translation in 1745 using a fifth- or sixth-century codex that he thought dated to the second century (552). Whiston mentions this Bible in the preface to his Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament. He mentions that his sources include eyewitness records from Jews, pagans, and Christians (Whiston, n.p.). He promises that resources, such as maps and sketches, will be included, too, “so all honest Enquirers may be able to judge for themselves, about the Truth of these Scriptures, and to understand the greatest Part of the same impartially, without the Danger of Imposition from any common Prejudices” (n.p.). Mather did not live to see the publication of this translation.

1.10 Religious Antisemitism

As Stievermann, Smolinski, and other scholars have noted, “Biblia Americana” contains many surprises. Unfortunately, the biggest surprise is its anti-Judaism, or religious antisemitism,
the most shocking and unpleasant gargoyle to rear its head in “Biblia Americana.”  

Martin Mulsow notes that some radicals used Jewish polemics to criticize organized religion (Mulsow 31). Anthony Collins used several Jewish sources in his Discourse (31). Such reliance on Jewish writings may have caused orthodox exegetes to transfer their blame to the Jews instead of the radicals that cited them. Some of Mather’s sources, such as Raymond Martini and Richard Kidder, certainly do. Mather, indefensibly, follows his sources in their harsh condemnation of Jews, both ancient and contemporary.

For example, Mather argues that Jesus’s words, particularly in the speech in Luke 12, were so full of “Wisdom” that Jews collected some of his “Golden sayings” (“Biblia Americana” 7: Luke 12:47). He asserts that Jews collected the sayings “from their Countreymen” who were disciples of Jesus and inserted the sayings into the Talmuds and “many of their Treatises” (“BA” 7: Luke 12:47). Mather means to ridicule Jews who “continued in their blind Aversion” to Jesus while unwittingly using his words as “the principal Embellishments” of their treatises (“BA” 7: Luke 12:47). He notes as examples that words from Luke 12:47, “who knew his lords will, and did it not” appear in speeches he quotes in Latin by Rabbi Jochanan (“BA” 7: Luke 12:47).

Seeing Jews as believers in Judaism, not as a race, Mather focused his slander persistently on ideas. His Faith of the Fathers (1699) quotes the Old Testament to prove the truth

29 In Threefold Paradise, Smolinski suggests that Mather’s antisemitism intensified late in life as his chiliastic expectations transformed. Smolinski comments, “Mather’s sudden outburst of hostility bespeaks a type of latent anti-Semitism endemic among those whose eschatological ideology is grounded exactly on this kind of reasoning” (36).

30 “‘Biblia Americana’ 7,” hereafter shortened to “BA” 7, refers to the seventh volume of the ten-volume publication. All ten volumes are under contract and several have already been published. The volumes cited in quotation marks (i.e. “BA” 8) are currently being prepared for publication, and the volumes cited in italics (i.e. BA I) have already been published.

31 Johanan B. Zakkai (1st century C.E.), a Jewish teacher who preserved traditions from other rabbis (Bacher). He moved to Jabneh to found a school after the fall of Jerusalem (Bacher). He was most renowned for his wise sayings (Bacher).
of Christianity; it was written to convert Jews and supposedly it was successful (Hertzberg 107). “Biblia Americana,” on the other hand, shows Mather fiercely employing synonyms to criticize Judaism more harshly than any other faith, including even deism. An entire study could be written on Mather’s religious antisemitism, and this brief discussion barely suffices to address the reasoning behind Mather’s scathing attacks.

1.11 To Be or Not To Be

According to the first advertisement for the proposed publication, “Biblia Americana” filled only two volumes in 1706 (Stievermann, “Introduction,” 3). Mather considered the manuscript essentially complete by 1710 when he included an advertisement for it in Bonifacius (Silverman 236). Nevertheless, as Kenneth Silverman remarks, “Mather continued collecting material” and added more than one thousand illustrations in 1711 alone (237). In 1716, Mather published a pamphlet asking for subscribers so that his ever-growing work could be published (258). Unfortunately, his prayers went unanswered (258). Silverman observes:

Mather was wholly unable to accept the explanation given him by literally dozens of persons, that “Biblia Americana” was a valuable work but prohibitively costly to publish. In his mind, those who failed to confirm his worth were not simply shying from a project that could have cost little less than the reprinting of Eliot’s Indian Bible but were, as many others had done, affronting a great and unselfish man. (Silverman 258)

Silverman’s harsh but fair comment accurately assesses Mather’s character as well as Mather’s deep disappointment. Despite his efforts to find subscribers, Mather failed. By the time Mather died, the commentary filled six volumes, amounting to 4500 double-sided folio pages. His son

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32 Ironically, Silverman reveals, Mather forgot to indicate to whom the subscribers should write (Silverman 258). He even forgot to mention who the author of the work was, Silverman notes: “The slip suggests self-sabotaging guilt over the towering ambition of the work” (260).
also tried to find subscribers but failed (Silverman 427). Mather’s descendants donated it to the
Massachusetts Historical Society, where it remains.

Jan Stievermann laments the delay in the publication of “Biblia Americana.” Not only did
the failure to publish break Mather’s heart, but, Stievermann remarks: “It was certainly also a
heavy loss of what would have potentially been a very valuable resource for the Protestant
churches of New and Old England, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not to mention the
loss for twentieth-century religious and cultural historians” (Stievermann, Prophecy, 18). More
pragmatically, Michael Lee considers how the publication might have affected Mather’s career.
Weighing Mather’s use of allegorical explanations and extra-biblical authorities, Lee correctly
asserts that “these opinions may have shocked conservative Puritans if the ‘Biblia’ had ever been
published” (Lee 50). On the other hand, one wonders what information would not have shocked
conservative Puritans.

In 2010, publication of “Biblia Americana” finally moved forward, thanks to the hard
work of Reiner Smolinski and the publishing firm Mohr Siebeck. Stievermann notes in the
introduction to a collection of essays on Mather that “the reluctance of publishers to touch this
gargantuan project – the printed edition will comprise nearly 15,000 pages – has not diminished
since Mather’s days” (Stievermann, “Introduction,” 12). Stievermann suggests that in addition to
the size of the work, the “quotes in ancient languages surely repelled many modern scholars”
(Stievermann, “Introduction,” 12). Furthermore, he asserts, “anti-Puritan bias and prejudices
against Mather” lay behind the previous failures to publish “Biblia Americana” (Stievermann,
“Introduction,” 13). Stievermann criticizes historians for “this idea of Mather as a neurotic
genius” and praises literary scholars for not “putting Mather on the (amateur) psychologist’s
couch” (17). Mather’s life, however, is fascinating, and the man was an extraordinary and
accomplished minister who overcame heartbreak and disappointment to produce incredible works. Dehumanizing him by ignoring the circumstances that challenged his mental and physical health, one could argue, just as much “belittles the stature of his works” as would dismissing them as “frenetic” (Stievermann 17).

Perhaps most importantly, Mather wrote for a living audience of fellow ministers with the expectation that the ideas he shared would reach congregations, unlike modern academics whose works largely remain confined to the “ivory towers.” As Stievermann states: “While thus engaging with highly specialized philological and historical scholarship, Mather at the same time participated in the trend toward a more popular style of commentary literature written in England” (123). By writing in the vernacular and translating Greek and Hebrew quotations into English, and using simple sentences like those in his English sources, Mather tried to appeal to a broad audience, both scholastic and lay. Maintaining an approachable tone was one means of countering radicals who hunted the same audience.

1.12 Mather’s Sources

Mather consulted dozens of sources for his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. While he depended on different works based on the focus he pursued, a few sources he used fundamentally as the basis for his commentary. By far, John Lightfoot and Samuel Clarke were his favorite contemporaries and Josephus his primary ancient source. Because these authors are cited throughout his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, their biographies fit best in the introduction and appear in chronological order. Mather’s other sources, when known, are introduced as they arise in the discussion.

Flavius Josephus (37-100) was an oft-cited historian of ancient Judaism. His *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* relate the history of Palestine from the third century B.C.E. through the
first century C.E. and continue to be of use to exegetes (Chapman and Rogers 148). Commentators on his work note that “for much of this period, Josephus is our only witness” (148). He corroborates Luke’s story of the taxation in 6 C.E., for which Mather was grateful (149). He was cited by Christians for a variety of reasons, Louis Feldman observes (122). Not only does Josephus describe the general socio-historical context of the early Christian period and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., but he mentions Jesus briefly (122). Josephus was the most translated and published Greek historian of the early modern period, and he was available in Latin as early as the fourth century (123).

Jerome (c. 340-420) was an itinerant priest in his youth and student in a monastery for the last half of his life, during which time he translated the entire Bible (Saltet). He helped define Western orthodoxy by criticizing heresies, particularly against those of Helvidius and Pelagius, both of which Mather mentions (Saltet).

Augustine (350-430), bishop of Hippo, was an apologist for Christianity who remains beloved by both Catholics and Protestants. His most famous works are his autobiography, *Confessions* (c.400 C.E.) and his philosophical *The City of God* (c. 413-426) (O’Donnell). Before his conversion, he was a professor of rhetoric in Milan (O’Donnell). After his conversion, he persuasively applied Platonism to Christian ideas, having a lasting impact on Western Christianity (O’Donnell).

John Lightfoot (1602-1675) was one of the “foremost Judaic scholars” of the time, according to Richard Muller (20). He graduated from Cambridge with his M.A. in 1624 and D.D. in 1651 (Key). He served the Westminster Assembly during the Civil War and afterwards was a rector at Cambridge as well as a minister to a local church (Key). He wrote a harmony, but his “most important” work, his biographer notes, was his commentary using Jewish sources, *Horae*
Lightfoot attempted to understand the ancient Jewish customs mentioned in the Bible that would appear foreign or illogical to seventeenth-century English readers. For example, he describes “the customs of the synagogue” by including excerpts from *Megillah* (Lightfoot 2:405). Mather relates Lightfoot’s description of liturgical practices: “Moses, with the prophets, was read in the Synagogues, every Sabbath-Day… Seven Readers took their Turns; first a priest, then a Levite, then five Israelites” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:16). These cultural details helped Mather explain to his readers why the prophets sometimes appeared to be misquoted.

Herman Witsius (1639-1708) studied Hebrew at Utrecht and divinity under Bogaerdtius (Middleton 159). He preached at Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Leuwarden (160). In 1675, he became a professor of theology at Franeker, where he was also given a doctoral degree in divinity (162). He was professor of divinity at Utrecht for twenty-two years (163). While chaplain to the Dutch embassy to James II in 1685, he met the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of London (165). He was finally professor at Leyden from 1698 until his retirement in 1707 (166).

John Edwards (1637-1716), one of Mather’s favorite scholars, was a Church of England minister, Whig, and famous critic of Socinianism in the 1690s (Robinson and Wright). He graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1661 was minister at its Holy Trinity and then its St. Sepulchre’s (Robinson and Wright). When poor health forced him to retire from preaching, he focused on writing (Robinson and Wright).

Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) authored one of Mather’s favorite commentaries. Whitby graduated Oxford with his M.A. in 1660 and received his D.D. in 1672 (Quantin). He was a latitudinarian Church of England minister in Salisbury, but he controversially advocated for

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33 Tuttle’s study indicates that the Mathers owned the original Latin editions of Lightfoot’s *Horae* (Tuttle 287). Mather’s paraphrases of Lightfoot, however, closely match the English translation published posthumously in 1684 as *The Works of the Reverend and Learned John Lightfoot D.D.*
reconciling with Nonconformists in a book that was ultimately condemned and burned at Oxford (Quantin). After the Glorious Revolution, Whitby befriended Bishop Burnet, to whom he dedicated his popular *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (1703), which Mather uses routinely (Quantin). He also published a collection of Church Fathers’ works intended to highlight their “mistakes” and “show that they were neither adequate interpreters of scripture nor sufficient authorities to settle the debate on the Trinity” (Quantin). Whitby also revealed his Arminian leanings in *Discourse on the Five Points* (1710) in which he uses points in the Bible to counter Calvinism (Holifield 83). John Edwards, one of Mather’s other favorites, rebuked his open Arminianism (Quantin). Whitby’s confession of faith, published posthumously, retracted his popular Bible commentary and revealed his Arianism (Quantin). Given his admiration of Whitby, Mather probably never knew – or at least, one would hope, for his sake – about Whitby’s deflection from Trinitarian beliefs.

Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), an influential exegete and professor in Amsterdam, wrote commentaries on the Gospels and on the Old Testament and edited three encyclopedias (“Leclerc”). Although a controversial figure, his commentaries were standards for Mather.

Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) graduated with his B.A. from Cambridge in 1695, studied Cartesian philosophy, and translated the Cartesian textbook *Traité à physique* by Rohault into Latin, adding Newtonian notes that effectively caused the replacement of Cartesian philosophy with Newtonianism at Cambridge (Gascoigne). A moderate, he opposed both Calvinism and high-church ritual, preferring theology based in morality (Gascoigne). His *A Paraphrase on the Four Evangelists* (1701-2), used heavily by Mather, was intended, according to his biographer, “to render the text of the gospels into a form of prose that conformed to eighteenth-century idiom and sentiments” (Gascoigne). He delivered the Boyle lectures two years in a row (1704-5) and
produced works that increased his fame: *A Discourse Concerning the being and attributes of God* (1705) and *A Discourse concerning the unchangeable obligations of natural religion* (1706). These lectures emphasize the evidence of God in nature as well as the harmony between reason and natural religion (Gascoigne). Clarke ultimately questioned the divinity of Jesus in *The scripture-doctrine of the Trinity: wherein every text in the New Testament relating to that doctrine is distinctly considered* (1712) (Gascoigne). He couched his belief in the Son’s dependence on the Father in “cautious” terms, and after reaching an agreement with convocation not to write further about the Trinity, he became a more marginal figure (Gascoigne).

William Whiston (1667-1752) was a student of Newton and one of Mather’s favorite scholars. In a controversial move, in his 1707 Boyle lecture, published as *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies* (1708), Whiston argues that a prophecy can only have one fulfillment. Biographer James Force explains: “Whiston tried to show the literal, singly determine, nonallegorical, historical fulfillment of several biblical prophecies in the particular person of Jesus” (64). After 1710, when Whiston openly outed himself as an Arian, Mather took his ideas with a grain of salt, although he continued to endorse them.

### 1.13 Precritical Exegesis and Modern High Criticism

Historian Michael Lee argues that “Biblia Americana” marks Mather’s entrance into true biblical criticism; Lee claims that by verifying biblical passages with external evidence, “Mather was treating it like any historical document” (Lee 44). However, what one actually sees in “Biblia Americana,” and most moderate Bible commentaries of Mather’s day, is precritical engagement with radical criticism. As Muller and Thompson relate, referring to precritical exegesis: “The older exegesis assumed that the exegete lived and functioned not as part of an academic guild but as a ‘doctor’ or teacher of the church in a long line of churchly teachers”
Similarly, Mather’s “Biblia Americana” appears – and was meant to appear – as a collaboration. Mather tried to integrate his own ideas with the best of existing exegesis, ancient and contemporary. Muller and Thompson humorously comment: “The notion of a new, original, or individualistic interpretation was both foreign and alarming to precritical exegesis” (“Significance,” 342). Like other precritical writers, Mather was not interested in a new or unique interpretation but instead on a historical one in line with that of the early church. Scholar Louis Feldman misses the point when he shrugs off Mather as “conceited” (126). Feldman unfairly states that Mather’s commentary “seldom provides more than a miscellany of antiquarian lore and of other people’s views with little that is original” (126). At its heart, a commentary was a collaborative work, and while much of what Mather claimed would be considered outdated by exegetes today, many of Mather’s glosses illustrate how the methods of modern critical exegesis were beginning to inform precritical orthodox Bible interpretation and vastly change the conversation.

Timothy Beal eloquently notes that modern high criticism, which arose in the nineteenth century, “examined biblical literature not as the authoritative source for history, but as data for reconstructing history. That is, it examined biblical literature in the light of history, rather than the other way around” (8). Mather’s use of extra-biblical sources to supplement the Bible illustrates how his precritical exegesis was informed by the Enlightenment’s forerunner to modern high criticism. Although for Mather, the Bible held a privileged position, that position needed to be bolstered by other historical authorities. By the late nineteenth century, those other authorities gained ascendancy over the Bible.
The rise in modern high criticism is exemplified by scholarly views of the Synoptic Gospels. The name “Synoptic Gospels” was coined, in German, by Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812) during the last quarter of the eighteenth century (Peabody 492). Believing that harmonizing the Gospels was impossible, Griesbach created a synopsis that illustrated the vast differences between the four Gospels (Peabody 489). To this day, Bible critics generally refer to Matthew, Mark, and Luke as the Synoptic Gospels.

Most exegetes in Mather’s time followed Augustine’s theory that Matthew was the oldest of the four Gospels, that Mark had shortened Matthew’s account, and that the Evangelists after Matthew had all consulted his and each other’s works (Peabody 489). The latter point was challenged by John Calvin but otherwise broadly accepted (Peabody 489). Griesbach, however, proposed that the similarities between all three Synoptic Gospels were too great; he asserted that Mark drew from both Matthew and Luke and that Luke drew from Matthew, as well (Peabody 492).

Modern scholars believe that these three Gospels vary widely because the authors wrote in different places, for different audiences, with different goals, and using different sources. However, these Gospels also overlap, in some places verbatim. While previously, critics like Mather believed that each Gospel intended to tell only part of a story, modern high criticism considers each book individually, and in the nineteenth century, the Gospel Q theory formed and received widespread acceptance by Bible critics. The Gospel Q theory, formed as early as 1838, holds that early followers of Jesus produced a volume of his sayings which was later “embedded” in Matthew and Luke but otherwise is no longer extant (Robinson vii). Historian James Robinson explains in the introduction to a modern compilation of Gospel Q that the preserved sayings of Jesus is now believed to be the oldest surviving Gospel (vii). The Gospel Q
was likely written in Greek, since “the sometimes very high degree of verbal identity in the Q sayings of Matthew and Luke makes it apparent that they were working from a shared Greek text” (ix). Robinson also observes that “the most striking thing about epithets for Jesus in Q is the complete absence of the title ‘Christ’” (xiv). No such theory existed in Mather’s day; the identical phrases in Matthew and Luke were viewed as simply the true words that Jesus had spoken. Indeed, it was the words that were not identical in all of the Gospels that drew the focus of exegetes. Since the nineteenth century, on the other hand, critics have accepted non-devotional explanations.

In The Nature of Biblical Criticism (2007), John Barton provides a concise overview of current Biblical scholarship. Barton explains that Bible criticism is not inherently secular, but it is a search for a “plain sense” of meaning in the text (Barton 4, itals his). Precritical exegetes used extra-biblical sources to contextualize history, he points out, and so he considers a “historical” approach alone insufficient evidence of high criticism (36). Instead, Barton proposes that modern criticism has three main features: attention to semantics, attention to genre, and suspension of questions about the truth (58).\(^34\) For Mather, truth was the issue at stake, and he was probably incapable of suspending the search for it. However, Mather does devote attention to semantics and, to a lesser degree, genre, as is discussed in Chapter Eight, Corruption of the Text.

Likewise, Barton explains how the search for a literal meaning has changed from the precritical style: “New Testament critics do not tell us whether the resurrection happened; they do not read the story literally, but instead ask questions about the motivation of its compilers or the process by which it was transmitted. In this way modern criticism is far removed from what

\(^{34}\) Modern critics, in other words, would not ask whether the miracle stories in the Gospels are literally true but rather would ask why the stories appear.
is usually meant by literalism” (91). As will be seen in the seventh chapter, Evidentialism, Mather does question the means by which the Gospels have been transmitted; as a committed participant in hermeneutical conversation, he had little choice, since the integrity of the Bible was heatedly debated in the 1720s.

The concessions made by conservatives should not be considered true criticism, though, because they were made narrowly, with a determination to read the Bible as a privileged and inspired religious work. Conservatives like Mather certainly did not treat the Bible like any historical document. Rather, they tailored their concessions to radicalism to fit a predetermined reading of the Bible that confirmed its elevated status. Such predetermined conclusions appear frequently in Mather’s commentary, despite his avowed faith in natural philosophy, recognized by modern scholars in his *Christian Philosopher* (Lee 38, and see also Jeske, Solberg, and Beall and Shyrock). Taking for granted that the words of the Bible must in some way be true, Mather questioned the traditional interpretations that contradicted contemporary epistemology.

1.14 This Study

This study will examine how Mather navigates between conflicting viewpoints. The two major perspectives, radical and conservative, are painted broadly in this introduction, but, as will be seen, they were often grey rather than black and white. Generally, Mather uncovers a multitude of interpretations of any given Biblical passage. Sometimes, he presents all of them, giving preference to none, but more often he specifically endorses particular readings. Overall, his remarks on the Synoptic Gospels reveal that as he tried to weigh radical arguments objectively, so he often accepted the radical conclusions that undermined the Bible’s authority. While Mather seemingly did not recognize the significance of the concessions he made,
examination of his commentary on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals that Mather was a wholehearted participant in Enlightenment discourse and its radicalizing tendencies.

This study examines the major issues tackled by Mather in this portion of his commentary and assesses what was at stake. The study is organized to demonstrate the spectrum of Mather’s responses to early Enlightenment hermeneutics – from acknowledgment to full-fledged engagement. The first two chapters illustrate Mather nodding towards the issues of rationalism and of miracles. Although he endeavors to address contemporary commentary on these topics, he does not acknowledge critics’ primary concerns. The following two chapters reveal Mather making concessions to critical hermeneutics; here, he engages with radicalism even as he claims to dismiss its validity. The final three chapters, perhaps the most surprising in the study, examine Mather’s full engagement with radical hermeneutics and his acceptance of readings that undermine the authority of the Bible.

Mather’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels is of particular interest because of the rise of Unitarianism in England during Mather’s lifetime. Interpretations of the narratives of Jesus’s life and the credibility of stories about Jesus’s deeds and words naturally played heavily into the increasing instability of the established Church. The second chapter, Rationalism, addresses the rise of rationalist philosophy and its impact on hermeneutics. Inspired by Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke, radical critics like Toland and moderate critics like the Cambridge Platonists challenged the Biblical passages that in their eyes did not make logical sense. Aware of this discourse, Mather tries to rationalize the otherwise inexplicable behaviors of Jesus, his disciples, and even his contemporary critics. However, Mather’s explanations are usually based on the predetermined conclusion that the Bible must be right. His belief in both the Bible’s authority
and in Puritan dogma – which held human faculties deficient – led him to privilege faith over reason and effectively not truly engage with rationalists.

The third chapter, Miracles, looks at how Mather weighs the miracles described in the Synoptic Gospels. While Mather addresses the scientific possibility of miracles at greater length in his commentary on the Pentateuch (see BA I), in his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, he shows more concern with explaining the reasons behind miracles. Mather asserts that Jesus’s miracles were performed to convince people of the validity of his mission. However, Mather does not shake his Calvinist belief in predestination and unconditional election; he argues that Jesus’s miracles would have only convinced followers who already had faith in Jesus. By implying that physical evidence was an unnecessary supplement to faith, Mather effectively suggests that Jesus’s miracles were performed in vain.

The fourth chapter, Jesus, examines how Mather confronted challenges to the Trinity. He ultimately focuses severely on proving that Jesus was a prophet. Ironically, the authors from whom he draws most heavily, Daniel Whitby and Samuel Clarke, eventually were recognized as Arians. Although Mather himself always believed in the Trinity, his commentary gives so much ground to Arian ideas that it fails to prove the divinity of Jesus.

The fifth chapter, Harmony, reveals how Mather attempted to harmonize the four Gospels. He effectively illustrates, as Griesbach would almost a century later, the many irreconcilable but minute differences between the four Gospels. As he addresses radical assertions about the lack of harmony in the four canonical Gospels, he essentially accepts the conclusions that question the provenance of surviving manuscripts. Most remarkably, he concedes that in some cases, one Gospel must be privileged over the others.
The sixth chapter, Typology, considers how Mather weaves together the historical narratives of the Old and New Testaments. Although Mather believed in typology, which is addressed comprehensively by Smolinski in BA 1, he shies from using literal typological explanations to connect the Testaments, instead often falling upon allegorical explanations and thereby serving radicals who argue that Old Testament prophecies were not directly about the New Testament. He hints that the Hebrew Bible foundations of Christianity were symbolic rather than literal.

The seventh chapter, Evidentialism, examines Mather’s integration of extra-biblical sources into his commentary. The reliance on outside sources to support the Bible inherently acknowledges the fracturing authority of the Bible as a measure of history. Furthermore, Mather sometimes stretches his interpretation of both the Bible and his external sources in order to make the two match. Unintentionally, he undermines the Bible’s centrality as a historic source and he raises doubts about its credibility.

The final chapter, Corruption of the Text, reviews Mather’s criticism of the King James Version of the Bible. Like some of his contemporaries, Mather considered the King James translation faulty. Using additional translations, he indicates potential corrections of the King James Version and subverts traditional Christian imagery that he attributes to erroneous translations. Most radically, Mather also accepts the authority of non-canonical sources, granting their provenance and historical reliability the same value as that of the canon.

2 CHAPTER TWO: RATIONALISM

2.1 Introduction

A cursory glance at the New Testament will reveal that the culture of first-century Israel was very different from that of Western civilization today. Biblical figures do and say seemingly
illogical things, with no explanation. Similarly, simply skimming will show that the four canonical Gospels vary significantly in the way they relate stories. In short, to a modern reader, the Gospels often do not make sense. Critics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were just as culturally distant from early Christians and just as aware of the Bible’s apparent self-contradiction. The rise of rationalism in Bible commentaries responded partly to challenges like those of Hobbes, Spinoza, Toland, and Collins. It was unacceptable, in their eyes, to ask people to believe in concepts that did not make sense and to accept as authoritative a book that is often unclear and sometimes even misleading.

Mather attempts to rationalize that the Gospels stretch credulity and that they at times even border on the absurd. The seemingly contradictory passages in the Bible take several forms: illogical translations; inconsistent or irrational behavior of biblical figures, especially Jesus; and scientifically impossible yet seemingly meaningless events. Mather reveals how much was at stake by his desperate attempts to explain away these conflicts.

Because he worried that the authority of the Bible was under attack, he tackled seemingly minor issues, such as differences in chronology, with serious intensity. For instance, in Matthew and Mark, Jesus meets Peter for the first time while the latter is out fishing. Using the same expression as he does in Luke, Jesus tells Peter and Andrew that they will be “fishers of men” (King James Version Bible Matt. 4:19, c.f. Mark 1:17, Luke 5:10). In Luke, however, Jesus first meets Peter when he is called to the latter’s house to heal his ill mother-in-law (Luke 4:38). Shortly thereafter, Jesus comes across Peter at his fishing trade (Luke 5:3). The healing of Peter’s mother-in-law happens in Matthew and Mark as well, but only after Peter has been called to his discipleship (Matt. 8:14, Mark 1:30). It would seem then that the story about the mother-in-law is out of place in Luke. Mather, however, suggests that Peter had met Jesus, but then Jesus
“probably” dispensed with his disciples and went into Galilee alone to avoid attracting attention. Either way, Mather asserts, there is “no doubt” that Peter and Andrew had remained faithful to Jesus “and that they were now Returned unto their Fishery, was not without His Direction” ("BA" 7: Luke 5:3). Mather’s explanation creates more questions than answers, though, regarding why the Gospel writer did not explain Jesus’s motivation, let alone include the actual dialogue between Jesus and his apostles. By ignoring this coincidence and refusing to consider it an error, Mather speculates and makes the Gospel appear even less logical.

This chapter examines Mather’s response to rationalism by drawing on several of Mather’s glosses on the most inexplicable passages in the Gospels. These passages were selected based both on the length and depth of Mather’s explication and on their ability to represent the issues with which he struggled. Notably, by continually returning to the glosses over the years to add more information, he revealed his desire to explain these incongruous passages finally and conclusively.

First, led by other contemporary exegetes, he reinterprets the character of Nicodemus, traditionally seen as a hypocrite. None of the exegetes have evidence from the Bible to support their readings of Nicodemus, who appears out of the blue to ask Jesus questions. By turning on mainstream interpreters for no good reason, Mather makes the story of Nicodemus even more confusing. Similarly, he examines several mysteries, such as lack of agreement in detail between the Gospels about the resurrection of Jesus, but instead of successfully clarifying the reason for the apparent disagreement, he leaves the issues unresolved. Just as he does in smoothing out inconsistencies, Mather implies that the four Gospels were written in order to be read together. Even though he acknowledges that the books were written by different authors, he sees them as part of one complete project, and he argues, for example, that the Gospel of John emphasizes
Jesus’s divinity because the other Gospels provide full accounts of Jesus’s humanity. Without asserting that the Bible was directly inspired, he credits these four writers as prophetically anticipating that audiences would manage to read the accounts together as one work. Most perplexingly, Mather addresses Jesus’s seemingly counter-purposeful commands for receivers of healing miracles to keep silent about what happened, but instead of acknowledging that this behavior seems illogical, Mather accepts that it must have been appropriate because it was Jesus’s command.

The examples presented in this chapter demonstrate that Mather did not engage completely with rationalism. Instead of fully appreciating the lack of clarity in many of the Gospels’ narratives, Mather assumes that explanations based on symbolic readings or on the authority of other exegetes’ interpretations, without textual evidence, will be sufficient to illuminate the reasonableness of the Bible.

2.2 Nicodemus

The story of Nicodemus raises several questions. First, the story appears only in the Gospel of John. Second, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, inexplicably visits Jesus at night. To clarify this incongruity in the Gospels, Mather adds missing context that contradicts traditional explication. Mather, like other Christian writers, recognized the oddness of a Pharisee coming to Jesus alone at night. The passage is “commonly Interpreted,” he remarks, as implying that Nicodemus was afraid to be seen speaking to Jesus (“BA” 8: John 3:10). Exegetes had read much into Nicodemus’s character due to this interpretation, even though the Gospel provided no evidence in support. Guided by Samuel Clarke and John Lightfoot, Mather presented a different interpretation of Nicodemus, but they did not have evidence for their reading, either. Instead, by
trying to provide a different analysis of Nicodemus without specific scriptural support, he indicated how unclear the passage was.

Mather did not believe that the traditional interpretation condemning Nicodemus was correct. He counters instead that Nicodemus had witnessed Jesus performing miracles and felt intrigued (“BA” 8: John 3:10). Mather contextualizes this idea, as he precedes this gloss with a list of miracles illustrating the “mighty Demonstrations” that impressed Nicodemus (“BA” 8: John 3:2). In John 2:23, Mather explains, Jesus was seen to perform miracles in Jerusalem during the Passover feast, which Mather assumes that Nicodemus witnessed. Since this verse appears shortly before the anecdote about Nicodemus, this deduction seems logical. Interested in the miracles, Nicodemus “was desirous to have some Discourse, with our Lord Jesus Christ, upon ye first conveniency” (“BA” 8: John 3:2). However, “the Concourse of ye people would not allow him an opportunity of privacy with our Lord Jesus Christ by Day,” so Nicodemus could only visit Jesus at night (“BA” 8: John 3:2). Mather suggests that this narrative therefore confirms the “Faith” of Nicodemus rather than his “Weakness” (“BA” 8: John 3:2). This kind reinterpretation of the character of Nicodemus, while logical when contextualized by Mather, nevertheless draws attention to Nicodemus’s unusual timing, and perhaps more damagingly, highlights the absence of this contextual detail in the Gospel.

Nicodemus featured heavily in Reformation Protestant imagery, yet other scholars had not reached the same conclusion as Mather. Instead, Nicodemus symbolized hypocrisy in Protestant rhetoric. Mather’s was an important reinterpretation for contemporary Protestants, because Nicodemus had exemplified skepticism for appearing at night, questioning Jesus, and then appearing not to believe Jesus’s answers, muttering, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). For example, modern critic Wulfert de Greef notes, John Calvin argued in Excuse à Messieurs
les Nicodémites (1544) that Protestants living in Roman Catholic regions who outwardly conformed to Catholicism – “Nicodemites,” as they were labeled – ought to flee rather than hide their true faith (de Greef 123). Calvin charges that these Nicodemites are worse than their namesake, because even Nicodemus outwardly showed his faith by appearing at Jesus’s burial (123). Even more critically, as modern scholar George Tavard relates, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, Calvin labels believers who hide their faith hypocrites and accuses them of hiding behind the example of Nicodemus (Tavard 60). Modern critic Nikki Shepardson writes that, according to the Theodore Beza, the Nicodemite was “the antithesis of the martyr” (Shepardson 38). Examining the rhetoric of sixteenth-century anti-Nicodemite texts, Shepardson argues that extremists like Calvin pressured converts to embrace their faith wholeheartedly: “a faithful man must break with the old community, including family, if it supports idolatry” (42). Anti-Nicodemite tracts in turn “offered the blueprint” for a new community of the faithful (42). Given that Mather himself emphatically depicts Puritan settlers in New England as martyrs in his Magnalia Christi Americana, it is surprising that here he reverses a traditional Protestant symbol and posits Nicodemus as a true believer with no wish to dissemble. Mather might have been swayed by Samuel Clarke’s paraphrase. Clarke introduces Nicodemus positively: “Now among those who were convinc’d by the Miracles which Jesus

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35 Mather writes in the introduction to the Magnalia that Reformers had been “driven” to America after the Church of England “ grievously smote” them (1:26). He famously charges in his history of Massachusetts Bay Colony: “It was PERSECUTION” that had “driven into the wilderness” Christians like his grandfathers who sought to reform the English church (1:65).

36 Ironically, Mather’s optimism was probably misplaced. Modern Bible critic Michael Whitenton eloquently summarizes in a commentary on John’s depiction of Nicodemus: “Essentially, a suspicious trait counterbalances each positive characteristic” (Whitenton 143). Whitenton claims that for first and second-century audiences familiar with this stock character in the literature of their time, in fact, “Nicodemus’s lavish praise, amazement, and claims to ignorance strongly resemble the classical dissembler” (151). This interpretation implies that polemists were correct to view Nicodemus, at least when he first appears in John, as a negative character.

37 See Section 1.12, Mather’s Sources, for information about Clarke and Lightfoot.
wrought at Jerusalem, that he was really a Divine Prophet, an extraordinary Teacher sent immediately from God, was one Nicodemus” (23). Clarke uses artistic license with this paraphrase, since the King James Version only reads, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1). Even so, Clarke does not grant Nicodemus the same credit as Mather does, because Clarke adds in the next verse that “for fear of the Jews he durst not openly own the Perswasion he had entertain’d concerning Jesus” (23). John Lightfoot also tries to justify Nicodemus’s behavior. He points out that Jews traditionally studied at night and that the Pharisee’s desire to go to Jesus “so soon” hinted at his “willingness toward the Gospel” (1:566).

Mather makes much of Nicodemus as a positive example, dedicating several glosses to this figure. Mather argues that Nicodemus approaches Jesus as a believer. He interprets Jesus’s pressing “so Emphatically under ye Notion of being Born of Water” as Jesus’s means of encouraging Nicodemus to be baptized (“BA” 8:John 3:5). He hints too that Nicodemus had some prophetic awareness of the coming resurrection, since “Nicodemus, in mentioning ye Miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, seems therein to conceive & confess ye Approach of ye Kingdom of God” (“BA” 8: John 3:9).38 While Mather does not elaborate on this intuition Nicodemus apparently possessed, it is clear that he accepted Nicodemus as a positive character. He adds that Jesus used the opportunity of speaking with a Pharisee to refute the “Judaical principle” that the kingdom of God would be physical rather than spiritual. In this sense, Nicodemus served as a messenger of Christianity to Jews. Despite this significant role, Mather

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38 Likely taken from Lightfoot: “But this was Nicodemus his argumentation upon the miracles that he saw done: that undoubtedly this could be nothing but a token of the days of the Messias or Kingdom of God now approached” (1:570).
appreciates that Nicodemus had his faults. Jesus’s description of “a New Birth from above” was “a Doctrine too High” for a Jew to understand (“BA” 8: John 3:9).[

Astoundingly, Mather promotes Nicodemus as an example of piety. Mather was inspired by William Hooke (1600-1678), an English clergyman who served in New Haven before returning to England in 1656 (Moore). When Jesus speaks of a new birth, Nicodemus takes him literally and worries that an old man cannot physically be born again. Based on this confusion, Hooke reasons that Nicodemus was an old man when he met Jesus (“BA” 8: John 3:21). This story therefore illustrates that a person can convert, at any age, despite living in error for much of his or her life. Hooke marvels: “Yea, but upon his conversion, how fast ye work of God thrives in him!” (qtd in “BA” 8: John 3:21). Nicodemus serves symbolically as an example of how “The Old Man gott the Start of them all, and of many others that sett out before Him. So, The First are Last, and the Last are First” (qtd in “BA” 8: John 3:21).

Mather also cites the Babylonian Talmud in order to use the Nicodemus story as an example of the Bible’s historical reliability. First, he mentions the symbolic significance of Nicodemus’s conversion: Mather speculates that “a Nicodemus” mentioned in the Talmud had responsibility for providing water to worshippers during festivals (“BA” 8: John 3:5). Mather notes with a play-on-words that “if” this was the same person, Jesus’s words about water hold “a further pungency” (“BA” 8: John 3:5). In a later insertion, Mather connects the figures more confidently, although he indicates no reason for doing so. He relates the Talmudic story almost

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39 Clarke also indicates that Nicodemus asked questions out of ignorance, not criticism. He explains that Nicodemus asks, “grossly misunderstanding Jesus’s words” (Clarke, John, 24). Evidently, Jesus had little patience with the convert, replying: “How can you put so absurd a meaning upon my Expressions?” (24).
40 Probably The priviledge of the saints on earth, beyond those in heaven (1673).
41 Tractate Ta’anith, fol. 19b.
42 Lightfoot relates the anecdote from the Talmud in his Harmony of the Four Evangelists (1:565). Lightfoot also adds that this figure may not be the same as the one in John, but he concludes that similarities are great enough that “it is not worth debating” (1:565).
verbatim, using Lightfoot as his source, of Nicodemus successfully praying for rain so that he could repay a loan of water and then successfully praying for sunshine. Characteristically, Mather hesitates to accept a miracle performed by a Pharisee, so he questions “whether this noble story be true,” but he does rely on the anecdote to prove Nicodemus’s existence and describe his occupation as “Overseer of ye Waters” (“BA” 8: John 3:5).

Originally, Mather wrote that “the Faith of Nicodemus in coming to our Lord so soon seems to mee, as much declared here, as ye Weakness of his Faith, in coming by Night,” but sometime later he crossed out “mee” and replaced it with “some,” seemingly removing his personal opinion and merely reporting (“BA” 8: John 3:10). He waffles further by adding at the end of the gloss: “However, we do not propose Calvins Treatise, Contra Nicodemitas, to be nullified” (“BA” 8: John 3:10). Mather clarifies that despite his support of Nicodemus as a positive example, he has no desire to challenge John Calvin’s authority. Nevertheless, in countering Calvin’s interpretation of this character, Mather does undermine Reformed exegesis, even though he does not provide any evidence to support his reinterpretation. Instead of illuminating the passage on Nicodemus, Mather muddles it further.

2.3 Scene at Jesus’s Tomb and other Mysteries

Unlike the story of Nicodemus, the story of Jesus’s resurrection appears in all of the canonical Gospels. Recognizing that each narrative provides a different chronology of Jesus’s resurrection, Mather tries to harmonize the accounts to prove the literal historical accuracy of each Gospel independently and all four together. Not only is the creation of a harmony an obvious construct, but Mather deliberately reinterprets passages in order to make pieces fit. Similarly, he produces unsubstantiated details to provide clarification for murky passages. Using only the authority of Church Fathers as his proof, he offers a symbolic explanation for confusion
about the feeding of the five thousand. Instead of clarifying mysterious problems in the Gospels, Mather draws attention to them.

The details of Jesus’s resurrection in the four Gospels are seemingly irreconcilable. Matthew and Mark describe Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, visiting the tomb, seeing Jesus, and then greeting the disciples with the news of his rising (Matt. 28, Luke 24). In these two Gospels, the first sign of the resurrection is an angel at the tomb who has rolled away the stone. Luke and John, on the other hand, agree about the stone and the appearance of angels, but the primary sign of the resurrection is the presence of Jesus’s grave clothes. Furthermore, on several particular details, including who visited the tomb, the number of angels, when the apostles learned of Jesus’s resurrection, and when and to whom Jesus appeared first, the four Gospels disagree. Mather tries to solve this idiosyncrasy. His attempt to alleviate the inconsistency about Jesus’s apparel offers one means of harmonizing the accounts.

Mather attempts to consolidate the four narratives by presenting a fifth, comprehensive narrative that blends all four stories. He blames the inadequate translations for any additional “clashing of Circumstances” (Matt. 28:1). Mather recognized numerous flaws in the King James Bible, a translation now discredited by Bible critics for its heavily biased and inaccurate translations. Likely using a polyglot, Mather frequently compares surviving early editions of texts. In his treatment of the resurrection, he criticizes the King James Version for using a tense that is incompatible with “the original” (Matt. 28:1). Unfortunately, Mather does not explain which original source he claims to be using. Later in the same gloss, Mather takes issue with the King James Version’s translation and cites a Greek translation, although he does not say whether that is the original he means. Mather critiques the translation of a verse in Luke: “Then arose

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43 See, for example, Timothy Beal, The Rise and Fall of the Bible. Houghton Miflin Harcourt, 2011.
Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre” (Lk 24:12). Mather claims that the tense used should be the past perfect (“had run”), not the past simple (“ran”).

While such striving for accuracy in translation forms a substantial and legitimate part of high criticism, nonetheless Mather clearly only provides this revision of the King James Version because it fits his comprehensive narrative. In fact, Mather retranslates Luke 24:12 so that he can place Peter’s visit to the tomb earlier in his narrative to make it consistent with the other Gospels. He claims that, contrary to how Luke relates the narrative, Peter visited the tomb after the mourning women but before the appearance of the angels to Mary Magdalene in Matthew 28:2. He argues that “Luke takes notice of it, where he does, only because, he would not interrupt the Account which the Women were giving of what they had seen” (Matt. 28:1). Because, to reconcile the accounts, Peter must visit the tomb before the women inform the disciples, Luke must have a reason for having rearranged the narrative, and the translation of the tense in the King James Bible must be incorrect. Here, then, Mather’s bias shows: he uses the methods of a textual critic by analyzing the translation and its arrangement, but he does so because his goal is a subjective accuracy – the historical reliability of the Gospels, which Mather, of course, truly believed in – not an objective search for the truest original intent of the author of Luke’s Gospel regardless of its historical accuracy or compatibility with other accounts of Jesus’s life.

Likewise, Mather attempts to present a new comprehensive narrative – generally called a “harmony” – that captures all four stories. According to his reconciled narrative, the two Marys, Peter, John, and some women all go back and forth to the tomb and to the disciples, allowing each to be alone and to speak to the angel. Mather’s harmony patches together all four narratives, ultimately reinterpreting all of them. Instead of each Gospel telling the full story independently,
Mather has each Gospel telling part of the story, so that the story is only complete if all four Gospel narratives are put together. This reading suggests that the Gospels were not individual works in Mather’s eyes but necessarily were created to be read side-by-side. However subconsciously, Mather wanted to demonstrate the inspired nature of the canon as well as the compatibility of the texts.

As modern Bible critic John Barton has shown, assuming that the canonical Gospels are mutually dependent does the opposite of high criticism. The chief problem with a harmony, Barton reveals, is its illogical insistence that the Gospels were written to together form a whole (Barton 19). Objective criticism, Barton remarks, treats the Gospels as what they really were: individual works, written as complete narratives, that include all of the details that the authors believed were true (19). Textual critics treat each book as an individual work, which is what they were. The present New Testament canon of Western Christianity was not even proposed until 367 C.E., when it was suggested by Athanasius (Ehrman, *New Testament*, 13). Debates about which books held authority abounded throughout the early years of Christianity. By suggesting that the full narrative is only complete when all four canonical Gospels are read together, Mather treats them as works that were written to be joined together. He takes for granted that the canon would form and that the writers were deliberately selective. This suggestion further implies problematically that Christians before Athanasius – including the Church Fathers that Mather himself consults, like Ignatius and Justin Martyr - did not have access to the true full story of Jesus.

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46 Athanasius (296-373), bishop of Alexandria, wrote apologies of Christianity directed to Gentiles and Jews and helped formulate doctrine about the Incarnation, particularly in response to the rise of Arianism (Clifford). In an appendix following his commentary on Revelation, Mather claims that the canon was “finished by the Apostle John” and passed down to the Council of Laodicea via generations of John’s disciples (“BA” 10: “Some Remarks, relating to the Inspiration, and the Obsignation, of the CANON”). He suggests, too, that the books were collected into one canon by Clement of Alexandria (“BA” 10: “Some Remarks”).
Because Mather did not want to discredit any element of his narrative of Jesus’s resurrection, he accepts that Jesus’s grave clothes had been discarded. Rather than argue that Luke and John were inaccurate, Mather tries to explain how Jesus had acquired other clothing. Mather was, after all, a Puritan. He could not imagine that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the nude. In his commentary on John he indicates his discomfort with nudity. The King James Version relates that Peter was fishing when Jesus came to him, and “when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he got his fisher’s coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea” (John 21:7). Mather’s scandalized interlocutor gasps: “Naked!” (“BA” 8: John 21:7). Mather replies soothingly that the writer surely only meant bare-chested: “Read it, without his upper Garment” (“BA” 8: John 21:7). He likewise cannot imagine Jesus being a flasher. However, neither would he accept that Luke and John had made a mistake. If they said Jesus discarded his clothes, then he did. And he must have acquired other clothes somewhere. Mather notes that Mary Magdalene had seen him in the clothes of a gardener (“BA” 7: Mark 16:6). Instead of pursuing this image further, he adds that Jesus “had Angels to wait upon Him, and bring Him what He had occasion for” (“BA” 7: Mark 16:6). However, Mather seems to have accepted the theory of Amalarius Fortunatus that Jesus “flew to Lazarus at Bethany, or some other Friend, for a supply of convenient clothing” (“BA” 7: Mark 16:6). An intelligent man, Mather no doubt recognized the ludicrousness of his argument. He hints at it by making a tongue-in-cheek joke: “We will not say, with Metensis Diaconus, that His Heavenly Glory, was a sufficient covering” (“BA” 7: Mark 16:6). It was imperative for him to cite other authoritative

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47 Amalarius (c.775-850), bishop of Trier and Lyon, born at Metz, who introduced controversial liturgical works (Fischer).
48 “The deacon of Metz,” meaning Amalarius.
exegetes to imply that in-depth biblical criticism was not new. The question itself, he notes, comes from Gurtler.⁴⁹

Mather takes the same approach to other narrative inconsistencies. Acknowledging the different order of Jesus’s temptations in Matthew and Luke, Mather argues that Matthew’s order will “bee found ye True. And Luke, supposing ye Reader to be well-satisfied in that, pursues a further Design” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Illogically, Mather implies that Matthew and Luke originally had the same audience – something Mather consciously knew was untrue.⁵⁰

He occasionally attempts to make biblical narratives appear logical by ascribing miraculous causes. When he describes the forty days’ temptations of Jesus, Mather elaborates on the meaning of “led by the Spirit” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:2). He suggests that Jesus was literally brought to the place of temptation; he states that Jesus was “caught up into ye Air, and so carried into ye Wilderness” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:2). This explanation supports biblical harmony, he hints. Mather invites his readers to “Compare the case” with Elias in Kings and Philip in Acts (“BA” 7: Luke 4:2).

He adds in his commentary on Matthew that the devil also has this power. He accepts Lightfoot’s proposal that Jesus’s transportation by the devil happened literally, as it would heighten Jesus’s humiliation, “that Hee who had newly been proclaimed [sic], The Son of God, from Heaven, should now be so Hurried about by the Divel of Hell” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:5).⁵¹ This solution therefore illustrates God’s consistency. It also harmonizes the Gospels, as the language in Matthew, “led up of the spirit,” implies literal lifting rather than spiritual inspiration (Matt. 4:1).

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⁴⁹ Nicholas Gurtler (1654–1711), of Bazil, author of a history of the Templars (La Bruja 187).
⁵⁰ Mather addresses the issue of the different audiences in his analysis of the genealogies, which is discussed in Section 5.3.3, Something about Mary.
⁵¹ C.f. Lightfoot’s harmony (1:505).
Lightfoot might have recognized the ridiculousness of the image of Jesus flying around above Jerusalem, as he addressed “scruples and questions” that arise from this passage (1:506). He suggests that the devil carried Jesus deliberately. Mather paraphrases, claiming that the act was part of the devil’s strategy:

Now, it may bee conceived, that ye Divel, meant some Evil to Others, besides our Saviour… Why might not the Divels Intention bee, to deceive ye people, with misprisions about Elias? They had a Notion among them, about Elijahs flying to ye Temple… If now, they should see a man in a mantle, flying thro’ ye Air, to, & from ye Temple, they would soon take up such Fancies about Elijah as would prejudice them against ye ministry of John Baptist & of our Lord. (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:5, c.f. Lightfoot 1:506)

Mather goes so far as to provide Lightfoot’s extra-biblical historical description from Josephus of the Temple’s pinnacle, which Mather says should be translated as its “Battlement” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:5, c.f. Lightfoot 1:507). He follows the excerpt from Josephus gleefully: “Quaere, Whether this were not ye pinnacle on which our Lord suffered His Temptation!” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:5).

Yet for all his desire for historical accuracy, Mather dismisses some mysteries as irrelevant. He has his interlocutor ask on which mountain specifically Jesus was placed by the devil. Mather answers himself, “It is neither Determinable, nor much material” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:8). However, he then offers a guess that the mountain “probably” lay east of Jordan (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:8).52 Ironically, he later abandoned this lackadaisical approach. Sometime after 1703,

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52 His speculating follows Lightfoot, who comments: “It is as undeterminable what mountain this was, as it is what part of the Temple it was that he set him upon, and it is as little material” (1:507). Then Lightfoot guesses that it “was beyond Jordan eastward” (1:507).
Mather added another gloss that includes an excerpt from Henry Maundrell’s narrative of travel to the region (Maundrell 78-79). Maundrell describes the specific mountain, “the Quarantania, which, they say, is the Mountain into which the Devil took our Blessed Saviour” (79, c.f. “BA” 7: Matt. 4:11). Despite claiming that it did not matter, Mather could not resist adding this detail once he found it. This obsessiveness indicates the encyclopedic nature that Mather intended his commentary to have.

Other mysteries he considers not mysterious. He addresses the fact that more fragments remained after Christ fed five thousand than after he fed four thousand (“BA” 7: Luke 9:17, c.f. KJV Matt. 15:32-39, Mark 8:1-10, Matt. 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44). Citing Ambrose, he explains that the 4000 were with Jesus for three days and therefore needed more nourishment. Mather did not need Ambrose to reach this straightforward conclusion; he might have just compared the passages. In fact, Ambrose provides an allegorical reason, modern scholar John Moorhead explains. Ambrose argues that the five thousand who ate five loaves represent the five senses (Moorhead 89). He adds only as an aside that the four thousand who received seven loaves were resting; Ambrose suspects that the three days’ rest reflects their faith in Jesus’s resurrection on the third day (89). Mather deliberately oversimplifies Ambrose’s reading and narrows it down to the basic literal interpretation, stripping it of allegory. Ambrose serves only as an authority, not a real guide for Mather.

53 As England, France, Spain, and Holland settled colonies and companies around the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exploration by laypeople into exotic regions grew, as did its literary counterpart, travel writing. Maundrell was one of many to explore the Middle East and write about his travels. Mather uses travel narratives throughout his Bible commentary. See Kuehn and Smethurst, Travel Writing, Form, and Empire (2009).

54 Ambrose (339-397 C.E.), bishop of Milan, was seen as one of the fathers of the Catholic Church. His biographer attributes his fame to his exegesis: “Ambrose’s chief concern, the interpreting of the Bible, has been central to the western intellectual tradition” (Moorhead 3).
Like Ambrose, though, Mather suggests in his gloss on Matthew 14:20 that the fragments do have symbolic meaning, since “by ye Fragments here taken up, we are to understand ye more abtruse, obscure, Difficult parts of ye word, which are left by ye common people” (“BA” 7: Matt. 14:20). Mather claims to have this interpretation from “one of ye most pious & Learned Fathers” (“BA” 7: Matt. 14:20). He means Augustine, who, in his 24th Homily on John, provides a symbolic interpretation of the five loaves. Augustine’s editor summarizes: “The multiplication of the loaves signifies the exposition into many volumes of the five Books of Moses…. The ‘fragments’ are the truths of hidden import which the people cannot receive, and which were therefore entrusted to the twelve apostles” (Schaff 22). The editor notes that this allegorizing did not sit well with later Protestants who otherwise deeply admired the Bishop of Hippo (23). He quips that Luther interpreted Augustine’s exegesis as evidence that “a figure proves nothing” (quoted in Schaff 23).

Even if he could put Jesus on the top of the Temple, it was literally impossible for the devil to show him “all the kingdoms of the world” at once from one place, as Matthew relates (Matt. 4:8). Nevertheless, Mather tries to make the impossible possible. He suggests that the devil “might have unknown wayes, to Augment ye Object & Refract ye Medium” in order to reveal the “Grandeurs” of any one kingdom at a given time (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:8). Mather proposes as well that the devil tried a “Deceit of Sight” that took advantage of the “sinless Infirmity of Humanity” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:8).55 Perhaps not satisfied with either of these options, he shrugs that Matthew meant only the Roman empire, anyway, since “[t]he glory of the whole world, was in that Empire” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:8).56 He further supports this interpretation by quoting the

55 Lightfoot likewise remarks that “there was some jugling[sic] and delusion of the Devil in this business” but that it was “no Derogation to our Saviour at all,” since it “shewed the truth of his human nature, and neither sin nor imperfection at all” (1:509).
56 Lightfoot has the same conclusion in his harmony, including the quotation of Paterculus (1:508).
Roman historian Marcus Paterculus,⁵⁷ who subjectively calls the empire “Terrarum orbis Imperium” (qtd in “BA” 7: Matt. 4:8). Illustrating the collaborative nature of Bible commentaries, Mather presents several conclusions, not fully endorsing any of them. An open-ended approach lends itself to Toland’s suggestion that readers must use their own minds to interpret the Bible, but this Toland-friendly reading does not make Christianity less mysterious or the Bible’s meaning more transparent.

2.4 The Inconsistent Morality of Jesus

In Luke 16, Jesus tells a parable that appears to praise a dishonest steward. Jesus seems to condone the steward’s deception, which contradicts the morals of the New Testament as well as the Commandment not to bear false witness. In this parable, Jesus relates that the steward lowers the bills of his master’s debtors, effectively short-changing his master, yet the master commends the “wise” dealing by the steward (Luke 16:1-13). Mather suggests that “[t]he Intention of our Saviour, is to represent not only prudence, but also a Vast Contrivance, Industry, Resolution, and a certain Heroic effort of Soul, as necessary in them that would attain ye Kingdome of Heaven” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:1). His interlocutor asks why Jesus could not present an example of honest wisdom instead of one that is criminal. Mather concedes that the world provides many potential examples of honest industry and prudence, yet those would be less compelling than “ye most Extraordinary Subtilty, Transcendent Invention, and Exquisite Artifice” in the “Theeves, and Cheats” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:1). If Jesus means to praise industry in this parable, Mather adds, “There is no such Ingenuitie, or Vigorous Application, as is in these Folks” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:1).

⁵⁷ Velleius Paterculus (ca. 19 B.C.E. – 30 C.E.), a Roman soldier, senator, and historian, wrote Historia Romana, which was relatively unknown until it was republished by Beatus Rhenanus in the early sixteenth century (Yardley and Barrett 36). After that, his biographers write, “he did enjoy a certain vogue” and was cited by Dryden and Samuel Johnson (Yardley and Barrett 36).
He may have realized that this interpretation stretched credulity since it suggests that criminal activity has moral merit.

In another gloss on this parable, Mather cites an analogy from the classic rabbinic commentator David Kimchi, who likens the steward to humankind, which has been trusted by God to manage the world like a steward would manage an estate (“BA” 7: Luke 16:3). Mather likely borrowed Kimchi’s analogy, as it appears in Lightfoot’s *Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations* (1684). Kimchi concludes: “If hee[the steward] behave himself well, hee will find favour in ye eyes of our Lord. If ill, hee will remove him from his Stewardship” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:3, c.f. Lightfoot 2:450). This is an interesting perspective on humankind’s responsibility to maintain the Earth, although Mather does not offer further reflection. However, by borrowing this analogy from Kimchi, Mather further confirms his opinion that the dishonest steward performed well, even as he double-crossed his master. Possibly, the steward had performed well because he managed to collect the debts, and perhaps that success came from dropping the interest on the debts.

Mather implies in an additional gloss on the parable that the steward performed well because he improved the situation for everyone, not just the master. Mather examines Jesus’s conclusion to the parable: “The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). Quoting an anonymous biography that applies the passage to a deceased minister, Mather states: “This worthy man was wise for his generation & Exercised his Witt with much contrivance and much Diligence, that his generation, even ye Faithful people of God in the world might bee accommodated in all their Interests” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:8). Speaking of dishonesty, Mather himself deliberately misleads his reader when he introduces the biography,

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58 David Kimchi or Kimhi or Radak (ca. 1160-1235) was a rabbi at Narbonne and wrote commentaries on Chronicles, the Psalms, and the major prophets (Talmage 155). Despite Mather’s polemical religious antisemitism, he periodically cites Jews as exegetical authorities.
writing: “I have read that passage in the life of a Worthy man” (“BA” 7: Luke 16:8). In fact, the passage he quotes is not only one he read, but one he wrote! He connects the parable to Jonathan Mitchel in his famous *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) (2:105). As was common at the time, Mather often quotes without acknowledging his sources and sometimes without using quotation marks. As was less common in this period, but characteristic of Mather’s desire to maintain a façade of modesty, he occasionally quotes himself, even though the supposedly anonymous attributions are usually transparent.

The inconsistency in Jesus’s behavior appears in the other Gospels, as well. Because Mather faithfully believed that the four Gospels belonged together as a non-severable canon, he dismisses variations between the four narratives as deliberate. For example, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’s mother, Mary, is notably present as a mourner at Jesus’s execution and at his tomb, implying that she was one of his disciples. However, in the Gospel of John, when she speaks to Jesus at the wedding at Cana, he sharply rebukes her: “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” (John 2:4). Mather, supposing Jesus was responding to her request for wine rather than simply to her presence at the wedding, defends this remark as “A Rational Answer, to an Impertinent or unseasonable proposal” (“BA” 8: John 2:4). Mather’s interpretation of this passage might come from Matthew Henry’s similar reading in his *Commentary on the whole Bible* (1704). He adds that this rebuke illustrates Jesus’s independence of Mary since she “had no Authority over Him” (“BA” 8: John 2:4, c.f. Henry, John 2). This odd relationship raises a question about how insubordinate Jesus was to his parents in his youth, but instead of considering Jesus’s discipline, Mather adds a doctrinal level of interpretation. He explains, unkindly referring to the Roman Catholic doctrine of intercession, that Jesus foresaw that in “ye

59 Matthew Henry (1662-1714), a Presbyterian minister in Chester, England, most famous for this five-volume exposition on the Bible, begun in 1704 and completed by thirteen Independent ministers after his death (Wykes).
church of Rome,” there would be “an absurd & wicked Generation of Idolaters, who would prefer Mary above Jesus” and apply to her to “direct, order, procure for them, the kindnesses of our Lord-Re Redeemer” (“BA” 8: John 2:4). The rebuki ng of Mary, then, had a mystical significance, and “to Anticipate this Idolatry, was this passage, first Uttered, & then Recorded” (“BA” 8: John 2:4). Mather accepts not only Jesus’s words but the anecdote in the Gospel itself to be divinely inspired.

Since he chose to include and justify it, Mather likely recognized the harshness in Jesus’s address to his mother and its apparent contradiction of the commandment; he realized it seemed uncouth enough that it deserved an explanation. In fact, he suggests that the words should actually be translated as “What is that to mee & thee, woman?” (“BA” 8: John 2:4, c.f. Henry, John 2). He adds that “woman” was not a derogatory term in the first century. Although he claims “I infer nothing from it,” he points out that he has read of servants using that term to address their mistresses and even queens (“BA” 8: John 2:4). However, he evidently saw its derogatory connotation in his own time, because he concludes: “But, on the [term?] in general, I make [no?] Remark” (“BA” 8: John 2:4).

2.5 The Meaning of Jesus

It is apparent to modern Bible critics, as it was to exegetes in Mather’s time, that each Gospel presents a different – in some cases radically different – depiction of Jesus’s personality. Matthew presents Jesus as “a new Moses” whose five major didactic speeches parallel the five books of Moses (Ehrman, New Testament, 101). Mark depicts Jesus as the misunderstood and

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60 Henry also labels appeals to Mary as “that idolatry which he foresaw” and states that this rebuke “was plainly designed either to prevent or aggravate such gross idolatry, such horrid blasphemy” (Henry, John 2).

61 Perhaps guided by Henry, who mentions it as part of the rebuke: “He calls her woman, not mother” (Henry, John 2).

62 These words, written in the margin, are illegible.
longsuffering Son of God (Ehrman 70). Luke depicts Jesus as a prophet who, rejected by the Jews, shares his message with the Gentiles (Ehrman 123). Notably, in Matthew, Jesus emphasizes that he is the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Bible, while in Mark he constantly encourages his apostles not to tell anyone about his miracles, and in John he publicly draws attention to himself not only as the Messiah but as the Christ. Similarly, his fallible humanity is evident in the Synoptic Gospels, from his asking, “Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5:30) to his feeling “forsaken” by God on the cross (Matt. 27:46) to his not knowing the time of the Second Coming (Matt. 24:36, Mark 13:32). These depictions vary because each Gospel writer had a different intent.  

The Synoptic Gospels do not blatantly claim that Jesus was divine. First-century Jews had various expectations regarding the Messiah described by the prophets, ranging from a literal king to a war-waging judge who would restore the victory of the Jews over their enemies (Ehrman, *New Testament*, 69). As Bible scholar Bart Ehrman relates: “In no source prior to the writing of the New Testament, however, is there any reference to a future messiah who is to suffer and die for the sins of the people” (68). While passages in Psalm 22, Psalm 69, and Isaiah 53 propose that “the one who is truly righteous suffers,” which may have inspired the Christian idea, “the term ‘messiah’ never occurs in these passages” (68). The Synoptic writers seem to have all agreed that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jewish prophets, but the Messiah was only human. Trinitarian doctrine appears solely in John and the epistles. Ehrman notes, for example, in an analysis of the Gospel of John: “Even to the casual reader, the Fourth Gospel may seem somewhat different from the other three within the canon. Nowhere in the other Gospels is Jesus said to be the Word of God, the creator of the universe, the equal of God, or the one sent from heaven and soon to return” (Ehrman, *New Testament*, 158). Some modern high critics

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63 Mather’s commentary on the different emphasis of each Gospel is discussed in Chapter Five, Harmony.
consequently also hold that the account of Jesus’s resurrection was appended to Mark later (Ehrman 80).

In Mather’s time, radicals had begun to assert the lack of evidence of Jesus’s divinity; more and more prominent scholars like William Whiston⁶⁴ and Isaac Watts⁶⁵ seemed to be declaring themselves Arians.⁶⁶ In the early twentieth century, William Wrede proposed that even Jesus did not believe that he was the Messiah and that early Christians invented the connection after his death (Ehrman 75). Charles Blount (1654-1693) had already hinted as much in Mather’s day. In a 1679 letter, published in a 1695 collection of his works, Blount argues that while Jesus’s miracles convinced the Jews that he was the Messiah, “I think he never directly told any he was so, but the Woman of Samaria” (164).

Mather had no doubts of Jesus’s divinity or of its evidence in all four Gospels, and he assumed that the Gospel writers all believed in it. He openly acknowledges the difference between John and the other canonical Gospels, but the differences among the Synoptic Gospels he treats as parts of a single unified narrative. Echoing common beliefs of his time about the history of the Gospels, Mather holds that John was written in response to the other three. Citing

⁶⁴ William Whiston (1667-1752) declared himself anti-Trinitarian in 1710 and lost his professorship at Cambridge due to heresy (Snobelen).
⁶⁵ Isaac Watts (1674-1748), raised a Dissenter in Southampton, England, was a private tutor then an Independent minister beginning in 1699 in London, at the Mark Lane church where Cromwell’s associates worshipped (Rivers). He is perhaps most famous today for his poetry and hymns. He remained with the same congregation all his life (Rivers). According to his biographer, “he struggled to find a way of explicating the doctrine of the Trinity that would keep him within the bounds of orthodoxy, but these attempts aroused the suspicions of the rigidly orthodox” (Rivers). Mather, who corresponded with Watts, was among the rigid (Rivers). Watts also wrote to Mather’s peers in Boston, ministers Thomas Prince and Benjamin Colman, and he donated forty-nine books to Yale (Rivers).
⁶⁶ After Arius, a fourth-century Alexandrian preacher who publicly posited that the Word could not be God but instead was a mediator between God and the world (Norris 17). He added that the Word was created – not existing eternally like God the Father (Norris 18). Arius sparked a debate among his contemporaries, and historian Richard Norris comments: “It was this doctrine which the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) repudiated in its famous creed, which declared that the Logos is not a creature but is eternally born out of God himself and is therefore divine in the same sense as the Father” (18). So-called Arians of the eighteenth century rejected various assertions, such as that Jesus was divine at all, or that Jesus had always existed. They were not an organized group with defined doctrines.
Clement of Alexandria\(^{67}\) as his source for this information, Mather relates that John noticed “[t]hat in ye other Gospels, there were Ταθωμχζικλ, The things pertaining to our Lords Humane Nature,” and chose to write “A Spiritual Gospel,” both “at the Request of his Friends” and “Inspired by the Holy Spirit” (“BA” 8: John 1:1). Likewise, citing Epiphanius\(^{68}\) and Jerome, he suggests that John wrote to counter the Ebionites who believed “that CHRIST had no Being before He was born of Mary” (“BA” 8: John 1:1). This explanation, written on an insert, and therefore possibly a later addition, stands in stark contrast to his gloss on Jesus’s refutation of Mary. In this case, Mather depicts John as a historical figure responding to the problem of his own time rather than prophetically dismissing the charges of eighteenth-century deists. Mather also cites “ecclesiastical history” that John requested a public day of prayer and was “honoured with a satisfactory Revelation from God” before he began writing (“BA” 8: John 1:1). Ironically, in handling Jesus’s inconsistent behavior, Mather offers an answer that bears resemblance to true high criticism: “Perhaps no one general Answer will do” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). He recognizes that the specific context is needed in order to understand each passage.

2.6 The Secrecy of Jesus

Mather clearly had personal motivations – chief among them a desire to make the Bible simultaneously appear completely rational and infallible. This intention is apparent in his reading of Mark 1:44, Jesus’s command to a leper to not tell anyone about his miraculous healing. Mather explains, without citing any other source, that the leper only needed to maintain secrecy temporarily because “[t]he priests were such envious & venemous wretches,” that if they had

\(^{67}\) Clement (150-215 C.E.), well-versed in Greek philosophy and literature, devoted his life to converting Hellenistic pagans to Christianity (Osborn 2).

\(^{68}\) Epiphanius (310-403 C.E.), bishop of Salamis, defended orthodoxy and was seen as a father of the Catholic Church as he combated Arians and Origenists, and, more controversially, John Chrysostom (Saltet).
learned about the means of his cure before giving him his oblation, “their Envy would have prompted them to have denied unto ye man ye Liberties of a Restored Leper” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). This reasoning is based solely on this narrative and an assumption about the priests, suggesting then that the reason for Jesus’s command was self-evident.

Mather adds more detail, though no further justification for this conclusion, in his gloss on this miracle as related in Matthew 8:4. Mather states, as he does on Mark 1:44, that Jesus did not want the priests to learn about the miraculous healing until they had already declared the leper clean (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:4). Mather notes that the priests were “at Jerusalem, which was a pretty way from Galilee, where the cure was wrought” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:4). The leper therefore had good reason to fear that the story would precede him. Mather suggests that if the priests learned that the leper was cured by a miracle, they would reject him, just out of spite towards Jesus, against whom they were “fill’d with so much maliquity” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:4). That is why Jesus commanded the leper to keep the miracle secret until he had been declared clean; Jesus sought to protect the leper, not himself.

In his gloss on Mark 1:44, Mather lists other miracles that Jesus concealed. He explains that the healing of the blind men at Matt. 9:30 was suppressed because “[t]he privacy of ye place & ye way wherein the miracle was done for them, would have given the wicked Jewes occasion to have suggested a subornation in ye case” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). Unfortunately, Mather does not explain how healing blindness would be considered a crime. He only adds that this “might” also be why Jesus conceals the healing of a deaf man in Mark 7:35. Elsewhere, his interlocutor asks why Jesus “forbid the publication of His Miracles; which yet He wrought, that His Divine Mission might be proved from them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 9:30). Mather answers, quoting in Latin and then translating “my admirable Witsius”: “Our Lord had Glorious Reasons, with Relation to
The only remarkable difference in this gloss is that Mather uses less invective language; here he calls the plotters “malicious people” (“BA” 7: Matt. 9:30). Explaining why Jesus would ask for miracles to be concealed, Mather describes the other miracles hidden by Jesus. He argues that the healing of the man with the withered hand was kept quiet because the Pharisees were conspiring to murder Jesus, “And an unseasonable Noise about His miracle, might irritate their Fury to such a praecipitation of the murder” (“BA” 7: Matt. 9:30). It hardly makes sense that Jesus had to command silence in order to prevent being crucified too early, particularly since the Pharisees witnessed the healing and that appears to have been what actually caused them to conspire: “Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him” (Matt. 12:13-14, c.f. Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11).

Mather evidently derived this interpretation of Jesus’s motivation from the paraphrase by professor John Hales on the twelfth chapter of Matthew. In his gloss on Matt. 12:50, Mather lists “diverse Thoughts, which are somewhat curious and Singular” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Among them is the answer to “Why did our Lord, when He had healed people of their Diseases, Charge them that they should not make him known?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Mather paraphrases Hales’s commentary. According to Hales, Jesus feared “Violence” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50).71 He both concealed his miracles and left Jerusalem in order to stay safe while he was “waiting for the

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69 From a dissertation by Witsius titled “De miraculis Jesu” (Witsius, Meletemata, 347).
70 John Hales (1584-1656), a scholar who worked on the King James Version of the Bible in 1611 (Greenslade). He graduated M.A. from Oxford in 1605, was professor of Greek at Eton College from 1615 until 1619 (Greenslade). Hales claimed that all necessary ideas were available in several plain places in the Bible in his 1617 sermon, Abuses of Hard Places of Scripture (Greenslade). He was accused of Socinianism but denied it, although he believed that all people had the faculty of reason. He was a reluctant writer and his works were not collected until 1765 (Greenslade).
71 Hales writes that based on the previous verse, Jesus thought “He might be safer from all violence, and force” (106).
Repentance and Amendment of the *Pharisees* (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). However, Jesus “meant only that they should not discover where He was” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Hales 107). He wanted to maintain his liberty “until such Time, as Resisting ye Light and Testimony of their own Conscience, they rendred themselves more worthy to be Left unto ye Guilt of that Innocent Blood, which afterwards they brought down Upon their own Heads” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Hales 107). Although this conclusion contradicts what Mather says elsewhere about the meaning of Jesus’s command for silence, Mather argues that Jesus wanted the stories of his miracles to spread so that the Pharisees, by resisting increasingly compelling evidence of Jesus’s being the Messiah, became increasingly guilty of obstinacy. Mather, still citing Hales, adds that this desire to operate secretly also fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah 42 related at Matt. 12:19, as Mather phrases it: that “He shall cause no Tumult; or popular Hubbub” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, *KJV* Isa. 42:2, c.f. Hales 109). Mather adds, quoting Matt. 12:20, that “This He will do, til He send out Judgment unto Victory” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50; *KJV* Isa. 42:3 reads “truth” instead of “victory”). Mather debates whether “judgment” refers to the Gospel or to “Discussion of a cause,” and concludes that the passage in Matthew “may be read thus; *Till He shall carry away the Judgment with Victory*” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Jesus’s “patience” towards the Jews, Mather celebrates, “gives Him a Victory” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50).  

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72 Although Mather includes without comment Hales’s apparently inaccurate transcription of Isaiah, Hales addresses a different but related issue from the same passage. Hales’s interlocutor remarks: “Methinks it seems a little strained sense, to be put upon those words, as you read them, *Till he shall send forth Judgment*” and proposes they read “*Till he shall carry away the Judgment with Victory, or, to Victory*” (113). Hales answers himself positively, confirming that the Greek word can mean either understanding (113). Most tellingly, Hales adds: “But you must bear with more faults in the Translation of your Testament than this,” and promises to show more (113). His interlocutor concurs innocently that “though I have a very great opinion of those men who did translate the Testament; yet I would be loth to be a loser by my reverence” (114).  

73 Hales: “And in this Judgment Christ got the Victory, when with all Patience and Long-sufferance, with all Gentleness and Meekness, He endured the perverse and crooked dispositions of the People of the Jews” (112).
Mather comes to the same conclusion regarding the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter, “which might unseasonably provoke ye Rage of His Adversaries” (“BA” 7: Matt. 9:30). Mather adds, “Our Lord’s Empire over Death also, must not be much published before His own Resurrection from ye Dead. Then was ye Time for it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 9:30). There seems to be no reason for Jesus to want to conceal his ability to raise the dead before his resurrection, but even if he did, certainly he could have waited until he had risen from the grave to perform those resurrections. Elsewhere, Mather remarks that Jesus tried to keep the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter quiet “that so ye malice of the Government might not shorten His opportunities to do Good in ye world” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). By making Jesus’s mission that of doing good, Mather provides a reasonable explanation for Jesus’s risking performing miracles. Likewise, in his gloss on the raising of Jairus’s daughter in Mark, Mather quotes Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae. Aquinas himself quotes Pope Gregory I74 to the effect that while Jesus knew that Jairus had no intention of keeping the secret, Jesus was offering a good example of humility (“BA” 7: Mark 5:43; c.f. Aquinas, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 104, Article 4 and Gregory, Moral 35).

It seems particularly ironic that Jesus would heal “one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech” if it was so vital for that person to remain silent, especially since the “multitude” who saw it “published it” anyway, despite his ineffective command (Mark 7:32-36). Curiously, Mather suggests that Jesus concealed the healing of a blind man in Mark 8:23 because of the “unworthiness of the hardened wretches in ye Town, to be treated with another miracle, after their Contempt of the Former” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). Since the people would not revere Jesus’s miracles either way, it hardly seems punishment to keep them ignorant.

74 Pope Gregory I (ca. 540-604), abbot at St. Andrew’s in Rome, gave lectures on Job published as Magna Moralia (Huddleston). Elected Pope in 590, he wrote a guide of duties for bishops, Liber pastoris curae, which remained the textbook of bishops for centuries (Huddleston).
In a gloss on Mark 1:44, Mather claims more logically that witnesses were only forbidden from publicizing “His being ye Son of God. This was a truth more seasonably to be inculcated, after His Resurrection from ye Dead” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:44). This action is more in character with the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, who tells his apostles that he is the son of God but seems not to share it with anyone else (Mark 8:29-30). In his gloss on Mark 5:43, Mather explains why Jesus chose to perform miracles for certain people: for every martyrdom in the New Testament, there is “a miraculous Resurrection, quickly following” (“BA” 7: Mark 5:43). Mather notes that “[a]fter ye Martyrdom of ye Infants in Bethlehem, you shortly have ye Resurrection of ye young man of Naim, and ye Daughter of Jairus” (“BA” 7: Mark 5:43). Not only do these events appear in different Gospels, but in linear time they were decades apart, since the slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2 occurs when Jesus is a baby and the raising of the young man of Naim in Luke 7 and Jairus’s daughter in Mark 5 occur when Jesus is an adult, having begun his ministry (Matt. 2:16, Luke 7:15, Mark 5:42). While Mather implies that Jesus ensured a balance of living and dead, this supposed justice does raise questions, as Mather apparently saw, regarding why Jesus chose to resurrect adults, not children. Mather explains that Jairus’s daughter was the youngest person to be resurrected in the New Testament because “the Lord would work this miracle only upon such, as had the Discretion, and ye Memory, to apprehend ye Grandeur of His Operation” even though they were not permitted to tell (“BA” 7: Mark 5:43).

2.7 Conclusion

Although he was writing at the same time as John Toland was criticizing the New Testament’s lack of clarity, and shortly after John Tillotson endorsed Christianity and the Bible as reasonable, Mather’s defense of the Bible’s rationality relies primarily on conservative
exegetes: Hales, Lightfoot, and a variety of Church Fathers. Seeing, like Toland did, that Biblical figures did not follow what in Mather’s time would have been considered consistent behavior, Mather tried to explain each story. In every case, however, instead of answering questions, he unintentionally raises more, effectively supporting Toland’s charge that the Bible must be interpreted through individual reasoning rather than by the Church and its authorities.

3 CHAPTER THREE: MIRACLES

3.1 Introduction

One of the pillars of biblical authority under greatest attack during Mather’s lifetime was the veracity of miracles. Mather’s Bible commentary demonstrates his perpetual struggle with this hermeneutical problem. In the Gospels in particular, miracles provided proof of Jesus’s mission and divinity. Miracle stories not only needed to be defended for the sake of the Bible’s reliability, but also to prove the authenticity of Christianity. Mather defends Jesus’s miracles principally by focusing on their harmony with the rest of the Bible and with rationality.

This chapter examines Mather’s apologetic analysis of miracles in the Synoptic Gospels. Because Mather focuses on the symbolic meaning of the miracles rather than on their physical nature, his glosses overwhelmingly resort to expecting his readers to put faith in the mysteries of the Bible. He dismisses critical materialists outright and emphasizes the power of the spiritual world, attributing the possessions and diseases described in the Gospels to evil spirits rather than natural causes. Rather than appreciating critics’ assertions that miracles do not prove the truth of Christianity, Mather asserts that miracles are in fact evidence of Christianity’s validity. However, in explaining the symbolism of Jonah and the whale, Mather himself gets swallowed up by detail. He not only attaches significance to minor and seemingly coincidental parallels between Jonah and Jesus, but he deliberates obsessively regarding whether Jonah was swallowed by a
whale or by some other marine animal and how long Jonah actually remained inside that animal. Even the miracles without apparent connection to the Hebrew Bible, he holds, are self-evidently valid, and he fails to come up with a persuasive argument about why readers should accept the authenticity of Jesus’s miracles yet deny accounts of miracles performed by pagan figures. He ultimately concludes, after a lengthy discussion of miracles, that faith is required for miracles to hold validity. Instead of meeting critics on their own turf and providing empirical data to support his interpretation of miracles, he suggests that appreciation of miracles comes only through God-granted grace.

Mather asserts that, through Jesus, miracles reappear in human history after 800 years, with the last known performer of miracles having been the prophet Elisha (“BA” 8: John 3:2). Mather argues that the Messiah was not looked for in Elisha’s time “because ye Time of Day for His Coming, was as yett farr Enough off,” so the miracles would not have misled the Jews, but the reappearance of miracles in Jesus’s time would “Raise ye Attention of ye Faithful, unto ye Messiah” (“BA” 8: John 3:2). Similarly, Jesus increased the intensity and significance of his miracles throughout the Gospels. In his gloss on John 3:2, Mather argues that Jesus “began His miracles, with providing ye Aliments of ye Bodies. . . . And Lastly, Having helped ye Living, Hee went on to Raise the Dead” (“BA” 8: John 3:2). Mather contradicts himself by suggesting that Jesus only raises the dead toward the end of his ministry, since in his gloss on Mark 5:4, Mather argues that the raising of Jairus’s daughter came shortly after the slaughter of the innocents by Herod (“BA” 7: Mark 5:4).

Identifying a parallel between the Old and New Testaments, Mather remarks that the first performer of miracles in each is the person who delivers the law; for that reason, John the Baptist

75 Witsius proposed that the last miracle performed before Jesus’s conception was in 1 Kings 13:20, eight hundred years before Jesus (Serle 1:79).
does not perform miracles (“BA” 8: John 3:2). Mather implies, too, that the resurrections in the Gospels deliberately parallel those in the Hebrew Bible, pointing out the “notable marks of Resemblance, between the Three Raised under ye Old Testament, and the Three Raised under ye New” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:15). However, the parallels appear to be coincidental at best: “The First, Raised under ye Old Testament, was ye Son of a Widow, and so was ye First Raised under ye New” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:15). He mentions as well that the third person raised in both the Old and New Testaments was “in his Grave, before hee was Raised,” hardly an unusual circumstance for a dead person (“BA” 7: Luke 7:15). These tenuous parallels are one of Mather’s ways of illustrating, however ineffectually, the continuity between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

Early Enlightenment scientists who believed that God had created an autonomously functioning universe with natural laws challenged the historical reality of miracles. Historian Robert Burns argues in *The Great Debate on Miracles* that orthodox Christians, influenced by evidentialism, increasingly pointed to miracles as evidence of Christianity’s veracity (18). Wishing to provide an empirical example of revelation, they claimed that miracles were proof that the Bible’s messages were from God (18). On the other hand, radicals charged that miracles were insufficient evidence. Burns summarizes the radical stance as follows: “The major concern of the Deists throughout the controversy was to nullify this evidentialist use of miracle stories, rather than to demonstrate the unreasonableness of belief in miracles per se” (70). In the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, even radicals like Toland mostly did not

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76 The stories appear in 1 Kings 17 and Luke 7. Mather explains that the first is the widow of Sarepta with whom Elijah is staying (“BA” 7: Luke 7:15). In 1 Kings 17, Elijah prays for her son and he comes back to life (1 Kings 17:19-22). In Luke 7, Jesus comes across a burial at Nain and heals the dead man (Luke 7:12-15).

77 The stories are in 2 Kings 13:21 and John 11:43-44. The individual in 2 Kings was thrown into Elisha’s grave and came to life upon making contact with Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:21). The individual in the Gospel, Lazarus, had been laid in a tomb (John 11:43-44).
question the scientific possibility of Jesus performing miracles (71). Only a minority outright rejected the idea of miracles altogether during Mather’s lifetime (82). Consequently, Mather does not feel pressure to prove the possibility of Jesus’s miracles, and instead he focuses on the importance of miracles to Christianity.

In his references to critics, Mather clarifies the points on which he was unwilling to compromise in his rationalization of the Bible. He states furiously that radicals “pretend, that all ye Divels cast out by our Lord, were no more than certain Diseases” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:22). Thomas Hobbes infamously proposed that Jesus healed the ill and that witnesses ignorantly assumed it was possession:

For they that see any strange, and unusuall ability, or a defect in a mans mind; unlesse they see withall, from what cause it may probably proceed, can hardly think it naturall; and if not naturall, they must needs thinke it supernaturall; and then what can it be, but that either God, or the Divell is in him? (144)

Hobbes applies this theory directly to anecdotes in the Gospels. He cites Mark 3:21, John 10:20, and Matthew 12:43 as examples of Jesus healing the ill “as if they were possest; and not as if they were mad” (145). Jesus does so, Hobbes thinks, because “Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God; and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects” (145). In other words, the Bible is a scam created to fool the ignorant and naïve into subordination to the Church. While Hobbes unsurprisingly received plenty of heated responses, Mather might have read his work directly. Mather writes, regarding the apparition of spirits in Luke 24, that “ye wretched Hobbs” thought “the Internal Apparition of Spirits” were only “Phantasmata” (“BA” 7: Lk 23:37). On the other hand, if he had actually read Leviathan, in calling him only “wretched,” Mather let Hobbes off surprisingly easy, considering the harsher
terms he used for Jews both ancient and contemporary. At any rate, while Mather does not mention him in connection with miracles, Hobbes inspired later radicals to examine the miracle stories critically and question what exactly Jesus had healed.

It is significant that Mather proves unwilling to accept that the healing of diseases could be the same as Jesus’s other healings of the ill. Instead, Mather clings to biblical literalism and, breaking away from his ordinarily moderate tone in the commentary, reveals his outrage at the radicals, labelling them “Unreasonable men,” “ungodly Sadducees of our Dayes,” and “Absurd people” who are “scarce worthy of an Answer” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:22). Mather routinely used the term “Sadducee” in his other works to refer to materialists, and by applying that term here he reveals what was at stake in his eyes: if he agreed that the “divels” were really only “distempers,” he implicitly supported the materialists’ conclusion that devils did not truly exist.78

Although he might have agreed about the healings without making that concession, here he reveals that he equated literalism with belief in the supernatural. He argues, in fact, that even in curing diseases, Jesus was casting out devils: “The Ejection of proper Divels may bee implied, in our Lords curing of ye Maladies here insisted on” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:22). He contradicts his own scientific beliefs, as illustrated in his medical guidebook, Angel of Bethesda (finished 1724, published 1972), by claiming that “they were Evil Spirits, that were ye Instruments of ye Divine vengeance in-inflict of those Infirmities & Plagues” (“BA” 7: Luke 7:22).79

78 In his introduction to Mather’s commentary on Genesis, Smolinski also addresses what was at stake for Mather in the miracles debate (BA I: 105-112).

79 Mather may have believed, as he did regarding laypeople working miracles, that diseases operated differently in Jesus’s time than in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, Mather is remarkable for being among the first published writers to suggest that smallpox spread through germs. His idea was so unprecedented that he did not even have a name for what he saw (Jones 348 n. 5). After describing how smallpox spread from Africa to Europe, he announces: “It begins now to be Vehemently Suspected that the Small-Pox may be more of an Animalculated Business, than we have been generally aware of. The Millions of [blank] which the Microscopes discover in the Pustules, have Confirmed the Suspicion. . . And so, we are insensibly drawn into New Sentiments, about the Way of its Conveyance” (94).
determined to fight materialism\textsuperscript{80} that he retreats into a conservative reading that belies his own medical practices.

Mather also explains why “it should seem as if ye Number of these miserable \textit{Energumens} was then increased, above what has been usual in other Ages” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:16). Revealing his view of the working of evil spirits, Mather suggests that the number was greater because they were more welcome in the world at that time. He claims that “there may bee something in ye Conjecture of ye Learned Bartholinus,” whom he quotes in Latin to the effect that ancient Jews enjoyed performing magic (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:16).\textsuperscript{81} He includes the same quotation in his \textit{Magnalia Christi Americana}, only there Mather translates it as well so that he can spell out his point: “The Jews, by the frequent use of magical tricks, called in the devils among them” (1:185). Instead of basing this assumption on prejudice, Mather here has the integrity to cite ancient sources. He relates that the Talmud not only mentions use of charms and amulets but tells the history of cases of witchcraft, including the discovery of eighty sorceresses in one day (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:16). He rests his case: “Tis not at all to be wondred at, if possessions were frequent among a people who had by such Familiarities with Evil Spirits Invited them in among themselves” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:16). Furthermore, he suggests that devils sought to reside in the idle. Quoting the anonymously-published\textsuperscript{82} book called \textit{St. Paul the Tent-Maker} (1690),

\textsuperscript{80} The importance of this debate is further discussed in Chapter Seven, Evidentialism.

\textsuperscript{81} Mather likely means Thomas Bartholin (1616-1680), a physician whose works Mather cites in \textit{The Christian Philosopher} (Solberg, Philosopher, 383).

\textsuperscript{82} Written by Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), a Whig and Dissenter, who was a businessman in London and a political writer, now most famous for authoring \textit{Robinson Crusoe} (1719) and \textit{Moll Flanders} (1722) (Backscheider). In \textit{St. Paul the tent-maker}, Defoe asserts that industry and religion support each other, with examples from Geneva, Holland, and New England, concluding that idleness is “‘the Parent of all Sin’” (quoted in Bastian 147). His biographer claims that in this book, Defoe “expands in a relaxed manner some of his thoughts on his main interests in life – trade and industry, society and religion – and tries to bring them into a related system” (Bastian 148). This book sounds like Mather’s kind of read, even though the work itself is out of place with the rest of Mather’s bibliography.
Mather points out that the possessed were always unemployed. Sounding like a dyed-in-the-wool Protestant, he suggests that “lawful Employment” could be “an Antidote and counter-charm, against the Entrance of those Evil Spirits” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:28). Similarly, in a 1701 sermon, A Christian At His Calling, Mather notes that every person should have an occupation, for the good of mankind: “Ordinarily, no man does Nothing: If men have nothing to do, they’ll soon do Too much; do what they ought not” (41). Such seems to have been the case in Jesus’s Israel. Evidently feeling that evil could be brought into a community through the will of the people, this gloss sheds some light on how such an intelligent man could naively accept the quick spread of witchcraft in Salem in 1692, a year before he began writing this Bible commentary.

Although Mather blames the presence of evil spirits on the people’s participation in witchcraft, he also argues that evil spirits have the power to choose to increase their presence. He explains that since God chose to be present on Earth in a human body of Jesus, so too did the devil choose to occupy human bodies at that time. Through possessions, evil spirits “Blasted ye Miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ” and gained the support of Pharisees (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:16). For these reasons, Mather insisted that Jesus’s healing miracles were expelling demons, and his miracles expelling demons were not merely healing diseases.

Mather alludes to the materialism controversy when he explains why Jesus, listing all of his miracles in a speech for John the Baptist’s disciples, did not include the casting out of demons. Jesus tells the disciples only about the miracles that were specifically prophesied in

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83 Mather’s role in the witchcraft episode, during which nineteen people were executed for witchcraft, has been discussed ad nauseum. Under pressure from the judges and governor, Mather agreed to write a work defending the legal procedures in Salem, but, historian Kenneth Murdock aptly observes, he was “clearly terrified and unhappy” (11). The finished product, Wonders of the Invisible World (1693) was, Murdock notes, “strangely confused and hastily written” (10). Although belief in witchcraft was normal in colonial New England, the Salem witchcraft trials loom large in public memory in part because so many individuals, relative to the size of Massachusetts Bay’s population, were convicted and executed in only a few months, without physical evidence.
Isaiah 35:5-6: “They were *Those Works*, which ye *Messias* was to do according to ye praedictions of ye Divine and Ancient Oracles” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5). Likewise, “Tho’ *preaching of the Gospel to ye poor* bee not a *Miracle*, yett it might well bee mentioned by our Lord, as a Thing very Remarkable” as well as a fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, which promises to “preach good tidings to the meek” and “proclaim liberty to the captives” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5, c.f. *KJV* Isa. 61:1). Mather adds an enlightening embrace of pacifism: Jesus “was not one that should Employ His *Arms* against the *powerful* oppressors of ye Earth, but one that should Employ His *Hours*, in ye Instructing of ye *poor*” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5). Nevertheless, Mather acknowledges that the translation may be at fault. He explains that the Greek was “by some rendred, *The poor preach ye Gospel*” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5). The fulfillment of the prophecies then would mean not only Jesus’s miracles, but the successful ministries of the apostles and the early Christian church. After all, Mather notes, the “power and success” of the poor fishermen’s preaching was indeed remarkable: “And when wee consider what *poverty* ye most faithful preachers of ye Gospel have in all Ages been compelled unto, ye *Zeal* with which they have prosecuted the Holy Designs of their Ministry, under so much *Temptation*, may, for ought I know, pass also for something little short of *miracle*” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5). He understates the situation, perhaps out of humility or perhaps out of unwillingness to praise the church more than Jesus, but this interpretation of Jesus’s list allows all of the items, including preaching to the poor, to count as miracles.

### 3.2 Why Miracles

In his effort to prove the Bible’s literalism, Mather explains the specific purpose of some of Jesus’s miracles. While in his Old Testament glosses, Mather contemplates how supernatural events, such as the Noahic Flood, might be physically possible, the major issue in the Gospels

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84 See, for example, *BA I*: Gen. 7:6, and Smolinski’s discussion, *BA I*: 77-112.
is whether the performance of each miracle makes sense. His interpretations rely on symbolic explanations – for Mather, miracles represent both the fulfillment of the divine promises made in the Old Testament and the making of new promises in the Gospels.

In a gloss on Matthew, Mather proposes that Jesus’s miracles have symbolic meaning, as they are all “pledges of Spiritual” miracles (“BA” 7: Matt.11:5). Quoting Edward Polhill,85 who cites Estius,86 he remarks on the symbolism of Jesus’s healing miracles, such as “Restoring Light unto ye Blind” as clear “Types of giving the Vital Principles of Grace” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5, Polhill 113, Estius 2:337). He adds too that Jesus’s miraculous assistance to the apostles, such as in having Peter walk on water, “shadow forth, the giving of Auxiliary Grace unto ye Saints” (“BA” 7: Matt. 11:5). Unlike the miracles in the Old Testament, Jesus’s miracles are not primarily intended to demonstrate his power, but to demonstrate his promise of spiritual redemption.

Jesus’s miracles also demonstrate his consistency with the Hebrew Bible. Although the New Testament miracles are less awesome than the flooding of the Earth, the stopping of the sun, and the parting of the Red Sea, Mather argues that they fit the Old Testament narrative. Mather explains that “Our Lord-Redeemer, after His Entrance upon His public ministry, did Reiterate seven sorts of Miracles, which had been done in ye Dayes of the Old Testament, but Hee still gave a greater Extent & Accent, unto every one of these miracles” (“BA” 7: Matt. 14:29). Mather notes as examples the healing of Miriam and Naaman of leprosy, and Jesus’s healing “no Less than Ten at a Time” (“BA” 7: Matt. 14:29). The New Testament miracles are

85 Edward Polhill, Speculum Theologiae in Christo: or, a View of Some Divine Truths (1678). Polhill (1622-ca. 1694) was a county judge in Sussex, England, during the Interregnum, and a lifelong member of the Church of England but sympathetic to Independent ministers (Black). Though a lay person, he wrote several volumes on practical theology and sided with John Owen against William Sherlock in the 1670s debate about the relationship between faith and works (Black).
86 Willem Hessels van Est (1542-1613), a Dutch Catholic commentator on the Pauline epistles (Aherne). Polhill appears to quote Estius’s Commentarii in IV libras Sententarium Petri Lombardi (1615).
by no means overshadowed by the older miracles; rather, the sorts of miracles that Jesus
performs are done on a greater scale.

Mather’s interpretation of the catching of fish in Luke exemplifies these two meanings
behind Jesus’s miracles. Jesus orders the apostles to let down their nets, even though the
fishermen had been trying in vain all night to catch fish. That the fishermen do capture many fish
once Jesus commands them is not physically impossible or difficult to imagine, but it had
seemed unlikely (Luke 5:3-7). Consequently, even though it does not violate natural laws, this
story can be considered a miracle, with a symbolic meaning and a connection to Old Testament
miracles. Because he does not need to provide a scientific explanation to detail how such an
event might have happened, Mather focuses on why it happened. In his gloss on Luke 5:5,
Mather explains that “The Design of our Lord, was not only to work a Miracle, but also to
preach a Mystery” (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). He argues that the two ships filled with fish are symbolic
of Christianity’s two audiences: “the church of ye Jewes & the church of ye Gentiles also”
(“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). Augustine thus reads the passage, noting: “What are the two boats? Two
peoples; the two peoples for whom the Lord became the cornerstone” (134). Mather accepts that
even Peter “did not Enough Consider ye Mystery of it” (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). Because Peter failed
to see the significance, he later had a vision, related in Acts 10:11-16 (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5).
Although Mather writes this gloss to illustrate “ye Design of our Lord, in helping of Peter to
such a mighty Draught of Fishes,” and tries to make sense of why Jesus would cause Peter to
receive an unhelpful amount of fish – so many that both ships nearly sank – in a miracle that
Peter did not understand, Mather’s symbolic explanation implies that Jesus was unsuccessful.
Since Jesus was supposed to be omniscient, it hardly seems logical for him to perform a miracle
that he knew would fail in its purpose.
Mather also uses this story to identify a parallel between the Old and New Testaments, except in this case it is by means of contrast: “Behold, those Creatures coming in Homage to ye Second Adam, that never came so to ye First: for, only Birds & Beasts came to Receive their Names from him” (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). Here Mather implies that Adam did not name fish, even though in Genesis, Adams is said to name “every living creature” (Gen 2:19). It seems misleading that Mather would misconstrue the Genesis story in order to find a parallel with the Gospel story. Perhaps even more far-fetched – and an example of possible wishful thinking – is Mather’s other conclusion in this gloss: “Behold, an Intimation, How our Lord Jesus Christ, will provide for His ministers, if they faithfully obey & follow Him” (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). Since Mather does not elaborate, it is unclear whether he means that Jesus will provide material rewards or followers, but in either case, it contradicts Mather’s interpretation of his own experience as well as the expectations he encourages in his Bonifacius and Manudctio ad Ministerium, where he advises his readers that good behavior is seldom rewarded or appreciated.

3.3 The Jonah Saga

Mather also remarks upon a supposed parallel with the story of Jonah, famously swallowed by a whale. In his gloss on the Hebrew Bible story, Mather argues that Jonah was swallowed by a shark, not a whale. Mather comments that “Whales visit not ye sea, where Jonah’s Disaster befel him” (“BA” 6: Jonah 1:17). He dismisses the possibility of the

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87 In Bonifacius (1710), his guidebook on living morally, Mather states: “I will not yet propose the REWARD of well-doing, and the glorious things which the mercy and truth of God will perform for those who devise good; because I would have to do with such as esteem it a sufficient reward to itself” (20). He also warns: “After all the generous essays and labours to do good that may fill your lives, your people will probably treat you with ingratitude…. They will neglect you; they will oppress you” (90). However, “the more patient you are under ill usage, the more you exhibit a glorious Christ to your people” (90).

88 In Manudctio ad Ministerium (1726), his guidebook for aspiring ministers, he warns: “You must not be so weak as to imagine, that this way of living will recommend you to the favour of this world. A sedulous doer of good will certainly find himself more exposed than other men, to be ill-spoken of” (91).
supernatural intervention of a mammal that does not belong in that place, in favor of arguing that a fish native to that area would be more probable. He adds that, furthermore, whales have throats “so narrow that ye single Arm or Leg of a Man could scarce go through it” ("BA" 6: Jonah 1:17). Mather agrees with Samuel Bochart\(^89\) that Jonah’s sea creature was “the Cetaceous kind,” specifically a “Shark,” or “Carcharias,” which were plentiful in the Mediterranean and Red Sea ("BA" 6: Jonah 1:17). Mather paraphrases Bochart, who sharply criticizes ancient historians for claiming that whales can swallow vessels (Bochart, 1712, 742). Instead of a whale, Jonah was swallowed by a large fish.

Consistent with that belief, Mather suggests in his gloss on Jesus’s fish-catching miracle in Luke that fish are associated with preaching: “Behold, ye different case of Jonah, and of Simon bar-Jonah: the one was caught of a Fish, when hee did refuse to preach; upon his being sent thereunto; the other caught Fish in good store, for his Encouragement to preach, when sent unto it” (“BA” 7: Luke 5:5). In fact, there is no parallel between the stories; Peter merely catches fish when Jesus commands him to, and, in this case, according to Mather, the fish represent believers. Jonah, on the other hand, was caught by a sea creature when he fled from his duty, and in this case the fish symbolizes God’s vengeance. The only similarity between the stories is that they contain sea creatures.

Mather enjoyed drawing parallels, however. He also exclaims, just as illogically: “It is very remarkable. Jonah preached The Destruction of Ninive at Forty Dayes. Now, Forty Years after this preaching of our Saviour, there came on the Destruction of Jerusalem” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). Because both stories have a narrative of prophecy and destruction, and the number forty, Mather sees a relationship between them.

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\(^{89}\) Samuel Bochart (1599-1667) was a Huguenot geographer who collected data about the Middle East, particularly from ancient sources (Sheehan 203).
Despite his insistence on the connection between the stories, Mather was uncertain about whether or not Jonah was caught by a fish or a whale. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus says, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). In his gloss on that passage, Mather wavers. His interlocutor asks: “It should seem, from ye words of our Saviour, That ye Fish which devoured Jonas, was a proper Whale: Whereas in your Illustrations upon Jonas, I think, you objected against it, from ye Small Throat of that creature. How shall we do to swallow this Discrepancy?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:40). This question is a testimony not only to Mather’s wit, but to his integrity, because he recognizes honestly that his commentary is self-contradictory. Unfortunately, so is his answer.

Mather equivocates that “The words of our Saviour do not infer any more, than that this Fish was one of ye Cetacious kind” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:40). He does not provide the Greek or Hebrew word, but here implies that the translation of Matthew might be the problem. However, instead of leaving the issue there and keeping his glosses consistent, Mather preferred to maintain the literalism of the Gospel at the sacrifice of his own scientific research. He adds: “But, our Edwards, ha’s found out a way, to Explain and mentain that a Whale, strictly so called, suppose you his Throat never so narrow, was ye Fish, that seized upon Jonas” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:40). Mather quotes directly from John Edwards’s *A discourse concerning the authority, stile, and perfection of the books of the Old and New-Testament with a continued illustration of several difficult texts of scripture throughout the whole work* (1693). According to Edwards, the Hebrew word for “belly” actually meant “all ye Inward & unseen parts of any thing” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:40, c.f. Edwards 281). Since whales have large mouths, Mather explains, “probably Jonas was Lodged, in some cavity of ye Mouth, rather than ye Maw of this Enormous Animal”
Mather thus contradicts his gloss on Luke 5:5, which seeks biblical harmony, and his gloss on Jonah 1:17, which concludes, based on historical and scientific evidence, that the fish was a shark, so that he can agree with Edwards and the King James translation of Jesus’s words. Mather states the situation most accurately as an aside on an unrelated gloss: “[Sir Thomas Browne] observes, That ye Books of Scripture, are often Silent, or very Sparing, in ye particular *Names of Fishes*” (“BA” 8: John 21:25). Mather explains, summarizing Browne, that fish are rarely named even though beasts and birds are named particularly. Mather concludes: “Even ye Fish that swallowed Jonah, is not fully determined” (“BA” 8: John 21:25). Browne himself was writing about an unrelated topic in “Of the Fishes Eaten by Our Saviour with His Disciples After His Resurrection from the Dead” (1684). Mather quotes closely but omits a few words: “The Books of Scripture (as also those which are Apocryphal) are often silent, or very sparing” (Browne 98). Similarly, Browne notes the idea that Jonah’s fish “is called a Great Fish, and commonly thought to be a great Whale, is not received without all doubt” (98).

An additional problem with Jesus’s prophecy at Matthew 12:40 is that, despite what Jesus states there, neither Jonah nor Jesus spent three days and three nights buried. Mather smirks that “Many, both of ye Modern, as well as of the Ancient, fly to Subtilties on this occasion” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). The examples he cites reveal that he is not overstating the situation. Johannes

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Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), a London physician, became famous in 1642 when his private religious meditations celebrating his belief in the doctrine of the Church of England and blending religion with natural philosophy were published as *Religio medici* (Robbins). He followed it with a book on natural philosophy: *Pseudodoxia epidemica, or, Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths* (1646). This work, states his biographer, “earned his reputation as scholar and naturalist” (Robbins). He graduated Oxford with his M.A. in 1629. Mather quotes from a collection of epistolary essays published posthumously (Robbins).
Cloppenburg\textsuperscript{91} “saies, Tis not amiss to begin ye \textit{Three Dayes and Three Nights} of our Lords being in ye \textit{Grave}, at ye moment of His Exaltation on ye \textit{Cross}” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). This explanation is obviously far-fetched, since Jesus prophesies that he shall be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). To accept the literal accuracy of this prophecy, one would have to view the cross, as well as the tomb, as the heart of the earth.

Witsius agrees that Jonah was a type of Jesus. In addition to considering whether or not the fish was a whale, Witsius cites other exegetes on how long Jesus was buried. He cites renowned scholars, including Ambrose,\textsuperscript{92} William Teeling,\textsuperscript{93} and Cocceius\textsuperscript{94} (c.f. Witsius, \textit{Sacred Dissertations}, 2:129-134). Following Witsius, Mather tries to smooth over the inconsistency by adding, “Nor does it appear, that \textit{Jonas}, was the whole space of LXXII Hours in the \textit{Whale},” as though somehow the prophecy is more accurate because both elements of the parallel are incorrect (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). Mather accepts Witsius’s citation of Isidore of Pelusium,\textsuperscript{95} who suggests that “our Lord exactly knew, \textit{how long} Time \textit{Jonas} was in ye Belly of the \textit{Whale}” because he was there, spiritually, so “we may conclude, That our Lord lay \textit{so Long} Time in ye \textit{Heart of ye Earth}” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). By presenting this conclusion, Mather ultimately requires his readers to trust their faith in Jesus’s omniscience over the narrative in the Gospels. There seems no reason then for Jesus to say “three days and three nights” if that

\textsuperscript{91} Johannes Cloppenburg or Cloppenburch (1592-1652), a Reformed minister in Amsterdam and Brielle, then professor at the universities of Harderwijk and Franeker (Loosjes). He wrote in Dutch but his works were republished in Latin.

\textsuperscript{92} Ambrose (ca. 340-397), bishop of Milan, fought the spread of Arianism (Loughlin). Erasmus published his works in 1527 (Loughlin).

\textsuperscript{93} Witsius remarks that Teeling, a Dutch minister, published his thoughts on Jesus’s death in his \textit{Catechetical Exercises} (Witsius, \textit{Sacred Dissertations}, 2:132).

\textsuperscript{94} Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), a Bremen-born Reformed exegete who taught with Cloppenburg at Franeker (van Asselt 25). He specialized in philology and orientalism, and he emphasized the importance of language in interpreting the Bible (van Asselt 26).

\textsuperscript{95} Isidore of Pelusium (d. ca. 450), possibly a priest of a monastery, but most famous for his thousands of surviving letters dealing with morality and dogma (Leclercq).
timeframe is inaccurate. Instead of addressing this problem, though, Mather, like Witsius, encourages accepting gullibly that three days must be right since Jesus said it.

Nevertheless, Mather supplements this gloss with an additional consideration: “The space is to be taken, Restrictive, and not Extensive” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). He explains: “He that saies, I will finish such or such a work in Three Dayes, does perform his promise, if he perform it within the Second Day tho’ he should never come to the Third Day” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). This interpretation might be convincing if Mather would provide justification for it – such as Hebrew conventions around the expression – but instead, he depends on the reader to simply trust, despite lack of evidence, that Jesus’s prophecy was meant in a “restrictive” sense. To throw in a witty aside, Mather appends an additional gloss that quotes “Dr. Gell”96 (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39). The scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus calls “an evil and adulterous generation,” had received this parallel as the answer to their request for a “sign” (Matt. 12:38–39). Mather, by way of Robert Gell,97 snarkily observes: “The Pharisees and Sadduces would see a Sign from Heaven [Matth. 16.1] But our Lord points them to a Sign from Hell, as more fitt for them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39, brackets his). Mather adds, for clarification: “The Belly of the Fish, was by Jonah, called Hell” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:39).

In another gloss on the catching of fish in Luke 5, Mather quotes Augustine, who suggests that the net breaking under the weight of all of the fish the apostles caught symbolizes schisms in the church (“BA” 7: Luke 5:6). Augustine notes that in a parallel story in John, the

96 Robert Gell (1595-1665), Church of England minister at St. Mary Aldermary, London (Curth). He graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1621 and received his D.D. in 1641 (Curth). His essay, cited by Mather, was both a discussion of the Pentateuch and a response to critics who accused him of familism (Curth).

97 In a sermon about hypocrites, Gell states: “They are inquisitive after heaven and heavenly things; as the Pharisees and Saduces[sic], their predecessors, would see a signe from heaven; but our Lord points them to a signe from hell more fit for them; so Jonah called the belly of the fish, Hell” (Gell, An Essay toward the Amendment of the Last English-Translation of the Bible, 142).
apostles catch fish but the net does not break. Augustine argues that this net in John symbolizes the unity of the saints in heaven (“BA” 7: Luke 5:6, c.f. Augustine 133). What this contrast highlights is the similarity of the stories; the story in John is nearly identical except that there is only one ship, and while that net is heavy laden with fish, it does not break (John 21:3-11).

Mather and Augustine treat these similar stories as distinctly separate events, as the Luke story occurs when Jesus and Simon first meet, while the John story occurs after Jesus’s resurrection. Mather presented the same interpretation and quotation from Augustine in his gloss on John 21:11 but later crossed it out and referred readers to the Luke 5:6 gloss (“BA” 8: John 21:11). In a second gloss, he comments on the symbolism of the fish: “They were an hundred & fifty & three. Some say, These are just so many Kinds of Fish in the world. And here, they say, is an Intimation, that all kinds of men should be caught in the Nett of the Gospel (“BA” 8: John 21:11). Since the Earth had not been fully explored yet, it is odd that anyone could claim to know the precise number of species of fish. Possibly aware that the evidence on which he built this significance was flimsy, Mather adds, probably influenced by Lightfoot,98 that “here might be some Allusion” to the 153, 000 proselytes counted by Solomon in Israel in 2 Chron 2:17 and thus “to the prophecy that was in that History” (“BA” 8: John 21:11). Even Mather seems to have recognized the scant resemblance of the supposed prophecy to its fulfillment.

3.4 The Nature of Miracles

Mather devotes several pages specifically to contemplating Jesus’s miracles. He employs the Boyle lectures by the “ingenious” Samuel Clarke “to afford matter, from whence we will shape ye Illustration” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). It was significant to Mather – and indeed he draws attention to the fact – that he was using the Boyle lectures as his source. Created through an

98 Lightfoot mentions the similarity in his harmony (1:271).
endowment by Robert Boyle, these lectures featured the most prominent natural philosophers, presenting, from a Christian world view, the most current physico-theological information. Mather closely copies Clarke’s lectures, published as *A Discourse Concerning the being and attributes of God* (1705). Consequently, Mather becomes philosophical in addressing miracles: “We know… that all things are alike Easy to Him. A Miracle therefore is not to be distinguished, by the Difficulty in the Nature of the thing itself” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). He adds: “Strictly speaking, if we regard only the Power of God, there is nothing Miraculous” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Mather vows by a conservative belief: “Matter is no more capable of Law or Power, than of Intelligence” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). While Mather did believe in natural laws, as he explains in *Christian Philosopher*, when it comes to his understanding of miracles, he hesitates to accept the deist belief that God was not providentially intervening in all earthly affairs: “All those things, which we commonly ascribe to the Lawes and Powers of Matter and Motions, as Gravitations and Attraction, and the Like, are indeed strictly and properly but ye Effect of GOD acting upon Matter, continually, and Every Moment” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Mather essentially denies the concept of independently-operating natural laws in favor of divine volition over nature.

The concept of physics gaining ground in scientific communities was that God had created natural laws and only intervened to break those laws. Some conservatives, such as

99 For example, Mather writes: “The Arguments that prove the Stability of the Sun, and the Motion of the Earth, have now render’d it indisputable” (84). He recognizes that the movement of planets must be “the Necessary Consequence of the establish’d Law of Gravitation” and he includes a chapter on gravity (84). However, he also mentions “the Stop to this Course in the Days of Joshua” which he attributes to God’s intervention: “The same Infinite Power that gave the Motion, gave the Check” (84, c.f. Hab. 3:11). Nevertheless, he uses less providential phrasing in *Christian Philosopher* than he does in his Bible commentary. He determines that gravity “must be religiously resolv’d into the immediate Will of our most wise CREATOR, who, by appointing this Law, throughout the material World, keeps all Bodies in their proper Places and Stations, which without it would soon fall to pieces” (90). He means the same thing by “the immediate Will” of the “Creator” as he does by the “Effect of God” acting “continually, and Every Moment,” but the former sounds more technical and the latter more devotional.
Samuel Clarke, held to the medieval concept that God perpetually caused nature to remain static. Robert Burns suggests that this conservative view developed in response to radical criticism. Clarke and other adherents to “extreme evidentialism” argued that only God had the power to produce miracles and therefore “the event is more or less decisively proved to be miraculous entirely apart from the accompanying doctrine and character of the miracle worker” (Burns 99).

Mather sides with Clarke and fellow conservatives, holding that “What men call, The Course of Nature, is really nothing Else, but the Will of God, producing certain Effects... But this manner of Acting, is to the Great GOD, every moment perfectly Arbitrary, and as Easy to be Altered as to be preserved” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Clarke 379). Scholar Henning Reventlow observes that Clarke’s position illustrates a predicament; he notes that Clarke simultaneously suggests that God is free and arbitrary yet bound to human interpretation (Reventlow 870). Clarke claims that the world which God freely made proves God’s goodness, and so God’s free actions must be consistent with his goodness (870). Reventlow finds this view of God’s freedom conflicted:

From Clarke’s Boyle lectures one can recognize the forced situation in which rationalistic apologetics found itself in this period. It could not overcome the intrinsic contradiction between the philosophical approach, which it also wanted to follow, and traditional Christian doctrines, which it sought to defend. (872)

Mather wanted to accept natural laws without diminishing God’s power; the result was a God who subjected Himself to natural laws. Since Mather holds that everything is caused by God’s continuous involvement, defining the miraculous was somewhat challenging, but Mather paraphrases Clarke: “a Miracle may be rightly defined; An Effect produced contrary to the usual Order of things in the world, by the unusual Interposition of some Intelligent Being superior to
“men” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). This definition allows the intervention of angels to be considered miraculous.

However, Mather is most concerned with proving why Jesus’s miracles can be trusted while ancient extra-biblical accounts of miracles, pointed to by radicals like Charles Blount, cannot. Thomas Woolston, for example, remarked in 1728 that some of the miracles attributed to Jesus would have been dismissed as forgeries had they been attributed to Muhammad (Burns 73). Mather tries to explain why only Jesus’s miracles received credence. His answer is subjective: miracles come from God, he claims, if they are in support of doctrines that appear reasonable, true, and moral (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Jesus’s miracles “were to prove a Glorious Doctrine, and all tended in ye Highest & most glorious Degree, to bring forward all possible Service and Homage to GOD” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Contrarily, the miracles supposedly performed by Apollonius Tyanaeus and Aristeas Proconnesius were done “to prove Absurd, Silly, Foolish, yea, and Wicked Things,” not to demonstrate “New Doctrine,” and so “They could not be of a Divine Original” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Mather was not unusual in responding this way; he echoed the Latitudinarian approach to miracles. His words, in fact, are reminiscent of John Locke’s in “A Discourse of Miracles” (1706): “No Mission can be look’d on to be Divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the Honour of the one, only, true, invisible

100 Apollonius of Tyana, a Greek philosopher who lived at the same time as Jesus and was said to have resurrected the dead, founded a school at Ephesus (“Apollonius”). He was highly praised as more important than Jesus by Hierocles in the third century and Charles Blount in Mather’s own time (“Apollonius”). Blount translated The Life of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus and added notes that pitted Apollonius against Jesus by observing their similarities (Oldmeadow 9). As historian Ernest Oldmeadow comments, “Orthodox Christians had been accustomed to affirm boldly the uniqueness, sufficiency, and finality of Mary’s Son: but, like a bolt from the blue, here was Philostratus opposing himself to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and offering an alternative Messiah” (10). Clarke and Mather therefore could count themselves among the orthodox from whom “sermons, pamphlets, and volumes descended upon the presumptuous Blount like fireballs and hailstones” (10).

101 Aristeas the Proconnesian was said to have disappeared and reappeared miraculously and to have been viewed as a god by ancient Greeks. Origen, in Contra Celsum, compares the story of Aristeas with that of Jesus, remarking that if Celsus believes the tales about the former, he surely must accept the more plausible stories about the latter’s miracles (Origen 145).
God” (226). This Lockean argument did not sway critics, however, and writers like Thomas Morgan ultimately observed, Robert Burns comments, that “the miracle stories of Jesus, when considered in isolation, are at most no more probable than those of many other religious figures,” so “their evidential value must be nil” (73). On their own, critics charged, miracles hold no weight.

3.5 Miracles and Faith

Mather acknowledges an additional contradiction in Jesus’s working miracles. Matthew relates that Jesus “did not many mighty works” in Nazareth “because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58). Mather recognizes that this seems inconsistent with Jesus’s behavior since “Our Saviour had given undeniable proof, of His Irresistible and Unconfined power to work miracles, in many Instances, before ever He required Faith, as a condition” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). Citing Robert Jenkin,102 Mather notes that this is the first time Jesus demands faith. Unfortunately, Mather and Jenkin offer a weak explanation: Jesus began to demand faith because that was the appropriate response. Mather lists some of the miracles Jesus had performed, such as the casting out of devils, then defends Jesus: “It was highly Reasonable, that after this, our Saviour should require a Faith of what He had already done, & was able to do, before He should Extend His Healing Power” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58, c.f. Jenkin 2:472). He implies that the stories of previous miracles should have been sufficient enough to give hearers faith in Jesus’s powers.

Rationalism, which supported humanity’s ability to reason, and empiricism, which supported making logical deductions based on sensory experiences, had both gained ground in

102 Robert Jenkin (1656-1727) was a Church of England minister who refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary (Brunton). He graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1681 and received his D.D. in 1709, becoming Master of St. John’s College beginning in 1711 (Brunton). He served as a chaplain and a fellow of Cambridge and completed his most popular work, The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion, which Mather uses, in 1696 (Brunton). It went through two more editions by 1708 (Brunton).
scholarly circles at this time and made their way into the church. Individuals who wholeheartedly embraced empiricism may have struggled with Mather’s explanation. If Jesus required faith before performing miracles, he would be expecting his followers to depend naively on secondhand stories instead of trusting their own faculties to determine the truth. This line of defense was common among orthodox exegetes in the seventeenth century, Robert Burns explains: “The proof from miracles… is relevant only to an enquirer already so impressed by the distinction of Jesus’s teaching that he has no doubt that it possesses those qualities which the reasonable man must expect to be manifest in a genuine divine revelation” (97). Burns notes that apologists’ focus on a priori faith caused critics to dismiss their arguments as circular (97).

Mather’s emphasis on a priori faith without empirical evidence would not fly with seventeenth-century philosophers, just as it did not sway ancient Pharisees. He states it mildly in his gloss on Mark 6:6: “He did not use to work them for any but saith as Desired them, and Requested them, & had some Hope of receiving such Favours from Him. – Such Dispositions were wanting in this Wicked people” (“BA” 7: Mark 6:6). What Mather limits to “disposition” in the gloss on Mark he is much more clear about in his gloss on Matthew 13:58. In that gloss, he spells out that a priori faith was Jesus’s expectation: “It was requisite for these [applicants] to Beleeve, what they had heard so well attested, if they would receive the Benefit, they besought Him to do for them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). He adds that since Nazareth was Jesus’s homeland, these people must have seen his miracles before. If such is the case, though, then they were not being asked to believe without seeing, and therefore they were less likely to doubt the miracles, even if they questioned the merit of Jesus’s means.

Although Mather does not address that complication directly, his manner of explaining the incredulity of the Nazarenes indicates his Calvinist view of their depravity. With all his
explication on Jesus’s demanding faith before performing additional miracles, Mather admits that Jesus “saw how unsuccessful all His works would be” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). The miracles, if performed, would not assure the Nazarenes’ faith, anyway, because their hearts had already hardened against him. That is why Jesus chose to perform miracles only for those who had "Faith required as a Disposition, or Praeparation” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). In other words, miracles, the Puritan implies, and any other empirical evidence, do not cause grace, and such evidence cannot convert a person who does not already have faith. Mather quotes Jerome to the effect that unbelievers would be condemned further for seeing miracles and not converting, so Jesus was doing them a mercy by refusing to perform miracles for those without faith (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). He implies, then, that so far as empirical evidence was concerned, miracles had no value: “The End of His Miracles required, That those who were cured by Him, should Beleeve in Him” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). The miracle would only be performed for someone who would believe in Jesus even without the miracle.

After excerpting Jenkin, Mather adds, “I take leave to subjoin my own Thoughts” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). He remarks that Jesus’s miracles serve primarily to “trial Bodies and souls, together” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). Jesus observed that “that people had no Faith by ye Hand of Heaven wrought in them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). This “First Essay of mercy . . . was hitherto withheld from them” and so “He could do nothing for these unbeleevers” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). If such is the case, then, seventeenth-century radicals who demanded empirical proof of Jesus’s miracles and rationalization of Jesus’s behavior were, by indicating their need for evidence instead of trusting their faith, demonstrating the hopelessness of their situation. Whether or not Mather consciously considered it in such a light, he was effectively dismissing the validity of radicals’ empiricism-based arguments as inherently at odds with Christianity. Whatever Mather’s
intent, his implication suggests that he did not truly seek to refute empiricists and rationalists but instead sought to compete with them in hopes of winning over disciples who were considering deflecting from the church.

3.6 Conclusion

Responding to the criticisms of Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* and Charles Blount in his notes on *The Life of Apollonius*, Mather argues unconvincingly that the Gospels’ depictions of miracles are both logical and historically accurate. In doing so, and largely borrowing his ideas from Samuel Clarke, Mather problematically limits God’s power by implying that God deliberately puts natural laws in place and continually enforces them. Furthermore, in trying to explain the significance of miracles in the Gospels, Mather ultimately concludes that miracles will only convince people who already believe, seemingly contradicting his argument that Jesus’s miracles were intended to confirm Christianity’s authenticity and fulfillment of the Messianic promise. He implies, then, that only those predestined to have faith would appreciate miracles as empirical evidence of Christianity.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: JESUS

4.1 Introduction

The foremost issue at stake in Mather’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels is the divinity of Jesus. In Mather’s day, most Christians not only believed in the Trinity but held that Trinitarian doctrine is revealed in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, early Enlightenment radicals began to note what is commonly accepted by modern high critics: that the Synoptic Gospels do not depict Jesus as God. They asserted that the Trinity was a later invention of the Church.

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103 Most modern critics agree that ancient Jews did not anticipate a divine Messiah. As much of Matthew illustrates, the Messiah was expected to be a human who would literally restore the entire kingdom of
For example, in c. 1697, Samuel Crell, under the pseudonym Lucas Mellier, authored *Fides primorum christianorum ex Barnaba, Herma, et Clemente Romano demonstrata*, which asserts that Trinitarian doctrine was uncommon in early Christianity (Mulso 62). Some Socinians charged that the Gospel of John had been written by a Gnostic disciple of Simon Magus (Mulso 176). Gnosticism, while never a defined or organized religion, was decried as heresy by Church Fathers, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian. Irenaeus and Justin Martyr were the major ancient critics to associate Gnosis with Simon Magus (Markschies 73). One of Mather’s favorite scholars, William Whiston, argued in *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery* (1712) that Athanasius had fraudulently interpolated Trinitarian passages into the Bible in order to crush Arianism (*BA* 1: 277n). With such attacks Israel by implementing a new law. Matthew and the other Synoptic Gospel writers argue that Jesus, as the Messiah, led a spiritual restoration of the Israelite kingdom through his preaching and self-sacrifice. Only John further adds that Jesus was actually divine. The Hebrew Bible does not expressly prophesy that a Messiah would cause a spiritual restoration, nor does it directly indicate that God is three beings in one. Historian Christoph Markschies cautions modern scholars to be careful about defining early orthodox Christianity, “because it is becoming increasingly clear that Christianity took shape only in the second and third centuries and defined its limits by both linking up with its environment and opposing it” (21). As will be explored in this chapter, Mather rallied against this reading of the Synoptic Gospels. However, in an appendix following his commentary on Revelation, Mather implies his agreement with the radicals. Describing the acceptance of the New Testament canon by contemporary Christian sects, Mather remarks that “Every Sect has Endeavoured to Reconcile ye Books to their Principles” and he notes as an example that “The Socinians own the Epistle to the Hebrews; tho’ ye Deity, and the Sacrifice, of Christ, be so plainly asserted in it; and they dare not Renounce ye Gospel, and Epistle of John; tho’ they are from thence distressed wonderfully” (“BA” 10: “Some Remarks”). If all four canonical Gospels are bursting with evidence of Jesus’s divinity, as Mather tries to illustrate in his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, then it is interesting that in his appendix Mather just mentions the Gospel of John. He – and Robert Jenkins, whom he paraphrases in his essay – seem to have recognized that the doctrine of the Trinity is only apparent in the Fourth Gospel.

Markschies explains that by the early Enlightenment, “Gnostic,” like “Sadducee,” was sometimes used as a blanket criticism, particularly by Cambridge Platonist Henry More, who “was following an earlier English tradition in summing up under the name ‘gnosticks’ not only the adherents of quite specific groups assigned to ‘knowledge’ in antiquity but all Christian heresies” (14).

Scholars disagree about whether this mystical “knowledge” movement existed prior to Christianity and joined with it or whether it developed alongside orthodox Christianity. Bart Ehrman describes Gnostics generally as “dualists who thought the material world was evil but the spiritual world good. … Christ, in these Gnostic religions, is a divine being who came to earth to reveal this saving knowledge to those with the divine spark” (*New Testament*, 193).
being leveled against the Trinity, the very heart of Christianity – the divinity of Christ himself – was at risk. The significance of this problem for Mather cannot be overstated.

Throughout his commentary on the Hebrew Bible, Mather highlights passages that he feels refer to the Trinity\(^{108}\) and prove that ancient Israelites believed in both it and in the spiritual restoration of Israel, so that only Jews in Jesus’s time falsely believed in a human-only Messiah. Such a reading depends upon a doctrinal interpretation of the Old Testament and is inescapably precritical. Of more concern for the present study is how Mather addresses these issues in his commentaries on the Gospels. It is unlikely that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels believed that Jesus was divine. Mather, however, and most Christian exegetes in the seventeenth century, accepted as fact that they did. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, though, radicals observed the flaws in Jesus’s behavior and the lack of references to Jesus’s divinity in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For example, in a letter composed in 1678 and published in 1695, Charles Blount argues that first-century Jews expected a “great Prince” that would “reestablish the Jewish Monarchy” (164). Followers of Jesus expected the “temporal Reign of a Messiah” for the first century of Christianity (166). Blount claims that all early Christian documents support this belief and those who try to oppose it “never quote any for themselves before Dionysius Alexandrinus, who liv’d (at least) 250 years after Christ” (167, parenthesis his). If Blount is correct, and if Whiston is correct that references to the Trinity were also added later, then it would appear that the Trinity itself was an invention of the Roman Catholic Church. Mather attempts to head off these implications by defending the authority of the Gospels.

This chapter particularly explores how Mather clarifies the reasoning behind Jesus’s actions when Jesus’s behavior does not seem consistent with his supposed divinity. Mather

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\(^{108}\) See, for example, *BA I*: Gen. 1:1, Gen. 1:26, Gen. 12:1. Mather also wrote a separate treatise on this topic. See Mather, *The Faith of the Fathers*, Boston, 1699.
resolutely defends Jesus’s omniscience, even in the passages that depict Jesus claiming not to know something and in the instance where Jesus appears to prophesy inaccurately. Mather further asserts that Jesus’s behavior accords with the behavior of a prophet and thus makes sense. Making significant concessions, Mather goes so far as to explain that some passages refer to Jesus as human only. He uses the devil’s temptation of Jesus as an example, concluding that the devil did not know of Jesus’s divinity, and notes Jesus’s baptism as another instance. Similarly, Mather observes, Jesus uses language that refers to himself as a human, particularly in reference to being God’s messenger, and allows his hearers to believe it as well instead of insisting that they recognize his divinity. By emphasizing Jesus’s actions as a prophet, Mather does not prove that the Synoptic Gospels claim that Jesus is divine. Instead, he unintentionally supports the Arians’ argument: that Trinitarian doctrine only appeared later in church history.

4.2 Man-God

Unlike Clarke and Whiston, two of his favorite scholars, Mather thoroughly believed that Jesus was both man and God. In his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, he tries to explain why some passages appear to depict Jesus as man alone. It seems entirely contradictory to God’s omniscience for Jesus to be limited in knowledge, for example, and Mather remarks that Jesus “knew the Hearts of all men” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:58). However, even if Jesus could read thoughts, Mather admits that Jesus could not fully predict the future. In both Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, Jesus, describing the end of the world, states: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Mark has an additional clause: “neither the Son” (Mark 13:32). For Mather, this ignorance was reasonable. In his gloss on the verse in Matthew, he casually remarks that Jesus did not know when the world would end because “It was a secret still reserved in ye Omniscience of the Father” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42).
He elaborates in his gloss on the same verse in Mark, recognizing that the passage is “wonderful” and having his interlocutor wittily ask: “How shall we know what to think of it?” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Indeed, Mather concedes: “It seems very strange, That He, who is equal to ye Father, should not have the same knowledge with the Father” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather answers that the explanation lies in the nature of the Son: “Tis one thing to understand, the Son of God abstractly for ye Second person in ye Holy Trinity; so Hee knowes all things: and another thing tis to understand it, of ye Messiah, who was also a servant of God, and a messenger from ye Father” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). With no evidence, biblical or physiological, Mather suggests that Jesus had two natures related to his roles as Son of God and Messiah. Jesus received his information both through his “Hypostatical Union” with the Father and through “ye Immediate Revelation of the Spirit” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Unintentionally making Jesus out to be telling a bit of a fib, Mather hints that through his hypostatical union, the Christ would have known things “not fitt matters to be communicated unto creatures” and so only shared the things “Reveled fro’ ye Father, by the Spirit” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). The specific day of Jerusalem’s destruction fell into the former category: by virtue of his hypostatical union, Jesus knew the day, but he was only given permission to share “more fully” after his ascension, at which point, according to Revelation 1:1, he spoke to John the Divine (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32).

Mather suggests elsewhere that some exegetes, such as Augustine, argue that “tho’ He did know ye Day and Hour, yett it was the same, as if He knew it not; because He did not intend to Reveal it” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). A “worse” way of expressing it, notes Mather, is in the words of Basil, who claims Jesus “feigned He was Ignorant” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather

109 Basil (ca. 329-379), bishop of Caesarea, studied at Athens and founded a monastery at Pontus (McSorley). His many surviving works include anti-Arian dogma, homilies on morality, and 366 letters, one of which is paraphrased by Mather (McSorley). Basil’s works were translated into Latin in 1515 (McSorley).
refers to Epistle 8 by Basil, in which the Church Father suggests that Jesus “assumed ignorance” because that puts him on the same level as his hearers: “It is on your account that He knows not the hour and day of judgment” (Basil 8:6). Yet for all its implications, this view was also held by Augustine, Hilary, Isidore, Cyril of Alexandria, Photius, Aquinas, and Bellarmine. Mather name-drops these Church Fathers without elaborating on their positions (c.f. Edwards, Exercitations, 233). Sassily, Mather adds that “there is a Protestant on their side” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Cameron, whose argument he bears out the most for being based on 1 Corinthians 2:2, also argues that Jesus knew but could not tell when the end would come (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather likely means John Cameron (1579-1625), a Reformed minister from Scotland who served as professor of philosophy at Sedan before serving as a pastor at Bordeaux (Brockliss). He corresponded with Louis Cappel110 and his theological works were published posthumously, but, ironically, because of his sympathy to Arminianism, he was ultimately suspected of heresy and of wanting to reconcile Calvinism with Roman Catholicism (Brockliss). Mather might have been making a tongue-in-cheek joke.

No sooner than Mather mentions this idea, he refutes it, expressing that he considers the great following of this theory to be “very Strange” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). He challenges these exegetes to “say now, That man or Angels do know of it, only they do not so know of it, as to Reveal it, unto others,” a position he apparently finds ridiculous (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Taking the gag even further, he asks, “Now, does ye Father so know it, as to Reveal it?” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather suggests, citing Lightfoot,111 that in taking the shape of the Messiah, “The Divine

110 See the eighth chapter, Corruption of the Text, for more about Cappel and the controversial debate. 111 In his commentary on this passage, Lightfoot states: “It is without doubt, that. . . he, conversing on earth before his death, acted with the vigor of the Holy Spirit and of that unspeakable holiness which flowed from the Union of the Humane Nature with the Divine, the Divine Nature, in the mean time, suspending its infinite activity of Omnipotence. So that Christ might work miracles, and know things to
Nature of our Lord, might suspend its infinite Activity of omnipotence” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather quotes Grotius to the effect that Jesus could choose to receive divine wisdom when it suited him, and that is why he sometimes did not know things (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). More logically, Mather adds that since Jesus could prophesy enough to name “certain Marks and signs” of the coming day of judgment, he did know “If we speak Generally” when the time would be (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather uses this deduction to argue that when Jesus claims that he does not know the hour, he refers to “ye particular, punctual, praecise Time” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather takes his direction from John Edwards’s commentary,112 which refutes Grotius’s stance.

Satisfied with his solution, Mather argues that this confusion is not new but has long been debated by Christians. He points out, borrowing from Edwards, that a sect in the sixth century, led by Themistius,113 raised a “Cavil” about this passage because they doubted that Jesus was truly divine if he was not omniscient (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32, c.f. Edwards 225). Edwards and Mather cite the many rebukes levelled against Themistius. Jerome, Ambrose, Zegerus, Origen, Epiphanius, Abbot of Claraval, Scotus, and Aquinas - all argue that Jesus had different forms of knowledge (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32, c.f. Edwards 226-240). Edwards lists these rebukes only to criticize them as insufficient. He determines to “particularly enumerate” some of the responses to Themistius and the Arians “and then pitch upon something which I apprehend to be most solid” (Edwards 225). However, Mather concludes, “But all this, is Little to the purpose” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). For Mather, the purpose was to demonstrate the longstanding debate on this topic come, in the same manner as the Prophets also did, namely by the Holy Ghost, but in a larger measure” (Lightfoot 2:351-352).

112 Edwards asserts that Jesus refers to “the particular and exact time” of the Second Coming (Exercitations, 225).
113 ‘Themistius was a deacon in Alexandria (Hovorun 30). During the second quarter of the sixth century, Themistius proposed controversially that this passage, and others where Jesus appears ignorant, illustrates that Jesus’s humanity was weak and corrupt, and that Jesus was not truly omniscient (33).
and deprive seventeenth-century radicals of the satisfying feeling of originality. Had this work been published, Mather would surely have accomplished this purpose. He even follows this dispute with another list of exegetes who thought Jesus did know but was not permitted to tell his disciples, and so claimed he did not know, which, to the supporters of the theory, was “the same with, Not to know so as to tell others” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Others, such as Euthymius and Irenaeus, felt that Jesus needed that information, just as he needed life, from his Father (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Edwards dismisses their theory “because here is a plain denial of knowledge in the Son as to this matter” (237).

Mather’s conclusion is no more logical than these other explanations. It is a contrived response tailored to fit the passage: “Our Saviour knew not the more particular Time, Day or Hour of ye Last Judgment, as He was Man, tho’ as God, He did” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather borrows the ethos of Edwards, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria by quoting all of them in agreement with this conclusion. Edwards and Mather quote Athanasius’s rebuttal of the Arians, which asserts that being in flesh, Jesus had the same infirmities as humans, including hunger, thirst, and ignorance (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Cyril of Alexandria explains that in John 11:34, Jesus asks the Jews where Lazarus had been laid, and then resurrects him, illustrating that Jesus was at once both man and God (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Edwards at least admits the weakness of his conclusion: “And though I find there are some that look upon this as no good Account of this Text, yet I do not perceive that they pretend to offer a better” (240).

Mather sees similarities between Jesus’s words and ancient pagan literature, as well, and he suggests that Jesus deliberately alluded to pagan works (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Jesus says of

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114 Edwards: “After all that hath been said, the most simple, genuine, and satisfactory decision of the word is this, Christ knew not the Day of Judgement as he was Man, though as God he did” (237).
anyone who does the will of his Father, “the same is my Brother, and Sister, and Mother” (Matt. 12:50). Mather acknowledges that similar phrasing appears in Homer: “You are not only my Husband, but my Father & Mother, and Brother” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Grew 344). Mather calls the parallel “a little surprising” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). But he recognizes still more allusions. The orator Isocrates116 had an expression similar to the Golden Rule: “What you cannot Endure others should do to you, neither do yee to them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). As Mather and his source, Nehemiah Grew,117 see it, Jesus “transfers it from a Negative, to a Positive,” since in his Sermon on the Mount, he states: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye ever so to them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50; c.f. KJV Matt. 7:12, c.f. Grew 344). Similarly, some of Jesus’s sayings bear close resemblance to passages in Socrates and Plato.118

These ancient sources all unquestionably predate the historical Jesus – they were undoubtedly written prior to the Gospels. Mather asks himself, “What shall we make of these things?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). He satisfies himself with the explanation quoted from Grew: Jesus “chose to Resemble them… that being observed by the more learned Heathen, they might ye rather be reduced to Assent unto all that He has Himself delivered” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Grew 344). Mather and Grew do not mean to suggest that Jesus studied classical Greek philosophy and literature. Rather, Grew asserts that Jesus “knew ye Thoughts of all men, and their sayings without Reading them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50, c.f. Grew 344). Interestingly, then, to

115 Grew, Mather’s source, does not express surprise.
116 Isocrates (436-338 B.C.E.) was a rhetorician in Athens (Cawkwell). He opposed the Platonic Academy with its focus on philosophy in favor of clear, understandable rhetoric (Cawkwell).
117 Nehemiah Grew (1641-1712), a botanist whom Mather cited in his Christian Philosopher (Hunter). He received his D.D. from Leiden in 1671 (Hunter). He was a prolific author who wrote about botany and medicine (Hunter).
118 Grew quotes Socrates side-by-side with Jesus (344). Grew also comments that Jesus “is pleased to describe the Day of Judgment, after the same manner as Plato does” (344).
explain these similarities, Mather gives a mystical reason: the man-god Jesus was omniscient. Furthermore, Jesus was ecumenical enough that he “despised nothing that was good”\textsuperscript{119} and so was willing to let “Heathen” relate to his principles by seeing Christianity through the lens of pagan philosophy (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50).

Mather briefly hints that Jesus’s divinity is represented differently in the Fourth Gospel. In a gloss on John 1:1, Mather asks: “If it be at last Enquired, whether any but John calls our Saviour by the Name, of, The WORD? It seems that both Luke, and Paul did so too” (“BA” 8: John 1:1). Yet he cites just one passage from Luke: “Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the WORD” (c.f. KJV Luke 1:2). In the following gloss, he challenges himself to “go on, in compleating the Collection” of references to Jesus as the Word (“BA” 8: John 1:1). Here too he does not cite any examples from the Synoptic Gospels, even though he notes “Luke (besides ye Instances given in ye Former Illustration) affords more Instances, of, Logos, and, Christ, used promiscuously” (“BA” 8: John 1:1, parenthesis his). An actual example would verify that claim.

4.3 Man-Man

In addition to trying to clarify how the Synoptic Gospels illustrate Jesus’s divinity even when they do not appear to, Mather attempts to explain the problematic term “Son of Man” and its significance. He argues that the term refers to Jesus’s role as his Father’s messenger. Because Mather, in trying to define the term, limits its meaning, he effectively proves Jesus’s humanity. Although Mather nearly always assumes that Jesus’s references to the “Son of Man,” such as in the prophecy in Matt. 12:40, describe Jesus himself, Mather also discards this assumption when it is not convenient to his rationalization of passages. Using John Hales’s paraphrase on the twelfth chapter of Matthew as his guide, Mather suggests that when Jesus states at Matt. 12:8

\textsuperscript{119} Grew remarks that Jesus “despised not any good Saying” (344).
that “the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day,” he means “every common ordinary man” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). If Jesus had meant himself as the Messiah, “that would have rendred all ye other Arguments needless” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). Mather and Hales support this interpretation by citing Jesus’s words at Mark 2:27: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27, c.f. Hales 104).

While this evidence makes sense, it indicates two underlying problems in Mather’s work as an exegete. Firstly, it reveals that Mather tried to prove the interpretation of one Gospel by citing another, implying that the texts must be read side-by-side, instead of treated as the separate, independent works that they actually were. Secondly, it suggests that the phrase “Son of Man” has different meanings based on different contexts, all dependent on which meaning supports Mather’s interpretation. Mather also cites Hales’s argument regarding Jesus’s rebuke against the Pharisees: “Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him” (Matt. 12:32).

Hales, Mather relates, claims that here too “son of man” refers to “any other man” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:50). In his gloss on that passage, Mather, citing Grotius, argues that Jesus is not referring to himself, even though Jesus almost exclusively speaks about himself in third person in the Gospel of Matthew by calling himself the Son of Man. However, Mather claims that in this tricky passage, “The son of man means Any son of man” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:32). Without explaining why Jesus would not just say that, Mather adds that the purpose of the passage was to

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120 A verbatim quotation of Hales’s paraphrase, published in 1677, with some of his other writings, as Several Tracts (103). Hales reasons that Jesus’s previous arguments defending plucking corn on the Sabbath would serve no purpose “if Christ had meant onely, that he as the Messias, was the Lord of the Sabbath, and so could abrogate it at his pleasure” (103).

121 Ironically, in a sense, modern exegetes agree with Mather on this point. Maurice Casey observes that the Aramaic term for “man” literally translated as “son of man” (2). However, “by the processes of translation and Christological development, this became a Christological title in Greek” (2).

122 Hales paraphrases Jesus’s words: “Whosoever speaketh a word against the son of Mon, that is, whosoever slandereth or calumniateth any other man, it shall be forgiven him” (125).
challenge the common Jewish belief of the time that followers could be forgiven all kinds of sins ("BA" 7: Matt. 12:32).

In Mather’s time, the issue under debate was not the humanity and historical reality of Jesus, but whether he was God. While trying to explain Jesus’s ignorance, however, Mather unintentionally sidetracks himself by endeavoring to prove Jesus’s humanity, a cause that hurts Mather’s greater purpose. Mather himself states the problem as follows: “There are frequent passages, that speak of our Saviour, as Man only” ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). Mather cites “A Gentleman whose Name is Jeffery” as recently expounding on Jesus’s claim of ignorance ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). Thomas Jeffery argues that Jesus’s mission on Earth was to do “every thing in the Name of his Father, by his Authority and Commission” (Jeffery 24). Jeffery even notes: “It does not appear that the Disciples, during our Saviour’s Ministry, considered him in any other Capacity than as such a Prophet of God” (24). Mather, paraphrasing, does not go this far. He says “The Disciples look’d on Him, as a prophet, unto whom God had made more than ordinary Discoveries” ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). Nevertheless, Mather praises Jeffery for having “a Discretion and a Modesty” in his discourse ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). Jeffery’s concession seems to undermine the argument for Jesus’s divinity: even the disciples who worked alongside Jesus did not think that he was divine. Their belief in his divinity arose later.

Following Jeffery, Mather argues that in describing the end of the world, Jesus was acting in his capacity as prophet and revealer of God’s will: “He delivered nothing but what His FATHER commanded Him to speak” ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). Mather compares Jesus to the prophet Daniel as one who reveals information about the end of the world ("BA" 7: Matt. 13:32). In other words, he suggests, Jesus was a “Messenger” ("BA" 8: John 5:30). This role is evident

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123 Thomas Jeffery (1698-1729) was a Presbyterian minister in Exeter, England, who most famously answered Anthony Collins with *True Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1725) (Woodland).
in John, he explains. In Jerusalem, Jesus appeals to Jewish law to refute his Jewish critics (John 5:30). In the gloss on this passage, Mather cites Maimonides,124 whom he calls Rambam, and the “Talmudists” whose writings argue that contracts are invalid if the messenger “Transgresseth against the words of him that sent him” (“BA” 8: John 5:30). Mather hereby derogates Jesus’s role to that of a person acting solely on another’s behalf.

Not only does Mather make Jesus seem to be more human than divine, but even Jesus’s human role hardly outshines that of other biblical figures. At the conclusion of his discussion on Jesus’s ignorance about the Day of Judgment in the gloss on Mark 13:32, Mather finally offers an argument that could have legitimately assuaged contemporary Socinians: “But consider also, that our Saviour spoke ye Syriac language; and probably, the word He used might indifferently signify, to know, and to make known” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Mather bases this linguistic argument entirely on conjecture.125 Mark was not written in Syriac126 and the Gospel certainly was not preserved in that language into the seventeenth century, so Mather could not have seen the specific Syriac word in Mark or proved his theory. However, by asserting that the confusion was caused by a limitation in the translation due to the lack of a corresponding word in English, he offers an empirical and objective argument that does not take Jesus’s role as prophet or God into consideration and does not rely on bias or faith in order to be accepted.

124 Moses Maimonides or Moses ben Maimon or Rambam (1135-1204), was a rabbi and physician whom Mather frequently cites as a Jewish authority (Rabinowitz 381). He wrote a commentary on the Mishnah and was a physician to the royal court in Egypt, where he used his influence to lower the heavy taxes on Jews (382-3).
125 Exegetes debated the language spoken by Jesus. Historian Albert Schweitzer explains that until the mid-sixteenth century, Western commentators did not discern Syrian dialects (270). Joseph Scaliger and Hugo Grotius both noted important distinctions between forms of Chaldaic and Syriac, and Scaliger proposed that the apostles spoke a form of Syriac (270).
126 Jesus spoke Aramaic and the Gospel of Mark was written in Greek using sources written in Aramaic (Casey 1). The Syriac versions surviving today were translated into that language from Greek (2).
In an insert, Mather adds yet another gloss on the troublesome passage in Mark 13:32. Daniel Whitby, Mather reveals, demonstrates that Jesus only professed this ignorance regarding the Son. The context of Jesus’s words suggests “That, the Son, here, is Christ, considered as a 
_prophet_ sent into the world, upon ye Design of Reveling the Will of His Father” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32, c.f. Whitby 300). This relationship can be seen in multiple places, Mather implies, listing passages\(^{127}\) in which Jesus mentions his dependence on the Father’s will. In the final addition to the gloss, Mather adds the paraphrase of Samuel Clarke, who exclaims that “the Time when it shall be, is not yett Reveled” (“BA” 7: Mark 13:32). Clarke supposes, in line with other exegetes, that the passage refers to the Day of Judgment. These supplements by Mather add little to the argument, but they indicate Mather’s discomfort with the issue. By adding these comments quoting Whitby and Clarke, Mather tried to buttress the reliability of his reading. Not only was Mather unconfident in conservative interpretations, but evidently so were other exegetes, since Jesus’s wording continued to be addressed in their works.

### 4.4 Bad Prophet

In trying to demonstrate Jesus’s divinity as revealed in the Synoptic Gospels, Mather continually portrays Jesus as a human with prophetic powers. Consequently, Mather finds himself hard-pressed to explain why Jesus apparently prophesied inaccurately. In Matthew 24, Jesus describes a period of tragedy, with war and suffering followed by the return of the Son of Man, and he remarks: “Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:34). The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E. when Rome invaded, but the other prophesied events did not occur: the Son of Man did not return, the sun was not darkened, and the world did not end. In a gloss on this passage, Mather states the

dilemma clearly: “That Generation is long since Dead and Gone, & passed way, and yett wee see not ye coming of ye Lord” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). Instead of answering his own question, Mather equivocates: “It is a most wonderful Thing, that ever this Israelitish Nation, should be preserved in ye World” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). He filibusters about the wickedness of Jews in Jesus’s time and God’s mercy on them: “Never was any Nation guilty of such prodigious Wickedness, as the Jewish Nation!” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). Then, Mather finally offers an interpretation of the text at hand. Surprisingly, he quotes Increase Mather, whom he proudly identifies as “my Father” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). It is uncharacteristic of Mather to admit his identity within a text, let alone that of his relatives. However, Mather had, according to biographer Kenneth Silverman, a complex and likely psychologically unsound filiopious relationship with his father, the pastor of the North Church. The relationship was no doubt damaging to the younger Mather. Cotton deeply admired the cold, emotionally and sometimes also physically distant Increase. Silverman observes: “Cotton was correct in believing he could ‘never do enough’ for his father” (Silverman 26).

In The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation (1669), Increase Mather argues that the word “generation” actually meant “nation.” Cotton explains that Increase criticizes the King James translation for this mistake: the Greek word “properly signifies A Nation, and is so rendred in other places [as Phil.2.15]” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34, brackets Cotton’s; Mather, Mystery, 73).

128 Both in “Biblia Americana” and in several other works, Mather outlined his chiliastic projections at length. His “Triparadisus” particularly reveals the beliefs he ultimately held shortly before his death. His expectations regarding the Second Coming – and his reading of the Book of Revelation - changed dramatically over his lifetime. The best comprehensive study of Mather’s eschatology is Smolinski’s The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather, which includes an edition of “Triparadisus.”

129 Increase Mather (1639-1723) was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, to minister Richard Mather and Katherine Holt (Hall 3). He graduated Harvard with his B.A. in 1656 (32). He earned his M.A. at Trinity College in Dublin (48). In addition to serving as minister at the North Church in Boston, he became president of Harvard in 1685 (198). He also contributed to the Salem witchcraft trials’ paper war – although, unlike his son, he opposed the proceedings (262).
Increase restates the passage in order for it to make more sense: “And this I take to be the genuine Interpretation of those words, Matth. 24.34. Verily I say unto you, that this Nation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled” (Mather, Mystery, 73). It is possibly significant that as a young scholar Increase Mather was interested in correcting the translation of the King James Bible and on verifying words in Greek; it suggests that a major influence on his son’s method came from home rather than from across the ocean. Similarly, as president of Harvard, Increase certainly influenced its pedagogy and, in turn, New England pulpits. Increase adds that Jesus’s prophecy about the end-time was told to the disciples in order to be a comfort (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). Cotton eventually felt dissatisfied with his father’s solution, though, and he crossed out the entire gloss.

Instead, Mather chose to endorse the harmonizing account by William Whiston, which combines the three surviving versions of the prophecy and proposes that the prophecy was actually two prophecies. Perhaps to explain why the Gospels do not indicate that these are two separate prophecies, Mather notes: “Yett the Disciples did so confound these Questions, in their own Thoughts, that they look’d upon them, as belonging to the Same Time” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). Jesus knew, however, and that is why when he said that these things would be fulfilled before the generation passes away, “He thereby referred particularly, to those Great Buildings of ye Temple; which were to be destroy’d in that Age; without any Respect unto ye Day of Judgment, or ye Signs belonging unto it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:34). The only clue Mather or Whiston could depend on to know that Jesus supposedly referred to two prophecies was the way that history unfolded; even the disciples evidently did not understand Jesus’s words.

130 As Increase Mather states: “Now this is wonderful!” (74).
4.5 The Son and the Holy Ghost

Mather also draws attention to the verses that seem to describe Jesus and his spirit as separate entities. For example, Mark 2:8 relates that when some scribes secretly questioned Jesus’s teaching, “Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves” (Mark 2:8). The verse refers to Jesus being able to read thoughts by means of his “spirit.” This anecdote appears in Matthew and Luke also, but in the latter, Jesus merely “perceived their thoughts,” which could mean from the context that he sensed their doubts (Luke 5:22). Matthew describes Jesus as “knowing” their thoughts, but he, too, does not attribute this knowledge to anything more than tact (Matt. 9:4). The Mark verse could be read the same way, but in Mather’s view the verse referred to Jesus’s divinity. Mather explains “what may be there meant, by Spirit” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). He argues that “The Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ… did use to be called, by ye primitive Christians, His Spirit” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). Rather than suggesting that Jesus could read thoughts because he was omniscient, Mather tries to illustrate that the term is an antiquated word used for Jesus’s part in the Trinity. Samuel Clarke, who names this passage as an example in his compendium listing New Testament references to the Trinity, may have influenced Mather’s perspective (Clarke, Scripture-Doctrine, 94).

Mather’s assessment of this issue raises a longstanding question regarding when belief in the Trinity first arose. Modern Bible critics hold that the doctrine of the Trinity did not originate with Jesus but, as deists in Mather’s time alleged, was a later invention of the church, and that it arose out of the school in which the Gospel of John was written. As Bart Ehrman summarizes regarding an early Christian text, “The signs [Jesus performs] were not designed to show that Jesus was God; they indicated that he was empowered by God as his representative” (Ehrman,
New Testament, 171). Such an idea would have been unacceptable to Mather, who not only believed completely in the Trinity but saw evidence of it throughout both testaments.

Nevertheless, his scholarship seems to point in the same direction, albeit unwittingly. He clearly tries to explain away the passages that contradict Trinitarian doctrine.\(^{131}\) While Mather genuinely believed in the arguments he put forward, his focus emphasizes the problems behind his glosses. For instance, Mather remarks that Tertullian “beleeved the Glorious Doctrine of ye Trinity; and yett he often calls, the Godhead of our Saviour, His Spirit, in opposition to, His Flesh” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). He also names “ye Greek Fathers” who used that term: Clement of Alexandria, Hermas, Tatian, Theophilus, and Irenaeus (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). He says that they continued to use that term “even after ye Arian controversy” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). Mather claims that Jesus’s divinity was called his spirit “altho’ the Third Person in ye ever adorable Trinity, had that Name also given unto Him” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). This solution seems naïve, particularly since the Gospel of John does not have this problem. Finally, he presents 1 Peter 3:18 as an example of how early Christian writers viewed the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Peter described Jesus as “quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). Inviting his readers to look at that verse, Mather asks excitedly “whether we have not here a Key, to many other Scriptures?” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:8). Interestingly, though, he does not raise this point when addressing other problematic references to Jesus’s spirit.

\(^{131}\) Separately, Mather made a full study of this topic. In his diary for August 1713, he notes having written an epistle to William Whiston in defense of the Trinity, “briefly asserted, and clearly explained, and victoriously defended; both by the Infallible Scriptures, and by the Antenicene Fathers” (2:230). This work, which Mather titled *Goliathus Detruncatus*, was sent to John Edwards to be published in London and was subsequently lost. Mather’s son, Samuel, tells the story in his biography of his father. Edwards wrote a preface to the work but died when the book was on the “brink” of being published, and so “the Work was bro’t to a full Stop, and I have not heard where the Letter is disposed of” (Mather 73).
Another confusion regarding the Trinity was the recontextualization of the Holy Spirit. There are several references to the “Spirit of God” and to his Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Bible. It is logical, then, that the Synoptic Gospels mention this Spirit as well. Difficulty arises, however, when Jesus’s relation to this Spirit appears the same as that of any other human. For example, the first verse of Luke 4 contains two clauses describing Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Mather proposes that each clause has a different meaning. The full verse reads, “And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). Mather claims, borrowing his ideas from Lightfoot’s *Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, that the latter clause must be interpreted literally. However, he and Lightfoot did not see “full of the Holy Ghost” as having the same meaning. He did not believe that the Spirit literally transported Jesus to Jordan. Instead, he proposes that “a collation of *Prophetical Qualifications* upon Him, is hereby intended” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). This clause, Mather suggests, refers to Jesus’s abilities as a prophet. Mather dodges its confusing reference to the Holy Ghost by claiming that “by ye phrase of, *the Holy Ghost,*” the “Jewes” referred to prophetical “gifts” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1).

Furthermore, Mather explains, Jesus was always part of the Trinity and therefore full of the Holy Ghost. In other words, he clarifies: “Our Lord had not now any Addition of Sanctity, to what Hee had before” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Even though Mather elsewhere makes much of Jesus’s fluctuating powers, here he paraphrases Lightfoot’s emphasis on Jesus’s power compared to other prophets.

The key word in this passage, Mather hints, is “full”: as regards “working *Miracles, Healing Diseases*, opening *Difficulties*, & *Foretelling Futurities*,” the “*Gifts* of others, were so

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132 See, for example, Gen. 1:2, Gen. 41:38, Exod. 31:3, Numb. 11:29, 1 Sam. 11:6, Isa. 48:16.
133 Lightfoot: “By this expression, *Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost,* is not intended any addition of grace or sanctity, which he had not before, but the collation of Prophetick qualifications at the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, which he had not till then” (1:500).
limited, that they could not act on all occasions” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). In contrast with other biblical prophets, “there was in our Lord Jesus Christ, a Fulness hereof,” so that he could “even do what, & when, & how Hee pleased” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1, c.f. Lightfoot 1:501). Mather does not cite Jewish sources to support his claim about this ancient turn of phrase. Instead, he lists examples of Hebrew Bible prophets’ limitations, such as that of Moses, who had “power over all Egypt, & yett has not power over his own Stammering” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Again, by suggesting that this passage refers to Jesus’s omnipotence yet only in his capacity as a prophet, and by implying that both Jews and early Christians considered physical powers to be hallmarks of prophets, but not gods specifically, Mather here unintentionally indicates that the author of Luke did not consider Jesus to be God. Instead of countering Arians successfully, Mather unwittingly added fuel to their fire. Although Mather probably considered his defense successful, he did not provide what Arians like Whiston demanded: explicit evidence testifying to Jesus’s divinity.

4.6 The Son and the Devil

In the Synoptic Gospels, the devil does not acknowledge Jesus as divine, either. While in the Old Testament, the devil tries to undermine God’s power, in the Gospels, the devil does not seem to recognize that Jesus possesses any power above that of an ordinary human. As Mather’s interlocutor asks, “If Christ were God, why should He be Tempted? There could be no Doubt, that God could overcome ye Divel” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1). Instead of addressing directly any contemporary radicals that might raise this question, Mather dismisses their originality, with his answer, quoting Whitby: “The Ancients were not ignorant of this Objection. It was made by

134 For example, Eve’s temptation by the serpent, whom Christians in Mather’s time believed was the devil (Gen. 3:1-6). The devil also challenges God directly in Job (Job 1:6-12).
the Ebionites,\textsuperscript{135} the Elder Brethren of the Photini
ans and Socinians” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1, c.f. Whitby 29). Whitby refutes their argument by quoting Irenaeus,\textsuperscript{136} who, he observes, was quoted by Theodoret,\textsuperscript{137} “and that showes, that the latter Father did approve of such a solution of ye Difficulty” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1). However, while Theodoret may have been satisfied with Irenaeus’s rebuttal, the resurfacing of the issue suggests that the second-century bishop’s doctrine had not satisfied critics.

Irenaeus grumbles that Jesus is the only human described as “God, or Lord” in the Scripture and, furthermore, since Jesus was both the Word and man, while he was tempted as a man, the Word was glorified. Irenaeus adds that for Jesus to be tempted, “the Word was Quiescent” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1, c.f. Irenaeus 56, Whitby 30). In other words, although Jesus was believed by Trinitarians to be both man and God, the divine part of him was minimized when the devil tempted the human part. Even though Jesus was God, it was his weak human side that was tempted and theoretically capable of yielding to temptation. Neither Irenaeus nor Mather use the text at hand to illustrate that Jesus was the Word. They rely on John’s phrasing, as the description of Jesus as the Word of God appears only in the Fourth Gospel. This conjecture that Jesus’s divinity was “quiescent” is not based on an assertion made in Matthew. After Irenaeus, Whitby presents his own idea that the temptation and triumph of Jesus was also a demonstration of Jesus’s human capacity. Mather, paraphrasing Whitby, suggests that the passage is intended to comfort Christians since “we may combate and conquer Satan, with the Same Aids that were

\textsuperscript{135} The Ebionites were early Jewish-Christians who produced one of the earliest harmonies of the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of the Ebionites, which urges the abolition of Jewish sacrifices (Ehrman, \textit{New Testament}, 197).
\textsuperscript{136} Irenaeus (ca. 140-202), bishop of Lyon, famously criticized Gnostics as heretical (Norris 10). In \textit{Against Heresies}, Irenaeus remarks that “the Logos became quiescent so that he could be tempted” (Irenaeus 56).
\textsuperscript{137} Theodoret (ca. 393-457), bishop of Cyrus, who brought thousands of so-called heretics into the Catholic Church (Baur).
afforded unto Him" (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1). Jesus is like a regular person inasmuch as “that He did overcome Satan, & repell all his Assaults, might be, because He was Anointed, and filled with ye Holy Spirit” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:1). Any Christian could relate to the anecdote, Mather hopes. He adds another gloss to echo Whitby’s second comment on this passage in Matthew. This note addresses contemporary “Socinians” who questioned why the devil would bother to tempt Jesus (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:9, c.f. Whitby 30). Citing Johann Bisterfield, Mather, paraphrasing from Whitby, observes that such was the unbounded pride of the devil, and this daring was in keeping with the temptation at Eden (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:9, c.f. Whitby 30). It is in character with this figure to scoff at challenges.

In a similar vein, instead of stopping there, Whitby continues to write further interpretations. He remarks: “But ye Ancients add another Answer; That when ye Divil tempted Christ, he was ignorant of this Mystery” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:9, c.f. Whitby 30). Evidently Mather and Whitby worried that the devil’s behaving irrationally out of pride was not a satisfactory answer. He notes that Ignatius and Origen both believed that the devil did not know everything. Mather, paraphrasing Whitby, says as much about the devil: “All his Temptations intimate, that he look’d on our Saviour, not as God, but only as one, who might be very dear to God” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:9). Unintentionally indicating that critics might have a more realistic

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138 Whitby: “We, who have the same Unction from the Holy One, may also hope to do it by his Aid” (30).
139 Johann Bisterfield (c.1605-1655) was a student of Johann Alsted and is known to have impacted Leibniz’s philosophy (Murray 123).
140 Ignatius of Antioch or Theophorus (ca.50-ca.117), bishop of Antioch, who wrote epistles to church bodies, credited by Lightfoot though the authenticity of them has long been questioned (O’Connor). The letters were republished by Archbishop Ussher in 1644 and by Le Clerc in 1698 (O’Connor).
141 Origen (185-ca.254), a Platonist teacher at Alexandria and Caesarea, believed that the Logos was the mediator between God and the world (Norris 15). In addition to blending Platonism with Christianity, he wrote commentaries on the Gospels of Matthew and John (Prat). His philosophy is known for embracing allegorical interpretation and subordination of the Logos (Prat).
142 Whitby: “All his Temptations shew, he looked upon our Saviour, not as a God, but only as one who might be dear unto him” (31).
understanding of early Christian theology, Mather wittily concludes: “This Argument of ye Socinians, will not prove, That our Saviour was not really GOD; it only proves, That the Divel was a Socinian” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:9). It did not occur to Mather that the author of the Gospel of Matthew may have been a “Socinian” as well.

4.7 The Son of Man and the Son of God

Jesus’s own words sometimes suggest that he was only a prophet. Mather hastens to explain Jesus’s “Son of Man” self-labelling. Mather concedes that “our Lord almost constantly calls Himself, The Son of Man” even though the Jews called the Messiah “The Son of David” (“BA” 8: John 5:27). He argues, using Lightfoot’s commentary, that Jesus did so in order to demonstrate that he fulfilled Daniel’s prophecy about the Messiah: “Behold, one like the Son of Man, came with the Clouds of Heaven” (Dan. 7:13). By applying that label to himself, “Our Saviour now points at those words of Daniel” (“BA” 8: John 5:27, c.f. Lightfoot 2:549). Lightfoot and Mather agree that the term was an allusion to Daniel. Since the prophets do not assert that the Messiah would be divine, this allusion does not indicate Jesus noting his divinity.

Furthermore, in John 5:30, when Jesus appears at the Sanhedrin to criticize the judges, he claims to be only a messenger, telling them: “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). Although Mather writes a gloss on this verse, he skirts the issue by claiming that Jesus was directly citing specific Jewish beliefs. Mather quotes a “Report” from the Sanhedrin section in the Babylonian Talmud regarding the judicial process at the Sanhedrin, which, he points out, is where Jesus voiced his criticism: “Our Lord, now before the

143 This witticism is Mather’s. Whitby merely concludes humorlessly: “This Argument doth therefore prove, not that our Saviour was not truly God, but only that the Devil did not then know him so to be” (31).
144 Lightfoot: “So did Christ in these words look that way” (2:549).
145 Lightfoot cites the same work (2:549).
Sanhedrin, seems to speak according to their own Rule: You Judge as you Hear, even so, I Judge as I Hear; meaning, as Hee had Received from ye written word of God, and ye Things therein written of Him; as well, as ye secret counsels of ye Father” (“BA” 8: John 5:30). With the exception of the unclear last clause, ironically, Mather suggests that Jesus had no greater insight as an interpreter than the Jewish judges. Mather adds that Jesus was arguing the accuracy of his judgment because it was objective: “My Judging is Just, because, I being sent of ye Father, do not my own will, but ye Errand that Hee sent mee upon” (“BA” 8: John 5:30).

Mather apparently did not see the problem in Jesus presenting himself as a disinterested third party. He did, however, recognize the difficulty in Jesus’s admitted limitations, such as this assertion in John: “For as the Father hath life, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also” (John 5:26-27). Elaborating on the powers of the three persons in the Godhead, Mather quotes Athanasius to explain “those Expressions, which occur sometimes of the Fathers Giving to the Son, and of this and that being Delivered” (“BA” 8: John 5:27). According to Athanasius, these terms illustrate the relationship between the persons: without limiting Jesus’s divinity, they “rather shew, that He is Really the Son” (“BA” 8: John 5:27). Somewhat confusingly, Athanasius also argues that the Son “alwayes” had these abilities, “thus, not that the Son sometimes had not these,” even though he had them from the Father, who also had them “from Eternity” (“BA” 8: John 5:27).

Jesus’s baptism likewise raises questions about his divinity. Critics questioned why Jesus, who was sinless, would need to be baptized at all. They also wondered why, if he was God, he

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146 Athanasius (ca.296-373), bishop of Alexandria, famously responded to Arius and his followers in defense of Jesus’s divinity (Norris 19). In Orations Against the Arians, Athanasius draws a parallel between the arguments of Arians in his time and the arguments of Jews in Jesus’s time (Athanasius 85).

147 Athanasius: “Someone who sees the Son in full possession of whatever belongs to the Father may... conclude that the Son is identical with the Father.... He is not the Father but the Logos of the Father and the eternal Son, who on account of his likeness to the Father has eternally whatever he possesses from the Father, and on account of his being the Son has from the Father whatever he possesses eternally” (95).
would be anointed by the Holy Spirit. Whitby accuses “the Socinians”¹⁴⁸ of charging “If Christ had been God as well as Man, he could not have needed this Descent of the Holy Spirit upon him” (27). In several glosses, Mather tries to answer these questions. He answers the first question handily, quoting Martin Luther: although Jesus indubitably had no sin, he took mankind’s sins upon himself as the Redeemer, and so “It was necessary that our Saviour should be Baptized for ye Remission of Sins” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). Mather answers this question confidently and well within mainstream Christological thought.¹⁴⁹

With regard to the second question, why an eternal member of the Trinity would need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit, this debate, Mather reveals, paraphrasing Whitby, dates back to the early Christian church. Citing Irenaeus and Justin Martyr,¹⁵⁰ he argues that “Christ, as God, could not need the unction of the Holy Spirit” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16, c.f Whitby 27). The descent of the Spirit did nothing for Jesus spiritually. Instead, the Church Fathers argued that the Spirit made a symbolic gesture to indicate that “ye prophetic office of our Lord Jesus Christ, was to be performed, not by the Divine Nature but by the Afflatus of the Holy Spirit” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). The anointing was the Spirit’s recognition of Jesus as a prophet. Whitby evidently saw the problem with this argument, and wrote, as Mather cites, “That in all ye Actions relating to the

¹⁴⁸ Whitby names these Socinians particularly as Johann Ludwig van Wolzogen and Johannes Crellius. Johann or Hans Ludwig von Wolzogen (1600-1661), a baron, lived in Vienna and later in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland), and criticized Cartesian philosophy (Bordoli 178). Scholar Roberto Bordoli comments that “the rejection of Cartesian philosophy by Wolzogen bears witness to the separation between philosophy and religion maintained by the Socinians” (184). Johannes Crellius (1590-1633) was a rector in Raków, Poland and an apologist for Socinianism (Platt 232). See also Knijff, Philip and Sibbe Jan Visser. Bibliographia Sociniana: A Bibliographical Reference Tool for the Study of Dutch Socinianism and Antitrinitarianism. Ed. Piet Visser. Doopsgezinde Historische Kring, 2004.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Calvin asserted that Jesus’s baptism was a manner of uniting himself with Christians and giving meaning to that sacrament (Smith 155). John Lightfoot similarly states: “When by the institution of Christ those that entered into the Profession of the Gospel were to be introduced by Baptism, it was just, yea necessary, that Christ, being to enter into the same profession, and to preach it, too, should be admitted by Baptism” (2:128).

¹⁵⁰ Justin Martyr (ca.100-165), a teacher in Rome who drew on Stoic thought to describe how the Logos functioned as a mediator (Norris 6).
prophetic office of our Lord, His Divinity must be supposed QUIESCENT, and He was assisted by ye Spirit of God” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16).¹⁵¹ In Whitby’s reading, Jesus’s divinity waned depending upon his activity.

4.8 The Spirit and the Dove

The most perplexing issue for Mather regarding Jesus’s baptism was the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. This anecdote is related, with variations, in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32). Always interested in symbolism, Mather implies that the Holy Ghost in the shape of a dove is the antitype of the serpent in Genesis.¹⁵² He does not use the terminology of typology, nor does he literally call the dove an antitype, but he notes somewhat farfetched parallels, such as that each appear in the third chapter of their respective books, even though he and all educated Bible scholars of his time knew that the chapter divisions were not imposed on either testament until well after Jesus’s execution (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). Mather’s brother, Samuel,¹⁵³ wrote about the chapter divisions in both the Old and New Testaments. Samuel comments that Stephen Langton, the archbishop of Canterbury, had divided the Hebrew Bible into chapters: “I do not perceive that any person has been able to prove that the penmen of the holy scriptures did themselves divide their books into chapters; as we have them in our modern copies” (61). Similarly, regarding the New Testament, Samuel adds: “That the New Testament was not at first divided into such chapters as it is now, we have certain evidence

¹⁵¹ Whitby: “In all the Actions relating to his prophetick Office, the Divinity of Christ must be supposed quiescent, and Christ must be said to perform his Miracles, to confirm the Doctrine which he delivered, by the Spirit of God, by which also he was assisted to speak the words of God” (27).
¹⁵² For more detail on typology, see Section 1.7, Radical Attacks on Typology, and Chapter Six, Typology.
¹⁵³ Samuel Mather (1674-1733) was an Independent minister in Witney, England (“Memoirs” 506). His name has fallen into “undeserved oblivion” despite his having written several defenses of the Trinity and the Bible’s authority (“Memoirs” 506). This Samuel should not be confused with their uncle, Samuel Mather (1626-1671), a more famous author and Independent minister in Dublin.
from the manuscripts that are still in being” (65). Legend held that Cardinal Hugh created the chapters in c. 1240 and Robert Stephens divided the chapters into verses in c. 1550 (65).

Mather also observes that the serpent cursed the first Adam while the dove declared the second Adam the “Beloved Son of God” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). Nevertheless, Mather contradicts himself by quoting Anthony Blackwall, who argues that a dove did not appear at all, and that such a literal reading is a “Great Blunder in a Socinian objection” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16, c.f. Blackwall 420). Blackwall laughingly dismisses the word as a description of “the Motion,” since “Grammar and plain sense show that the words have no Relation to a Bodily Shape” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16, c.f. Blackwall 420). Mather evidently felt hesitant to commit one way or another; instead of admitting that the parallels he had identified contradicted “plain sense,” he simply advises his readers to “allow a due Attention & Reception” to Blackwall’s ideas (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). Time and the rise of John Toland’s individualism might have changed Mather’s mind to make him more agreeable to this “plain” understanding of the passage.

Elsewhere, Mather agrees with Blackwall and flatly denies the literal appearance of the dove. Ordinarily a devoted disciple of Augustine, in his gloss on Mark 1:10, Mather calls the Church Father’s ideas on the dove “dangerous,” “Improper,” and “perillous” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:10). This criticism may be perhaps less surprising considering that Augustine’s assertion was adapted by Aquinas, but even anti-Catholic Mather does cite Aquinas periodically, including in this same gloss. Mather argues that the literal incorporation of the Ghost into a dove “was not fitt” because it implies “that ye Holy Spirit, should in this Thing Deceive them” (“BA” 7: Mark

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154 Anthony Blackwall (1672-1730), schoolmaster and Church of England minister in Derbyshire, England. He graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1698 (Westby-Gibson and Skedd). His Sacred Classics, which Mather cites, was first published in 1725 and was criticized by Samuel Clarke (Westby-Gibson and Skedd).
1:10). He clarifies that “all ye Evangelists express it, only, ως, Like as, or, As it were” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:10).

After questioning the literal appearance of a dove, Mather returns to considering the symbolism of “ye Shape of a Dove (if there were one)” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:10, parenthesis his). Leaning lightly on Aquinas, Mather addresses the symbolic innocence and purity of doves and notes the parallel with the end of the Noahic Flood (“BA” 7: Mark 1:10). He becomes further emboldened in his belief in the real presence of the dove in his gloss on Luke 3:22, where he speculates that it is “most probable, That here was not only the Shape of a Dove, but also that it was a Fiery Shape” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:22). Incredibly, Mather supposes that the Holy Spirit ascended upon Jesus in the shape of a bird literally on fire. Even more remarkably, he bases this image on extra-biblical sources. He explains that early Christian accounts mention a light shining on Jesus. Justin Martyr describes it as “Fire,” which Mather supposes comes “from an undoubted Tradition” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:22). Surprisingly, Mather accepts as credible non-canonical Gospels that corroborate this story: a description of light shining around Jesus appears in “the old Gospel of ye Nazaraeans, & Ebionites… And the Syriac Lyturgy” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:22).

Interestingly, in his gloss on Matthew 3:16, Mather notes that Jesus’s baptism followed a Jewish tradition: “The Kings of ye House of David, were to bee Anointed by a Fountain of Water” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). He does not name his source, although he attributes this tradition to the “Jewish constitutions” and the story of Solomon in 2 Chronicles 32:30 (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:16). The anointment by the Spirit would publicly place Jesus in the Messianic tradition. Mather also suggests that the Spirit appears at the baptism in order to clarify the doctrine of the Trinity. Although Mather believed that the Trinity is apparent in the Hebrew Bible, he also felt, like other

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orthodox Protestants, that the full power of the Spirit had not been made clear before. Upon Jesus’s baptism, the Spirit may “now Reveal Himself, as a person in God, and not a meer Qualitie, Operation, or Act” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:10). This sounds like an admission – however unintended - that the Old Testament did not present Trinitarian doctrine, even in its references to the Spirit of God.

### 4.9 Judge Jesus

Mather similarly explains why Jesus denies having the ability to judge. When the apostles James and John argue over a place at the table, Jesus tells them that “to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared” (Mark 10:40, c.f. Matt. 20:23). Mather cites Whitby’s paraphrase, which uses the exposition of Theophylact\(^\text{156}\) to argue that Jesus does not mean that he cannot judge, but rather that he is a fair judge, unlike James and John, who desire special treatment. As Mather explains, “Our Lord intimates, That He never varies from the Will of His Father. He is a Righteous Judge. . . . He dispenses this Favour to such only as the Will of the Father has directed” (“BA” 7: Mark 10:40).\(^\text{157}\) By demoting Jesus to being his father’s messenger, Mather does again seem to limit his divinity, even as he attempts to defend it. In another gloss on this narrative, Mather, relying on the translation by Robert Gell, claims that the words have been mistranslated and that Jesus said the seating had been prearranged: “The words of our Saviour should be read, It is not mine to give, Except unto them for whom it is prepared of my Father” (“BA” 7: Matt. 20:23, c.f. Gell 14). He adds, with Gell as his source, that this translation agrees with the Syriac, Arabic, Dutch,

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\(^\text{156}\) Theophylact of Ohrid or Theyphylactus of Ochrida (ca. 1050-ca. 1109), Greek Orthodox archbishop of Ochrida and teacher of rhetoric who critiqued fellow Greek Orthodox scholars for their attacks on Western Christian beliefs (“Theophylactus”).

\(^\text{157}\) Whitby: “It is not for me, who never vary from my Father’s Will, to give to others than to them for whom it is prepared by my Father… so Theophylact” (291).
and Spanish translations, as well as those by Pagnin, Castellio, Tremellius, and Coverdale (“BA” 7: Matt. 20:23, c.f. Gell 15). In this case, he implies that Jesus and his Father agree and will not change the arrangement.

Mather also ascribes Jesus’s self-limiting to his modeling humility for his followers. In Matthew, Jesus states that “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Matt. 19:17). Mather suggests in true Calvinist fashion\(^\text{158}\) that man’s “Great Sin” is “ascribing to himself, what belongs only to the Glorious GOD” and that Jesus, speaking to people who did not believe in his divinity, encourages them to remember humanity’s subservient position (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:17). Citing Johann Arndt,\(^\text{159}\) he proposes that Jesus “would not, while He was yett in a state of Exinanition, Challenge to Himself ye Glory which belong’d unto GOD alone” (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:17). Instead, he allowed them to continue to believe that he was “a Meer Man” (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:17). This misleading behavior seems inappropriately deceptive of Jesus.

Mather takes his interpretation to an even further Protestant extreme in his gloss on the same passage in Mark. Quoting William Lorimer,\(^\text{160}\) Mather assumes that the questioner was a Pharisee (“BA” 7: Mark 10:18). Noting that they were “Great magnifiers of the Power of Mans Free-will,” he adds hatefully that “so they are to this day; they are down-right Pelagians”\(^\text{161}\) who “think, that a man may, if he will, attain to be truly Good, without Help from any but himself” (“BA” 7: Mark 10:18, c.f. Lorimer 49). Based on Lorimer’s argument, Mather suggests that the

\(^{158}\) In his chapter on “Original Sin” in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin agrees with Augustine that “pride was the beginning of all evil, because, had not man’s ambition carried him higher than he was permitted, he might have continued in his first estate” (1:213).

\(^{159}\) Johann Arndt (1555-1621), a Lutheran theologian and pastor in Brunswick, Germany. His controversial works emphasizing moral living inspired Philipp Jackob Spener, the founder of Pietism, a movement Mather deeply admired (“Johann Arndt”).

\(^{160}\) William Lorimer (1640-1722), an English minister and active writer (Fesko 378).

\(^{161}\) Pelagius was a Roman writer in the early fifth century whose writings were later condemned as heresy (Pohle). Pelagius asserted, in line with Stoicism, that people could achieve goodness through willpower, and he denied original sin, countering that humans looked to Adam only as a bad example, while Jesus’s sacrifice presented a positive example (Pohle).
man Jesus was addressing not only assumed that Jesus was not divine but that Jesus’s goodness came “without any Dependence on, or Assistance from, any other” (“BA” 7: Mark 10:18).

Lorimer explains, “it is possible he might have had some suspicion that he might be the Messias,” but nevertheless, “it is certain he thought him to be but a meer Man, tho’ a very good Man” (49). However, Lorimer adds, “But possibly it will be said that there was never any Man in his Wits so absurd, as to entertain such Thoughts of a meer Man, as to believe that he could be good, morally good of himself, without being beholding to any other, God or Man, for his goodness” (49). He provides evidence of this belief, which Mather copies, by quoting pagan philosophers, such as Cicero and Seneca, who argue that people can rely upon themselves to become truly good (“BA” 7: Mark 10:18, c.f. Lorimer 50). Mather and Lorimer thereby reduce these ancient schools of philosophy into mere vanity. Lorimer calls these philosophers “absurd” for saying that “our Wisdom is from our selves” (50). Like these people, Mather concludes, the man who approached Jesus was “infected” with “Pelagian Haeresy” (“BA” 7: Mark 10:18).

Tellingly, Mather accepts that Jesus did not choose to set the man straight.

4.10 Conclusion

In Mather’s lifetime, anti-canon radicals like Charles Blount began not only to question the divinity of Jesus but to assert that Jesus’s ancient followers had not believed in it either. English Protestant ministers, like Samuel Clarke and Daniel Whitby, replied by providing explanations for the Biblical passages that present Jesus as a “meer man.” They also cite early Church Fathers who made the same assertions. These defenses, however, in proving that the Bible often paints Jesus as a prophet rather than specifically divine, at best avoid the problem at stake and at worst confirm radicals’ assertions about the first century of Christianity. Ancient Jews expected a prophet, and Jesus claimed to be that prophet, but belief that Jesus – or the
Messiah - was divine does not appear in historical sources until very late in the first century. It is telling perhaps that both Clarke and Whitby themselves ultimately questioned Jesus’s divinity.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: HARMONY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how Mather harmonizes inconsistencies both between the Old Testament and the New Testament and among the four canonical Gospels. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, harmonies were a popular method of addressing conflicting narratives. Mather uses Whiston’s harmony but does not produce his own. Instead, his glosses incorporate ideas from Bible commentaries that he felt resolved incongruities. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines how Mather confronts contradictions in the Biblical narrative.

As he untangles passages to illustrate Jesus’s divinity, Mather unintentionally demonstrates that the Synoptic Gospels overwhelmingly present Jesus as a prophet, not divine. Because he did not see any conflict in the idea of Jesus being both a prophet and the second person in the Trinity, Mather thought that Jesus’s omniscience could prove simultaneously that Jesus was both the Old Testament’s promised Messiah and a deity. He had a second goal in mind with this evidence; he wanted to illustrate the New Testament’s clear harmony with the Old Testament. While the historical Jesus probably saw himself located within the Jewish tradition, the early Christian church so fully separated from Judaism that to some Enlightenment critics, like Anthony Collins, the connection between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament appeared feigned. Just as the foundation of Jesus’s divinity was under attack, so were Christianity’s roots in the Old Testament. Mather therefore tried to illustrate the continuity between the testaments and indicate that together they formed a full, consistent narrative. He
does so primarily by proving that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament prophecies, and secondarily by noting similarities between the two testaments. In both cases, he oversimplifies the larger problem, as he does not prove that the promised Messiah was part of the Trinity, nor does he prove that the similarities between the testaments are anything more than coincidental.

The second, lengthier section examines how Mather harmonizes the four canonical Gospels. Mather recognizes that narratives, quotations, and chronologies vary between the Gospels. However, he also denies that any of the versions are incorrect. Instead of privileging one account over another as more historically accurate, he mostly suggests that the accounts should be joined, so that effectively each Gospel tells an incomplete part of the story. In some cases, though, such as the calling of the apostles, Mather cannot reconcile the conflicting narratives, and he instead privileges one account over another but still indicates that the variant accounts merely present different emphasis. He struggled significantly with reconciling the conflicting genealogies presented in Matthew and Luke. He offers numerous solutions, endorsing one after another, until he seems to finally tire of the subject; the harmonies he describes are so elaborate that the ability to consolidate the two accounts seems impossible.

This chapter sees Mather engaging in Enlightenment hermeneutical study. He remains biased, as he seeks a solution that will reconcile conflicting accounts, but in harmonizing the Gospels, he uses objective tools in order to find this preconceived truth. Likewise, he explains his process in arriving at his conclusions. Instead of demanding faith, as he does regarding miracles, Mather provides evidence to support his ideas. For example, he applies a historical-critical approach to the marriage of Jesus’s grandparents, weighing which would have been the most likely union in Greco-Judaic culture in order to determine which genealogy is more
accurate. Similarly, he studies cultural norms regarding executions so that he can assess which account of Jesus on the cross has the most reliable details. To explain why the New Testament appears to misquote the Old Testament, he provides both historical context regarding quoting in Jesus’s time and literary analysis of the words, including close reading that aims at understanding the author’s original intent. Inevitably, by using external sources and providing context, Mather indicates that the Bible cannot stand on its own as a reliable authority. More importantly, in addressing these conflicting narratives, Mather takes a significant step as an exegete: he encourages his reader to use empirical data and reason, not revelation, in order to interpret the Bible. Even though his bias remains clear, this chapter, particularly in the second section, demonstrates a sea change in Mather’s approach to hermeneutics compared to the previous three chapters. He accepts the challenge of radical critics and replies on their level, using their tools: evidence and reason.

5.2 Problem 1: The Biblical Narrative

5.2.1 The Importance of Being a Prophet

Mather grounds the affiliation of the two testaments in Jesus’s authority as the Messiah. Historian Jonathan Israel suggests that Jesus’s authority as a prophet was challenged in the seventeenth century, particularly by Benedict Spinoza. In *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Spinoza argues that Jesus was not a prophet but a wise person with awareness of universal human doctrines (Israel 195). Spinoza had a lasting impact on exegesis, Israel argues, because he had powerful friends (181). His Dutch friends, called the “Collegiants,” were anti-Trinitarians who rejected ecclesiastical hierarchy (182). This party influenced English thought and fueled the movement that led to Unitarianism (190).
Mather uses examples of Jesus’s accurate prophecies to illustrate that Jesus was the Messiah. In John 2:19, “our Lord utters His first Praediction, of His own Death” ("BA" 8: John 2:19). Mather explains that, through his prophecies, Jesus reveals how Christianity will replace Judaism. Mather suggests that the place where Jesus prophesied about his death was particularly significant: “in ye Temple, ye place of Sacrifice, were His First Words about His own Death, wherein Hee was to Terminate all sacrifice, by ye Sacrifice of Himself” ("BA" 8: John 2:19). Jesus demonstrates his omniscience again in Luke when Pharisees order him to rebuke his disciples, and he prophesies that “if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). Jesus implies that even if his disciples did not defend him, the stones would. Mather interprets these words as referring to Jesus’s execution, because as he died, “the stones then opened their Mouths, and the Rocks, by Rending as it should seem, with a mighty Noise, cry’d out against ye Murderers” ("BA" 7: Luke 19:40). These natural events are described in Matthew: “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matt. 27:51). Luke mentions different natural events at Jesus’s death: “And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:45). Mather unites the Gospel narratives so that this supposed prophesy related in Luke refers to an event related in Matthew.

Since Luke and Mark do not mention the earthquake, Mather uses extra-biblical sources that he thinks provide natural evidence of it (c.f. KJV Mark 15:33-38). In *The Loganthropos* (1707), Robert Fleming relates that an acquaintance told him about the experiences of a traveler in the Holy Land ("BA" 7: Matt. 27:51). This traveler, a deist, would “make merry” with

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162 Robert Fleming (ca. 1660-1716) was a Presbyterian minister in Leiden, Rotterdam, and London. He was considered an authority on classical and oriental languages and was offered the principalship of Glasgow University, which he declined (Mercer). His most famous writing was a two-volume work on Christology based on lectures he delivered in London (Mercer).
the stories related by the tour guides about the sacred places they visited, “and particularly, when they first shew’d him the clefts in the Rock of Mount Calvary” (Fleming 98). However, when he looked closer at the clefts, he told his fellow travelers: “I have been Long a Student of Nature, & the Mathematicks, and I am sure, These Clefts and Rents in this Rock, were never made by a Natural Ordinary Earthquake” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:51, c.f. Fleming 98). He supposedly converted immediately and pronounced the shape of the clefts “a Real Miracle, which neither Nature nor Art could have ever Effected” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:51). The new convert, thanking God for the sight, declared the rocks a “Monument” of God’s power, which “gives Evidence, to this Day, to the Divinity of Christ” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:51, c.f. Fleming 98). However apocryphal the anecdote, Mather, by way of Fleming, uses this story to support Jesus’s standing as both prophet and God. It also illustrates that here Mather did not seek, but rather spurned, a scientific explanation for a miracle. While elsewhere in his commentary, Mather emphasizes how God’s miracles might be physically possible, here the lack of scientific explanation, in the eyes of the traveler through Canaan, at least, makes the miracle compelling. Mather also mentions other extra-biblical, but historical, accounts of the event: he claims that Phlegon,163 Pliny, and Thallus all described the earthquake, and Mather suggests, further implying the supernatural essence of the event, that “it was probably universal; ye whole Earth felt ye Shock of it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). He does not explain why he makes this assumption.

Jesus’s miracles were further proof of his legitimacy as the Messiah, Mather argues. Because Mather believed that miracles were God’s way of supporting a ministry in the early stages of the Christian church, he sometimes leans on them as evidence not of Jesus’s divinity but his standing as a prophet. For this reason, the apostles praise Jesus as “a prophet mighty in

163 Phlegon of Tralles (d. ca. 140), a Greek historian, and Thallus (first century C.E.), a Roman historian. They were quoted by Origen and Julius Africanus, respectively (Ussher 822).
deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). Mather argues that the apostles meant “that God gave a Testimony unto His being such a Prophet, by His mighty operations accompanying of Him” (“BA” 7: Luke 24:19). To modern critical eyes, the apostles’ testimony would seem to indicate that they considered Jesus a prophet rather than God. Almost in support of this argument, Mather argues in another gloss that even mere humans could perform miracles to prove the legitimacy of their ministry. Jesus prophesies in Mark 16 regarding Christians: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17). The Bible provides several examples of God’s messengers performing incredible deeds, including resurrections: Elijah and Elisha both bring dead children back to life, Peter raises a dead woman, and Paul revives a young man (1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 4:35, Acts 9:40, Acts 20:10). However, Mather argues that Jesus’s prophecy about believers refers not only to the apostles, but to other early Christians after the canonical texts had been written. Irenaeus and Origen both claim that believers cast out devils in Jesus’s name (“BA” 7: Mark 16:17). Origen, Mather remarks, “saies, that even Ideots among ye Christians, did Expel Divels, not by any Curious or Magical Act but by such Prayers as may be made by the Simplest of men” (“BA” 7: Mark 16:17). Miracles, then, would not prove Jesus’s divinity any more than they would prove early Christians’ divinity.

For Mather, proving that Jesus was a prophet was important because it was a way of establishing biblical harmony. Because other Gospels and alternative histories of the Earth were gaining increasing attention in scholarly circles during the early Enlightenment, conservative exegetes like Mather strove to emphasize the legitimacy of the Protestant canon in order to explain why the New Testament canon was the legitimate record of Jesus’s life and the early Christian church to the exclusion of other Gospels and ancient records. One means of proving its
legitimacy was to illustrate how closely it corresponds to the Old Testament. In his gloss on Moses and Elias’s appearance on the mountain during Jesus’s transfiguration in Luke 9, Mather suggests that the Old Testament figures testified not only about Jesus’s death but his general mission when they, according to the verse, “spake of his decease, which he should accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Citing Lightfoot, Mather argues that the word translated “decease” in the King James Version should actually be rendered “exodus” and so “it intends His Ascension into the Heavens, as well as His Death” (“BA” 7: Luke 9:31, c.f. Lightfoot, 1823, 12:88). Mather adds that Moses and Elias “Discoursed with our Lord, no doubt, about His Death,” and that the passage indicates a conversation between Jesus and the two Old Testament figures, rather than a prophecy spoken by them about him (“BA” 7: Luke 9:31). The King James Version states that they “talked with him,” so this is not a fanciful reading on Mather’s part (Luke 9:30).

Citing Witsius’s interpretation of the passage, Mather elaborates that the “exodus,” might have referred as well to “our Lord’s Going forth out of Jerusalem, carrying His Cross, when He went unto His Crucifixion” (“BA” 7: Luke 9:31). It is a passage that simultaneously demonstrates Jesus’s omniscience, God’s approval of his mission, and his role in the biblical narrative. Mather goes so far as to add, in agreement with Grotius, that the passage also alludes to the “Departure of Israel out of Egypt” (“BA” 7: Luke 9:31). Even though it may seem to make little sense that Moses and Elias would prophesy about the past, this reading by Grotius suggests that these Jewish fathers allude to Israel’s previous triumph in order to include Jesus in all of biblical history, lending their own authority in support of his.

Mather explains that “Moses was ye first prophet of ye Jewes and Elias ye first prophet of ye Gentiles,” implying that the appearance of them both together symbolized the commissioning of a new, equally valid prophet (“BA” 7: Matt. 17:1). He describes them, citing Robert
Fleming’s Christology, as “the Representatives of the Ancient Church” who are there to “Attend upon our Lord, the Great Accomplisher of the Law; and they consent unto His being the Abolisher of it” (‘BA’ 7: Matt. 17:21). However, Mather ironically clarifies that Jesus’s mission did not need verification by Jewish leaders because he himself was the true authority figure: “They both of them now attend their Master, the Saviour both of Jewes and Gentiles” (‘BA’ 7: Matt. 17:21). Somewhat contrarily, Mather argues that Moses and Elias appear in positions that are at once both authoritative and subservient. They appear at the Transfiguration to validate Jesus’s mission while acknowledging their own inferiority, even though they thereby invalidate the authority by which they claim to speak. This confusion may be why he hesitates to state blatantly that they lent their ethos to Jesus: “Moses and Elias, ye Two most Memorable persons of ye Old-Testament Dispensation, did now also appear in Glory; Tho’ Doubtless a Glory inferiour to that of their LORD; from whom they borrowed it” (‘BA’ 7: Matt. 17:21).

The transfiguration itself, Mather felt, demonstrated Jesus’s fulfillment of the Old Testament’s expectations. With his shining face and raiment described in Matthew 17:2, Jesus exhibited “ye Distinct Glories of both Moses and Aaron” (‘BA’ 7: Matt. 17:1). Each of these ancient Israelites experienced one of those glories, yet “neither of those had Both; but both of these are now seen on our Transfigured Lord” (‘BA’ 7: Matt. 17:1). This demonstration of Old Testament glories in front of the very Jewish fathers who had similar experiences illustrated the kinship between their stories, Mather implies.

Mather dances around equating Jesus with the Jewish fathers, as he saw them as inferior to him but recognized that Jews in Jesus’s time would have revered them. That reverence is reflected in Matthew, which seems to have made Mather uncomfortable, since the Gospels were supposedly written to show the superiority of Christianity. Noticing how highly Matthew writes
of Moses and Elias, Mather quotes Fleming’s paraphrase in order to put words praising Jesus into Peter’s mouth. When they see Moses and Elias, Peter says to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (Matt. 17:4). According to Fleming, Peter worried that Jesus had not received sufficient respect from contemporary Jews and so he was recommending the creation of a new “Abode” to “make this mountain, the same to the Jewes now, that Sinai was of old unto their Fathers” (“BA” 7: Matt. 17:21). Fleming’s Peter assumed that this association would command respect: “When Moses and Elias shall appear to them again, they will no more doubt, that thou art ye Messiah, especially when they shall point thee out thus, in the Glory wherein thou art at present” (“BA” 7: Matt. 17:21). As Mather does not add further commentary on Fleming’s rendering, he apparently agreed with it.

5.2.2 Everyone has a Type

Mather likewise tries to harmonize the Old and New Testaments by observing parallels, even when they bear minimal resemblance to each other. While typology was losing its power as an interpretive lens in the early Enlightenment, Mather loved spotting “remarkable” similarities between the two testaments. He does not always, or often, call these similarities “types,” but neither does he call them coincidences.

Although he manages to piece together clues to determine it anyway, Mather admits that “Our Lords Birth-Day is no where mentioned in ye Scripture, nor indeed, is ye Birth-Day of any one Saint in all ye Scripture” (“BA” 7: Matt. 26:2). This parallel makes the Gospels consistent with the Old Testament history books, Mather notes: “Our Lord would in this point bee of ye Same Condition with Them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 26:2). Furthermore, because the day of Jesus’s death, the Passover, receives special attention in the Gospels, he challenges himself to see if it
had been “signalized by any Remarkable Events in ye Former Ages” (“BA” 7: Matt. 26:2). He
does not go so far as to claim that the parallels in the Hebrew Bible foretold Jesus’s death
explicitly, but he does not accept that they are coincidental. On “ye Same Day [Passover], in
several very distant Ages,” Abraham was called from Ur, Israel was called from Egypt, and the
decree to rebuild Jerusalem was sent (“BA” 7: Matt. 26:2). The parallels have particular
significance, Mather advises, because each example illustrates God’s gracious mercies to the
Israelites. The greatest mercy, Jesus’s sacrifice of himself for the forgiveness of sins, was the
most significant of these Passover events. Mather asserts that the historical mercies granted on
Passover indicated an additional truth: they are “An Intimation that ye Benefits of His Death,
were Extended thro’ all ye former Ages” (“BA” 7: Matt. 26:2). This striking argument illustrates
Mather’s comfortable placement in the Calvinist church.¹⁶⁴

Mather draws attention to consistency problems by ascribing Jesus’s decisions to a
deliberate, pre-ordained Hebrew Bible parallel. He reveals that God changes the names of three
figures in the Old Testament: Abram, Jacob, and Solomon, “And Christ now in ye New, changed
ye Names of only Three Disciples, Simon, James, and John” (“BA” 8: John 1:48).
Characteristically, when Mather observes a numerical parallel between the Old and New
Testaments, he mentions it, but does not explain its relevance. He evidently saw it as worthy of
note yet hesitated to use this opportunity to explain why.

Likewise, Mather sees “Remarkable” significance in the figuring of a fig tree in the
calling of Nathaniel (“BA” 8: John 1:48). He asserts that “As God saw ye first Sinners under a

¹⁶⁴ Calvinists believed that Jesus’s sacrifice retroactively extended to pardon the sins of Israelites who had
died before the Incarnation. Calvin notes that in Romans, Paul “carefully distinguishes between the sons
of Abraham according to the flesh and the spiritual sons, who are called after the example of Isaac”
(2:210). Paul does so, Calvin explains, because to be a son of Abraham did not impact grace, but “the
immutable counsel of God, by which he predestinated to himself whomsoever he would, was alone
effectual for their salvation” (2:210).
Tree, so Christ saw one of ye first Beleavers under a Tree” ("BA" 8: John 1:48). Nathaniel was one of the first, but certainly not the first; he was the sixth convert recorded in John, converting after John the Baptist, his disciple, Andrew, Simon, and Philip. Mather adds that both Adam and Nathaniel hid under a fig tree, but while Adam deliberately hides, Nathaniel is told about Jesus by Philip and approaches Jesus, who relates having seen Nathaniel “under the fig tree” before Philip intervened (John 1:48). The King James Version does not suggest that Nathaniel was hiding. Mather finally presents a contrast in his parallel: “Adam when hee was discovered, Expressed his Fear… Nathanael seen by our Lord, Expressed his Faith” ("BA" 8: John 1:48).

While Mather adds that both appear at the beginning of their respective testaments, the association he draws from the parallel is that “Nature” is in Adam while “Grace” is in Nathaniel ("BA" 8: John 1:48).

Mather sees similar parallels in Jesus’s renaming apostles. Just as “the Great God Himself, imposed Names on some of ye Cheef Creatures” such as “the Light, Day; and the Darkness Hee called, Night” that were “to have a more Extensive consideration in His Government of ye World,” so “Behold, ye same thing done in ye New Creation!” ("BA" 7: Mark 3:16-17). Even though the “Creatures” specifically named by God in the creation of the world are natural elements, and they were initially named by God, not renamed by God, Mather excitedly elaborates on this parallel: “As twas in ye Formation of ye World, thus in ye Formation of ye Church: Those Principal Ministers of our Lord, that were to bee ye more Eminent Leaders now, & hereafter Judges, of His People; our Lord, ye Maker of this New World, imposed particular Names upon them” ("BA" 7: Mark 3:17). He mentions that Simon, James, and John were given new names, as was Saul ("BA" 7: Mark 3:17). In fact, the renaming of James and John only appears in Mark, and it is the addition of a surname, rather than a replacement name as
in the case of Simon and Saul. James and John receive the surname “Boanerges,” which means “Sons of Earthquake, as well as, of Thunder” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:17).

Evidently drawing on an uncited exegete, Mather remarks that “It is thought” that the surname “had respect unto that prophesy, in Hag.2.7. I will shake all Nations, and the Desire of all Nations shall come” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:17). He adds that the surname fit, since their preaching had “a Force, Like that of Thunder, thro’ ye Jewish Nation” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:17). Their preaching can only be imagined, particularly since this reference to thunder does not appear in the other Gospels. Mather hints at a less supernatural possibility: “Quaere, Whether they took not some encouragement from ye Appelation, which our Saviour here gives unto them” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:17). They may have felt inspired to preach forcefully after Jesus urged them to do so.

5.2.3 Conclusion

Mather uses several means to illustrate the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps in response to Spinoza, and at least in imitation of his critics, Mather tries to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah anticipated by the Old Testament prophets. Even though Mather’s tone is persuasive, he nevertheless misses the bigger problem that the Old Testament Messiah was not inherently the second person of the Trinity. Mather also links the Old and New Testaments by noting several coincidental parallels between narratives. Possibly realizing that typology lacked authority among contemporary exegetes, Mather hesitates to call these parallels types or even prophecy fulfillments, leaving the similarities as just entertainment, not illuminations about the Biblical narrative.

165 When Boston suffered from alarming earthquakes during the winter of 1727-1728, Mather published a sermon with this name. In the style typical of his preaching, Mather mentions the two ministers named “Boanerges” and cries, “Oh! That one of the Boanerges were here to have the management of this EXHORTATION; and that he who is a Son of Earthquake, in Essays to serve the Intentions of the present Commotions, might be a Son of Thunder, in bringing with it the Right Words that shall be Forcible!” (Mather, Boanerges, 20).
5.3 Problem 2: Variations among the Gospels

A significant consideration in harmonizing the Bible was not only making the New Testament canon clearly fit with the Old Testament narrative, but also making the New Testament canon clearly match itself. In a sense, this was a bigger task, as the Gospels contradict each other both in their narratives and their quotations of Jesus. Numerous exegetes wrote harmonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several of which Mather depended on. The “first American attempt” at a harmony, E. Brooks Holifield notes, was John Eliot’s *The Harmony of the Gospels* (1678), which Mather, surprisingly, does not mention despite his admiration of the famous “apostle to the Indians” (Holifield 71).166 Mather’s clear discomfort with inconsistencies is one of the greatest indications of this work’s status as a precritical exegesis. Modern Bible critic John Barton observes that precritical interpreters saw inconsistencies throughout the Bible but insisted that they were only apparent, not truly inconsistent: “Harmonization is an attempt to deal with this awareness by showing that, contrary to appearances, it is actually a false perception of the textual data” (14). Mather himself particularly blamed translators for inconsistencies, as will be seen in Chapter Eight, Corruption of the Text, but he also, less critically, assumes that each Gospel holds a piece of the story and that joined together they are complete.

Like other orthodox exegetes, Mather tries to harmonize conflicting Gospel narratives by patching them together. One of the most problematic narratives for him was Jesus’s prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem. Mather argues that this narrative joins two of Jesus’s prophecies, one of which was fulfilled in 70 C.E. and one of which will occur at “the End of this World” (“BA”

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7: Matt. 24:42). He interprets it thus in order to maintain Jesus’s authority as a prophet since Jesus claims that “all these things” will happen before the apostles die (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). Mather further explains, quoting Whiston, that by joining the Gospel accounts together, one can tell the full story: “It is hard, that commentators will fix their Opinions, before they have ye patience to Examine, what Each of ye Gospels do say of the matter” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). He argues that in Luke there is a prophecy about “ye Destruction of Jerusalem” which includes not only “The Destruction of Jerusalem” but “The Dispersion of ye Jewes over ye world; & their captivity; The conculcation of Jerusalem, by ye Gentiles, till ye Times of Antichrists trampling down ye Holy City, be at an End” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). He thinks that these specific events are alluded to in Matthew 24:29 (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). This, he feels, clears it all up: “If we will be content, that Luke inform[s] us, what is meant, by ye Tribulation of those Dayes… Little Doubt will then arise concerning the Distinction of ye Two prophecies before us” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). In other words, Matthew’s account is partial and must be supplemented by Luke in order to be fully understood. This is not only a defense of Jesus’s status as a prophet but of the validity of the New Testament canon.

5.3.1 What’s In a Name?

Some narratives theoretically supplement each other, creating a fuller historical account. However, other narratives in the Gospels literally contradict each other. Since Mather strives to prove that all of the Bible is reliable, he attempts to reconcile these differences by suggesting that every account and therefore every Gospel is equally accurate. For example, Jesus’s calling of the

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167 An interpretation that could possibly be considered double fulfillment. However, double fulfillment generally refers to a single prophecy having two fulfillments, not a single speech including two prophecies. The issues at stake in the notion of double fulfillment are discussed in Chapter Six, Typology. 168 Mather summarizes Whiston’s dissertation on this topic appended to the latter’s 1706 commentary on Revelation, pp 290-302. The full title of Whiston’s dissertation is “The XXIV Chapter of St. Matthew, and Parallel Chapters in St. Mark, and St. Luke contain two distinct Prophecies: The One belonging to the Destruction of Jerusalem: The Other to the Day of Judgment.”
apostles appears differently in each Gospel. In Matthew and Mark, Simon is called first, when Jesus sees him fishing (Matt. 4:18, Mark 1:16). In Luke, Jesus meets Simon at the latter’s house (Luke 4:38). In John, Simon’s brother hears Jesus and brings Simon to him (John 1:41). Mather acknowledges that the calling of the apostles presents many inconsistencies, even though he does not admit that they are problematic. Instead, he highlights the issue by including a table from Fleming’s *Christology* that lists the apostles in the order in which they are commissioned by Jesus in the three Synoptic Gospels and in Acts (Matt. 10:1-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16, Acts 1:13). By placing the lists side by side, Mather makes the inconsistency obvious. Each list names twelve apostles, yet the order is different in each list and even some of the names are different.

Mather approaches this difficulty by addressing what is the same in each list. Immediately below his table, he writes: “It is to be observed, That all the Lists agree to sett Peter first” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Peter “was mark’d out by our Saviour, to be the First, that should begin ye Gospel-Church” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Likewise, “why Judas Iscariot is mentioned ye Last, in all ye Lists, the Reason is obvious” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Presumably, Mather meant that, because he betrayed Jesus, Judas was the least of the apostles. After noting the similarities, Mather examines the variations. He argues that “Matthew and Luke, follow ye order of Time, wherein ye Apostles were made acquainted with our Saviour” while Mark and Acts give preference to the apostles on whom “our Lord had putt more special marks of Honour” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Andrew appears fourth in Mark and Acts, because the sons of Zebedee, who appear before him, were witnesses of the transfiguration. This is how Fleming tries to resolve the variations of order, though he admits to being stumped: “Why Thomas is putt before him [Bartholomew] in ye Acts, we do not know” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Thomas is written after Matthew in Mark and Luke, while “Matthew mentions Thomas before himself: which only shews
ye modesty of ye Writer” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Mather also does not acknowledge or explain why Luke and Acts would name different apostles in a different order although both books were written by the same author.

The Gospels and Acts list the apostles in pairs. Mather evidently felt perplexed by Matthew and Luke grouping two of the pairs differently. He hypothesizes that Luke put the two men named Judas together to demonstrate the contrast “between ye Honest Judas, and ye Wicked One” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Strikingly, Mather suggests that in terms of accuracy, “we may rather follow ye Account of Matthew, who was present at the Action” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). By elevating Matthew, he privileges empirical evidence and assumes that Luke’s was a symbolic representation. Nevertheless, regarding the variation in names, Mather generalizes: “It was very customary among the Jewes, to call men by the Name of their Fathers” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). In fact, Mather notes, “Among ye Apostles themselves, there are several, at least Five, Instances of One person having various Names” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). For Simon, who has several names throughout the Gospels and Acts, Mather offers more convoluted explanations: “He had not ye Name of Cananite, from ye country or Nation, that of old bore ye Name of Canaan” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). By refusing to accept the name as a reference to Canaan, Mather dismisses the accuracy of the King James Version, as it spells the name with an additional letter, reading “Simon the Canaanite” (Matt. 10:4, Mark 3:18). Luke calls him “Simon called Zelotes” (Luke 6:15). Acts renders the name “Simon Zelotes” (Acts 1:13). Mather relates that exegetes offered different theories, such as that “Zelotes” was a Jewish nickname meaning “zealot,” or that he

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169 In a gloss about Matthew as an apostle, Mather notes that Mark and Luke do not label Matthew “the publican” in their lists of apostles – only Matthew does (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:3). Mather ascribes this label to Matthew’s humility as an author: “His own Humility in branding himself with the Remembrance of his own unhappy circumstances, is very Exemplary” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:3). It did not occur to Mather that the author of the Gospel was not that same apostle.
came from the town of Cana, or that he was alternatively called “Simon the Zelotes” in Luke because he had once been in a sect called the Zelots (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1).

Mather deliberately avoids providing a non-spiritual reason for the pairing of the apostles. He reveals that Fleming tries “to find out ye Rationale of our Saviour’s choice” in matching together each pair of apostles (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). But “I rather decline any further pursuit of that consideration. For I look upon the men, as having been among the most uncapable and Improbable part of mankind, for ye work in which they were afterwards Employ’d” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). He does not mean to denigrate them; rather, he feels that “they were miraculously & supernaturally Qualified for their work” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Mather literally chooses a supernatural explanation over a rational one in the same gloss where he privileges empirical evidence over hearsay.

Comparison of lists also allowed exegetes to determine which apostles were supposedly meant by different names. Lightfoot argues that the mysterious Bartholomew, Mather reports, must be Nathaniel, “if you compare the Order, wherein the Disciples are called, in the First Chapter of John, with the Order, wherein they are for the most part reckoned” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:3). The extent to which Mather was willing to conjecture for the sake of finding any reasonable explanation is evident in his gloss on Judas’s name. Mather argues that “Iscariot” might come from the Hebrew word for a leather apron: “Judas Iscariot then may signify, as much as, Judas with the Apron” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). Since “in such Aprons, they had their purses fastned,” this might refer to Judas having “ye Title of ye Purse-bearer” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). On the other hand, “what if he used the Art of a Tanner, before he was chosen into Discipleship!” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). Mather obviously had no idea. Furthermore, “if Judas were not branded with this Name, till after his Death, it may bee derived fro’ [Hebrew] Iscara” (“BA”
7: Matt. 10:4). That word among the Gemarists meant “the Roughest Death” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). It refers literally to strangling, “wherefore, Judas Iscariot, is as much as to say, Judas that perished by strangling” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). Lastly, Mather reports that Grotius “after all” asserts that the Greek word comes from a Hebrew term meaning “A man of Issachar” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:4). He leaves Grotius with that final word and the reader with no clear answer.

Simon most famously undergoes a name change, to Cephas, or Peter, meaning “stone” (John 1:42). Mather dismisses “Ridiculous Roman Catholicks” who claim that Cephas comes from the Greek word meaning “head” although he does not explain what makes that interpretation faulty (“BA” 8: John 1:42). His alternative explanation has no more apparent ground to it except that the church of Gentiles “was to bee founded on a Rock,” a “special work for this our Simon (or, Simeon)” (“BA” 8: John 1:42, parenthesis his). The name-changing seems unnecessary and calls into question why the omnipotent God would have had Simon born with the wrong name.

5.3.2 The Death of Judas

Mather acknowledges that the story of Judas is inconsistent in the New Testament canon. In a gloss on Acts 1:18, Mather’s interlocutor notes that Matthew reports Judas dying by hanging himself while Acts states that he fell on rocks (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18, c.f. Matt. 27:5). Even though surely one would assume that Judas could not have died both ways, Mather’s interlocutor asks, “Laying these together, I pray, what is ye Exact Story of ye business?” (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18). In fact, the differences between the passages are even greater than the interlocutor suggests: Matthew reports that Judas returned the silver, which the chief priests had paid him for betraying Jesus, then hanged himself,\(^{170}\) while Peter, giving a speech to the disciples in Acts, relates that

\(^{170}\) Whiston’s harmony of the Gospels follows this narrative (Whiston, *Harmony*, 541).
Judas purchased a field with the silver, then fell (Matt. 27:5, Acts 1:18). Even though Matthew relates that the priests purchased a field with the silver, these accounts certainly seem to be irreconcilable. Either the priests or Judas himself purchased the field, and either Judas died by suicide or by accident. Rather than call into question the Bible’s inerrancy, however, Mather unwittingly presents a list of increasingly ludicrous explanations proposed by other exegetes, compiled by Jacobus Gronovius.\(^{171}\) Some think that as Judas choked to death, he burst “with ye Raging Vapours raised by his Disturbed Mind,” as though a person could literally explode from insanity (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18).\(^{172}\) Others held that Judas broke the rope as he was hanging and fell onto rocks (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18). Lightfoot imaginatively argues that the devil lifted Judas up, choked him, and threw him (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18). Gronovius himself argues that “Judas did really Hang himself: λπλγχεςλ will admitt no other sense,” so the Acts account must refer to Judas’s unburied body (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18). A “well-known pitt” existed for discarding refuse, Mather explains, “& thither dragging this Wretched Body they threw it,” where it broke upon the rocks at the bottom (“BA” 8: Acts 1:18). Mather agrees that Judas must have committed suicide.

Forcing this story to fit with the rest of the biblical narrative, he names several biblical figures who commit suicide in the Hebrew Bible, “all of them such as in some singular Wickedness had surpassed & exceeded other men” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:5). Mather theorizes that self-murderers “rarely” act “without a very sensible possession of a Divel” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:5). In his gloss on the Matthew text, Mather includes a brief dissertation on suicide, mentioning the cases he has known. Although it is rarely addressed by historians, suicide was a cultural problem

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\(^{171}\) Jacobus Gronovius (1645-1716) was a professor of classics at Leiden who also practiced Dutch scholarship in Latin (Mijers 74).

\(^{172}\) Mather initially studied medicine at Harvard because he feared that his stammer would prevent him from having a successful career in the church (Jones, Introduction, xiv). In his medical guidebook, *The Angel of Bethesda*, Mather observes that in cases of insanity, “Irregular Particles, which being fixed in the Blood, with Acid or Biliious Ferments there, do help to fire the Animal Spirits” (129). He recommends bleeding, among other cures, as a remedy (131).
in Mather’s New England. The Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 have drawn scholarly attention to teenage angst in colonial Massachusetts, but less focus has been given to New England’s high youth suicide rate, which exceeded that of modern America (Kushner 227). In 1699, New England witnessed what Howard Kushner calls “a series of alleged epidemics of teenage suicides” (111). Mather attributed youth suicide to a decline in family unity, as he preached in A Family Well-Ordered (1699) (Kushner 227). A decade earlier, Increase Mather had preached a sermon on suicide, published as A Call to the Tempted: A Sermon on the horrid Crime of Self-Murder (1682). Suicide, unless caused by insanity, was considered a felony under colonial law (Kushner 14). Increase Mather argued that “melancholy” was a temptation of Satan and yielding to it was evidence of criminal guilt (Kushner 15). His son likewise preached that melancholy, and even madness, did not excuse suicide, because the temptation to suicide came from the devil (Kushner 25). Even in his diary in 1703, Mather describes experiencing this temptation himself (Wendell 206).

Mather does not mention the contradicting account of Judas’s death in Acts. Instead, he concludes his discussion of Judas’s suicide with a remarkable statement that summarizes the Enlightenment view of the Bible perfectly: “But behold, a Difference between Divine History and Humane!” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:5). He announces that in all times, “more Women have been self-murderers than Men; But in ye Bible, there is no one Instance of a Woman, that murdered herself” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:5). Mather does not, as appears at first glance, intend to argue that the Bible does not accurately reflect human history. Instead, as is characteristic of his view of the holy book, Mather means that the Bible contains so much supernatural intervention that it is almost foreign to uninspired humans.
5.3.3 *Something about Mary*

The genealogies of Jesus recorded in the Gospels likewise disagree. Mather bravely tries to sort out the conflicting details, telling his readers that he had “amass’d many Illustrations” in an effort to make sense of the contradictions (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38). His commentary strives to “leave out nothing that may give light in the matter of ye Two Genealogies” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). He evidently pondered this issue over the years as he worked on his commentary and it was hopefully some consolation that he concluded with an explanation that satisfied him.

In his first gloss on the issue, the interlocutor tactfully refers to the contradictions as “Difficulties,” saying only “You know what they are!” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Mather replies that “it is thought, that Matthew gives Josephs pedigree from ye House of Solomon, and Luke gives Maries, from ye House of Nathan” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). He even explains that Matthew follows the Jewish custom of tracing ancestry while Luke, “being a Gentile, followes ye Law of Nature” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Assuming those were in fact the customs of the time, this explanation makes reasonable sense of the vast difference between the two genealogies.

However, the text of Luke reads that the ancestry is that of “Joseph, which was the son of Heli” (Luke 3:21). Both Gospels claim to provide the genealogy of the same person.

Mather notes that “Learned men assert, That Luke as well as Matthew, gives us ye Genealogy of Joseph (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Their theory creates two problems, he explains: it does not prove Jesus to be descended from David, and furthermore, the two charts disagree. Mather courageously tries to resolve both problems, even though he could have easily presented them as an argument in favor of Luke’s chart referring to Mary. The pedigree of Joseph does prove Jesus’s natural descent from David, Mather argues. It shows that Joseph descended from David, and “in giving ye Pedigree of one, there was given ye Pedigree of t’other” since Joseph,
“an exact observer of ye Law,” would only marry “one of his own stock” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). The non-matching accounts in Matthew and Luke arise because “There were so many Names, and Men related unto Each other, that ye Evangelists were at their Libertie, in a more desultory way, to mention which they thought fitt” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). This freedom extended to omitting generations, leaving “a Loose Draught of the matter that is offered” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Without explaining why he has this confidence, Mather asserts that “ye Writers would never have offered unto ye public, if it had not been uncontestable” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Mather apparently does not see the irony in referring to such a heavily-debated genealogy as uncontestable.

Mather’s desperation to make the Gospels match rings clearly in the manner of his identifying Joseph’s father. Matthew names the father as Jacob, Luke as Heli. Mather tries to prove that both can be right, but also that one can be wrong: “If wee say Joseph ye son of Jacob did marry Mary ye Daughter of Heli, it satisfies mee well enough” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). This explanation somewhat stretches credulity, though, since Luke does not mention Mary in the genealogy, so Mather’s theory supplements information without evidence just for the sake of reconciling the Gospels. Nevertheless, it would seem more constructive for Mather to choose one explanation and stick with it, because his argument unravels quickly when he speculates that Jacob and Heli were brothers and one married the widow of the other (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). His specific wording indicates that his purpose was to defend biblical inerrancy at any cost, as he has already concluded that Heli was Mary’s father, but he adds the other explanation “if you will still have both to bee Josephs genealogies” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). In trying to prove that every interpretation is equally valid, he essentially proves that none of them are. Perhaps he recognized the weakness of this method of arguing and that is why he later crossed out the gloss.
Despite having crossed that one out, he makes nearly the same assertions in additional glosses. He argues, citing “Old Raymonds” 173 Pugio Fidei (1278) that “Jacob and Heli, were now Fratres uterini” because they had the same mother, but different fathers (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). According to this theory, Jacob’s father, Matthau, died and the widow married Melchi and gave birth to Heli (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Unfortunately, he does not explain how Martini deduced all of these details. Furthermore, this theory does not explain why Joseph’s uncle would be recorded as his father.

In an insert, Mather adds another theory: that Jacob married Heli’s widow (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). He explains, echoing Martini’s argument: “Among the Israelites, the Names of Generations were counted, either from the order of Nature or of the Law” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). The “order of Law” included “successors to the Deceased, who had no Genuine Children” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v., c.f. Samuel Mather 228). In other words, Jacob was Joseph’s biological father, but because Heli did not have children, the law considered the deceased Heli to be Joseph’s father. Mather explains again that Luke names Heli as Joseph’s father while Matthew names Jacob (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Although Mather does not present historical evidence to support this theory, he instead supports the position by suggesting its popularity. He points out that this theory is “agreeable” to Martini’s, but it was actually written “hundreds of years ago” by Julius

173 Raymond Martini (ca. 1220-1284), a Dominican preacher based in Spain who studied oriental languages (McHugh). He was chair of Hebrew Studies at the University of Barcelona (Spanier 6). He is most famous for his polemical Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos (1278) which cites the Talmud and rabbinical writings to support Christianity (McHugh). It was published in the seventeenth century in Latin and Hebrew (McHugh). He sourced his material for Pugio Fidei from his role in the commission, ordered by King James I of Aragon in 1263, to confiscate Hebrew books and expunge so-called blasphemy (Spanier 6). He consequently had access to, and cited, the Talmud, David Kimhi, Aben Ezra, and Maimonides (Spanier 6). Aben Ezra (1092-1167), a rabbi, was considered an authoritative exegete by Jews and Christians (Popkin, “Spinoza,” 3).
Africanus (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.).\textsuperscript{174} This theory came to him by way of Samuel Mather, his brother, in \textit{Vindication of the Holy Bible} (1723) (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.).\textsuperscript{175} In case the argument was not already clear, still copying from his brother, Mather draws a table on the back of his insert, with two columns of names, the left descending to Jacob and the right to Heli. Beside Jacob’s name he writes: “He married a woman, who was widow of \textit{Heli}, that had no children by her; But this \textit{Jacob} had \textit{Joseph} by her” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v., c.f. Mather 230). Clearly protesting too much, the brothers Mather reaffirm: “Thus, \textit{Joseph}, is by \textit{Nature}, the son of \textit{Jacob}, and by \textit{Law}, the Son of \textit{Heli}” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v., c.f. Mather 230). This overemphasis points to Cotton’s insecurity regarding this theory. Although his reader would only need to read it once, Mather evidently wrote it repeatedly to try to convince himself. Samuel, on the other hand, rests his case with a satisfied assessment: “There seems to be no manner of difficulty in this account; it being stated with all appearance of truth, and according to the known laws received by the \textit{Jewish} nation” (Mather 230). Here, Cotton breaks from his brother’s opinion, to reveal that his attempt to convince himself has failed: “After all, tho’ I was willing to give you this piece of Antiquity, I chuse to go to work another way about the matter” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Apparently, dissatisfied with this theory, Cotton decided to try to find another explanation.

He borrows a last excerpt from his brother but spins it like a radio DJ heading into commercials:\textsuperscript{176} “In the meantime, take an observation of \textit{Surenhusius}” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.).

The Hebraist scholar notes the obvious and uninteresting fact that Matthew writes in

\textsuperscript{174} Julius Africanus (ca. 160-ca. 240), a Christian historian who studied at Alexandria (Fortescue). His attempt to harmonize pagan and Christian history influenced other Church Fathers, including Eusebius and Jerome (Fortescue).

\textsuperscript{175} Cotton paraphrases Samuel: “It is objected against the evangelists, that in the exhibition of Christ’s genealogy there is an irreconcilable difference between St. \textit{Matthew} and St. \textit{Luke}. \textit{Julius Africanus} has many hundred years since, made them friends” (Mather 228).

\textsuperscript{176} Or, as James Hartman states regarding Mather’s rhetoric: “Cotton Mather seems at times like a carnival barker or impresario as he presents his providence tales in \textit{Magnalia Christi Americana}” (91). Mather’s enthusiasm is in full force in “Biblia Americana” as well.
chronological order, beginning with Jewish fathers, “that he might answer the Jews,” Mather exclaims, while Luke “writes to ye Gentiles, among whom the Name of our Saviour was in the Highest Honour” and therefore begins with Jesus and lists the genealogy in reverse chronological order (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.).

Turning back to the matter at hand, Mather offers another reading of the texts, “if what is already written do not satisfy,” clearly mirroring his personal opinion on Samuel’s argument (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Hilariously, he proposes “a short way” – as though a man who authored 400 books, including this 4500-page commentary, would know how to be succinct – “to solve the Difference of the Two Evangelists” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Citing Numbers 36:8, he points out that daughters would inherit and “the next kinsman” would marry a childless widow, though the child would take the first husband’s name (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). His point is that “ye Names of Both men may bee Entered in the Register” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Unable to stop himself from sounding like a broken record, Mather elaborates: “The Genealogies of the Jews, therefore, were of Two Kinds; One of their Natural; another of their Legal, descent” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.).

Then he echoes a second argument he has already made: “the Virgin Mary, being the only Child of her Father it was lawful for her, to bee Espoused unto none out of her own Family; and therefore the pedigree of Joseph sett down, show’d her Lineage, as much as if her own Pedigree had been inserted” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Luke may have recorded Mary’s ancestry but ascribed it to Joseph because they were closely related already. The conflicting genealogies evidently were as much of a headache for Mather as they would have been for his readers had the commentary been published; Mather had already written this argument, only to cross it out, write another, supplement it, then write this one again. At least here he also asserts, apparently with

177 Samuel Mather paraphrases Surenhusius: “The evangelist [Matthew] begins with these great men, to remove the prejudice of the Jews, who look’d upon Jesus with contempt” (231).
evidentialism in mind, that the genealogies “must bee Exactly the same with the Registers of the Genealogies then Extant, which were upon all Accounts kept, with the Greatest Exactness Imaginable” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). It would follow, he adds, that if the genealogies in the Gospels varied from the public records, “this had forever silenced all pretences to our Saviours being the Messias” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Jesus’s contemporaries would have raised an outcry had the Gospels falsified his genealogy, because, he explains in a gloss on Matthew, “There were then Censual Tables kept, out of which they would have been confuted” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). He bases this argument on his assumption that the Gospels were written – and evidently dispersed - before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the genealogical records.

Despite all of these efforts, Mather still did not feel satisfied. His interlocutor charges, “All that you have hitherto said, upon the Genealogy of our Lord, Leaves Room still, for further enquiry. I will therefore Enquire again; How Joseph was called, the Son of Heli” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Here Mather supports his earlier argument, that Luke’s genealogy refers to Mary, not Joseph. The passage reads: “Jesus… being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli…” (Luke 3:23). Mather, by way of Lightfoot, argues that the pronoun “which” refers to Jesus, not Joseph, and so it “must bee carried in the Mind of the Reader, to every Race in this Genealogy,” making the passage mean “Jesus (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, and so, the Son of Heli” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). This far-fetched explanation allows the text to be inerrant and it also matches “the Genealogical Style” of Moses, who writes in Genesis 36:2 of “Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite” (Gen. 36:2). Tongue-in-cheek, Mather jokes that if one read the Genesis passage as “Aholibamah ye Daughter of Anah, which was the Daughter of Zibeon, you emasculate Anah, and make a woman of him, who was a man, and the Father of Aholibamah” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Instead, readers should assume that
Jesus, not Joseph, was the descendant of Heli, just as Aholibamah, not Anah, was the daughter of Zibeon.

Emboldened, Mather inserts a leaf on which he writes that “It is highly probable” that Luke refers to Mary’s ancestry (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). He assumes that Luke was written to complement Matthew: “Matthew… had already given the line of Joseph. Luke, had no doubt seen it” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). While Jewish readers “might well be satisfied with Matthewes Account of our Saviours Genealogy by Josephs Line,” Gentiles “might Expect a further Account of Maries line, inasmuch as our Saviour was Really descended of her, as he was not of Joseph” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Consequently, the pronoun “which” may “very well be applied unto Jesus, without the Least Violence to ye Text” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Possibly using Lightfoot as his source, Mather evidently feels more satisfied with this interpretation than he did with his brother’s and Raymond Martini’s theories. He confidently advises his reader: “Consult the Syriac version, and you’ll find this Notion abundantly countenanced; and there is nothing harsh, & hard, & constrained in it” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). This list of adjectives reveals Mather’s feeling toward the other theories with which he struggled for so many years.

At last satisfied with an interpretation of the genealogies, Mather concludes the lengthy discourse with “a Final Stroke to our Amassment,” by borrowing from Whiston’s Harmony of the Four Evangelists (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38). Here again he affirms that Matthew refers to Joseph’s ancestry and Luke to Mary’s. Quoting Whiston, he explains that the genealogies jointly meet the requirements established in John: “One single verse… will give us the True Reason of ye Two Genealogies… corresponding to the Two Great Characters of ye True Messiah. Joh.7.42. Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the Seed of David, & out of ye Town of Bethlehem, where David was?” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38, c.f. Whiston, Harmony, 171). Whiston remarks that
both requirements, descent from David and birth in Bethlehem, were prophesied about the Messiah, and so “both these Characters are own’d by all Christians to be necessary” (171). Consequently, Whiston and Mather add, “Now, I say, the two Genealogies of our Saviour were principally design’d to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth had an undoubted claim to them both” (Whiston 171, c.f. Mather “BA” 7: Luke 3:38). This reading makes Gospel harmony mandatory; according to Mather, Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels serve John’s purpose, even though he believed that they were written first. It would certainly seem more logical that if John was arguing the Messiah’s being descended from David, then John would include the genealogy. Alternatively, if Matthew and Luke deliberately wished to show that a prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus’s genealogy, they should be the ones who quote the relevant Hebrew Bible passage. This logic, however, treats the Gospels as three independent works; Mather did not.

As Mather wrestled with Raymond Martini’s theory from Pugio Fidei until at least 1723, when his brother’s work was published, this agreement with Whiston likely reflects the position he held at his death. Interestingly, Mather asserts that in Jesus’s time, Jews “never questioned ye Truth of our Lords being of ye Tribe of Judah, and ye House of David” as, if they had, they would have mentioned it “as an Invincible Argument against His pretensions to be the Messiah” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38). This is a good point, and one he had raised in an earlier gloss. However, the passage he quotes from John 7 actually comes from doubting Jews, as the context of course implies, since they were the ones quoting the prophets’ words about the Messiah. Overlooking this problem, Mather instead cites the Jerusalem Talmud which mentions a Mary who is the daughter of Heli (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38). He completely contradicts his assertions only pages earlier, taken from Martini, Africanus, and his own brother, by arguing that the genealogical descent by law rather than nature “can have no place in the present case” and that the lines

178 Mather does not cite the specific text, but the reference is to Hagigah 2:4.
represented in the two genealogies were too distant that “Jacob of ye Family of Solomon, should be next of kin to Heli, of the Family of Nathan” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:38). In other words, Mary and Joseph could not have descended from the same tribe or had nearly indistinguishable genealogies.

He elaborates further on the importance of Joseph’s ancestry in his glosses on Matthew. There, he notes the irony that “the Jewes” make a “Shrewd Cavil” against this genealogy by asserting that “the Genealogy of Joseph does not belong to Jesus” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Mather certainly does not debate whether Joseph’s genealogy literally belongs to Jesus, but he points out that Matthew included Joseph’s genealogy in order to appease Jews: first of all, “the Jewes commonly look’d on him, as the Father of Jesus,” and secondly, “It was not usual for ye Jewes to draw a Genealogy by the Mothers side” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). He also contradicts his own earlier assertion by stating as follows: “It is an Error of many Christian writers, That a Jew might marry nowhere, but in his own Tribe” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). In fact, he claims, “The whole Bible confutes it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Nevertheless, Mather holds that Mary came from the same family as Joseph anyway, and he dismisses the questioning by “modern Jewes” as “unreasonable… when ye Ancient Jewes never did it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.).

5.3.4 Minutae

In arguing that the genealogies served different purposes, Mather recognized that the authors of the Gospels consciously wrote to two different audiences and were deliberately selective in their narratives. He attributes the different order in which the Gospels record Jesus’s temptations to this same audience awareness. Mather considers Matthew “ye True” order because of his use of “Then, and, Again” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Luke, on the other hand “pursues a further Design” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Mather takes for granted that Luke intends to supplement
Matthew, “supposing ye Reader to bee well-satisfied in that” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Even though he knew that the authors wrote for different audiences – he makes this clear in his glosses on the genealogies – he nevertheless also seems to assume that Luke’s Gentile audience had access to and interest in Matthew. For this reason, Luke “had, by ye Genealogie of our Lord, on ye side of His Mother, been pointing Him out for ye promised seed of ye Woman, that was to destroy ye power of Satan” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). In turn, his description of Jesus’s temptations focuses on this “Wonderful combate” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Luke arranges the order of the temptations to make them “answerable” to the serpent’s temptation of Eve by showing how the devil tempted through the lust of the flesh, the eyes, and pride (“BA” 7: Luke 4:1). Luke himself does not directly draw the parallel; evidently it was up to insightful readers like Mather to see the connection.

Mather takes for granted as well that Christians read Mark alongside Matthew and Luke, because he argues that even in relating a simple story, the three Gospels must fit together. As they travel to Capernaum, the apostles argue over which of them will be the greatest in heaven; Jesus points to a child as an example of the innocence one must have. The Synoptic Gospels agree on this basic outline but disagree about the details. In Matthew, the disciples approach Jesus together and ask him directly (Matt. 18:1). In Mark, Jesus asks them what they had been arguing about, and “they held their peace, for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest” (Mark 9:34). They refuse to confess, but Jesus appears to know anyway and lectures them, using the example of the innocent child, as in Matthew (Mark 9:35-37). In Luke, the disciples debate it amongst themselves, but Jesus “perceiving the thought of their heart,” intervenes and lectures them, again using the example of the child (Luke 9:46-48).
The moral lesson remains the same regardless of who raised the question first or how exactly Jesus phrased his response.

Although the differences in detail do not equate to a fundamental divergence in doctrine, Jesus’s character, or ecclesiastical history, Mather tries to explain away the conflicts anyway, because any implied historical inaccuracy without a symbolic explanation could undermine the text’s authority. Therefore, his interlocutor asks, “Now, how are the seeming differences to be Reconciled?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 18:1). Mather hints that it can be done easily, even without implying that at least one of the Gospel writers made a mistake. In fact, Mather really only draws attention to the minutiae, and he offers such an outlandish reconciliation of the details that he unintentionally highlights their inability to be properly reconciled. Mather pieces the three narratives together by taking a passage from each and rewriting the story. This fourth narrative claims that Jesus omnisciently knew what the apostles argued about, even though they refused to tell him (“BA” 7: Matt. 18:1). This narrative directly contradicts Matthew’s account (“BA” 7: Matt. 18:1). Even though his attention to it is sometimes damaging to his cause, Mather revels in minutiae; he even speculates about which apostles began the argument (“BA” 7: Mark 9:33).

5.3.5 Drinking on the Job

Mather highlights another variation in minutiae between Matthew and Mark; Matthew reports that soldiers gave the dying Jesus vinegar with gall, while Mark calls it wine with myrrh (Matt. 27:34, 27:48, Mark 15:23, 15:36, Luke 23:36, John 19:29). Borrowing Lightfoot’s theory, Mather notes that the “custome of the Nation” then was to present the executed with wine and myrrh, while “Matthew relates the Thing as it was really Acted” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:34). Lightfoot explains that the drink would cause the executed to “lose their senses” (348). Though

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179 Lightfoot’s commentary on Matthew: “The words of Mark seem to relate to the custom of the Nation; those of Matthew, to the thing, as it was really acted” (Lightfoot 2:267).
the executors would typically present wine, in Jesus’s case they presented vinegar “for the more
of mockage and rancour” ("BA" 7: Matt. 27:34, c.f. Lightfoot 349). Mather claims he sees “no
contradiction, between ye Two Evangelists” ("BA" 7: Matt. 27:34). In each Gospel, Jesus
receives an offer of vinegar “to take away the sense of pain,” but, “our Lord, that He might show
His Readiness to suffer, would not meddle with it” ("BA" 7: Matt. 27:34). This offer is attested
in Luke as well. In John, though, Jesus not only drinks the vinegar but requests it. Mather
remarks that Jesus’s drinking vinegar fulfills Psalm 69:21 ("BA" 8: John 19:29). This fulfillment
is especially significant, he reports sagely, because “giving Vinegar unto Dying malefactors was
Diametrically contrary unto ye common & courteous custome of ye Jewes” ("BA" 8: John 19:29).
Ordinarily, as he had explained before, they would provide wine and myrrh to dull the
senses, while vinegar “awakens ye sense of pain, & recovers out of swoons” ("BA" 8: John 19:29).
This is a spiritual explanation, and one that connects the Old Testament with the New
Testament, but it does not clear up the contradiction. Nor does it explain why in his gloss on
Matthew he claims that vinegar was used to dull pain.

In his gloss on the passage in Mark, Mather changes his tune. He suggests that, according
to Nehemiah Grew, the Ethiopian version of the text calls the liquid wine, not vinegar ("BA" 7:
Mark 15:23, c.f. Grew 309). Grew adds that “by Gall, Matthew meant, according to the Hebrew
Stile, only something that was bitter; as Myrrh also is” (Grew 309). Therefore, even though Mark
differs from Matthew and Luke in the King James Version, Grew proclaims, “they are all true”
("BA" 7: Mark 15:23, c.f. 309). Mather assumes that the soldiers offered Jesus the same
“cordial” that they would typically grant to the faint, except this wine “had lost its scent, and was
grown sowre” ("BA" 7: Mark 15:23, c.f. Grew 309). Johann Heinrich Reitz180 attempts to

180 Johann Heinrich Reitz (1655-1720) was an itinerant Pietist minister based in Frankfurt and author of
the influential Historie der Wiedergebohrnen (1710), a history of the Pietist church (Shantz 37).
resolve the contradictions by arguing that Jesus was offered a drink twice, which agrees with the narratives in Matthew and Mark. Although he refused the first offer, wine, he later called out for a drink, and a soldier put hyssop in the wine to make it even more bitter before Jesus drank it ("BA" 7: Mark 15:23). This seems to be Reitz’s means of explaining why in Matthew and Mark, Jesus was given a fresh sponge of vinegar while on the cross, yet in John the vinegar comes from a full bowl that was already available.

Mather must have realized that his attempts to conflate the narratives only made the differences more stark. Borrowing from John Edwards, he discourses at length on what Jesus drank on the cross. Edwards argues that “They were Two Distinct Cups, at Two Distinct Times given to our Saviour” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:22). The wine came from “compassionate Friends” before he was put on the cross (“BA” 7: Mark 15:22). Numerous scholars agree that it was an intoxicating wine meant to relieve pain, Edwards and Mather say, and Jesus refused it (“BA” 7: Mark 15:22, c.f. Edwards 182-186). Edwards naively claims: “Indeed, there is no occasion to reconcile the Evangelists, because they don’t fall out with one another, but very firmly agree” (181). According to Edwards’s reading, which conflates the four narratives, shortly afterwards, “Enemies” offered Jesus sour wine or vinegar with gall, “not to Abate, but to Augment, the sense of pain” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:22). Mather does not mention whether Jesus refused this cup. At any rate, Edwards closes the discussion while Mather continues. After the sour wine, Mather remarks, “Anon, we find our Lord molested with a Third potion” ("BA" 7: Mark 15:22). The third drink, a sponge of vinegar and hyssop, was given to Jesus on the cross, not to stimulate or

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181 Edwards, after discoursing on other exegetes’ theories: “But I rather take it upon me to effect it thus, namely, by asserting that these passages of the Evangelists must be understood of Two Distinct Cups given to our Saviour at different times” (Exercitations 181).

182 Edwards puts it more dramatically than Mather: “Instead of good and generous Wine, they gave Christ sotr dead Wine, or Vinegar: and moreover, they blended it with Gall, to make it distastful [sic] and loathsom, and (not to alleviate, but) to increase the sense of pain” (187).
relieve his sense of pain, but only to “Quench His Thirst,” as “Vinegar was used in these Hott countreyes, for that purpose” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:22). Since he did not add anything further, this conclusion was probably Mather’s final thought on the vinegar story, unresolved as it might seem.

Mather was not the only exegete to try to harmonize by building a long, repetitive narrative. Modern critic John Barton notes that this style of harmony appeared in the Reformation and is exemplified by Andreas Osiander’s *Harmonia evangelica* (1537) which insists on a literal meaning (Barton 17). One of the early major harmonies, Augustine’s medieval *De consensu evanglistarum*, emphasizes that the literal truth has less importance than the “sense,” so even though one Gospel has John the Baptist unfit to untie Jesus’s sandals, and another has him unfit to carry them, the sense is that John the Baptist was humble (Barton 16). Reformation Protestants like Osiander, however, wanted the literal truth and insisted that every Gospel was correct, so “Jesus heals the servants of two different centurions, cleanses the Temple three times,” and so on (Barton 17). Barton applies an apt simile: “Augustine and Osiander are like lawyers adding up evidence from many sources to make a case” (19). Like lawyers, authors of harmonies argue in order to defend a specific position.

Unfortunately, another step in Mather’s thought process is missing, as, in his glosses on Luke he includes a note: “It happens, that by an unhappy Accident, a Leaf of our *Illustrations* in this place has been torn out; and I cannot now recover ye Treasures, which this Leaf contained” (“BA” 7: Luke 23:34). Mather’s arrogance aside, his obvious heartbreak and sense of defeat over losing a section of his hard work rings through clearly. One of the illustrations was “on ye Vinegar brought unto our Lord” and although he could not remember the details of his original

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183 Andreas Osiander (1498-1552), a leader of the German Reformation, taught at the University of Königsberg (“Andreas Osiander”).
gloss, he vaguely recollected that soldiers commonly drank vinegar and “had it alwayes by them” (“BA” 7: Luke 23:34). The missing section, which caused him such disappointment, may have been lost, stolen, or destroyed by his wife. The contradictions presented by Mather – vinegar dulls the senses, awakens the senses, and relieves thirst – indicate the damage that could be caused by harmonies. Instead of resolving the conflicting accounts of what Jesus drank on the cross, Mather highlights the conflicts then tries to patch all of the narratives together, implying that each is incomplete on its own.

5.3.6 Misquoting the Hebrew Bible

Exegetes had long been aware of apparent misquotations from the prophets appearing in the New Testament and of facts related in the New Testament not according properly with details provided in the history books of the Hebrew Bible. These issues undermined the inerrancy of the Bible by raising questions about the accuracy of its translations, the inspired nature of the Gospels, and the legitimate connection between the Old and New Testaments. Mather’s concern with this issue dominates his Bible commentary and his attempts to find resolutions are sometimes transparently desperate. Although Mather did not doubt in the slightest degree the

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184 In 1724, Mather’s study was robbed of six pounds – about three months’ salary – and at least one private letter (Silverman 377).

185 Mather’s third wife, Lydia Lee George, fought with him regularly after their 1715 marriage. Silverman remarks: “Only Mather’s account of these episodes survives, leaving it unclear whether Lydia suffered from a clinically severe emotional disturbance or was only fed up with Mather’s behavior” (382). In 1718, Lydia searched his study and stole some of his diaries, claiming he would never see them again (Silverman 310). At some point around then, she encouraged him to write and sign “a ‘True Account’” of what he had written about her in his diary, illustrating his “approving and affectionate” remarks about her (310). Silverman labels this signed account “weirdly pathetic” and reveals that despite this supposed agreement, the domestic disruptions continued (309). In the summer of 1724, Lydia left him “in the dead of night” to stay with a neighbor, after, Cotton reported in his diary, she had “charged me with Crimes, which obliged me to rebuke her lying Tongue, with Terms I have not been used unto” (quoted in Silverman 386). This public humiliation happened within days of Cotton hearing about the death of his oldest son, Increase, at sea and the same summer that Cotton was declined for the presidency of Harvard.
legitimacy of the New Testament, he recognized that the numerous misquotations or false allusions pointed to human errors that undermined it.

Jesus himself appears to commit this error. In Luke 4:17, Jesus reads from the book of Isaiah, but one of the clauses he quotes does not appear in that prophet. Although some, Mather notes, suggest that the clause had been in the margin of the Septuagint, he explains that he “can by no means grant” the accuracy of that claim (“BA” 7: Luke 4:n.v.). Instead, he depends on the insight of Maimonides, who asserts that readers might “skip from one Text to another” for the purpose of clarification (“BA” 7: Luke 4:n.v.). Mather proposes that the mysterious clause appears in Isaiah 58:6, even though that text too is slightly different – by only “but one Syllable changed,” Mather excuses (“BA” 7: Luke 4:n.v.). Citing Lightfoot, Mather adds another gloss to describe the tradition of skipping passages. The tradition stemmed from the physical condition of the books: “Each of ye five Books of Moses, & ye Books of ye greater prophets, were single; only ye Twelve smaller prophets were bound up together” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:17, c.f. Lightfoot 2:407). A reader could skip from one passage to another in order to illustrate a matter, “but not from one prophet to another, but only in ye Twelve smaller prophets,” at least, according to “a Tradition” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:17, c.f. Lightfoot 2:407).

The genealogies present another such problem. Mather struggled at length with inconsistencies between Matthew and Luke’s genealogies, but another inconsistency, which Mather only addresses in his glosses on Matthew, is the number of generations in each pedigree. Between Abraham and Jesus, Matthew records forty-two generations, Luke fifty-six (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Mather argues that the difference is really only eleven generations, not fourteen, because there were three kings that “we all know, were omitted” from Matthew’s account because of their ancestor’s idolatry (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.).
Matthew relates Joseph’s descent from Abraham, but it does not match the pedigree named in the Hebrew Bible. The interlocutor notes: “It is objected, I know, That here [v.9] Ozias begat Joatham. Whereas tis clear [1 Chron.3.11,12] that Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah, were in between Ozias and Joatham” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v., brackets his). In this case, Mather replies that “Immediate Generations, are not in this Genealogie always pretended unto” and he adds that Matthew had “perhaps Mystical Reasons, for such Omissions” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Needless to say, he elaborates on what they are, even though the word “perhaps” hints that he was speculating. He argues that, in accordance with the Second Commandment which promises to “visit the sins of ye Fathers upon ye Children to the Third & Fourth Generation,” since Joram, the father of Ozias and grandfather of Joash, was an idolater, God “blots them out of this line to the Fourth Generation” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v., c.f. 2 Chron. 21:14).

The intensity of this concern is evident in Mather’s replying to a “further” objection, that Jeremiah had announced a curse on Jechonias, making him “childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days” (Jer. 22:30). Unwilling to overlook an inconsistency or unclear detail, Mather retorts that the entire curse includes the following: “No man of his seed shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David, & Ruling any more in Judah” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Therefore, “Tho’ hee had a son, Salathiel by Name, yett that Son was not a successor in ye Kingdome” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). Likewise, Matthew states that “Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren,” but, Mather’s interlocutor asserts, “Josias did not beget Jechonias, who was his grandson, and it appears not that this Jechonias had any Brethren” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:11). Mather explains that both Josephus and the Septuagint use the same name for Jechonias and his father, Jehojakim, and while the son did not have brethren, the father did, and so the text refers to Jehojakim (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:11). This also reveals, he argues in another gloss, why Matthew seems to claim falsely
that there were three sets of 14 generations – called tesseradecades – when the third set only has 13 names. It is because “ye Jechonias, who concludes ye Second of ye Tessaradecads, was ye Jehojakim, who was the Father of ye Jechonias that begins the Third” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v., c.f. Matt. 1:17). Returning to the problem of the three missing generations between Ozias and Joatham, Mather stretches credulity when he asserts that “Matthew does not say, There were no more than Fourteen Generations from David unto the Captivity” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.). He admits that for the first tesseradecade, “he saies, Fourteen were All,” which indeed appears conclusive, “but,” he argues, “coming to the Second Interval, he leaves out the word, All” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:n.v.).

Equally problematically, neither of the Gospel genealogies matches the Old Testament genealogies. His handling of incompatibility with the Hebrew Bible genealogies indicates the extent to which Mather had grown frustrated with the genealogies of Jesus. He acknowledges a “grevious disturbance Raised” about Cainan, an individual appearing in Luke’s genealogy but not in the Old Testament (“BA” 7: Luke 3:36). Mather provides a full answer that fills half of a folio page, proposing that Cainan was a transcription error in Greek copies of Luke and does not appear in ancient copies of the New Testament (“BA” 7: Luke 3:36). Then he adds a supplement that drips of exhaustion: “Since ye writing of this I have read (among many other discourses on this matter) a Chapter on this matter in Dr Kidders, Demonstration of the Messias, which does more fully Assert & confirm, all that I have here more briefly propounded” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:36, parenthesis his). Too tired to copy out all of the details, Mather refers his readers directly to another author.

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186 Similarly, in his harmony, Whiston observes that “it seems reasonable to suppose that St. Matthew’s third as well as first Period had just fourteen Generations” (182).
187 Possibly the second edition, which was published in 1726. The first edition, one volume, was published in 1684. A Boyle lecture was published in 1699 as the second part of the Demonstration.
Another, though less common, problem Mather finds is what appears to be misrepresentation of Hebrew Bible history. Paraphrasing Kidder, he responds to “a cavil” from “The Jewes.” Jesus refers to King David having visited the high priest. “The Jewes” charge that Jesus mistakenly names the high priest as Abiathar, when the actual high priest was Abiathar’s father, Ahimelech (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26). Kidder refuses to admit to an error in the text, so instead he seeks historical evidence that can support legitimately calling Abiathar the high priest. Unsurprisingly, he finds what he is looking for. Citing Kimchi, Selden, and Victor Antiochenus, he argues that, conveniently, “Ahimelech was also called Abiathar, and Abiathar was also called Ahimelekh” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Kidder 2:72). In case this argument is not enough, he adds that an Ahimelech, who was called the son of Abiathar, was a priest in David’s reign, according to 1 Chronicles 18:16 and 2 Samuel 8:17 (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Kidder 2:72). If the men interchanged names, then both were priests. The Old Testament texts Mather cites both read: “And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimeleck the son of Abiathar, were the priests” (2 Sam. 8:17). Kidder reads these passages as confirming Jesus’s statement, since they make the son, not the father, the priest. Mather triumphantly adds “And yet more;” the word for a high priest at that time would have meant only an “eminent man,” and, “More than this,” Jesus’s words for “in the days of Abiathar” in Greek truly mean “not yet present Time, but ye Time which soon after succeeds it” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Kidder 2:72). Furthermore, the high priest’s son is “Deputed by his Father in his stead,” according to “the Book of Sephra,” an ancient book

Richard Kidder (1634-1703), bishop of Bath and Wells, was a popular preacher who befriended other famous English scholars, including botanist John Ray, a major influence on Mather’s Christian Philosopher, and John Tillotson (Marshall). He graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1656 and received his D.D. in 1690 (Marshall). He was tutored by a Presbyterian minister but remained loyal to the Church of England (Marshall). His Demonstration of the Messias, quoted by Mather, was aimed at converting Jews and deists (Marshall).

188 This transition is Mather’s phrasing; Kidder has numbered paragraphs without transitions.
189 Actually Siphra, the Aramaic word for “book.”
among the Jewes” ("BA" 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Kidder 2:73). In other words, Mather spews a fountain of flimsy excuses and allows his readers to take their pick. Kidder concludes his discussion with: “What hath been said is enough to justifie the Evangelist” (2:73). He makes it clear that his purpose was to defend scriptural authority.

However, then Mather contradicts himself by adding a lengthy gloss detailing William Whiston’s view of the topic, which is that Abiathar, the son, was the high priest, not his father, and that “the Assertion [by Jesus] is no where contradicted in the Scripture” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Whiston 285). Neither is directly labeled a high priest, Mather notes (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26).190 Likewise, Whiston and Mather point out, the details about which one David visited are vague: “no Circumstances are mentioned” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Whiston 285). He also conjectures that the Abiathar mentioned by Jesus was not the same figure named in Chronicles and Samuel (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26, c.f. Whiston 286-288). But he dismissively concludes: “However, these Conjectures are hardly worthy to be mentioned, after such a Certainty, as we have seen in our Catalogue. It is very certain, David did Eat ye Shew-bread in the Dayes of Abiathar ye High-Priest” (“BA” 7: Mark 2:26).191 The inerrancy of the Bible is such a foregone conclusion for Mather that he does not even need to provide a single, irrefutable piece of evidence.

Primarily, in resolving biblical harmony, Mather confronts what appear to be misquotations. He offers numerous explanations ranging from blame on translators to blame on interpreters, but never blame on an error in the text itself. For example, Mark 1:2 reads: “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy

190 Whiston, making an oversight: “Is Ahimelech call’d the High-Priest any where in the Bible, or even his Son Abiathar? By no means. All we meet with is Ahimelech the Priest” (285).
191 Whiston: “But indeed, since the foregoing Arguments seem to me certain, such little conjectures do not deserve to be nam’d, much less particularly answer’d in comparison with them. To me therefore it seems abundantly evident that, according to our Saviours words, David eat the shew-bread in the days of Abiathar the High-Priest” (289).
way before thee” (Mark 1:2). The text quoted, Mather relates, comes from Malachi, which is almost identical, except for a change of voice in the latter clause: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Mal. 3:1). The prophecy implies that God will send a messenger before Him. The Gospel quotation has God sending a messenger before Jesus. Mather’s interlocutor quotes both - although he erroneously writes “my face” in Malachi instead of “me” - and asks, “you see it?” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:2). Mather replies that he does, and argues, remarkably, that “ye Face of God is ye Name for ye Messiah” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:2). In other words, the prophecy means that God will send a messenger before the Messiah. The prophecy therefore refers to John the Baptist serving as a messenger before Jesus, not Jesus the Messiah serving as a messenger before Yahweh. Mather gloats that “In this one Remark, I have given you, a golden key, to open, it may be, Thousands of Scriptures” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:2). From that one remark, readers can also understand why Mather has a reputation for arrogance.\(^{192}\) He deduces this reading by using one passage to illuminate another. Quoting Lightfoot, Mather exults: “ye Majesty of Scripture doth often show itself, in Requoting of places, with such a Variety, that ye Holy Ghost Expounds one by another” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:2). The interchanging in this passage, he suggests, was deliberate, done to give “Instruction,” and it illustrates “a peece of Hebrew Rhetoric” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:2). This blanket excuse can justify any apparent misquotation; no wonder Mather felt so elated.

5.3.7 Conclusion

Although exegetes already knew about conflicts in the New Testament, from variations among the Gospels to apparent misquotations of the Old Testament, orthodox scholars had more to fear in the early Enlightenment, as Latitudinarians like Tillotson and radicals like Spinoza and

\(^{192}\) Mather’s biographer, David Levin, comments on his ego: “In these heady moments, vanity becomes an inadequate word for what Mather expresses” (Levin 284).
Toland encouraged dismissing anything in Scripture that appeared illogical. Mather often tried to resolve the inconsistencies the way that his favorite authors did, by “harmonizing” with narratives that compiled all of the accounts. However, harmonizing did not work for outright contradictions, such as non-matching genealogies of Joseph, and Mather’s desperation to find a solution is apparent in his spinning out theory after theory and thereby drawing attention to the irreconcilable nature of the incongruities. As a means of resolving these conflicts, Mather engages in textual criticism, recognizing that some variations could not be reconciled, and supports privileging Matthew over the other Gospels. By introducing contextual details, particularly in his analysis of the genealogies, he encourages his readers to use reason and empirical evidence to interpret conflicting narratives.

6 CHAPTER SIX: TYPOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

A traditional method of illustrating the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, typology lost its strength as a dependable hermeneutical approach in the early eighteenth century. This chapter examines Mather’s conflicted views regarding typology. The first section briefly considers the significance of typology within twentieth-century American studies. Although scholars today recognize that to colonists, typology was at best symbolic and at worst outdated, in the mid-twentieth century, historians misconstrued colonial typological rhetoric in order to support a narrative of American exceptionalism. This narrative has been discredited by scholars but it continues to pervade public discourse and therefore deserves a concise overview in this study.

The bulk of this chapter focuses on the devolution of typological hermeneutics in the early Enlightenment as the result of the Whiston-Collins debate. This discussion considers
Mather’s reaction to the debate and draws attention to the opportunity presented by “Biblia Americana” to study, in both broad-strokes and on a micro level, the impact of the debate on Biblical exegesis. When he began working on his commentary, Mather believed, like many exegetes, in double fulfillment: that an Old Testament prophecy had an initial fulfillment in ancient times and a second fulfillment in Jesus’s lifetime. As Section 1.7, Radical Attacks on Typology, explained, this belief system was shaken by Richard Simon and especially William Whiston, who argued that fulfillment was the completion of a prophecy and therefore could not happen twice. Furthermore, Simon observed that the Old Testament prophecies did not correspond perfectly to their New Testament fulfillments; sometimes the prophecies were phrased differently, sometimes they appeared in entirely different contexts, and, in a few cases, the prophecy claimed by an Evangelist to be “fulfilled” in a Gospel did not appear in the Old Testament at all. In response to this issue, Whiston asserted that the prophecies in the Old Testament had been deliberately changed by second-century Jews who wanted to undermine the foundation of Christianity. In turn, Anthony Collins mused that Whiston had proven that the Old Testament prophecies supposedly fulfilled in the New Testament had never been uttered to begin with.

Not only did Mather feel required to reinterpret the corresponding passages in the Synoptic Gospels, but he faced additional challenges that inherently arose out of this debate. Mather refused to concede to Collins’s assertion that the prophecies had not been uttered, yet he also hesitated to accept that the Old Testament had been completely corrupted. Instead, he admits, agreeing with Spinoza and Toland, that prophets did not always understand their own words. Analyzing the historical and literary context of ancient Israel, Mather also agrees with critics that the prophets may have spoken allegorically rather than literally. Most radically,
Mather broadens his interpretation of prophecy. He allows that common expressions and the general expectations of ancient Jews could be considered prophecies that Jesus fulfills in the Gospel of Matthew. The Old Testament antecedents, he determined, need not even have appeared in the Old Testament itself. Going to great lengths to demonstrate that the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus had been foretold in the time of the prophets, Mather makes major concessions that undermine the authority of the Bible. In accepting that the exact words of the Bible were not inspired, in agreeing that prophecies may not correspond literally to their fulfillments, and in allowing that the prophecies need not have come from actual prophets, Mather leaves the Bible, and particularly the authenticity of Christianity’s basis in typology, open to attack.

### 6.2 American Typology

Although typology was being destabilized as a method of understanding the biblical narrative, it has played a vital role in American scholarship and the myth of American exceptionalism. Sacvan Bercovitch argues in *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975) that American Puritans believed in extra-biblical typology: that biblical figures could be types corresponding to non-biblical antitypes.\(^{193}\) He notes as an example that Cotton Mather calls John Winthrop “Nehemias Americanus” in a biography (Bercovitch 1).\(^{194}\) He takes such rhetorical flourishes as indications that Puritan biographies blended personal histories with biblical and Christological histories (33). Instead of a mere colonial leader, Winthrop was unfolding an important chapter in the history of human redemption: “For Mather, the New World errand was part of church history; he deduced its providential meanings from the preordained scheme of redemption” (46). He asserts that the Puritans believed that they themselves were the antitypes of

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\(^{193}\) In other words, the prophecy appears in the Old Testament, but the fulfillment occurs in colonial Massachusetts.

biblical types and that New England, literally the New Jerusalem, was central to the biblical narrative.

This argument is as far-fetched as it sounds. Michael Winship and others have convincingly demonstrated that while the Puritans, with Cotton Mather chief among them, loved to compare themselves to biblical figures, they did so for rhetorical emphasis only. Matthew Brown, for example, remarks that Bercovitch’s reprint of the Winthrop biography, an appendix in *Puritan Origins*, lacks Mather’s original italics (Brown 427). While Bercovitch asserts that the pointing hinders clear reading of Mather, Brown retorts that “one could easily argue that comprehension is assisted by pointing” (427). For Mather especially, pointing drew focus to specific words in a sentence and helped indicate his take-away message. To remove the italics is to remove a layer of communication. It does make the words more visibly digestible, but it obscures Mather’s meaning. Likewise, Michael Winship notes that Increase and Cotton Mather both recognized the possibility of New England’s failure (Winship, “Guarantee,” 412). They appreciated that colonists could choose to withdraw back to England and that this move would not devastate the unfolding of biblical history: “Both ministers knew that Israel, God’s church, did not necessarily need a permanent New England Israel in order to realize prophecies” (412). It is similarly telling that Mather dedicated his *Bonifacius* to Sir William Ashurst, the governor of “the greatest and bravest city on the face of the earth,” London (4). Although he obviously employed hyperbole deliberately, his praise of London and his choice to reach out to its mayor indicates his international, not provincial, focus.

The Puritans did not literally believe in extra-biblical types. This anachronistic idea of American exceptionalism found its most popular footing in the mid-twentieth-century

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195 They did, however, believe that the Book of Revelation, considered a prophecy, was being fulfilled, although they assumed that it referred to events in Europe and the Middle East, such as the 1453 Fall of
scholarship of Perry Miller (Gura 22). Miller mistakenly depicted colonial New England as religiously and culturally homogenous, a portrayal that has since been ably refuted (Gura 23). Philip Gura eloquently explains: “Once a chief constituent to any understanding of the United States of America, Puritanism is no longer central to this project, even if among some scholars it remains fascinating as a complex, engaging body of thought” (33). Mather’s Puritanism is undeniable, yet even “Biblia Americana” demonstrates that Mather drew from more than an insular local community. His exegesis, instead, drew heavily from European, non-Puritan scholars.

6.3 The Virgin Birth

The virgin birth prophecy was perhaps the most controversial because of its significance to the story of the Incarnation. The source text from Isaiah was not under debate: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). This passage is clearly the prophecy meant by Matthew: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel” (Matt.1:22-23). However, the prophet’s meaning was hotly debated, as commentators tried to prove that Isaiah referred solely to the Messiah. Simon remarks that his opponents presented two major objections to this interpretation (Simon, New Testament, 2:43).

First, they claimed that the Hebrew word “Alma” in Isaiah meant a young woman, not a “virgin,” and that Matthew had deliberately misinterpreted it (2:43). He replies that Jerome had Constantinople. Further, they believed, as has been discussed in this study, that Jesus prophesied about the future of the church and the Second Coming. They did not believe that Old Testament figures such as Abraham or Daniel were types of colonists.

already argued that Matthew’s expression is correct and that the word in the Septuagint does
indeed mean “virgin” (2:43). Second, they charged that Matthew misattributed Isaiah’s meaning
by applying it to the Messiah rather than to a child born in Isaiah’s time (2:44). They asserted
that the text refers to a child born to the king that Isaiah was addressing (2:44). Jerome had
refuted this charge satisfactorily as well, according to Simon. Jerome claimed that King Ahaz
was too elderly to have a son (2:44).

More controversially, Simon raised the idea of double fulfillment, an antiquated method
of interpretation that caused havoc amongst Enlightenment exegetes. According to Jerome,
Simon reveals: “That Prophesie, as the most part of the rest, has a double Sense” (2:44). It refers
to Isaiah’s second child, Immanuel, who “was the Type of Jesus Christ” (2:44). While Jerome
rejected this allegorical reading in favor of the prophecy simply referring to Jesus, Simon
comments that the “Spiritual or Mystical” sense is “consonant to the Principles of the Christian
Religion” (2:44). Furthermore, since this interpretation “is founded on the Theology and
Traditions of the Jews,” it would be more likely to “answer their objections” (2:44). Simon
apparently did not realize that the double sense challenged the Christian interpretation. Since
Isaiah’s wife had already had a child, the prophecy, if applicable to her, did not describe a virgin,
in which case, there was no Old Testament prophecy corresponding to the Messiah’s birth to a
virgin.

By insisting that each prophecy can have only a single fulfillment, Whiston skirted this
problem. Misinterpretation of this passage was one of the first issues he attacked in his Boyle
lectures. If the prophecy were explained as having two intended fulfillments, Whiston snickers,
“it would not be difficult to persuade me, that the same Prophecy was to have many more
completions” and therefore would never be absolutely fulfilled (Whiston, Accomplishment, 16).
Arguing that every event, whether it is a prophecy or a historic fact, can happen only once, Whiston proposes that the context of Isaiah’s words must be considered in order to grasp his intent. If the record of a virgin bearing a son named Immanuel appeared “not in a Prophecy, but in the History of the Old-Testament,” one could “without the least hesitation” accept that the event had in fact occurred (Whiston, Accomplishment, 14). Whiston explains that Isaiah and his infant son, Shearjashub, were sent by God to assure King Ahaz that the invading kings of Syria and Israel were to be unsuccessful in their attempts to conquer Judah permanently (87). Isaiah informed Ahaz that, by the time Shearjashub reached the age of discretion, the invading kings would be removed: “Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings” (Isa.7:15-16, Whiston 88). This prophecy was fulfilled a few years later, Whiston notes (88). Since the prophecy about the virgin birth was separate, Whiston explains, the prophecy referring to Shearjashub concluded, “so far as belongs to Ahaz, and Israel, at that particular juncture” (89). The prophecy about Jesus and the virgin birth was spoken separately as an assurance that the house of David would be preserved (89). Because it is presented as a “sign” of the royal line’s safety, it is clearly “some very wonderful thing” (89). A virgin birth was an appropriate sign for an important prophecy, Whiston continues, and so “this is a clear Prophecy of the coming of the Messias, of the seed of David, and as the Son of a pure Virgin, to be the great pledge and security of God’s promises to David and his seed for evermore” (90). Although Whiston appears to have been convinced that the fourteenth verse foretells the birth of Jesus only, this exegesis was not convincing to skeptics, as it does not take into consideration the context of the prophecy.
Anthony Collins, the thorn in Whiston’s side, had a field day with Whiston’s interpretation. In *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), Collins mocks Whiston’s exegesis and cites this passage as evidence that prophecies can only apply to Christianity if interpreters read them allegorically. After all, he charges, the words of the prophecy “do, in their obvious and literal sense, relate to a *young woman* in the days of AHAZ, King of Judah, as will appear by considering the context” (Collins 41). According to Collins’s interpretation, which he remarks is “the plain drift and design of the Prophet, literally, obviously, and primarily understood,” Isaiah’s visit to Ahaz consists of only one prophecy referring to only one child: the prophet’s son, Immanuel (42). The phrasing refers explicitly to this boy, giving no indication that any other child could be meant. Other interpretations are unfairly superimposed upon this one. The context of the prophecy is key, as “how useless was it to AHAZ, as well as absurd in itself, for the Prophet to say, *Before the Child*, born seven hundred years hence, shall distinguish between *good* and *evil*, the Land shall be forsaken of both her Kings” (43). For an exegesis to be convincing, the commentator would need to explain how the prophecy was relevant to its audience, Collins charges. Since Isaiah was clearly addressing the king and his court, a prophecy about another time would be illogical.

Before Whiston made it problematic, Mather accepted the idea of double fulfillment. His first gloss on the verse in Isaiah quotes Pierre-Daniel Huet’s *Demonstratio Evangelica* (1679), which asserts that the prophet refers both to a child born to a young woman in his own time and to the birth of Jesus to a virgin (*BA 5*: Isa. 7:14). Mather observes that “*Behold* is an Adverb frequently sett before those passages of Scripture, that Eminentl relate unto or Lord JESUS CHRIST” (*BA 5*: Isa. 7:14). Using the word “behold” as a hallmark, Mather hoped to distinguish

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197 Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), bishop of Avranches, produced scientific works and anti-Cartesian philosophy (“Huet”). Criticizing Cartesian rationalism, Huet argued that truth comes from faith, not the mind (“Huet”).
which prophecies referred particularly to Jesus. Likewise, he suggests that ancient Jews believed that the Messiah would be born to a virgin: he cites “Remarkable concessions of the Jewes” indicating this belief (BA 5: Isa. 7:14). In a later addition, Mather elaborated. He explains, using the history provided in the Second Book of Kings and the studies by Johann Reitz, precisely how many years the prophecy regarding the fall of the foreign kings would take to be fulfilled (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). He adds contextual detail regarding the invasion by the foreign kings that so troubled Ahaz (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). In a manner similar to that which was voiced by Collins around the same time, Mather uses historical detail to explain why Isaiah clearly prophesied about a woman in his own time. Unlike Collins, of course, Mather also believed that the prophecy referred to Jesus.

As early as 1698, Mather came to question double fulfillment. He altered his interpretation to suggest that the entire prophecy – both the virgin birth of Immanuel in the fourteenth verse and the desertion of the land by the two kings in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses – referred to Jesus only. Even Isaiah’s remarks about the child’s ability to discern illustrate “That Hee should Endure much Affliction, yett alwayes make an Holy Choice” (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). In support of his new interpretation, Mather sidetracked to discuss the nature of prophecies. He transcribes an argument from William Nicholls’s *A conference with a THEIST Part III* (1698) which claims that prophecy is not always the literal dictation of God (Nicholls 70). Most of the time, the prophets wrote using “the Natural Chain of their Thoughts” (Nicholls 70). Only in the case of “extraordinary Decress” would God direct the mind of a prophet to “strange and surprizing Ideas” that ascend from a mundane subject “to a sort of Extatick Revelation” (70). In such cases, the prophet himself “might not understand the full meaning of

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198 William Nicholls (1664-1712), a Church of England rector, was made canon of Chichester in 1707 (Cornwall). He graduated D.D. from Oxford in 1695 (Cornwall). He wrote an apology for the Church of England, *Defensio ecclesiae Anglicanae* (1707) and a lengthy commentary on the Book of Common Prayer and Sacraments (1710) (Cornwall). Prior to the 4-part *Conference with a Theist* (1696-1699) that Mather cites, he wrote a *Short History of Socinianism* (1691) (Cornwall).
the Words which were suggested” (71). This explanation of the apparent convolutedness of prophecies evidently pleased Mather, despite its implication that sometimes prophets used their own words and sometimes they lacked self-control, and neither manner of prophesying is clearly demarcated in Scripture. Nicholls likely did not appease his skeptical opponents. The first major Enlightenment critic of prophetic authority, Spinoza charges that prophets indicate in their phrasing that they imagine the prophecies (1:19). Furthermore, he comments that the prophets did not always understand their own revelations (1:32). Following Spinoza, John Toland deduced that “since by Revelation Men are not endu’d with any new Faculties, it follows that God should lose his end in speaking to them, if what he said did not agree with their common Notions” (133). The desire to explain the nature of prophecy, instead of accepting it simply as the dictation of God, seems a reaction to Toland’s reasoning. Orthodox exegetes like Nicholls and Mather wished to explain the nature of prophecy and to recognize that it was not always the direct dictation of God. Nicholls nearly echoes Toland when remarking that prophets would ordinarily prophesy following “the Common Vein of Reasoning” (Nicholls 70). When the prophecy was one they could understand using reason, they could use their own words. Nicholls does not offer empirical evidence to support his reading, however.

After the publication of Whiston’s Boyle lectures, Mather added another gloss to reflect his newest exegetical theory. Now a Whistonian, Mather states flatly that the prophecy about Jesus’s virgin birth was completed in the fourteenth verse, and the fifteenth verse is not about Jesus after all (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). Subsequent verses refer to Isaiah’s infant son, Shearjashub, “and not the son of ye Virgin, spoken of just before” (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). This interpretation, he notes, is “allowed” by Whiston (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). In his only exegesis on the prophecy’s appearance in Matthew, Mather tellingly states that “if the Typical Explication should fail, we have Enough to
show, that ye prophecy is meant only of the Messiah” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:23). His phrasing reveals that he seeks a predetermined conclusion in support of biblical authority. He repeats the ideas from Whiston’s Boyle lectures, indicating that the fifteenth and sixteenth verses refer to Shearjashub but that the fourteenth verse describes Jesus. He concludes that the prophecy necessarily had a grand outlook: “And is it possible, that the prophet should after so pompous an Introduction here, mean only at last that a young married woman should prove with child, The Hearers must have thought he came rather to insult their misery, than to comfort them under it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:23). A woman giving birth, in other words, would not be worthy of note, while a virgin giving birth would bear major significance to the king.

Mather appears to have rethought this interpretation after reading an attack on Whiston’s position. Writing another gloss on Isa. 7:16, he reports that a debate had begun in 1710 between Whiston and Nicholas Clagett (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). While he summarizes Whiston’s position in a sentence: “ye Language and Intent of ye prophets, is ever single,” he elaborates on Clagett’s more allegorical reading (BA 5: Isa. 7:16). In Truth defended and boldness in error rebuk’d (1710), Clagett charges that the fourteenth through sixteenth verses all refer to the same child (Clagett 70). He calls Whiston’s interpretation “a groundless and ridiculous Fancy” since the prophecy describes a child that has not been born, and therefore could not mean Shearjashub (72). Clagett conjectures that, so far as anyone can tell from the setting, Shearjashub might have already reached the age of discretion when he attended Isaiah to Ahaz (73). Because the following chapters describe the birth of Isaiah’s second child, the prophecy clearly refers to that event, and it remains accurate in the fullest sense, because Isaiah remarried, so his second wife...

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199 Mather likely had another reason to distrust Whiston; by the time Clagett published his response to Accomplishments, Whiston had publicly admitted to being an Arian (Force 88).
200 Nicholas Clagett (1654-1727), archdeacon of Sudbury, graduated Cambridge with his M.A. in 1678 and received his D.D. in 1705 (Johnston). He attacked Whiston’s denial of double fulfillment (Johnston).
was a virgin at the time that the prophecy was made (77). Furthermore, Clagett notes that if the prophecy “be no more than a Single Prophecy, then, it is no Prophecy on the Messias” because the fulfillment of it is clearly recorded in the eighth chapter (78). If, as Whiston attests, “there are no Prophecies with a Double Sense,” Isaiah’s prophecy “cannot belong to the Messias at all, and St. Matthew misapplies it” (79). Not only would this interpretation be damaging to Matthew’s authority, but it would be damaging to a fundamental Trinitarian doctrine: the miraculous Incarnation of the Word of God. As the other three canonical Gospels do not describe Jesus’s birth or childhood, Christians depended on Matthew for details about how the Son of God first appeared in human form. Even Jews believed in double senses and types, Clagett reminds his readers (80). He claims that the prophecy’s reference to Jesus’s birth to a virgin “is really more Literal” than the foretelling of a young married woman giving birth (85). The fifteenth and sixteenth verses refer only to the type of Immanuel, the prophet’s second son (86). Mather agrees with Clagett: If the prophecy refers to a child in the times of Ahaz at all, “the sense is double, because ye prophecy of Immanuel is most certainly a prophecy of ye Messias” (70). In conclusion, Mather paraphrases that “as there is a double Sense in the prophecy, so it gave a Double Sign of ye Delivery for ye House of David and a double Security against their Destruction” (BA 5: Isa. 7:16, cf. Clagett 86-87).

Still, Mather was not satisfied. Ultimately, he decided upon a compromise. John Green argues that Shearjashub was brought to Ahaz as a “Sign” that Isaiah was a genuine prophet (Green 61). Green conjectures that after Ahaz refused to accept a sign from God in Isaiah 7:12, Isaiah shifted his attention to the members of the court (62). Ironically, Mather had initially interpreted the prophecy this way. In an early gloss on Isaiah 7:12, Mather remarks that God’s

\[\text{201} J\text{ohn Green (d. 1774), the curate of Thurnscoe, is, according to Stievermann, “a now forgotten controversialist” (Stievermann n.p.).}\]
“Indignation” at Ahaz’s refusal to seek a sign indicates that “there were in this Idolatrous prince, a certain malicious Indisposition to have ye Glory of ye True God convictively Exhibited unto ye people by a miracle” (BA 5: Isa. 7:12). Enraged on Isaiah’s behalf, Mather interrupts his quotation of Green to dismiss Ahaz as “a Wretch” and “Hypocrite” that would not have appreciated a sign (BA 5: Isa. 7:14). Green explains that the prophecy of Judah being forsaken of its kings is followed by warnings about the country’s future sufferings, and “what Comfort this be to AHAZ, and his People” (Green 66). Green notes that the enemy was marching to Jerusalem and that in their present frightening situation, Ahaz and his people would not have been satisfied by the prophecy about the birth of a son to the prophet (76). Similarly, Green observes that exegetes cannot conclude that the text refers to a child in Ahaz’s time because the prophecy is not proven to have been fulfilled, as “we know no more of this Person than his Name, and cannot say whether he prov’d a good, or bad Man” (76). Consequently, Green proposes, revising the words of Collins, “the Words in their literal, obvious, and indeed only Sense, are to be understood of the Virgin MARY and the Birth of JESUS” (77). There are “two distinct Predictions”: one regarding the virgin birth, and the other regarding the forsaking of the land by the foreign kings (79). Green argues that “one of these Predictions is certainly made a Sign of the other, and was to be fulfilled in token, that the other should also come to pass in its Season” (79).

The deliverance of the land from the two kings before Shearjashub reached the age of discernment was, Green remarks, addressing Collins, the “Sign, according to your Desire, soon coming to pass, of a thing to be performed above seven hundred Years to come” (80). Mather quotes Green’s paraphrase of the passage (BA 5: Isa. 7:14). Ironically, although Green claims to meet Collins’s challenge, the rewriting of this passage, even if only for clarification, also seems to justify Whiston’s remark that the chapter was confused and disordered. Similarly, this
conclusion is a clear compromise based on determination to make the prophecy match the fulfillment. Green and Mather recognized that Whiston had dismantled double fulfillment while Collins had undermined a literal reference to Jesus in this passage, so they could not conclude whether this prophecy referred to only Jesus, or to Jesus and Isaiah’s son, or to only Isaiah’s son. Their conclusion, that it was all three, effectively embraces double fulfillment under a different name.

6.4 Parallels

In some glosses, Mather alludes to traditional typology without using the traditional terms. He sees the fulfillment of a prophecy in Jesus’s pronouncement: “And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come” (Matt. 11:14). Mather suggests that John the Baptist, about whom Jesus speaks, fulfills the prophecy uttered in Malachi: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). Obviously, John the Baptist was not the resurrected Elijah, so a literal reading of Malachi would be clearly inaccurate. Perhaps because the verse was figural, it did not draw the attention of major exegetes like Simon and Whiston. However, Surenhusius used it as an example of the form of allegorical writing used by biblical authors. Michel de la Roche, a Huguenot editor and literary critic in England, summarized Surenhusius’s arguments in his 1722 edition of Memoirs of Literature. De la Roche paraphrases that, according to the Talmud, proper names could refer to “those who are like them in their Works” (Roche 190). Since proper names in prophecies did not always refer to specific individuals, Jesus could tell his hearers that Elias had returned, fulfilling the prophecy, without actually rising from the grave. In other words, Surenhusius’s redactor reports, Jesus was saying: “It is so: Elias shall come; nay, he is already come: but it is not the same Elias, who lived among your Forefathers several hundred Years ago” (190). Surenhusius, accepting that such
figural speech was normal and would have been understood by Jesus’s, and Matthew’s, audience, did not see a problem with this non-literal interpretation of Malachi.

Collins also wrote about this passage, and he recognized a problem with its non-literal reading. Collins sarcastically paraphrases Surenhusius’s argument: “… there was a tradition among the Jews, that ELIAS was to come before the MESSIAS; and because he was not come, they could not believe, the MESSIAS was come. JESUS knowing this, told them, that JOHN the Baptist was the ELIAS” (Collins 76). This misquotation skewed Surenhusius’s argument in order to imply that Jesus deliberately misled his hearers. To make this argument more clear, Collins states the obvious: since Elias had not actually returned in the flesh, the words of Malachi “were not literally but mystically fulfill’d in JOHN the Baptist” (Collins 48). Collins tried to leave commentators with only two options: either some prophecies are allegorical, or Jesus was a liar. Outraged by Collins’s implication about Jesus’s honesty, Edward Chandler exploded: “This is one doughty argument, why men should disbelieve the gospel!” (Chandler 310). Attempting to offer another explanation of the verse, Chandler protests that the allegorical fulfillment is literally explained in Malachi. Since the prophet does not claim that Elias would return in the flesh, a figurative fulfillment is clearly intended (Chandler 311). Chandler cites other Old Testament examples of proper names used to signify figures similar in character, such as the interchanging of “David” and “Messiah” (311).

Like Surenhusius and Chandler, Mather toyed with the possibility of Malachi’s intending an allegorical fulfillment. John Lightfoot, he relates, explains that Elias is ordinarily described as “Elias the Tishbite” (Lightfoot, Elias, 23). The name used by Malachi, “Elias the Prophet,” could be significant, and might indicate that a similar figure, rather than Elias himself, was meant
(Lightfoot 23). Although this interpretation of Malachi at least explains how John the Baptist figuratively fulfilled the prophecy, Mather was not completely satisfied with this reading.

Mather proposes another interpretation of Jesus’s words. The Baptist had been one to “turn the heart of the father” as Malachi prophesies (Mal. 4:6). However, the Baptist “was not Elias ye prophet that was to be sent before the Great and dreadful Day of ye Lord” (BA, Mal. 4:5). Instead, Malachi reveals that “some other” would “answer” this prophecy. That Elias might even be “ye Kingdom of or Saviour” (“BA” 6: Mal. 4:5). The prophecy itself describes not the first coming of the Messiah and the establishing of the Christian church, but the day “that shall burn as an oven,” the Second Coming that had not yet occurred (Mal. 4:1). Consequently, the passage has two fulfillments: an allegorical one, related by Jesus in Matthew, and a more significant one at the millennium. Evidently, Mather felt that this passage referred more strongly to the Second Coming than to John the Baptist.

One New Testament allusion to the prophets that created problems for Enlightenment exegetes was the supposed fulfillment of Micah in Matthew. Micah prophesies: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). The Gospel of Matthew quotes this passage almost verbatim: “And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel” (Matt. 2:6). Mather’s gloss recognizes the difficulties that contemporary Bible criticism had created in questioning translations, and, by extension, interpretation. While Micah tells Bethlehem that it is “little,” Matthew describes Bethlehem as “not least.” Recognizing that this lack of concordance strongly suggests an error, Richard Simon clarifies that the Apostles “were directed by the Spirit of God in all that they put
in Writing, so as not to fall into error” (Simon, New Testament, 2:61). Since both Micah and Matthew must be correct, Simon proposes that Jewish interpreters would have recognized two meanings in the phrasing, he reveals, citing Edward Pococke. In A Commentary on the Prophecy of Micah (1677), Pococke argues that the Hebrew word used for “little” in Matthew means both the town’s small size as well as its future greatness (Pococke 47). The learned in Micah’s time would have understood that a word can have a dual meaning, even one that appears self-contradictory. Bethlehem certainly was small, but its role in producing the Messiah would make it illustrious. The dual meaning of “little” would have been self-evident.

Mather agrees with Simon’s reading and cites Pococke’s work as well. With additional consciousness of the context of the quotation, Mather copies from Lightfoot, who cites David Kimchi. In Matthew, Jewish doctors quote the text when addressing Herod. Lightfoot explains that the Hebrew word, translated in the King James Version as “princes” in Matthew, could be interpreted as “Alluph,” meaning “prince,” or “Alphi,” meaning “thousands” (“BA” 6: Mic. 5:2). Therefore, he explains, paraphrasing Lightfoot, “When ye Evangelist recites this passage it was fitter to speak of princes than of thousands: for Where should a King bee Look’d for, but among princes?” (“BA” 6: Mic. 5:2). Since the phrase “thousands of Judah” had a militant tone that would have concerned Herod, the Jewish doctors were tactful in choosing “the term to the best satisfaction of Herod and the People” (Lightfoot 1:442).

It was Whiston’s insistence on finding a literal basis of prophecy fulfillment that Anthony Collins attacked so fiercely. Highlighting the flaws in Whiston’s arguments, Collins used them to

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202 Edward Pococke (1604-1691), an orientalist who prepared a translation of the Syriac New Testament (Toomer). He graduated Oxford with his M.A. in 1626 and was a chaplain at Aleppo before becoming professor of Arabic at Oxford (Toomer). He traveled through Aleppo and Constantinople to collect manuscripts that would help him record the history of the region (Toomer). While his publications were highly respected, interest in Arabic waned at Oxford during his lifetime and he switched to writing Bible commentaries, which Mather cites (Toomer).
destabilize the traditional understanding of Christianity. He used Matthew 2:15 in particular to highlight Whiston’s shaky dependence on a literal application of prophecies. Matthew, referring to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph’s flight into Egypt to escape the slaughter of the young boys by Herod, states: “And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:15). This passage evidently alludes to Hosea, which states: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1). Israel was considered a type of the Messiah, although the two contexts vary fundamentally. The Hosea passage refers to Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Although the wording of Hosea and Matthew matches somewhat, Whiston argues that Matthew does not refer to the text in Hosea, because the prophecy applies “only” to Israel (Whiston 88).

In his 1707 Boyle lectures, Whiston had blamed unskilled expositors for poor translations that led to confusion (Whiston, Accomplishment, 12). Explaining that prophecies can only have one fulfillment, he criticized commentators who were overlooking the fact that most prophecies describe the Messiah (Accomplishment, 12, 16). The Hosea passage served as an example, as it was “exactly suitable in every word and Expression to the Messias in particular” (Accomplishment, 52). However, although the verse itself corresponded to Jesus, it did not fit the context of the chapter. Whiston suspects that the verse was “inserted” into Hosea. By the time he composed An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament; and for Vindicating the Citations made thence in the New Testament (1722), he had begun to focus more closely on the historical context of prophecies, and he decided that this verse could not be applied literally to Christ. The correspondence between the two passages is not at all clear, he pointed out, with the “calling the People of Israel out of Egypt in the Days of Moses, no way proving that the
Messiah was to be called thence in the Days of Herod” (Essay, 89). Since the prophecy refers to the removal from Egypt, he explains in the Essay, it cannot be a type of Jesus’s escape into Egypt; the fulfillment in Jesus would indicate the opposite of Israel’s experience.

Consequently, Whiston denies any connection between the texts. He argues instead that the verse does not fit in Hosea. He compares the Septuagint with the Hebrew Text as well as two later translations in order to demonstrate that the Old Testament text had been altered “and by Consequence that it could not afford St. Matthew this Citation” (Whiston, Essay, 90). Whiston explains the reason behind his desire for a clear literal prophecy for each citation in Matthew. The evident differences between the Gospel citations and the original Old Testament passages have caused commentators to “explain, or rather to excuse the Sacred Writers” by arguing that texts can have an initial, literal fulfillment and a secondary allegorical application (91). Instead of relating the true intention of the authors, Whiston charges, commentators invent explanations to serve their own purposes.

To Whiston, allegorical interpretation, which has no evidentiary basis, is “weak and enthusiastick” (Whiston, Essay, 92). He proposes instead that Matthew was referring to a passage in Isaiah: “But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away” (Isa. 41:8-9). Asking his readers merely to “consider” the possibility that Matthew is referring to another passage, Whiston belies his insecurity about his explanation (91). However, he emphasizes that, “whether this be the true Text here cited or not,” the allusion certainly cannot be to Hosea (91). By destabilizing the traditional interpretation of Matthew 2:15, Whiston
encouraged his contemporaries either to ignore the contextual incongruence between Matthew and Hosea or to deny that the texts were connected.

Recognizing the limitations that Whiston had placed on interpreting Matthew, Collins exploited Whiston’s findings to undermine the conservative position even further. He notes that Whiston must be aware that the prophecy was “suppos’d by all christian Commentators (and perhaps by all christians but himself) to be taken from HOSEAH” (Collins 122). Collins does not mean to suggest that public acceptance validates the interpretation. Instead, he reveals the extent of the damage to traditional hermeneutics that Whiston was, perhaps unintentionally, proposing. Since most Christians were satisfied with the “allegorical sense,” Collins implies, it is imperative that Whiston propose an even more satisfying explanation. By weakly suggesting Isaiah 41:8-9, an equally unconvincing passage, Whiston has failed to do so, Collins charges, asking rightfully: “How does the literal and obvious sense thereof in ISAIAH appear to concern JESUS’s coming out of Egypt, any more than the obvious and literal sense of the passage in HOSEAH?” (123). Like Hosea’s, Isaiah’s words describe a past event, so “commentators will be no less oblig’d to consider them as apply’d by St. MATTHEW in a secundary or allegorical sense, than they do the words of HOSEAH” (124). Collins projects that “not one reader” would accept the Isaiah explanation (123).

For conservative commentators like Mather, both the typological and the literal interpretations of Matthew 2:15 had been destabilized by Whiston. Unwilling to accept the implied dishonesty in Matthew’s allusion, Mather depends on Chandler, who agrees with Collins that the flight to Egypt was not a fulfillment of prophecy. Instead of attributing an error to Matthew, Chandler suggests that interpreters have been misled by the word “fulfilled.” This word did not mean that there was a corresponding prophecy, Chandler explains. Rather, “out of
Egypt” was a proverb used to describe any deliverance similar to that of the ancient Israelites from Egypt (Chandler 292). In fact, he adds: “Had Christ fled into any other country, and been safe there, it might have been as truly said of his return thence, out of Egypt have I called my son” (293). Mather echoes Chandler’s interpretation nearly verbatim, explaining that “It was an Instance of the Wisdome in the Ancient Jews, to apply Sentences taken out of ye Scripture, in ye way of Common Sayings, to the occurrences of their Times” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:15). Of course, if “fulfilled” did not refer to an Old Testament type, but only to a common turn of phrase, the same argument could be made for all similar statements in the Gospel of Matthew.

Such concessions endangered conservative typology. By converting one fulfillment into an expression, Mather opened up the possibility of all traditional antitypes receiving the same dismissal. Chandler probably did not foresee this consequence, but Mather may have had it in mind. At any rate, Mather was not comfortable with completely dismissing the correlation between Matthew and Hosea. Quoting Chrysostom, he explains that Egypt was the place chosen for Jesus’s delivery from Herod because it reversed the role that Egypt played in the persecution of God’s children (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:15). Although Mather resists offering a typological interpretation, he maintains the possibility of one, as Jesus’s preservation indicates God’s love of his son, thereby implying that Israel may be a type of Jesus. While this gloss might otherwise reflect a transition in Mather’s thought, his concluding quotation from Chrysostom indicates his intention of maintaining a traditional stance.

203 John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) studied Greek philosophy at Antioch, where he served as a priest before becoming the bishop of Constantinople (Baur). His many surviving works include monastical advice, letters, sermons, and Bible commentaries (Baur). His exegesis is known particularly for scorning allegorical readings (Baur).
6.5 A Naz Theory

Mather also faced supposed fulfillments that had no apparent corresponding Old Testament antecedent. A passage in Matthew claims to be a fulfillment but exegetes could not figure out what it fulfilled: “And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23). Like the other difficulties exegetes faced, this one was addressed by Church Fathers. Chrysostom, Richard Simon relates, had wisely argued that “we ought not to involve our selves in the trouble of an endless search” for type and antitype (Simon, New Testament, 2:52). Simon explains that Chrysostom felt that the book containing the corresponding text had been lost (2:52). Simon himself notes that Matthew refers to the prophets in plural, perhaps implying that the text may not have been a direct quotation but rather an allusion to prophets in general (2:52).

Mather struggled with this passage, adding to his gloss multiple times over the decades. Protesting that ancient commentators’ theories “seem to fall short of what was really intended,” initially he rejected enigmatic interpretation (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). He cites Jerome’s argument that Matthew alludes to Isaiah: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa. 11:1). In Syriac, the word “netser,” for “branch,” also means “Nazareth” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). However, Mather worries that this explanation does not capture the literal intention of Matthew: “tis most plain from ye Context, That Nazarene belongs to Nazareth. And, I pray, how could ye prophecies of ye Old Testament, about our Lords being a Nazarite, or a Branch, be fulfilled, by His dwelling at ye Town of Nazareth” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Since the prophecy needs to match the fulfillment, he argues that it was the fulfillment of a general expectation mentioned in various places in the Old Testament. Ancient Jews generally believed that the Messiah would be abused and insulted, Mather explains, and this assumption is
reflected in multiple Old Testament texts, which he lists. The label “Nazarene,” can be interpreted as a fulfillment of this expectation, since Nazareth “was a very poor and mean Town” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). The name “Nazarene” would have been applied by his enemies “as a Name of Reproach” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Therefore, although the Old Testament nowhere states that the Messiah would be given that label specifically, the sense is indicated in texts that foretell his abuse and it is, Mather assures, “One thing intended, in these oracles” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23).

Mather’s suggestion implies that fulfillment of prophecy can be allegorized to the extent of not requiring a basis in a literal Old Testament type. Mather was already hesitating to use typological explanations, so this reading fits his understanding of prophecy. He also broadens his definition of prophecy, since the texts he cites regarding ancient Jewish expectations about the Messiah do not all come from the books of the prophets. He quotes John Edwards, who argues that by “prophet,” Matthew meant not only those who were “the Penmen of the S. Scripture… but others of a like Prophetick spirit, who used to foretell the Coming of the Messias, and particularly to assign the Place of his general Abode, as well as that of his Birth and Crucifixion” (Edwards, Enquiry, 8). Under this expanded definition, even people with expectations about the Messiah could be considered prophets. Edwards also explains, according to Mather’s paraphrase, that it was accepted “as a General and a prophetic saying among the Jewes, That the Dwelling of the Messiah should be at Nazareth” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Mather might have realized that this interpretation was pushing the usual limits of traditional exegesis.

In a later gloss, he retreated from this interpretation in favor of a more literal reading. Influenced by Jacobus Alting, he suggests that the Nazarene reference fulfills Ezekiel’s

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204 Psa. 22:6-7, Psa. 69:7, 9, 12, Isa. 52:14, Isa. 53:2,3.
205 Jacobus Alting (1618-1679), professor of theology and oriental studies at Groningen (Wenswick 96). He was accused of heresy by a colleague because of his non-traditional means of exegesis (97). His works were published in 1687 and his Hebrew, Syrian, and Chaldeac grammar books were often reprinted (97).
prophecy: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent” (Ezek. 17:22, Alting 15). Applying a purely allegorical interpretation, Mather writes: “By the High Cedar, we may understand the Royal Family of David . . . By ye High Mountain, we may understand the Town of Nazareth, which had such a situation” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Since this interpretation was, like Jerome’s, impossible to prove, as well as a stretch of the imagination, Mather was never fully pleased with it. His repeated use of the word “may” hints at his dissatisfaction.

Needless to say, reading the prophecy allegorically did not sway radical critics. Surenhusius, for all his knowledge of Jewish rhetoric, was mocked for his interpretation of this passage. He suggests that Matt. 2:23 needs “enigmatic interpretation,” Collins laughs, meaning “the things were to be found out by a change of words” (Collins 74). Collins guffawed that this method of interpreting prophecies “ingeniously” allowed Surenhusius to find a corresponding Old Testament type in several places “tho’ it seems not to occur any where” (Collins 73).

Allegorical interpretation cannot be proven or disproven, so it must be accepted on faith until “the prophesies contain’d in them were to be shown to be fulfill’d” (76). Biographer James Force summarizes Collins’s opinion about Surenhusius: “prophecies are meaningless as they are rearranged to suit the requirements of the particular interpreter” (Force 85). An interpretation so obviously tailored to fit a predetermined conclusion would hardly sway a rationalist critic. Even extra-biblical sources like rabbinic commentaries were not sufficient evidence if they encouraged seeking predetermined non-literal explanations.

Mather eventually appended an additional gloss that relied on another farfetched allegorical interpretation. Citing Herman Witsius’ *De oeconomia foderum Dei cum hominibus*
(1677) he relates that the reference might be to Job: “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men: why has thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?” (Job 7:20). After all, when Job laments, the person he addresses is called “Notzer, or preserver of Men” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Jesus’s role as Messiah fulfilled this prophecy and, furthermore, “God in His providence ordered or Saviour, to Live at Nazareth so Long, that He was called by a Name, that might readily putt all His people in mind of His being the Great Keeper of Israel, A, Nazarene” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Arguably, this gloss was just as radical as Alting’s attributing the reference to Ezekiel, since the connection between the Old Testament text and the citation in Matthew is tenuous at best. Not only does it reverse the interpretation offered by Edwards, but it comes no closer to addressing the true context of the fulfillment as it appeared in Matthew. The Messiah did not need to live in Nazareth in order to be the preserver of men, nor is it clear that Job’s lament was a reference to the Messiah.

Although enigmatic interpretation was certainly acceptable to Surenhusius and some of his readers, even he looked for a more appropriate text. After acknowledging Jerome’s argument, Surenhusius added another solution that he hoped was far simpler. Matthew might refer to a different passage in Isaiah: “Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations” (Isa. 9:1). Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah would live in Galilee, Surenhusius explains, which is fulfilled by his living in Nazareth (Collins 74). Mather agrees, attributing the

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206 Samuel Mather agrees with this reading, remarking that “the prophet used the word Nezer and Netzri in an anigmatical manner” as interpreted by “Jewish Doctors” (222). Samuel mentions enigmatic writing, and he also cites Surenhusius (224). However, Samuel cuts to the chase quickly, evidently not struggling with this passage like his brother did, and so Cotton likely did not consult his brother’s work regarding this issue.
reading to Johann Reitz, who points out that Jesus preached at Galilee: “And when He dwelt at Nazareth, now were fulfilled, the prophecies, that He should appear in Galilee” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). While this interpretation of the Old Testament text did not require extra-biblical sources, the lack of direct correspondence to the New Testament made the argument shaky. Mather’s desperation shows: “Indeed we do not read any where… that He should be called, A Nazarene. But he that was a Nazarene, must be a Galilean” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23).

Mather must have been relieved to read Samuel Clarke’s A Paraphrase on the four Evangelists (1722). Clarke proposes that “Nazarene” refers to Judges: “For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg. 13:5). According to Clarke, Sampson, a “Nazarite from the Womb” is presented “as a Type of Christ” (Clarke 1:11). This interpretation permits a direct type and antitype abrogation. Thinking he had at last resolved the issue, Mather added Clarke’s interpretation to his commentary some time after 1722, thinking the matter had “Finally” come to a close (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Even this ending would be too easy, however. The focal word in Matthew was “Nazarene,” but in Judges, the word was “Nazarite,” and these two words were not synonymous.

Whiston did not read “Biblia Americana” and see how Mather struggled, but he may as well have, because he, too, felt fully frustrated with the Nazarene passage and its various interpretations: “I am ashamed so much as to mention the usual poor Expositions of this Text, which seem to me utterly ridiculous and indefensible” (Whiston, Essay, 104). He denies that the text appears in any Old Testament prophet: “This, which was in the Days of St. Matthew perhaps

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207 Probably in comments in his translation of the New Testament. Controversially, Reitz produced a literal Bible translation which he wanted to be direct and exact (Sheehan 67). His work angered orthodox critics because it made the Lord’s Prayer difficult to recite and stripped the New Testament of its “elegant” prose (67).

208 4th ed. The original edition (1701) does not contain this gloss.
in more Prophets than one, is now in none at all” (104). Collins echoes this sentiment: the text “does not expressly occur in any place of the Old Testament, and therefore the Old Testament cannot be literally fulfill’d therein” (Collins 47).

Edward Chandler, Mather’s hero regarding the “out of Egypt” passage, comes through for him on this prophecy as well. Whiston’s frustration is echoed by Chandler, who offers the same explanations as Mather and Simon had: that the original text was lost, that it alludes to “netser” in Isaiah, and that it refers to prophecies about the Messiah being insulted (Chandler 295-310). Chandler tries to dispel the apparent improbability of enigmatic interpretations: “This may seem strange to us, and will give modern wits, a contemptible idea of former times. But, it is nevertheless antient, and hath been thought by other nations, a beautiful and skilful way of writing” (300). Poor Mather rethought his position in the wake of Collins’s volume and, crossing out the “Finally” in front of the previous gloss, wrote an additional gloss on the Nazarene reference. He relates that, according to Chandler, “Netzar,” or “Branch,” can also mean Nazareth: “There was in ye Allusion so much of a prophecy, as justly to allow or speaking of a Fulfilment in it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 2:23). Although only a few pages prior, Mather seriously questions Jerome’s identical interpretation, Collins’s challenge ultimately drove Mather – and Chandler – to embrace Surenhusius’s unprovable extra-Christian methods that pointed to allegorical interpretation.

6.6 Jeremiah, the Prophet on the Move

In addition to challenging traditional interpretations of famous texts, the rise of early modern biblical criticism undermined the authority of the Bible as a reliable source. Another innocent-looking verse in Matthew raised the eyebrows of exegetes: “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the
price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value” (Matt. 27:9). The difficulty is that this quoted text does not appear in Jeremiah, although a very similar passage appears in Zechariah: “So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter” (Zech. 11:12-13). Mather promises to “accommodate ye matter” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:9).

While Enlightenment exegetes debated the passage, awareness of the problem was hardly new. Mather points out that even the Church Fathers knew about the apparent error. According to Lightfoot’s commentary, Mather explains, Augustine assumed that Matthew had made a mistake due to “a failing of memory” (Lightfoot 2:264). Enlightenment exegetes proved less willing to accuse the Evangelist of error. Even Lightfoot after introducing Augustine’s idea, counters: “I do not only deny, that so much as one letter is spurious, or crept in without the knowldg of the Evangelist, but I do confidently assert that Matthew writ Jeremy, as we read it” (2:265). He explains that the Old Testament was originally divided into parts, and that an entire section would be called by the name of the first book in it (2:265). As Jeremiah was the first book in the volume of prophets in the former arrangement of the books, Matthew could cite Jeremiah but might mean any text within the prophets (2:265). Therefore, something written in Zechariah could be said to have been prophesied by Jeremiah. Mather liked Lightfoot’s transparency and felt cheered that he resolved the issue “Not by denying ye Purity of ye Text” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:9).

The problems surrounding this text are central to Whiston’s argument about the authenticity of the Old Testament. He draws attention to the theory developed by Joseph
Mede. In a private letter to William Twisse, published in 1664, Mede suggested that the ancient rolls of the Old Testament were mislabeled: “The Jews wrote in Rolls or Volumes, and the Title was but one” (Mede 2:1022). The fact that the ninth through eleventh chapters appear in Zechariah does not prove that he wrote them, since they foretell events that would be far more relevant in Jeremiah’s time (2:1022). For example, Mede explains, the text quoted in Matthew is a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, “but methinks such a Prophecie was nothing seasonable for Zacharie’s time,” when the city had already been ruined (2:1023). Mede, appreciating the threat to orthodoxy in this charge, conjectures that Zechariah found some of Jeremiah’s rolls after the return from captivity and inserted them into his volume, where they appear as his ninth through eleventh chapters (2:1023). Mede does not explain how Matthew would have known that the rolls were written by Jeremiah. In another letter, Mede speculates that Matthew deliberately misattributed the quotation: Matthew wished to inform Christians “that those latter chapters ascribed to Zachary… are indeed the Prophecies of Jeremy, and that the Jews had not rightly attributed them” (2:963).

Whiston embraces Mede’s theory, adding that Barnabas quoted a Zechariah text “as belonging to Jeremy” (Whiston, Essay, 94). Whiston refers to what is known as the “Epistle of Barnabas,” an apocryphal book attributed by second and third-century Christians to the apostle Barnabas (Ehrman, Writings, 352). In the book, which is often called an epistle despite not conforming to the epistolary norms of the time, the author quotes God’s words to “the prophets” but appends a verse from Zechariah to a verse from Jeremiah (Barnabas 2:4, 2:7-8). Whiston sees this quotation as evidence that these passages belonged together (Whiston 94). Likewise, the Apostolic Constitutions “several times quote Passages now in Jeremy and Zachary so

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209 Joseph Mede (1586-1638), Hebraist and apocalypticist, was professor of Greek at Cambridge (Ball). He graduated from Cambridge with his M.A. in 1610 (Ball). He was sympathetic to the Puritans but remained faithful to the Church of England (Ball). His most famous works were his apocalypses (Ball).
together as if they were then in one Book” (94). The *Apostolic Constitutions* are a fourth-century book of liturgical instructions attributed inaccurately to the twelve apostles (Ehrman, *New Testament*, 375). To Whiston, these proofs indicate that the final chapters of Zechariah had belonged to Jeremiah originally.

This suggestion makes Matthew seem more reliable by clearing the Gospel of the error, but it undermines Zechariah, Jeremiah, and, implicitly, the integrity of the Old Testament. Whiston, however, had no problem with this implication. He criticizes the passage as “one of the most visible Insertions or Interpolations in the present Context of Zachary that one shall meet with; and appears to have been there-into intruded with the greatest Violence” (94). Despite having challenged the integrity of the Old Testament, Whiston does not explain why the rest of Zechariah should be trusted. Instead, he dismisses the misattribution of the texts in the Old Testament as “a gross and visible Error,” and implies that it needs to be rectified (95). Whiston thus left himself and the Old Testament vulnerable. It followed logically that if some chapters had been moved from Jeremiah, there could be reason to believe that other sections were not intact, either.

Collins, seeing that Whiston had left the issue open, pounced on the opportunity. He remarks that by severing the incongruous chapters from Zechariah, Whiston had effectively implied that any problematic part of the Bible could simply be dismissed as a later and unauthentic redaction: “But, granting this Prophesy, not to be found in ZACHARY, did, in St. MATTHEW’s time, exist in JEREMY; why does he not plant this quotation in some particular place of JEREMY?” (Collins 125). Since, in Whiston’s conjecture, New Testament fulfillment requires a corresponding literal prophecy in the Old Testament, the removal of those chapters has rendered them extra-biblical. However, while radicals like Toland proposed dismissing the
problematic texts to undermine the Bible’s authority deliberately, Whiston too dismissed problematic texts, but in order to salvage Biblical authority, a plan that obviously backfired. Collins charges that Whiston has discredited the Zechariah text completely, because he has not found the appropriate place for it elsewhere, and “till that be done, we cannot judge the pertinency of it” (125). Collins concludes that Whiston has not replaced the text because he does not have the authority to do so: “to confute any chimerical scheme of placing this quotation in our present book of JEREMY, or in any other authentick book of JEREMY; it appears, that it cannot be plac’d in him, but by such a method as will place any quotations, or prophecies, in him” (126). In other words, restoring the supposed true text of the Bible, as Whiston proposes to do, would be deliberately altering it and hypocritically committing the same corrupting act with which Whiston had charged second-century Jews.

The complexity of the issue is revealed in “Biblia Americana.” Aware of the Whiston-Collins controversy, Mather cites the viewpoint of Richard Kidder, who explains that since some copies do not name Jeremiah, “tis not evident, that St. Matthew did cite Jeremiah” (Kidder 2:75). He reveals that the Greek and Syriac versions say the text comes from “The prophet” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v., c.f. Kidder 2:75). Even critical Jews like R. Isaac “do not complain of putting in ye Name of Jeremiah,” so the addition of that name specifically to the text is not an issue for them (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.).

If, however, Matthew had cited Jeremiah specifically, “yet is it not a just imputation upon his credit” (Kidder 2:75). Kidder notes that the text might appear in an apocryphal work: “for what we know, Jeremiah might have written what is here quoted from him, tho’ it be not now in

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210 Originally a Boyle lecture of 1693-4, this text was published as Part II of A Demonstration of the Messias in 1699.
211 Isaac ben Abraham Troki (1533-1594), a Russian polemicist whose Hizzuk Emunah Kidder criticizes (Broyde 265). Kidder claims that “R. Isaac … objects against the Evangelists every thing that he can lay hold of” (2:75).
that, which we have of his in the canon of *Scripture*” (Kidder 2:75). Mather echoes that “there might be some *Apocryphal* writings of *Jeremiah*, which might have this passage in them” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v., c.f. Kidder 2:75). His evidence for this speculation is that Jerome claimed to have read the passage “in an Hebrew volumn, which a *Jew* in the *Nazarene sect* showed him as an *Apocryphal* work of *Jeremiah*” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). While Mather was obviously fishing, he does relate that Paul quotes Maccabees and Jude quotes Enoch, so “*Apocryphal* Writings may be worthy of credit” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.).

Mather, who used extra-biblical sources, remarks that Matthew could reasonably quote a non-canonical text. Mather charges assertively: “Who complains of *Paul* for quoting of what was in the Book of *Maccabees*, and the Book which tells of *Jannes* and *Jambres*! Or, of *Jude*, for quoting ye prophecy of *Enoch*?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:9). Luckily, since “Biblia Americana” was not published, no one directly answered Mather’s challenge to criticize those passages from Paul and Jude. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul mentions Jannes and Jambres as negative examples: “Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:8). Pliny the Elder had named Jannes as a magician who resisted Moses in Exodus 7:10-12. Both names are attributed in the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan in the commentary on Exodus. Paul’s source for the names, as Mather suggests, is unclear, although he may have been quoting the no-longer-extant *Apocrypha of Jannes and Jambres*. The First and Second Books of Maccabees, which Paul cites in his first letter to Timothy, are considered Scripture by some Christian faiths but not by Protestants (c.f., 1 Cor. 15:29, 2 Macc. 12:43-45; 1 Tim. 6:15, 2 Mac. 12:15 and 13:4). Likewise, the Epistle of Jude directly quotes the apocryphal Book of Enoch, which neither Christians nor Jews in

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212 As Kidder states: “Nor is it any disparagement to cite an apocryphal book: That book, which is apocryphal, is not therefore unworthy of credit” (2:75).
Mather’s time accepted as canonical: “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints” (Jude 1:14).

Thanks to Whiston and Collins, apocryphal works lacked the same authority as canonical works. The citations of apocryphal writings that Kidder and Mather name do not claim to be typological fulfillments of prophecies. Jude refers to a prophecy about naysayers, but not with the same specific detail as Matthew refers to Jeremiah. Collins’s deconstruction had moved well beyond just discrediting Whiston. Collins reminds his readers of Jerome’s comment: “the quotation was made from an Apocryphal Book, ascrib’d to JEREMY” (Collins 126). Whiston’s attribution of the Zechariah chapters to Jeremiah, Collins explains, was without foundation. The issue at hand instead was whether Matthew should have quoted apocrypha. In fact, he notes, some extant copies of Matthew do not cite Jeremiah at all, but merely read “the Prophet” (126). Those copies, he observes facetiously, must have been “corrupted on purpose” to preserve Matthew’s integrity (126). Later transcribers removed the reference to Jeremiah because they realized that the apocryphal work was not authentic and that Matthew had made a mistake. They acted “thinking that St. MATTHEW should not have cited a book forg’d under JEREMY’s name” (127). Although Collins does not elaborate, this charge contains significant implications. He forces his contemporaries to contemplate whether Matthew knowingly quoted, as a legitimate prophecy, a book that lacked Scriptural authority. If he did, extra-biblical prophecies would be capable of being fulfilled. The other possibility was that Matthew was mistaken in believing that the prophecy was legitimate. Ultimately, by deconstructing the flaws in Whiston’s argument, Collins put commentators in a difficult position. Evidently, Mather felt forced to choose the legitimacy of quoting apocryphal works over accusing Matthew of error. While Mather
responded by defending Matthew, still, he did not claim explicitly that extra-biblical prophecies could be fulfilled.

On the other hand, Kidder notes, the text in Zechariah might have been written by Jeremiah. Echoing Mede and Simon, he observes that some prophecies in Zechariah appear to “agree with the Time of Jeremy, and not of Zachary” (“Demonstration,” 113). Heavily influenced by Kidder, Mather suggests, “Tis very probable, That Jeremiah wrote the, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 chapters of Zachary” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v., c.f. Kidder 2:76). He borrows Kidder’s examples: Zechariah 10:11 refers to the fall of Assyria, which had already occurred: “Jeremiah might, but Zechariah could not, Foretel it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). Likewise, as Kidder observes, Zechariah 9:5 “agrees well with Jeremiahs predictions” in Jeremiah 25:20 (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). Gaza, “tis very certain,” was “smitten in the End of Jeremiahs Time, & was not Extant in Zachariahs” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). Finally, he concludes with Kidder’s third piece of evidence, that Zechariah 14:5 compares the prophecy to the days of Uzziah, which would be somewhat meaningless to people in Zechariah’s time but which “many might remember to have heard their Fathers Report in ye Time of Jeremiah” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v., c.f. Kidder 2:76).

This assessment of the text’s accuracy, using context and external evidence to weigh its veracity, regardless of the outcome, represents true high criticism of the kind that was gaining prominence and scholarly acceptance in Mather’s day. Of course, since he is taking his account nearly verbatim from Kidder, its appearance in “Biblia Americana” merely represents Mather’s acceptance of some high criticism – when done by a conservative Protestant in support of biblical authority – not his delving into it personally. Most disappointingly, Mather does not assess the possible implications of this revelation about Zechariah. He does not explain how it might impact biblical inerrancy.
6.7 Conclusion

Although Mather wanted to believe in double fulfillment of prophecies, the works of Whiston and Collins made clinging to that outdated method of interpretation appear ignorant and irrational. Orthodox scholars strained to prove any prophecy fulfillment in the Gospels as textual criticism revealed several examples of fulfillment that clearly did not correspond to the Old Testament. Mather interacted with this debate about prophecy fulfillment as it unraveled during his lifetime, and as the debate changed his opinion, he updated his commentary. The result is a sad demonstration of a devout man, full of conviction, grasping at straws to make Old Testament prophecies match the predetermined conclusions presented in the Gospels - even when that meant elevating non-canonical apocrypha to the status of prophetic works, as in the case of the Jeremiah-Zechariah text, or identifying double fulfillment but refusing to call it such, as in the case of the virgin birth prophecy.

7 CHAPTER SEVEN: EVIDENTIALISM

7.1 Introduction

Anti-revelation radicals asserted that only demonstrable sensory evidence had true authority, because, unlike revelation, it was available to be seen and understood by everyone. Empirical data, however, is hard to come by in the Bible, and as rationalists like Hobbes, Spinoza and Toland insisted that arguments should be supported with external evidence, orthodox exegetes struggled to provide factual information that could satisfy critics.

In Theology in America, scholar E. Brooks Holifield notes that while rationalism impacted American theological writing from the seventeenth century, its offshoot, evidentialism, reached its height in the early nineteenth century, when Christian writers became “convinced that the methods of Baconian science could work for theology as well as they did for geology or
chemistry” (174). He explains that the American response to Bacon was influenced by Scottish philosophy, primarily due to American theologians’ admiration of eighteenth-century scholars Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) (175). Mather himself embraced evidentialism, but obviously could not have been influenced by Reid or Stewart. “Biblia Americana” indicates another, earlier wave of evidentialism in American theology inspired by European commentators. As Holifield observes, “When Anthony Collins argued in his Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion that the biblical prophecies included a great many predictions that failed to come true, he set English apologists on the task of authenticating the predictive accuracy of the prophets” (188). This chapter will illustrate that the English apologists were joined by Mather in this endeavor.

Evidentialists relied upon extra-biblical accounts to undergird the information provided in Biblical stories. Intending to demonstrate that the Bible presents accurate detail and is therefore a reliable historical work, Mather implicitly acknowledges that to educated thinkers during the Enlightenment, the Bible no longer stood on its own as an authority. Framing his remarks apologetically, Mather indicates that outside sources ultimately provide validation of the Bible – not the other way around.

He uses extra-biblical sources to support the narratives presented in the Gospels, however minute the specifics of each story. For example, Mather considers the apparent existence of two high priests at once in Luke, a contradiction of the Mosaic law (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Luke relates that John the Baptist began preaching during the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, “Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests” (Luke 3:1-3). Although the naming of two priests appears to be an error, Mather refuses to make that admission. Instead, Mather cites John Edwards, who charges that “not only the High-priest of the present year, wore the Title; but the
person, who had been in that office the year before” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). However, Luke presents no evidence to support this reading, so Mather concedes that the priesthood was corrupt in Jesus’s time. According to Josephus, Mather reports, some priests “obtained ye Sacerdotal Honour by Bribes” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Possibly the existence of two priests indicates the corruption of the Jewish church, he reasons. Other arguments Mather dismisses based on literary criticism and historical context: while some charge that “chief priests” and “high priests” held distinct, separate positions, Mather scoffs: “these do not consult the original; for, ΑΞΙΕΞΕΙΣ is the word for both, in ye New Testament; tho’ our Translators differently render it” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Those theorists simply had not done their research. Similarly, although well-respected exegetes, including Mather’s own beloved Grotius and Lightfoot, claim that the high priest had a deputy, Mather bravely differs from them because he cannot find support for it “in any Historians” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Evidentialism impacted Mather so deeply that it caused him to disagree with two of his favorite scholars.

This chapter examines Mather’s integration of evidentialism into his exegesis. Mather flatly rejected materialists, who demanded evidence of the spiritual world, but other evidentialists, who sought proof of the Bible’s historical accuracy, were given full consideration. Mather uses notable critics William Surenhusius and Jeremiah Jones as guides to explain the rhetorical contexts informing the four canonical Gospels. He analyzes internal clues in the Gospels, such as references to standing structures, to date the Gospels. Likewise, he examines the narratives critically to determine whether Mary remained a virgin permanently, as orthodox Christians traditionally believed. Not convinced after his analysis that the Gospels provided sufficient evidence, he jokingly labels himself a “heretic” and asserts that Mary bore children after Jesus was born. In turn, he also accuses a Jewish polemicist of hypocrisy for criticizing
Jesus’s behavior, which, put into historical context through the guidance of Richard Kidder, Mather handily justifies. The last three sections of this chapter examine how Mather uses extra-biblical sources. He cites pagan accounts to confirm information described in the Gospels, recognizing that their lack of pro-Christian bias makes their verification of Christian accounts more dependable. This interest in objectivity reveals the influence of rationalism on Mather’s approach to determining truth. He makes a significant effort to provide empirical evidence that could be interpreted by anyone. In doing so, however, he not only indicates that he was privileging reason over faith in his interpretation of the Bible, but he reveals his own awareness of the Bible’s declining authority as a historical source.

7.2 Ghosts and Wizards

Orthodox writers accepted the invisibility of the spiritual world without question. Just as a person cannot share the direct experience of revelation, so one cannot literally reveal one’s soul. For philosophical materialists like Thomas Hobbes, this inability to provide evidence was a problem. He and other materialists argued that, since it cannot be proven with empirical data, the spiritual world simply did not exist. Mather readily dismissed such materialists as “Sadducees.” Even if spirits themselves could not be seen, Mather and other conservative writers alleged, their impact could. In English and American literature, a genre of “providence tales” arose in the seventeenth century as a response to Hobbesian materialism (Hartman 19). Scholar E. Brooks Holifield notes the rise of this “intensified supernaturalism” as an “ironic” reaction to the rise of natural sciences (73). Providence tales relate supernatural events, such as

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213 Mather uses this term routinely, both in “Biblia Americana” and in Wonders of the Invisible World, to slander people who denied the existence of the spirit world. He did not originate this use of the term. Nicolas Arnold labeled Cartesians “Sadducees” in Dissertatiuncula (1667) (Preus, Spinoza, 77). The Sadducees were a sect of Jews who were prominent in Jesus’s lifetime and are mentioned in the New Testament (Ehrman, New Testament, 42, c.f. Matt. 3:7, Matt. 22:23, Acts 4:1, Acts 23:8). They did not believe that the dead would be resurrected (Ehrman 42).
hauntings, witchcraft, and inexplicable phenomena. This reaction is evident in Increase Mather’s *Illustrious Providences* (1684) which differentiates between ordinary and extraordinary providences (Holifield 73). In England, conservative minister Richard Baxter’s *Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691) specifically presents stories about mysterious ghostly events as physical evidence of the spirit world (Hartman 47).

Even the more radical wing of the Church of England, Latitudinarianism, got swept up into the providence tale fad. Cambridge Platonists such as Joseph Glanville and Henry More viewed mysteries as a meeting point of natural philosophy and religion (Hartman 60). More’s *Antidote to Atheism* (1652) cites providence tales in a direct response to *Leviathan*’s denial of the spiritual world (Hartman 62). Comparing Reformation works like the famous *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) with early Enlightenment monographs by Baxter and Glanville, James Hartman proposes that the approach to witchcraft shifted focus from an emphasis on punishment to an emphasis on evidence (68). By the late seventeenth century, Hartman explains, “Punishment is forgotten, and the existence of a witch becomes an emblem of the existence of God” (68). The shift reflects not only the increased public questioning of the spirit world but also the philosophical culture of evidentialism. With this supposed evidence of the spirit world well-established by providence tales, Mather felt confident. Therefore, such radicals as Sadducees Mather could claim to brush off easily as unworthy of an answer.

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214 Joseph Glanvill[e] (1636-1680), a Latitudinarian, received his M.A. from Oxford in 1658 and served as chaplain at Oxford until he was ordained in 1660 (Burns, “Glanvill”). His biographer comments that Glanville “was less concerned with witchcraft *per se* than with the reality of spirits and their interaction with matter” (Burns). He first published on witchcraft in 1663 but continued to add to his collection of supernatural tales (Burns). The final edition was published posthumously as *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681) and included material from fellow Latitudinarian Henry More (Burns).
7.3 The Bible and World History

Other arguments fostered by rationalism were less simple for Mather. While he saw materialism in stark black and white terms, evidentialism appeared more murky. As its name implies, the movement sought solid evidence for historical assertions. Perhaps the most innocent-looking of the streams of thought to come from Enlightenment philosophy, it likely had the most damaging effect on Bible-centered perceptions of history.

According to evidentialists, the Bible told a history of the world, but not the authoritative history of the world. Orthodox writers, on the other hand, viewed the Bible as the benchmark of world history. For example, Augustine had dismissed Egyptian history because it dated back one hundred thousand years, and he accepted Greek history because it agreed with the Bible (Curley 73). Enlightenment evidentialists refuted this position, particularly in light of new historical discoveries. Joseph Scaliger wrote a world chronology, *Opus novum de emendatione temporum* (1583) that integrated extra-Christian sources (Grafton 106). He notes that the Chinese empire claims to date back 880,000 years (Grafton 210). Isaac La Peyrère further broadened the Western perception of world history with his *Prae-Adamitae* (1655). Although he based his argument on biblical passages, he interpreted in the Bible in a manner that equally validated external historical accounts and alternative narratives which dated well before the Garden of Eden. In turn, Richard Bentley noted in his 1692 Boyle lectures that the Bible does not contain all of universal history, since it does not describe the creation of angels (Grafton 21). Evidentialists built upon these assertions to charge that the Bible provided, at most, a partial account.

Mather saw the Bible as the sole foundational narrative of world history. Nevertheless, he unwittingly subscribed to some elements of evidentialism. By adding details for context, such as

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215 Richard Bentley’s lecture topic so closely represented Newton’s theology, James Force observes, the learned scientist probably proposed it himself (Force 74). Force suspects that Newton selected Whiston’s topic also (76).
descriptions of ancient customs and biographies of significant figures, and by relying heavily on extra-biblical sources for “proof,” he unintentionally confirmed radicals’ arguments that the Bible missed pertinent information. Mather accepted that the Bible was written for a particular audience in particular moments in history, without seeing the larger concession he was making about the timeless and inspired nature of the Bible. He conceded that the perfect book contained errors of omission and that even revelation could not make antiquated customs appear logical to Enlightenment readers. Implicitly undermining the Bible’s authority to stand alone as a historic source, Mather routinely employs extra-biblical and non-devotional sources to support assertions in his commentary. In addition to citing his own contemporaries, Mather consults ancient sources for historical evidence to provide contextual details. Grudgingly, he suggests that the Bible could no longer be accepted on good faith as an independent, reliable historical source.

As has been shown, the genealogies gave Mather grief. However, his incorporation of Surenhusius\(^\text{216}\) provides literary criticism not typical of a conservative approach (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Mather, via the Hebraist, analyzes the rhetoric of each genealogy with regard to its structure, its historical context, and its author’s purpose. He explains that genealogists would begin with the most important person: “If ye Discourse bore most on ye predecessors of a person, they would begin with them, & so come down” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Even though both authors focused on Christ, Matthew begins his genealogy with Jesus’s Israelite ancestry “to remove the prejudice of ye Jews, who look’d upon our Saviour with contempt” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Alternatively, “Luke writes to ye Gentiles… and no Name in ye Catalogue was more famous than that of Jesus: and so he carries all up from Him, to the man, who lost ye Glory of ye Humane Race” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:2). Instead of considering these accounts as mysterious or

\(^{216}\) The idea he asks his readers to consider “in the mean time” while he figures out the relationship between Joseph, Mary, Jacob, and Heli.
simply inspired, Mather accepts Surenhusius’s rhetorical analysis. In fact, Mather introduces Mark and Luke with a brief gloss on the historical context of each Gospel and its writer. The glosses are written on inserted leaves, revealing the change in Mather’s attitude over the years as he read Hebraists and literary scholars like Lightfoot.

### 7.4 The Gospels in Context

Mather similarly considers the provenance of the four canonical Gospels. Beliefs about the context in which each Gospel was written depended primarily on tradition. As rationalists sought evidence for traditional claims, orthodox exegetes struggled to find internal and external proof to uphold traditions. The identity of each author was one such issue that writers like Mather tried to verify. In Mather’s time, Bible scholars believed that the Gospels were named for their authors. Mather cites “a common Tradition among the Ancients” that Mark was one of the seventy disciples called by Jesus (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). Remarkably, the tradition holds that Mark left Jesus, having taken “offence” at the carnivorous phrasing of the Last Supper, but joined the church again after being reconverted by Peter (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). Perhaps that reason was given by early Christians for the brevity of Mark’s Gospel and its lack of full concordance with Matthew and Luke. Mather theorizes, citing Grotius, that since Mark was “a Roman, a Latin Name,” the writer likely had a “Hebrew Name, in sound somewhat Resembling ye Name of Mark” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). He adds that Jews commonly used different names when travelling to Europe and he offers the examples of Jesus calling himself “Jason” and “Saul call’d himself, Paul” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1, c.f. Acts 9:1-19, 13:9). Mather’s endorsement of Grotius

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217 This point from Grotius is cited in Matthew Henry’s famous commentary (5:449). Since Mather provides more detail, he likely read it directly in Grotius’s work.

218 Josephus relates that a high priest named Jesus changed his name to Jason (Josephus 3:38).

219 Grotius made this comment with regard to Moses being called Musaeus (309).
reveals a departure from Calvin. Although Mather followed Calvin on doctrinal matters, he derived his Bible interpretation from later writers that were more contemporary to himself. Calvin prioritizes Mark over Matthew while Grotius prioritizes Matthew (Muller and Thompson, “Significance,” 341).

To assess the historical context of each Gospel, Mather depends on literary scholar Jeremiah Jones, whom he praises as “Industrious & Judicious” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). Jones wrote with the specific goal of defending the canonical New Testament, but he was also an outstanding literary scholar in that he examined the rhetorical context of historic works and studied non-canonical texts in their original languages. Mather believed that the Gospel of Mark was composed after the Gospel of Matthew. He notes that some critics wondered why Mark was so much shorter and whether the Evangelist omitted portions from Matthew that he considered not true. Jones asserts that Mark held Matthew’s account to be reliable (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1).

Jones had an interesting explanation for the apparent absence of material in Mark. As Mather relates, “there might be enumerated more than seven Illustrious Instances of things for the Honour of Peter, which ye other Gospels have related, but in this of Mark, there is no Relation of them” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). Ironically, Jones’s explanation is precisely the opposite of modern

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220 Like his contemporaries in New England, Mather rarely cites Calvin specifically even though Puritans supported the ideas laid out in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. English Puritans particularly tended to cite the devotional and doctrinal works by other English Puritans, such as William Ames and William Perkins.

221 Jeremiah Jones (1693-1724), an Independent minister in Gloucestershire, England (Wykes). Despite his short life and lack of formal training, he was a remarkable exegete who studied the apocrypha in order to prove that they had never formed part of the canon (Wykes). His response to Whiston, also exhaustive, studied surviving Greek versions of Matthew to refute Whiston’s charge that they had been corrupted (Wykes).

222 Jones: “There are in the Gospel history, several very remarkable circumstances relating to, and in favour of St. Peter, which are related by the other evangelists, and not so much as mentioned, or hinted at by St. Mark” (Jones, *New*, 56). Jones indicates that he wrote about this issue in *A Vindication of St. Matthew’s Gospel* as well (48). Jones enumerates the anecdotes about Peter that are missing in Mark; there are indeed eight, as Mather suggests (Jones, *New*, 56-57). In *Vindication*, Jones presents a similar discussion (48-52). Whiston, he explains, has erroneously charged that Mark “was the Epitomizer of St.
high critics’. While modern scholars believe that Mark lacks details because Matthew and Luke used an additional source, Jones suggests that Mark was the one with the non-extant source: a redactor, in the form of Peter (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1, c.f. Jones, New, 56). This Church Father, Mather argues, “supervised the composing, as more particularly to direct what should be omitted in it” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1, c.f. Jones, Vindication, 52). He ascribes this redaction to “probably, the Modesty of Peter” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1). He adds as support that the Gospel of Mark “did in the primitive Times, commonly go go [sic] under ye Name of, The Gospel of Peter” according to Tertullian (“BA” 7: Mark 1:1, c.f. Jones 48).223 Ironically, although Tertullian posited that Peter helped write Mark’s Gospel, there did exist a different, apocryphal Gospel called the Gospel of Peter (Ehrman, Forgery, 118).

Mather apparently believed that Luke’s Gospel was written and circulated early. Citing unknown “Ancients,” in a gloss about genealogy, he suggests that Paul used the Gospel of Luke as his source about Jesus’s life (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). Mather and the ancients seem to have held that belief because Luke’s genealogy traces Jesus to David, and Paul writes to Timothy: “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8). Mather takes the word “gospel” literally: “it refers to ye Chapter of Luke which is now before us” (“BA” 7: Luke 3:n.v.). It was common in early Christianity to refer to one’s beliefs as one’s Gospel, so Paul may not have actually meant any specific written record, but it is certainly intriguing that Mather thought Luke’s Gospel had been written so early.

Modern high critics agree that the same person authored the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the

Matthew” who copied from Matthew but changed the order to “the true and regular Series of Events, which he learned from St. Peter” (Jones, Vindication, 42).

223 Tertullian (ca. 160-after 218), a lawyer in Carthage who converted and became a priest there (Chapman). However, he left the church to join the Montanists, and then left them to begin in his own sect of Christianity (Chapman). He wrote apologetics for Christianity aimed especially at pagans (Chapman).
Apostles. However, they recognize that these books were not ascribed to Luke until at least 180 C.E., one hundred years after they were originally written (Beal 96).

Through careful literary criticism, Jones deduces that the author of Luke and Acts was not Jewish (“BA” 7: Luke 1:1). Jones observes that in Acts “he saies, It was called Aceldama, IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, which intimates that the Syriac . . . was not His Language” (“BA” 7: Luke 1:1). Mather subscribes to the tradition that Luke was a physician, and he dismisses the proposition that Luke was a limner as “a Fiction of Later Ages never dreamt of, before ye Beginning of ye Sixth Century” (“BA” 7: Luke 1:1). Speculating regarding Luke’s “True Name,” Mather cites Grotius, who rejects the tradition that the author was the “Lucius” addressed in Romans 16:21 (“BA” 7: Luke 1:1). Grotius argues instead that Lucas was a “contraction” of “Lucillius,” similar to a dozen other ancient contractions (“BA” 7: Luke 1:1).

Elsewhere, Mather asserts that Luke was “a physician, bred at Alexandria, then famous for the Greek medicine” and consequently could provide “a more particular Account, of our Lords miraculous cures, than any of the other Evangelists” (“BA” 7: Luke 8:43).

Mather argues that the Gospel of John “was written, to supply what might appear wanting in the other Three Gospels,” including background on John the Baptist and especially “An Account of our Saviours Divinity” (“BA” 8: John 1:1). He accepts it as the last-written of the Gospels and speculates on its date. Some, he notes, date it to before 70 C.E. because it refers to the pool of Bethesda as presently standing (“BA” 8: John 1:1). However, Mather argues that the pool was not fully destroyed during the sacking of Jerusalem, since Tertullian mentions that it survived, albeit having “lost its Virtue” (“BA” 8: John 1:1). He, as was traditional, considered John to be the newest. He suspects that it was written “after ye Decease of Simon,” which is why

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John mentions that Judas was Simon’s son (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Mather explains that the other Gospels were written while Simon Zelotes was alive but since he “no doubt had his Heart Exceedingly broken with ye Villany of his woful Son, the Evangelists were willing to pass over in Silence, the Relation that Judas Iscariot bore unto him” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:1). Therefore, although he does not state so directly, he seems to agree with “our Jones” who dates it to 98 C.E. (“BA” 8: John 1:1).

Mather does not introduce the historic character of Matthew at the beginning of his commentary on that book. Perhaps he omits the biography because he accepts without question that the author of the Gospel is the apostle introduced in Matthew 9:9,225 so his activities are well-recorded in the Gospels and Acts. According to the Gospels, Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 9:9). Mather explains that, because of humility, Matthew adds “the publican” to his name when listing the apostles, even though that label “carried no great Honour in it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 10:3). Mather’s biographical notes about the Evangelists do not challenge traditional beliefs, but, with their focus on textual criticism, they indicate the increased pressure on exegetes to provide proof for their assertions.

### 7.5 Unlike a Virgin

While most orthodox denominations of Christianity believed in the miraculous conception and the virgin birth of Jesus, Mather was not at all convinced that Mary remained a virgin after delivering Jesus. Interestingly, in defending orthodox interpretations of the Bible, Mather also took responsibility on himself to handle Roman Catholic traditions as well. Catholic tradition held that Mary remained a virgin for life, even though the Bible does not indicate that she did. Protestants had come to support that tradition as well. Mather, on the hand, argued that

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225 Modern scholars disagree, asserting instead that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek in c. 80 C.E. (Ehrman, New Testament, 93).
the Bible demonstrated the contrary: the Gospels mention that Mary had children after Jesus.

Citing this evidence, Mather dismisses church tradition.

Mather explains that one can believe in Jesus’s virgin birth without going so far as to believe as well in her permanent sanctity. He notes that “The Jewes do speak of our Lords Brethren and Sisters, in the ordinary sense of ye word” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55). When Matthew mentions the “Brethren of our Lord,” he means the full biological siblings who were conceived with Joseph and born after Jesus (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55). Mather does not see why the text would be interpreted otherwise, and he cites Whitby in support. That exegete credits his reading to Antonius de Dominis226 (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55). Whitby praises “the very accurate Discourse” of Dominis, who remarks that the biblical texts are transparent on this point (1:125). After dispensing with the possibility that Jesus’s siblings were conceived miraculously or that Matthew means they were only spiritual, not biological, brethren, Mather scoffs that even the doctrine of Mary’s remaining a virgin was apocryphal. According to John Pearson,227 quoted by Whitby and in turn by Mather, the tradition of Mary remaining a virgin arose in Jerome’s time (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55, c.f. Whitby 1:126).228 The sanctity of Mary did not have major significance for Mather since he was a Protestant229 and did not believe in the intercession of the saints, but he did cherish the idea of the miraculous virgin birth as central to the authenticity of Christianity.

226 Marco Antonio de Dominis (1566-1624) was a Jesuit, bishop of Zengg in Dalmatia, and critic of the Roman Catholic Church (Myers). He fled to England for refuge, where he was made the dean of Windsor and continued to write anti-Roman sermons (Myers). He ultimately decided to return to the Catholic Church and fled England to the Continent, where he began to criticize the Church of England (Myers). Although he died a natural death, he was considered a heretic by both Rome and London (Myers). He is therefore a rather controversial figure for Whitby to admire.

227 John Pearson (1613-1686), bishop of Chester and chaplain to the Royalist army during the Civil War, assisted Brian Walton with his polyglot (Quehen). His most famous work, to which Whitby alludes, An Exposition of the Creed (1659), was based on a series of sermons and continues to be considered a “standard” (Quehen).

228 Scholar Ted Campbell argues that the tradition dates back to at least the second century (Campbell 46).

229 The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church believe in the veneration of the saints and some confessions elevate Mary above the other saints (Campbell 46).
and the New Testament. He confronted Catholic tradition and indicated where conservatives were mistaken, illustrating his willingness to provide evidence. His approach to Jesus's siblings reveals his real immersion into the field of literary criticism forming in his time.

Not content with a short gloss on the subject, Mather added two new leaves to address his departure from tradition. He acknowledges the significance of his argument: “ye clause of ye Blessed Virgin being Always a Virgin, has been an Article in the Creed of numberless Christians” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58).\(^{230}\) Regardless of the church’s desire to believe it, however, Mather states, “There are many Reasons, to persuade one, that these were properly the Brethren and Sisters of JESUS” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58). Whitby brazenly remarks that Mary’s permanent virginity was so accepted that “It is now passed into a matter of Faith . . . and hath been stiled an Heresie to hold the Contrary; whereas I know not how it consists with good Divinity, to make that an Article of Divine Faith, which is founded on no Divine Revelation” (1:125). He adds that Basil and Origen had not considered it a necessary belief even though they themselves believed it (1:125). Pearson means to defend Mary’s eternal virginity, but before he defends this position, he lists the objections to it – the objections that Whitby and Mather support (173-175). Whitby snarkily summarizes: “Dr. Pearson confesseth, This was always the concurrent Judgment of Antiquity” (1:126). Whitby charges that the Church Fathers seem to have believed that Mary gave birth to other children after Jesus, as Pearson himself notes. Even though Pearson recognized that the ancients had not believed in Mary’s eternal sanctity, he defends it anyway, in the face of biblical evidence.

\(^{230}\) Although the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed do not state that Mary remained a virgin forever, they each give her the title “Virgin Mary.” Furthermore, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran Church, as well as some Anglican theologians, believe in her perpetual virginity (Longenecker and Gustafson 64).
Mather offers as further evidence the reasons presented by “One Inquisitive Man”\textsuperscript{231} (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58). Primarily, he holds that the language in the text is clear: “He saies, \textit{He took unto him his wife, but knew her not, until she had brought forth her Firstborn Son}. It plainly intimates, that after this time they did \textit{Cohabit}” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58). He lists examples of the word “until” meaning something being delayed, but his examples all refer to contemporary English uses of the term, not contextual Hebrew. He dismisses the arguments made for other readings of the texts concerning Mary’s children, such as that Joseph had children from a previous marriage: “They are always joined with the \textit{mother} of JESUS, never with \textit{Joseph}” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58). Satisfied with himself, he concludes with a barb: “I think here is Enough to invite one into the \textit{Helvidian} Haeresy” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58).\textsuperscript{232} This jolly heretic adds: “For myself, I freely confess, no vociferations of any \textit{Jerom} will now make any Impression upon me” (“BA” 7: Matt. 13:55-58). This assertion illustrates Mather’s development as an exegete. Previous chapters have shown Mather holding resolutely to predetermined readings that defend tradition, particularly when he attempts to harmonize the Gospels. His approach to the sanctity of Mary, on the other hand, reveals an objective search for the truth as indicated by close reading of the text. He demonstrates his willingness to reject tradition in favor of truth supported by reliable evidence.

### 7.6 Casting Devils into Swine

Mather takes advantage of the opportunity presented by evidentialism to self-righteously criticize the critics. Using historical-critical analysis of a story in the Gospels, Mather provides

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\textsuperscript{231} He originally wrote “Whiston.”
\textsuperscript{232} Helvidius argued in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century that the appearance of Jesus’s siblings indicated a normal sexual relationship between Joseph and Mary (Jerome). Jerome responded in 383 C.E. with a tract “Against Helvidius” defending Mary’s permanent virginity and claiming that the siblings were Jesus’s cousins (Jerome).
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evidence that refutes a radical polemicist, Jacob ben Amram, a Marrano Jew in Venice, whose *Porta Veritatio* (1634) attacks Christianity (Sutcliffe 177). Amram’s work was “hitherto virtually unknown” until Kidder decided to respond to it in his *Demonstration* (Sutcliffe 177). Mather introduces the issue by explaining that “one Jacob Aben Amram” had curated “a foolish collection of Cavils, against our Saviour & the New Testament” (“BA” 7: Luke 8:32). After adding up evidence against Amram’s reading, Mather triumphantly accuses Amram of hypocrisy.

The case under discussion is a story in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Jesus and his disciples traveled into “the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee” (Luke 8:26). There, Jesus meets a possessed man who pleads for deliverance. The devils possessing the man beg Jesus not to cast them “into the deep” (Luke 8:31). Instead, since “there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain,” Jesus cast the devils into the swine, which then “ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked” (Luke 8:32-33). Historian Adam Sutcliffe credits Kidder with “painstakingly” responding to Amram’s criticisms, remarking that Kidder “sustained a high degree of respect for the acuteness of Amram’s arguments, and even appeared to appreciate them for inspiring his own more comprehensive defense of Christianity” (177). Kidder explains in his preface that he wrote the third part of his *Demonstration* in order to reply to Amram (Kidder 3:iv). He considers the monograph “to be the greatest effort against Christianity that hath ever been made, or is ever like to be made against it” and explains that he “did very carefully consider what that subtle Jew had to offer” (3:iv). Similarly, his summary of the argument against the destruction of the swine does not imply hypocrisy on Amram’s part like Mather’s does (3:51).

Indeed, Amram should be grateful to Jesus, because the destruction of the herd was “an Act of Favour unto ye Jewes, to remove such a Scandal, as an Herd of Swine from among them!” (“BA” 7: Luke 8:32). Mather elatedly alludes to this corruption in a second gloss on this anecdote. Critics naively questioned “how there could bee so many swine among the Gadarens when Swines-flesh was in such abomination among the Jewes” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:32). Mather agrees that it was, then he lowers the boom: “But lett us consider ye Report of Pliny, who tells us, what a Rare Dainty Swines-flesh was among ye Romans” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:32). Evidently, Mather remarks, “when there might bee such a Trading in Swines-flesh, as was caused by ye Roman cookery and Luxury, ye covetousness of a Jew would them strain him far for his Profit” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:32). Ironically, after all of his guffawing, Mather rescinds his anti-Semitism and adds that Josephus labeled Gadara as a Greek city so it likely “had but few, if any, Jews for its Inhabitants” (“BA” 7: Matt. 8:32). Indeed, in his gloss on Mark, Mather cites the appearance of swine as evidence that Gadara was “a city of Pagans,” not Jews (“BA” 7: Mark 5:10). His rationalization of the narrative not only tries to make sense of it, but uses the historical context,

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233 Kidder writes: “It was in truth an act of grace and favour to the Jews to remove from them so dangerous a snare, and so bad an example” (3:52).

234 Mather does not name the critics, but Thomas Woolston, for example, would scoff in 1728: “Its not credible there was any Herd of Swine in that Country. If any Historians but the Evangelists had said so, none would have believed it” (33).

235 Woolston was fore-armed against this conservative defense: “Then its unlikely (without better Reason than at present we are appraised of) that our Saviour would permit the Devils to enter into a Herd of them to their Destruction. Where was the Goodness and Justice of his so doing?” (34).
via Pliny and Josephus, to do so, even if it did not lead him to a firm conclusion. Whether Jesus
was correcting Jewish pig farmers or simply ridding Gadara of devils, Mather’s historical-critical
analysis successfully rebukes Amram’s argument.

7.7 Locusts

Contextual details could, further, make sense of apparent problems in some passages –
when reliable evidence could be found. Mather considers Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son not
only from a devotional standpoint, but within the context of its first-century audience. Jesus tells
about a young man who squanders his inheritance then works as a pig farmer for his living (Luke
15:15). For once, instead of assuming the hypocrisy of the Jews, Mather points out that if the
prodigal son fed swine, “Tis a Shrewd Intimation, that the Gentiles are intended in the parable”
(“BA” 7: Luke 15:13). He even explains what the prodigal son fed the swine: he describes the
“husks” as fruit from the carob tree (“BA” 7: Luke 15:16). He includes ancient descriptions of
them from Pliny and references to them in Stoic philosophy (“BA” 7: Luke 15:16).

He provides similar detail about the locusts eaten by John the Baptist: he remarks that
“Authors enow, will tell you, that Locusts are mans meat, in ye Eastern parts of ye world” (“BA”
7: Mark 1:6). Here Mather seems to recognize that eating a diet of insects would seem a foreign
concept to early modern Westerners. Consequently, he supports his assertion with numerous
ancient references to locusts in writers such as Strabo, Agatharchides, and Pliny (“BA” 7: Mark
1:6). However, unwilling to let well enough alone, Mather adds an insert to contradict
himself. He cites Charles Le Cène, who attributes his knowledge to “the most Exact Travellers

236 Strabo (64 B.C.E.-21 C.E.) studied history and geography in Rome, and after travel around the
Mediterranean, wrote the most comprehensive work on geography known to survive from that era
(Lasserre). Agatharchides (2nd century B.C.E.) was a Greek geographer and historian who studied cultural
habits (“Punt”). Mather is very likely using another exegesis as his source.
237 Charles Le Cène (1647-1703), a Reformed minister from Normandy who fled to the Netherlands after
the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (Larminie). His proposal was published in French in 1696 and was
who have been in the *Holy Land* (Le Cène 166). Those travelers had observed seventeenth-century monks in Israel eating a type of fruit called “locusts” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:6). Le Cène adds that Norton Knatchbull\(^{238}\) confirms this reading (Le Cène 167). The locust tree, Mather concludes, “may be ye same with the carob-tree” (“BA” 7: Mark 1:6). He thus provides ample sources to prove that the Baptist ate an insect-based diet, or, equally as likely, a plant-based diet. If the Bible lacked appropriate contextual details, Mather’s help was no more concrete. In presenting these extra-biblical examples to reveal interpretive possibilities, however, Mather concedes ground to rationalists. He lays out the available empirical evidence and allows his reader to reach a decision independently.

In another contextualization, Mather blames the King James translation for a confusing message. Jesus states in Luke 14:34 that people cast out salt that loses its savor, yet Jean Le Clerc notes that salt does not lose its savor (“BA” 7: Luke 14:34, c.f. Le Clerc 140). Le Clerc suggests that the word “is not to be understood of salt properly speaking, because that which is here said of Salt, neither does nor even can happen to it” (140). He proposes that Jesus meant wood ashes because they were used that way (140). Mather remarks that the ashes used in making lye soap may have been called by the same name, and after they become diluted through washing, they would be cast out (“BA” 7: Luke 14:34). Even Le Clerc was uncertain about his own argument, though, Mather adds thoughtfully, because “he has no precedent for his conjecture” (“BA” 7: Luke 14:34). As Le Clerc states: “I confess I can produce no Example to shew that these Wood-ashes were called Salt, and therefore I affirm nothing peremptorily” (140).

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\(^{238}\) Sir Norton Knatchbull (1602-1685), graduated from Cambridge in 1620, elected MP for Kent and knighted in 1639, and during the Civil War focused on Bible studies instead of keeping his seat in the Commons (Keene). His *Animadversions* (1659), translated into English as *Annotations upon Some Difficult Texts in All the Books of the New Testament* (1693), went through several reprints and was highly respected for the breadth of sources consulted (Keene).
Mather again indicates an omission in the Bible but does not rectify it, even though he tries to provide objective historical detail through textual criticism. He transparently acknowledges the lack of conclusive evidence to support Le Clerc’s theory, inviting readers to weigh their options for interpreting this passage.

7.8 More Minutae

Although Mather accepted the Bible as the foundational source of history, he appreciated that his readers wanted its validity confirmed by verifying its accounts against external sources. For example, Joseph of Arimathea, who appears in Mark 15:43 to bury Jesus’s body, can be understood better using the Talmud, Mather asserts, with Lightfoot as his guide (“BA” 7: Mark 15:43). The King James version calls Joseph “An Honourable councellor” and the Talmud explains that the chamber of councellors was the same as that of the high priests, “Hence Dr. Lightfoot thinks, That Joseph of Arimathea was a priest, and one of that sacerdotal Bench” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:43, c.f. Lightfoot 2:358). Of course, later Mather contradicts himself by sharply adding: “Joseph was not a member of a sacerdotal council, but one of ye Senatorian Dignity” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:43). He reaches this new conclusion due to “ye Incomparable Basnage,” who also cites extra-biblical sources to claim that “Mark here uses a Term well known in the whole Roman World” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:43). Based on “Trojans Epistle to Pliny,” the term refers to a Roman senator, which is why Joseph of Arimathea, no mere priest, felt “Emboldened” to apply to “Pilate ye Roman Praefect” (“BA” 7: Mark 15:43). Even though Lightfoot, Le Clerc, and Whitby, three of Mather’s favorite scholars, all believed that Joseph sat

239 Whitby endorsed Lightfoot’s argument, as did Le Clerc. Whitby also mentions Hammond’s proposal that Joseph of Arimathea represented a colony (1:308). Henry Hammond, A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament (1659) was somewhat radical in that he claimed the Bible could be read with reason and learning, independent of the Spirit (Harrison 124).
240 Jacques Basnage (1653-1725), a Protestant minister at Rouen who authored several works on the history of religion, most popular of which was the seven-volume L’Histoire des Juifs (1706-1711) (Schwab 580).
on the council of High Priests, Mather could not ignore evidence to the contrary, so he rested satisfied with Basnage’s answer instead.

Despite his willingness to use ancient traditions to support his arguments, Mather nevertheless also notes where he rejects them. Regarding the death of Jesus, Mather confesses that “There is a very ancient Tradition, That one of the Theeves crucified with our Lord, was an Egyptian…. The other was an Edomite” (“BA” 7: Luke 23:39). Its antiquity aside, this tradition holds no weight with Mather: “I value ye Tradition, as little as I do ye Mystical Flourishes that have been made upon it” (“BA” 7: Luke 23:39). Why mention it at all, then? Because, Mather admits, “I was willing, that the curious might be made acquainted with it” (“BA” 7: Luke 23:39). This attempt to appear objective and transparent might work, except he provides no explanation for why he believes some ancient traditions but rejects this one. While he presents it as a curiosity, his inclusion of this detail hints at his interest in evidentialism, even as he recognized that “tradition” was not reliable enough to mollify his contemporaries. In this case, it was not enough to satisfy him, either. This tradition had no basis in the Gospel of Luke or, apparently, in recorded history and therefore could not be substantiated.

Taking issue with the translation of Mark, which creates a variation among the Synoptic Gospels, Mather lectures about “The Eclipse, mention’d by ye Evangelist, as an universal one [for, Mark 15.33. should be rendred over ye whole Earth, and not, all ye Land]” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v., brackets his, c.f. Luke 23:45). He fumes that the “darkness over the whole land” for three hours as Jesus died was an eclipse that occurred worldwide and that Mark therefore agrees with the other Gospels, even though the King James Version translators got it wrong (Mark 15:33). Mather cites descriptions of it by “Heathens” in Egypt (Dionysius), France (Phlegon Trallianus), Rome (Roman Archives), and China (Chinese Annals), then proudly exclaims:
“Now, What could bee more Accurate?” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.).\textsuperscript{241} Even though it is physically impossible for an eclipse to occur worldwide at once, Mather presents these numerous extra-biblical accounts to illustrate that the Bible could be trusted.

Mather details the appearance of Jesus’s grave using historical sources, which he generically calls “ye Jewish records” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). The Gospels tell radically different stories about Jesus’s resurrection, varying even in the details about the layout of the tomb. While Matthew describes an angel appearing to Mary Magdalene at the entrance of the tomb, sitting on a “stone” by the door, John states that angels appeared to her within the tomb, near Jesus’s body (Matt. 28:1, John 20:12). Mather tries to explain that the place where Mary Magdalene stood was “within ye Cave, on ye Floor, but without ye Deeper cave, where the very Graves, or places for the Bodies were” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). He can describe the layout of the grave site with confidence, he says, since “The Gemarists, and Glossers, among them, are very curious in handling the circumstances of these Noble Sepulcres” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1).\textsuperscript{242} Using historic records, Mather tries to gloss over these differences between the Gospels.

More remarkably, to provide evidence of Jesus’s death, Mather trusts pagan sources within and outside of Western tradition. The fact that pagan authors were not believers adds to their reliability, Mather suggests, since they had no reason to spread the news of Jesus’s death. He tabulates the pagans who mention Jesus’s death in a list titled “Testimonies to ye Death of our Lord Jesus Christ, & ye Circumstances of it” (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). Included in his list is “Lucian, that great scoffer at Christianitie,” who “calls our Blessed Lord, τὸν ἐΓ Τι παλαιζίνη ΧνΧσκοΛοκίδεντα, The man that was hang’d upon a gibbet in Palaestine” (“BA” 7: Matt.

\textsuperscript{241} Mather likely used another exegete’s work. Whitby cites Phlegon, the Roman Archives, and Eusebius, but not Chinese Annals (Whitby 1:308).

\textsuperscript{242} Mather likely gathered this information from Lightfoot, who notes, regarding sepulchers, that “these things are handled by the Gemarists, and Glossers very curiously and very largely” (2:89).
By drawing attention to Lucian’s bias against Christianity, Mather openly acknowledges the importance of objectivity in pursuing the truth. High criticism deliberately seeks to avoid a predetermined reading. Much of Mather’s commentary fails to meet this standard, because his determination to make pieces fit often leads him to a forced reading of the Gospels. However, his use of extra-biblical sources nods toward the value of objectivity. Lucian certainly was not objective, but, as Mather hints, neither would Lucian benefit from confirming the historical reality of Jesus’s execution (“BA” 7: Matt. 27:n.v.). Mather’s awareness of objectivity presents a critical, rather than a precritical, analysis of the Bible.

Mather believed that pagan sources not only attested to Jesus’s birth and death but to his miracles. Mather briefly mentions a reference to the miracles from “other Historians of those Times, besides ye Evangelists” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:23). He brags that, according to Tacitus, the disciples had been accused of maleficium by Nero, and taunts, “Now, if Christians… could Agere Maleficium, or, Do Witchcraft; for so ye Heathen called, the Miracles of Healing ye Sick, and casting out of Divels: it must bee granted that our Saviour Himself did ye like Miracles” (“BA” 7: Matt. 4:23). Mather also appeals to Tacitus as an example of “any Remembrances among ye Pagans” of Jesus being called Christ (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:16). He lists all of the extra-biblical references he can find. Pliny the Younger mentions people he suspected of being Christians, but “hee found them otherwise” when they ultimately proved willing to curse Christ (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:16). Mather’s other examples stretch credulity as well as the parameters he himself set, since they come from Christian authors. Lactantius, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr all claim that Christians sometimes had the misappellation of “Chrestiani,” but Mather finds only

243 Lactantius or Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (240-ca. 320 C.E.), a teacher of rhetoric at Nicodemia and tutor at Trier, Germany, wrote a famous apology for Christianity, Divinae Institutiones (“Lactantius”).
one historic reference to that group, in Suetonius, who notes their banishment from Rome by Claudius (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:16). Mather admits that “some learned men” think Suetonius did not mean Christians, especially since he affiliates them with Jews (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:16). On the other hand, he argues, “twas common, with ye Pagan Writers to confound ye Names of Jewes with Christians; ye occasion of which mistake was, that ye first Christians were Jewes” (“BA” 7: Matt. 1:16).

Even pagans similarly unintentionally recognized Jesus as God, Mather asserts. Describing the Roman world into which Jesus was born, Mather explains how dramatically the holy birth impacted all people, not just Jews. After Jesus was born, Emperor Augustus refused to be called “LORD” any longer, according to Deo, and this act Mather considers “Acknowledgment” of Jesus’s birth “in ye pagan World” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:11). He adds: “The Emperour was mightily changed after ye Birth of our Lord, & after ye Fame of our Lord went abroad, hee became, as Philo tells us, a great Favourer of the Jewes” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:11).

Amusingly, Mather relates another anecdote about Augustus even though “this is a Story, not much to bee relied upon” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:11). According to this story, an oracle told Augustus that a Hebrew babe, “God Himself, & King of Blessed Subjects” would succeed him, and in response Augustus built an altar for that child in Rome (“BA” 7: Luke 2:11). Despite Mather himself acknowledging the apocryphal nature of this uncreditable story, Mather cannot help but conclude in awe: “That former usage of Augustus was remarkable, & seems to have owned a suspicion in him, that ye Lord Christ was indeed, THE LORD” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:11).

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244 Suetonius or Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (69-122), biographer of Roman emperors and authors (“Suetonius”). Suetonius was an imperial secretary and is believed to have read or answered letters about Christians and Christianity due to his line of work (Cook 18).

245 Presumably historian Dion Cassius, also known as Dio.
He similarly borrows an anecdote about the fall of Jerusalem from Robert Fleming that supports pagan recognition of Jesus’s importance. Regarding the destruction of the city, “Titus himself owned… That Christ sent him on that Errand” (“BA” 7: Luke 21:8). Fleming says confidently: “It was easy to conclude, that it was Christ that sent them on that errand, (as even Titus himself owned, if we may believe an enemy)” (Fleming 198, parenthesis his). Fleming adds in a footnote that his source is Philostratus (198). The rest of the story does not exactly confirm Mather’s reading: Philostratus relates in a biography of Apollonius that Titus refused to be crowned by the Romans for his conquest, instead humbly asserting that “he was not the proper conquerer of Judea but the servant of God, and the minister of His Justice in that Execution” (“BA” 7: Luke 21:8, c.f. Fleming 199). This confession seems to speak more to Titus’s anti-Semitism than to his embrace of Christianity, which Philostratus does not even mention. Titus supposedly added that he assisted God with this “service” because he was “angry with the Jews” (Fleming 199). Nevertheless, Mather and Fleming excitedly jump to the conclusion that Philostratus’s story, as well as Titus’s reason and Apollonius’s positive response, all “concur in Testimony for the Verity of what our Christ prophesied, concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem” (“BA” 7: Luke 21:8, c.f. Fleming 199). Hardly objective in this case, Mather bends extra-biblical material to make it supportive of Biblical accuracy.

7.9 Criticism of Outside Sources

Mather admits when extra-biblical sources do not support his argument, but only when he can explain the inconsistency away. For example, the Gospel of Luke provides the historical context surrounding the travels of Joseph and Mary into Bethlehem: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1). It was to be counted for this tax that Joseph brought his wife into Bethlehem, which
is why Jesus was born there (Luke 2:5). However, Mather notes, there is a problem: “No profane
author mentions this Taxing of ye Inhabitants of ye world by ye order of Augustus” (“BA” 7:
Luke 2:2). It seems unlikely that Roman sources would fail to mention such a large-scale taxation
count. Even though pagan sources appear to call Luke into question, Mather observes, Anthony
Bynaeus\(^\text{246}\) clears it up. The Greek word, he reveals, actually means “ye Land of Judea,” and the
purpose was to determine the number of soldiers that Herod could raise (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2, c.f.
Bynaeus 306-307). Mather thinks that the King James Version overstates the poll described in
Luke. He suggests that it was a minor event unworthy of widespread notice, so historical sources
were right to be silent: “This being so, tis no wonder, that other Historians have said nothing of
it” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2). The error, then, is the King James Version, which mistakenly suggests
that Augustus intended to tax the world, not count soldiers in Judea.

Mather might have felt uncomfortable with the lack of references to verify Luke’s story.
Evidently, Mather continued his search for sources until he found some that satisfied him, then
he added another gloss. His interlocutor acknowledges that “The Chronology of our Lords
Nativity delivered by Luke, is clog’d with several Difficulties” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:1). Instead of
mentioning them, though, he notes mysteriously: “You know, as well as I, what they are” (“BA”
7: Luke 2:1). When he answers himself, Mather mentions that, among other things, the year of
Jesus’s birth appears unclear. Using pagan records, Mather tries to determine the precise time
when Joseph and Mary travelled through Bethlehem. Mather explains that Deo,\(^\text{247}\) Tacitus, and
Josephus all attest to the enrollment for taxation (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2). Completely contradicting
what he states in his previous gloss, Mather remarks, “It is therefore a mistake to say, That
Augustus his Taxing of all ye World, is not mentioned by Pagan or Jewish Historians” (“BA” 7:

\(^\text{246}\) Antonius Bynaeus or Binaeus (1654-1698), preacher and professor of oriental languages at Utrecht,
wrote monographs on the birth and death of Jesus (Knipscheer).

\(^\text{247}\) Presumably Dion Cassius.
Luke 2:2. He does not add that he himself wrote exactly the same sentiment only paragraphs earlier. Instead, he adds that this anecdote is confirmed by “The Censual Tables at Rome” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2). More importantly, “ye Name of ye Holy Jesus, with ye Time and Place of His Birth, and His Lineage, were then Recorded in those Tables” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2). He knows this because Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Cyril, and Orosius mention it (“BA” 7: Luke 2:2). No longer thinking that the enrollment was a local event for the military, Mather reveals his willingness to reinterpret passages based on the evidence provided by extra-biblical sources. His dependence on historians, be they Christian or pagan, to confirm the stories in the Bible, belies his concern that the authority of the Bible as a historically reliable source was diminishing.

7.10 Conclusion

Rationalism discouraged unquestioning belief in tradition and dependence on revelation as evidence. Instead, evidentialists sought empirical proof to establish the historical accuracy and authenticity of the Bible. Mather’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels reveals the impact of evidentialism on his manner of arguing. Instead of resisting evidentialism and upholding the Bible as the sole authority on human history, Mather shifts authority to extra-biblical sources, using them to establish the validity of the Bible.

E. Brooks Holifield suggests that, by the mid-nineteenth century, American evidentialists argued that the Bible was fact-based and that its details needed to be accepted by Christians (Holifield 190). Mather himself made the same argument more than a century earlier because, by then, discussion of the Bible’s authority was well underway in Europe. The impact of European evidentialism is apparent in the way Mather responds to contextual problems. Drawing primarily

248 Whitby also writes about this issue, explaining that all empires were called “the World” (1:333). He notes that “it was not a Money tax, but an Enrolling of Persons according to their Families and Estates” (1:333).
on Jones, Whitby, and Lightfoot, Mather cites historical figures who verify the details narrated in
the Gospels. Mather’s apologetic approach to defending the accuracy of the Bible reveals that in
America the authority of the Bible had already begun to disintegrate during the early eighteenth
century.

8 CHAPTER EIGHT: CORRUPTION OF THE TEXT

8.1 Introduction

Mather readily acknowledges that the King James Version of the Gospels did not exactly
correspond to an “original” version as penned by the Evangelists. In addition to acknowledging
differences among surviving versions, which he mostly attributes to translators’ errors and
possible corruptions of the New Testament texts, Mather heavily criticized the inaccuracy of the
King James Version in particular. Throughout his commentary, Mather uses Samuel Clarke’s
paraphrase to better capture the sense of the Evangelists’ words. He also uses Le Cène’s
monograph to push for a new translation.

In Mather’s youth, the authenticity of surviving versions was questioned publicly by
radicals who argued that human error and deliberate maleficence had corrupted the entire Bible
beyond reliability. Scholar Edwin Curley249 states the issue at stake well: “If defenders of
Judaism and Christianity are going to claim greater credibility for their sacred texts on the
ground of their greater internal consistency, it becomes very important to know whether or not
those texts actually are internally consistent” (Curley 74). Unfortunately for conservative
scholars, the texts, especially as translated in the King James Version, contained many
problematic passages. This fact became obvious in the seventeenth century, when, in Critica

249 In addition to writing literary scholarship, Curley has translated and created a modern collection of the
works of Spinoza.
Sacra (1650), Louis Cappel noted thousands of errors in the Bible (Preus, “Part II,” 17). Likewise, in a 1707 translation of the New Testament, John Mill pointed out that the New Testament alone had thirty thousand different readings (Sheehan 44). Cappel argued that instead of being protected by God, the Bible must have been subjected to the fate of all books and been miscopied over the years (Preus, “Part II,” 18). Although some critics charged that the errors were due to fraud, others claimed that the copyists had been inspired, so the errors were actually deliberate (Preus, “Part II,” 18). Such claims prompted Quaker Samuel Fisher to laugh that the copyists must have been mere “stenographers of the Holy Spirit” (Preus, “Part II,” 2). In The Rusticks Alarm to the Rabbis (1660), Fisher questions the reliability of the surviving text and quotes orthodox exegete John Owen as noting that the transcribers had made mistakes, even though Owen considered the mistakes to be divinely inspired (Hill 213). The canon itself was, of course, not original, and Fisher pointed out the obvious: there was no evidence of divine authority for the creation of that canon (Hill 213).

Historian Christopher Hill only slightly overstates the situation: “Fisher’s book marks the end of an epoch, the epoch of protestant

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250 Scholars also recognized that the Bible’s punctuation had changed significantly. Elias Levita printed the first Masoretic Hebrew Bible in 1524, revealing that the accents for vowels were not only not original but dated to the sixth century C.E. (Preus, “Part II,” 17). Louis Cappel published this information for Latin-speaking Christians in Arcanum Punctuationes Revelatum (1624) (17). Before the sixth century, the Hebrew Bible did not have consistent vowels.

251 John Owen (1616-1683), an Independent minister, received his M.A. from Oxford in 1635 and served as a chaplain before becoming a vicar in Essex (Greaves). During the Civil War, he served the Rump Parliament as a preacher and afterwards was appointed a dean at Oxford (Greaves). Owen routinely defended non-conformist “Puritan” dogma, writing against Arminianism and Socinianism and defending Congregationalism (Greaves). He had close ties not only with the Puritan Parliament but with Massachusetts Bay. He was a professed admirer of John Cotton and after the Restoration, when he lost his position, he was invited to serve the church in Boston, and although he ultimately declined, he periodically wrote to officials in Massachusetts (Greaves). In the 1670s, he fought a paper war against William Sherlocke, a Latitudinarian, who accused Owen of antinomianism (Greaves).

252 In an appendix at the end of his commentary on Revelation, Mather addresses this problem. He asserts that “Tis Evident, that in Tertullians Time, diverse councils had passed their censure on ye Apocryphal Books, and that the Canon of the Scripture had been fixed long before” (“BA” 10: “Some Remarks”). He adds that these councils would have met during the lifetime of Polycarp, a disciple of John the apostle (“BA” 10: “Some Remarks”).
Bibliolatry” (215). It probably ended decades earlier, with Hobbes, La Peyrière, and Grotius. Despite the scholastic dislike of the King James Version, it remained the standard English Bible until 1885, when it was replaced by the Revised Version Bible (Beal 140).

By Mather’s twilight years, critics had begun thorough investigations that examined the thousands of variances among the surviving versions, and radicals like Anthony Collins challenged the legitimacy of the canon. By claiming that Jews had deliberately changed the Old Testament so that its prophecies would not match the New Testament fulfillments, William Whiston did not help the conservative critics’ cause. Also problematically, in these years scholars became increasingly cognizant of the many non-canonical Gospels that told yet other versions of the Synoptic Gospel narratives. By Mather’s death, conservative scholars had collected apocryphal texts into published editions, highlighting the breadth of issues inherent in assessing the New Testament as a canon, even as they meant to disarm critics by responding directly to challenges. The challenges raised by the potential corruption of the New Testament text touched every facet of early Enlightenment exegesis: the canon, narrative harmony, typology, and evidentialism.

This chapter reveals how Mather attacks the King James Version specifically in order to maintain the authority of the Bible. He asserts that the King James Version often misses the intended sense of the writers’ words and he cites Samuel Clarke’s paraphrase frequently to demonstrate this point. For clarification of the meaning, he also relied heavily on using other translations. These sources were available to him in Brian Walton’s multi-volume *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, completed in 1657, which contained nine translations of the Bible. Mather had access to this work, as did his European colleagues. Mather depended on Richard Kidder and Daniel Whitby to explicate difficult passages, as well. Both wrote textual criticism that compared
translations and offered reinterpretations of passages in the King James Version. Through their analysis and his own, he dismisses a few iconic and beloved Christian stories, such as the humble birth of Jesus in a barn. Most radically, he accepts the authority of non-canonical Gospels, using them to supplement the canon. He stops short of openly declaring them equally reliable, but he utilizes them as though he thought they were. This chapter, then, sees Mather at his most radical and surprising. He works with the most advanced critical exegesis of his time and presents ideas that upset traditional imagery and expectations regarding what constitutes Biblical authority.

8.2 Nothing is Set in Stone

Because of his low confidence in the King James Version, Mather consulted other editions of the New Testament for their renderings. Mather was particularly concerned that in Mark 3, the King James Version accuses Jesus of “Madness” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21). The text relates that Jesus had attracted a large crowd of followers, twelve of whom he ordained and brought into a house (Mark 3:10-19). However, the crowd followed “so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself” (Mark 3:20-21). Whitby paraphrases Jesus’s “Friends” as saying “he is fainty” (1:267). He notes, like Mather, that “it is absurd to say, That Christ did, either in his Gesture or his Actions, shew any symptoms of Transportation, or excess of Mind” (1:267).

Mather claims that the King James translation must be erroneous; the context of the verse reveals that “being so long Fasting, in so great a Crowd, the charitable Friends of our Lord, were afraid that Hee would Faint or Swoon: there was now no occasion for his Friends to beleev He

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Mather strongly sided with Whitby on this passage. Hales, on the other hand, suggests that the friends lied to protect Jesus: “Having had some Inckling of the Pharisees conspiring against him, to do him mischief,” his family tried to speak to him privately about it, and told the Pharisees that he was “beside himself” in order to “make the Pharisees less active in contriving any mischief to him, as conceiving him a fitter Subject for their pity, than their hate” (142).
otherwise *Ecstatical*” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21). Mather himself would know about that, since his diary indicates that he was a strong believer in fasting. Mather charges that “The Arabic Translation hath of all others hitt upon ye Right Sense” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21).\(^{254}\) This phrasing suggests that Mather was either consulting a polyglot or, without attributing his source, quoting another exegete who did so. Evidently, uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus might have gone mad, or even been suspected of hysteria, Mather found another version that resonated more comfortably with his understanding of the Son of God. The Arabic translation, he reveals, interprets the word “not for *Madness*, but for *Fainting*” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21).

Mather eventually returned to this verse and revised his theory. Now influenced by Le Cène, Mather quotes that exegete to contrast Mark’s rendering with “*Matthew* relating the same History,” adding that “*Luke* makes ye same Remark” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21, c.f. Le Cène 211). He thereby indicates his continued faith in those books as reliable historical accounts.\(^{255}\) However, he does not explain which supposed parallel stories he means. He might refer to a passage in Matthew 9, shortly before the calling of the apostles: “And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel” (Matt. 9:33). The parallel passage in Luke reads, “And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered” (Luke 11:14). All three of these passages are followed by the Pharisees accusing Jesus of using Beelzebub to cast out devils. Le Cène does not indicate which passage he means. He concludes that the verse should read: “Those who belonged to him seeing this went out to suppress them, (the Multitude) for they said they are beside themselves” (Le Cène 211, parenthesis his). Mather concludes that the madness referred to the crowd, not to Jesus, and he points out that Norton Knatchbull makes the same criticism (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21).

\(^{254}\) Whitby quotes similar examples from the Old Testament, but not the Arabic translation.  
\(^{255}\) Le Cène calls the translation error “a Fault which borders on Blasphemy” (210).
Knatchbull also calls this translation an “Interpretation (if it be lawful so to speak) unbeseeming the sacredness of his Person” (Knatchbull 45, parenthesis his). Knatchbull suggests that the verse refers to the multitude (47). He refers readers to “the Parallel places” in Matthew and Luke, which he names as Luke 11:14 and Matthew 12:23: “And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?” (47, Matt. 12:23). The proper action, Mather suggests, is to follow Le Cène’s translation, which Knatchbull “commends” (“BA” 7: Mark 3:21). As Knatchbull explains, “the one place must in all reason be an Expositor to the other, which mention all the same time, place, and thing” (48).

8.3 Mather’s Paramour: Clarke’s Paraphrase

Mather deeply admired Clarke, and his Bible commentary relies heavily on Clarke’s paraphrases of each Gospel. For example, on just one leaf, Mather cites Clarke’s paraphrases three times. He agreed with Clarke that the proper sense of the ancient words had been lost, in many places, in the King James Version. This acceptance of a different manner of phrasing indicates a major departure from his American peers’ methods. According to Michael Lee, in Mather’s lifetime, New England ministers still mostly held that the Bible’s penmen had been divinely inspired (16). Even Mather’s beloved nephew, Thomas Walter, noted that the writers had been directed by the Spirit of God (16). To challenge the wording was to raise significant questions:

How could a text be inspired (or possibly even dictated by God) if it had been edited and rewritten several times, centuries after the death of the original writer? If the original writer was inspired, why did it need to be edited? Did not editing tamper with and corrupt the original inspired text? (Lee 16)
Mather was not able to answer all of these questions, but by comparing surviving versions and depending on Clarke for clarification, he certainly indicated his lack of faith in the King James Version. Simultaneously, though, he seems to have sought an original version of the Gospels.

Mather uses Clarke sometimes just to elaborate on the meaning of Jesus’s parables. His gloss on Matthew 12:33 uses only Clarke for explication. He quotes the paraphrase verbatim. Clarke transforms Jesus’s “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good…” into:

In vain do ye Pharisees pretend to Holiness and sincerity of Heart, while ye suffer your mouths to utter such Blasphemies. For as a Tree is known by his Fruit, so a mans words are signs of the Dispositions of his Heart. Either therefore forbear Blaspheming or else pretend not to Religion at all, with which such Behaviour is utterly Inconsistent. (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:33, c.f. Clarke 137)

This elaboration on Jesus’s rebuke does not change the meaning or stir up controversy; it merely rephrases the issues nicely in eighteenth-century prose worthy of Samuel Richardson.

Likewise, Mather quotes Clarke’s paraphrase on Luke 22:38. Jesus advises his apostles to arm themselves with swords, and when they explain that they have two swords, he replies: “It is enough” (Luke 22:38). Clarke explains: “JESUS who meant really only to signify unto them the Greatness of their approaching Distress & Temptations & to warn them against ye surprize, replied; It is Enough: you need not trouble yourselves for any more weapons of this Nature for your Defence” (“BA” 7: Luke 22:38, c.f. Clarke 277). Again, Mather quotes verbatim. This is an innocuous reading, as it is the most obvious literal conclusion based on the context. Mather himself in fact supplements a more political interpretation. He notes that “I have somewhere mett with such a Thought as this upon it. Our Lord called not for Material Swords to assert & advance

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256 Hales paraphrases it too. His interlocutor states that Jesus simply defended his ministry: “But you do not see any other work of mine, besides this Miracle, which looks like a work of the Devil” (127).
His Kingdome” (“BA” 7: Luke 22:38). Instead, the two swords symbolize the two Testaments and “These are they which our Saviour would have His Disciples, to reckon Sufficient for ye Service of His Kingdome” (“BA” 7: Luke 22:38). This more pacifist allegorical reading aligns well with Mather’s personal views about violence. While Mather supported England’s wars and corporal punishment for traitors, he personally believed in using words rather than violence to solve problems. For example, in *Bonifacius*, he explains: “I wish that my children may, at a very early period, feel the principles of reason and honour working in them; and that I may proceed in their education, chiefly on those principles” (50). Condemning the “slavish, boisterous manner of education too commonly used,” Mather proposes avoiding use of physical punishment in favor of encouraging “horror of the baseness of misbehaviour” (51).

But Mather also depends on Clarke to explain more difficult passages. He relates that Jesus’s rebuke to the Pharisees, “By whom do your children cast them [devils] out?” is interpreted variously; he lists the several ways it can be read and concludes with Clarke’s paraphrase, with which he hopes “some will content themselves” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:27). While other interpreters suggest that Jesus meant the Pharisees’ followers do not cast out devils, or that the Pharisees’ children are the disciples of Jesus, Clarke offers the most literal reading: “Your own countreymen & Relations have sometimes undertaken to cast out Devils, and yett you never accused them of Confederacy with Evil Spirits” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:27, c.f. Clarke 133).

Similarly, Mather counts on Clarke to unravel a curious allusion to Isaiah. Jesus warns that “if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire and every sacrifice shall be salted

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257 Plenty of studies have been done on Mather’s views on child rearing. See, for example, Elizabeth Schlesinger, “Cotton Mather and His Children,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1953, pp. 181-189.
with salt” (Mark 9:47-49). Clarke rephrases Jesus’s words: “. . . Every one, who has been instructed in ye Doctrine of the Gospel, if, when he is tried he is found not sincere, shall be destroyed by ye Eternal Fire of ye Divine Wrath” (“BA” 7: Mark 9:49, Clarke 93). Mather adds that the passage must be considered alongside Isaiah 66:24, which uses similar imagery: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh” (Isa. 66:24). Mather adds that “salt preserves from corruption” and so will a fire operate in the same unquenchable manner (“BA” 7: Mark 9:49, c.f. Clarke 93). The salting with salt refers to the law in Leviticus about meat offerings: “And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt” (Lev. 2:13, “BA” 7: Mark 9:49). Aware that without context, the passage would seem unclear, Mather draws from Clarke in order to provide an explanation.

Clarke further untangles Jesus’s confusing words for Mather. Jesus adds, “Salt is good: but if the salt has lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50). Mather refuses to accuse Jesus of insanity, so he must interpret these words as an allegory. Clarke implies that Jesus uses “salt” to symbolize grace. Clarke paraphrases: “The Doctrine indeed, wherewith I have instructed you, is sufficient to make you truly Wise and Good, and to preserve you from all the Corruptions of this present World, and to enable you to teach others to preserve themselves likewise, unto eternal Life” (93). The saving “with ye Salt of Grace” refers to Isaiah 66:20 which describes the children of Israel as “an offering unto the Lord” (Isa. 66:20). These readings help unify the Old and New Testaments, while also making sense of the opaque passages. Again, Clarke does not present a controversial reading of the verses; the most controversial element – which appears to be a non-issue to

258 Mather did not find the allusions to Isaiah in Clarke’s paraphrase.
Mather – is that he indicates the Bible’s unclear language and resorts to an allegorical interpretation that depends on using one book of the Bible to understand another.

Mather also uses Clarke as an additional authority. His gloss on Matthew 12:36 regarding the meaning of an idle word argues that the Greek term means not only thoughtless rhetoric but distractions that “render men idle, in their most Important work” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:36). He quotes Cicero’s *De Fato*\(^ {259} \) to illustrate how the term for “*Idle Reasonings*” was “frequently used among philosophers” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:36). He concludes with Clarke, who acts as Mather’s sycophant: “And do not think that mens words are a Light thing and pass unheeded in the sight of God” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:36, c.f. 137). Although Mather considered the Bible a privileged book, he evidently recognized that its meaning frequently lacked clarity for eighteenth-century readers. Using Clarke’s words, he chose to rephrase multiple selections, implicitly suggesting that the words themselves were not directly inspired.

### 8.4 Textual Criticism

Mather’s dislike of the King James Version extended well beyond a desire to rephrase some passages. He found that it also blatantly misrepresented some of Jesus’s words. Mather admired the work of Norton Knatchbull, whose analysis focused on accurate translations of ancient languages, an increasingly popular topic in scholastic circles during the early Enlightenment and a method Mather emulated. Knatchbull helps Mather clarify Jesus’s words. As Mather learned what he believed were the original intentions of the authors, he came to question several traditional images presented in the King James Version. Mather and his

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\(^{259}\) Marcus Tullius Cicero or Tully (106–43 B.C.E.) was a Roman lawyer, politician, and rhetorician (Ferguson and Balsdon). He is famous primarily for founding a specific form of rhetoric and for his oratory skills (Ferguson and Balsdon).
ministerial colleagues routinely preached from the King James Version. Incredibly, every Sunday Mather would have preached authoritatively using a book in which he had little faith.

The King James Version seems to mistranslate a sentence. In Luke, Jesus tells Peter the following: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). This direction is a problem, because Peter has already been called as an apostle and served alongside Jesus and the other eleven apostles to preach the Gospel across Israel. It was a little late for Peter not to have converted to Christianity already. This passage could be taken to imply that a church member could fake his or her way through a mission since even the first called apostle did so, and it hardly looks comforting for the first apostle not to have believed in his own words. Luckily for Mather, Knatchbull offers an easy solution. Knatchbull counters that the Greek word, ἐπισεῖκας, should be translated into active voice, and that the object of the verb is the word for “brethren” (71). According to Knatchbull’s translation, the verse should read: “When thou shalt convert thy Brethren, strengthen them” (“BA” 7: Luke 22:32, c.f. Knatchbull 72). Although this one sentence is cleared up simply, Knatchbull mutters: “I confess that the Passive is often taken for the Active in the New Testament, and sometimes, though much more seldom, the Active for the Passive, but why it should be taken in this place I see no necessity at all” (71). Mather probably was not comforted by the idea that the authorized Bible of the English church “often” mistook the sense of a sentence.

Whitby also sometimes offered help interpreting the King James Version. After sharing a parable with his disciples in Luke 12, Jesus interprets it for them, indicating that it is a prophecy about the divisive and unexpected nature of the coming of the Lord (Luke 12:42-53). However, in the midst of this prophecy, Jesus awkwardly asks: “I came to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49). Trying to clarify Jesus’s confusing words by
paraphrasing them, Whitby argues that one particle in the Greek denotes Jesus’s eagerness and therefore changes the meaning of the entire verse (Whitby 1:382). Mather explains that Jesus’s words should instead be rendered:

I come to deliver unto the World, a Doctrine, which will incense the world against me and my Followers, and Subject us unto great Sufferings - - and will Baptize me in my own Blood; Butt yett I am so far from being moved from prosecuting my Fathers pleasure by ye prospect of them, that I wish ye Time of my suffering were at hand. (“BA” 7: Luke 12:49, c.f. Whitby 1:382)

Rather than meaning to suggest that he was literally going to set the world on fire, Jesus was describing his joyful willingness to suffer for the sake of mankind.

Kidder, too, studied the norms of ancient languages in order to establish a more accurate translation. Mather relates how Kidder tackles the phrasing in Matthew about the time when the two female mourners visited Jesus’s grave: “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre” (Matt. 28:1). Sensing a problem, Mather’s interlocutor wonders “What was the True Time” of the visit (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). Mather explains that the Greek word “signifies both, Late, and, After” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). He and Kidder blame the “version of the vulgar Latin” for increasing the “Difficulty” in interpreting the passage (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1).

Arrogantly, Mather criticizes “Readers” for not reaching the same conclusions as he had about the word. Kidder likewise states: “What difficulty there is in this matter, is owing to the

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260 Using dashes as an indicator, Mather removes “signified in Scripture by Fire, Psal.66.12. Isa.43.2. Eccles.51.4 and therefore called fiery Trials, 1 Pet. 4.12” (Whitby 1:382).
261 Whitby suggests that it means “in the end” or “after the Sabbath” (1:231). Kidder, too, says it means “late” and “after” (Kidder 2:44).
262 Per Kidder: “I know that this expression hath created some difficulty, and the rendering of the vulgar Latin hath increased it” (Kidder 2:44). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate further on the Latin. He probably meant Jerome’s Vulgate.
reader and not to the text of the Evangelists” (2:43). By failing to distinguish “ye several Periods & Actions” in the passage, Mather groans, interpreters created a vulnerability to “cavils” from “ye mouths of ye Jewes” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). Mather borrows this idea from Kidder, who writes about the “suspicion” of a “Jewish writer” regarding the timing of Jesus’s resurrection (2:43). This cavil asserts that the Gospels have “some contradiction,” but Mather charges that critics misunderstand, and, copying Kidder, he confidently tries to clear up the confusion by rewriting the timeline (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). The two women named Mary began their travel to the tomb “After the Sabbath,” which, he notes, is “as Matthew relates” and also “as John saies” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1, c.f. Kidder 2:44).263 They only arrive at sunrise, “as Mark reports” (“BA” 7: Matt. 28:1). Mark does support this interpretation, although this Gospel and Luke’s imply that at least one other woman joined the two women named Mary: “And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun” (Mark 16:1-2, c.f. Luke 24:1). In total contradiction, John states that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone “when it was yet dark” (John 20:1). Although the Gospels clearly contradict each other, Mather believed that his tidy summary, with the new translation of Matthew, cleared up the matter.

Mather’s growth as a Bible scholar is evident in his two very different assessments of Jesus’s prophecy on the fall of Jerusalem (Matt. 24, Luke 21). He argues that Jesus refers to two future events: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming at the Day of Judgment. Initially, commenting on the Luke’s version of the prophecy, Mather notes that Jesus distinguishes between the prophecies by using second- and third-person voice. However, Mather does not provide specific examples, and in the King James Version, at least, Jesus appears to use

263 Whitby also claims that Matthew “perfectly agrees with the other Evangelists” (1:231).
second and third person voice interchangeably, as in this passage: “Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matt. 24:41-42). Discerning between the two prophecies based on the voice being utilized would pose a significant challenge. Even though he claims that this prophecy primarily concerns the Day of Judgment, Mather implies that most of the details mentioned by Jesus were in fact observed during the destruction of Jerusalem. Mather remarks that Jesus wept on Mount Olive, the place where the Roman army “first pitch’d their Tents, when they came to ye Final Overthrow” (“BA” 7: Luke 19:42). Mather suggests that Jesus was moved to tears at that place because he foresaw the devastation that would fall upon it in 70 C.E. (“BA” 7: Luke 19:42).

Furthermore, Mather provides ancient Jewish and pagan records of the events in Jerusalem to complement Jesus’s descriptions in Luke’s version of the prophecy. Mather names Josephus as a source on false prophets; Tacitus, Josephus, and Philo on rumors of wars; Josephus on famine; Eusebius and Dion Cassius on earthquakes; Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny on persecution of Christians; Dion Cassius on a siege and desolation; Josephus on the destruction of Jerusalem; and Tacitus and Josephus on apparitions that gave signs of the approaching army (“BA” 7: Luke 21:8). These descriptions leave very little remaining in that prophecy to be fulfilled at the Second Coming. Interestingly, then, as Mather tries to prove that Jesus meant that

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264 Tacitus (56-ca. 120), a Roman historian, was republished in the sixteenth century and was the most published ancient historian in print in the early seventeenth century (Ash 3). Philo of Alexandria or Philo Judaeus (ca. 15 B.C.E-ca. 50 C.E.) was a Jewish Hellenistic philosopher whose writings offer insight on first-century C.E. Judaism in the Diaspora (“Philo Judaeus”). Eusebius of Caesarea or Eusebius Pamphilus (ca. 260-341), bishop of Caesarea, authored Ecclesiastical History, a “landmark Christian historiography” (“Eusebius”). Dio Cassius or Dion Cassius or Lucius Cassius Dio (ca. 150-235), Roman senator and consul, wrote a voluminous history of Rome (“Dio Cassius”). Pliny the Younger or Gaius Plenius Caecilius Secundus (61-ca. 113), nephew of Pliny the Elder, practiced law in Rome and published private letters exchanged with major figures, including the emperor (“Pliny the Younger”).
the date of the end of the world was unknown, what Mather ultimately proves with extra-biblical records is that Jesus’s prophecy sounds like a description of the 70 C.E. sacking of Jerusalem.

However, in his analysis of Matthew’s version of the prophecy, Mather blames translation errors for confusion about Jesus’s prophecy on the destruction of Jerusalem. Mather focuses on how that destruction described by Jesus must refer to the day of judgment: “They who make these Times to belong unto the Destruction of Jerusalem, do make a much Greater thing of it, and of more General Concern than the Matter will bear” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). He argues that the destruction of Jerusalem did not “much concern other Nationals” and thus could not have been worthy of “the High, and Great, and Noble Expressions, in ye Chapters before us” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:42). This claim is somewhat surprising since the fall of Jerusalem has had a lasting impact on the Middle East. Mather places this emphasis to prove that Jesus spoke of two events. However, since Jesus states that “all” of these things must happen before the generation passes away, proving that he was speaking about the end of the world would seem to indicate that Jesus was wrong (Matt. 24:34).

Mather fully engages with high criticism by recognizing the importance of analyzing the text in its original language. His entire discussion summarizes Whiston’s propositions in his commentary on Revelation (Whiston 290). Whiston bases his reading on the Greek version. Because the King James Version foolishly translates two different Greek terms into the same English phrase, English readers misunderstand one particular verse: “My lord delayeth his coming” (Matt. 24:48). While the Greek distinguishes, with separate terms, between Jesus’s presence and destruction by God, the King James Version translates both terms into “any Coming of our Lord” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:47, c.f. Whiston 292). Mather recognizes that readers would understandably, but incorrectly, assume that any reference to the coming of the Lord “will
naturally refer to the same Time,” but as the Greek meaning differs, “on this rendring, this mistake does mainly depend!” (“BA” 7: Matt. 24:47). Mather remarks that this interpretation came from “the Ingenious and Judicious” – later crossed out and replaced with “Mr” - Whiston, but his analysis of the language indicates his engagement with early high criticism. While Mather obviously seeks an answer that will support the authority of the Bible, even as it undermines the authority of the King James Version, his analysis of the author’s real intent indicates Mather’s rarely acknowledged skill as an objective intellectual and Bible scholar.

8.5 New Narratives

An honest scholar, Mather genuinely wanted to convey the truth, even if he refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the most radical critics. He openly subverts traditional imagery when he feels that translators have made errors. For example, a famous Christian anecdote, which has continued to prevail despite Mather’s efforts, holds that Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room in an inn. Citing a theory by Anthony Bynaeus, Mather asserts that the word translated into “manger” at Luke 2:7 refers to a trough: “These Mangers, were little square vessels, where they putt any thing for Horses to Eat, & Every Horse had his own” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:7, c.f. Bynaeus 2:277-369). Interpreters who believe Jesus was born in a “stable among oxen & Asses” do not have “quite Foundation enough, to bear all ye Flourishing Discourses that have sometimes been superstructured thereupon” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:7). Instead, the problem Mary and Joseph had faced was that “there was no Cradle, in ye Inn” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:7). Luckily, “ye Mangers were very convenient to lay a young child in, when cradles could not bee had” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:7). Rather remarkably, Mather proved willing to dispense with traditional beliefs about the humble circumstances of Jesus’s birth, based on a translation issue. Of course, for Mather

\[265\] Whiston: “nor is it so properly rendred by us the coming of Christ; on which rendring yet this mistake does a great part depend” (292).
and other New England Puritans, the traditional Christmas imagery did not have the same
cultural significance as it has in American mainstream culture today. Christmas became an
official Church holiday in the fourth century and it was meant to complement the winter solstice
(Nissenbaum n.p.). In Massachusetts Bay, however, celebration of the holiday was banned from
1659-1681 and remained socially unpopular until the mid-nineteenth century (Nissenbaum).
Colonial authorities associated the holiday with the violent and provocative revelry that would
take place on Christmas in Europe, so they preferred to leave the celebration behind them
(Nissenbaum). Nevertheless, the humiliation of Jesus being born in a stable among animals fits
with the Protestant appreciation of Jesus’s humility in taking on the weaknesses of the human
form.

In a similar reversal of famous imagery, Mather, perhaps unsurprisingly given his
congregation’s financial prestige, comes to the defense of the wealthy by urging reinterpretation
of Jesus’s famous words condemning the rich. Jesus gives this warning after a wealthy man asks
what he must do to “inherit eternal life” and is disappointed at being told to “sell whatsoever
according to Clarke, “our SAVIOUR does not seem to have bidden him sell his Estate, as a
Thing absolutely Necessary at This Time, to his being a Preacher of the Gospel” (“BA” 7: Matt.
19:21). 266 This interaction between Jesus and his would-be follower spawns a conversation about
riches between Jesus and his disciples. In Mark, Jesus warns his disciples: “How hardly shall
they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23). Mather calls this a “hard
saying” and assures his readers that the Greek word actually means “not only to possess Riches,
but also to Retain such an Affection to them, that we can’t well bear ye Thoughts of parting with
them” (“BA” 7: Mark 10:23). Jesus condemns love of riches, not merely possession of riches.

266 Another paraphrase that Mather quotes verbatim. C.f. Clarke 227.
According to the King James translation, Jesus adds: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24, c.f. Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25). Mather questions this translation, wondering if the Greek word really refers to a camel. He cites Samuel Bochart, who notes that the ancients, including Theophylact, Euthymius, and Phavorinus, used the word to mean a cord that was attached to anchors (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:24). This reading also agrees with the Syriac lexicon by Baptista Ferrarius (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:24). Still, though the image of a thick cord struggling to fit through the eye of a needle appears more logical, Mather hesitated to commit fully to this reading. He notes that the Talmudim “diverse times” use the expression, “of, An Elephant passing thro’ the Eye of a Needle” meaning “a very Incredible Thing,” just as Johannes Buxtorf cites a similar Hebrew proverb (“BA” 7: Matt. 19:24, c.f. Bochart 92). Since he views both translations to be equally well supported by reliable evidence, Mather leaves his readers to decide.

In addition to the Greek text, Mather employed other versions of the New Testament to critique the King James translation. He explains that surviving texts from other Christian traditions occasionally vary from the Greek version. Mather obviously disliked the King James Version and supported the idea of a new translation. Interestingly, though, he not only thought the translators misinterpreted their source text, but he questioned why they limited themselves to

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267 Mather appears to make use of Bochart’s reference work on zoology (Sheehan 203). He does not credit him, but Mather also paraphrases Whitby (Whitby 1:164).
268 The 11th-century Greek archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid, or Theophylactus Simocattes (d. ca. 640), a historian of the Eastern Roman Empire. There were several early medieval writers in the Eastern Orthodox tradition named Euthymius; Bochart does not specify which person or work he means (Bochart, 1692, 91). The last-named may possibly be the Roman philosopher of the second century C.E., Favorinus.
269 Whitby only notes that it agrees with “the Syriack and Arabick Versions” (1:164). Bochart does make the full reference (92). Giovanni Baptista Ferrari (1584-1655) was an Italian horticulturist who also wrote a Syrian-Latin dictionary (Berrall).
270 Johannes Buxtorf (1599-1664), scholar of Hebrew, graduated from Basel with his M.A. in 1615 and was Chair of Hebrew at Basel (Kayserling). In addition to publishing work on the Hebrew language, he debated with Louis Cappel about the origin of Hebrew vowel points (Kayserling).
271 This allusion appears in Whitby but with less detail: “the Hebrew Proverb speaks only of an Elephant, not of a Camel” (1:164).
it. In the King James Version, a verse reads: “He [the Devil] departed from him [Jesus] for a season” (Luke 4:13). Mather wonders “if it should bee read by us, as tis by ye Syriac, ye Arabic, & some others” as “Till a Season” (“BA” 7: Luke 4:13). Likewise, when twelve-year-old Jesus visits the Temple without his parents’ permission, he tells his angry mother, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). Mather touts the Syriac version, because in it the meaning is “truly rendred” since the Syriac has Jesus saying he is “In my Fathers House” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:49). Mather feels that this one is the more appropriate explication, since “Hee was contested withal, for being Absent from His Reputed Fathers House, but Hee Excuses Himself by being in His Real Fathers House” (“BA” 7: Luke 2:49). Although he does not say so explicitly, Mather suggests that a proper translation of the Bible into English should take all surviving versions into consideration. He overcomes his predilection to use Western sources in favor of implying that all versions should be credited equally. His bias was toward the most historic and reliable version of the Bible, and he apparently recognized that the Western church’s version may not have been the best.

8.6 The Good Book(s?)

Christian scholars recognized that other traditions existed in early Christianity which preserved their own Gospels. Alternative Gospels naturally were taken with a grain of salt, as Christians officially held them to have come from heretical traditions, even if those traditions developed directly from the same apostolic history as that of Western Christianity. One well-known non-canonical text was the Gospel of the Nazarenes. The independent work was no longer extant in Mather’s time, but it was quoted at length by Jerome and therefore accessible in fragments (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:10). Mather himself consulted it in order to provide more context

272 Mather likely used another exegesis as his source.
on a passage. The Gospel of Matthew briefly describes a man with a withered hand, whom Jesus agreed to heal on a Sabbath day (Matt. 12:10-13). The Gospel relates no information about the man other than his deformity. However, the story is told in more detail, Mather notes, in “that peece of Antiquity called, The Gospel of the Nazarenes” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:10). He uses that Gospel to supplement Matthew and quotes the injured man’s supplicating words: “I was a Mason who gott my living by my Hands. I beseech thee, O JESUS, that thou wouldest restore me to my strength, that I may no longer scandalously beg my Bread” (“BA” 7: Matt. 12:10). By adding these details, Mather does more than use extra-biblical sources to validate or clarify the Bible’s interpretation. In this case, he uses this source in order to add to the Bible story.

An informed reader in the early eighteenth century did not need to search long to find apocrypha. Because a volume of apocryphal Gospels was published by Jeremiah Jones in the early eighteenth century, Mather could access them and use them to support his glosses. The discovery of the Gospel of Barnabas prompted John Toland to write Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity (1718), alleging that Jesus had prophesied about Mohammed (Champion, Pillars, 126). Charles Blount also disseminated unorthodox works from the ancient times through the seventeenth century (Champion 142). Future archbishop of Canterbury, William Wake, translated a collection of Christian apocrypha in the late seventeenth century (Sheehan 37). Whiston himself included non-canonical works like the Epistle of Polycarp in his “Primitive New Testament” (Beal 135). Mather hesitates to use these texts for devotional purposes, but he happily cites them for historical evidence, as he does with the Gospel of the Nazarenes. According to all of the Synoptic Gospels, when Jesus was baptized, “the heavens were opened unto him” (Matt. 3:16, c.f. Mark 1:10, Luke 3:21). The Synoptic Gospels

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273 The earliest edition seems to be Jones, A New and Full Method of settling the canonical authority of the New Testament (1726-1727).
do not mention a fire starting, yet Justin Martyr claims “A Fire Kindled in Jordan, at ye
Baptism of our SAVIOUR” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:17, c.f. Jones 2:373). While some people thought
Justin Martyr must have read about that incident in the Gospel of the Ebionites, Mather snarkily
notes that “Mr Jeremiah Jones, proves them to be mistaken” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:17). Jones
theorizes that the fire story was a “tradition” and that it is “countenanced by Three of our
Gospels” (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:17). Mather adds that Le Clerc, pondering on it, proposes that “a
Flame of Fire descended” from between the clouds since that was the only way witnesses
could see the sky open (“BA” 7: Matt. 3:17). And, Le Clerc notes anachronistically, “We
commonly say, The Heavens are opened, when there is such a Phenomenon in them” (“BA” 7:
Matt. 3:17). Mather does not question whether this expression had the same meaning in
antiquity. However, in his gloss on this verse in Luke, Mather quotes “the old Gospel of ye
Nazaraens, & Ebionites” which state that “a great Light shone about the place” (“BA” 7:
Luke 3:22). Perhaps recognizing the shared origin of these Gospels, Mather accepts that read together
they provide a fuller, but no less reliable, history of the early church.

Perhaps most extraordinarily, Mather also employed non-canonical religious texts to
supplement his interpretation. Commenting on the “many other things which Jesus did” alluded
to in the Gospel of John, Mather mentions a letter supposedly authored by Jesus (John 21:25).
Initially, Mather hesitated to accept its validity, stating, “I freely confess to you, that I cannot bee
without many serious & some Dubious, Thoughts, concerning the Letter” (“BA” 8: John 21:25).

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274 Jones calls this detail from Justin Martyr “peculiar” and “not in our Gospels” (2:373).
275 Apparently only the third volume of the 1727 edition of Jones’s New and Full Method survives, but the
1827 edition must be close. Jones states: “some learned men have imagined this history to have been
taken by Justin Martyr out of this apocryphal Gospel” (2:379). However, “they are most evidently
mistaken” (2:374).
276 Jones says it was “founded upon” the canonical Gospels (2:375).
277 Le Clerc may have become more radical over time, or perhaps Mather had a poor translation. In his
annotations on Hammond’s commentary, Le Clerc suggests that “there was a parting of the Clouds, and
then that a light shone very high out of the Sky” (15).
However, at some point he crossed out the reference to himself and changed the phrasing of the first part of the sentence: “There are those, I perceive, that cannot bee without…” (“BA” 8: John 21:25). This edit indicates that he likely accepted its validity, perhaps after he read John Edwards’s *A Discourse Concerning the Authority, Stile, and Perfection of the Books of the Old and New Testament* (2nd ed., 1696). Edwards was unlike Jeremiah Jones, who vehemently criticized the Agbarus letters in several chapters of *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament* (1727) (2:1-18). Edwards mentions the letters as “some things which happened among the Pagans at that time when Christ was on Earth, as an Assurance to us that there was such a Man, and that he did such and such things” (Edwards 361). Evidently the situation was so dire that Christians needed “assurance” of the historical Jesus’s existence. Edwards claims no reason to doubt Eusebius, “universally acknowledged to be an honest and faithful Historian” (362). Despite accepting the authenticity of the letter, Edwards does not transcribe it. Jones does, and so does Mather.

Jesus supposedly wrote this letter to Agbarus, a prince, regarding his request for a healing miracle (“BA” 8: John 21:25). Eusebius not only saw the Syriac original but translated it into Greek and included it in the public records (“BA” 8: John 21:25, c.f. Edwards, Discourse, 362). Although “so few writers, of those Times, do take notice of it,” Darius Comes refers to it in a letter to Augustine, and Casaubon and Montague “Embrace it, as Genuine” (“BA” 8: John 21:25).

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278 Eusebius’s work was translated into English by 1709 and appears in *The History of the Church, from our Lord’s Incarnation, to the Twelfth Year of the Emperor Mauricius Tiberius, or the Year of Christ 594*. London, 1709. The letter appears on p. 14.
279 Edwards proposes that they were unable to speak Syriac (363).
280 Representative of the Roman Empire in negotiations with Pope Boniface (Sumruld 88).
281 Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), a Protestant minister born in Geneva who studied at the University of Geneva and taught at the University of Montpellier before being invited to Paris by King Henri IV in 1600 and retiring in England in 1610 (Considine). He wrote a comprehensive criticism of Cardinal Baronio’s world history (Considine).
21:25, c.f. Edwards 363). Mather transcribes in English the entire letter as preserved by Eusebius ("BA" 8: John 21:25). Jesus sends his regrets but promises to send a disciple; Eusebius relates that Thomas sent the disciple Thaddeus, who healed the prince through the laying on of hands ("BA" 8: John 21:25). One wonders how Mather’s acceptance of the letter and the Gospels of the Nazarenes and of the Ebionites impacted his view of the New Testament canon.

8.7 Conclusion

It is in Mather’s criticism of the King James Version that one can see him move from precritical exegesis to early Enlightenment criticism, the precursor to modern high criticism. In addition to favoring other ways of phrasing biblical passages, he carefully examines where translators have failed to capture an accurate sense, even when retranslating means doing away with traditional Christian imagery. Finally, Mather’s willingness to use extra-biblical, non-Christian sources extended to his citing non-canonical Gospels as reliable historical sources. Mather certainly did not write a fully critical Bible commentary, nor did he radicalize into Toland or Collins territory, but his commentary indicates that their arguments shaped the way this Puritan interpreted the Bible.

282 Richard Mountague (1575-1641), bishop of Norwich and controversialist, who also wrote a criticism of Baronio’s history (Macauley).
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