

# Millenarianism in Puritan New England, 1630–1730: The Exceptional Case of Samuel Sewall and the Mexican Millennium

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## ■ Abstract

The American Puritan layman Samuel Sewall (d. 1730) is perhaps best known as a diarist and as a repentant judge in the Salem witchcraft trials. But he was also the author of *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica* (first edition 1697), a work which argued that the New Jerusalem would arise in Mexico City. Sewall's unusual millennial doctrine may seem undeserving of study, for no other American Puritan thought that the New Jerusalem would first appear in Mexico City or anywhere else in New Spain. Yet when properly contextualized, the Mexican millennium is worth investigating for two reasons. First, it accentuates what the American Puritan millenarian mainstream, best exemplified by John Cotton, Increase Mather, and Cotton Mather, believed about the coming kingdom. Second, the Mexican millennium, like the mainstream position, challenges the academic claim that American Puritan millenarians characteristically believed that they were destined to inaugurate the millennial kingdom in New England.

## ■ Keywords

Judeocentric millenarianism, Judeocentrism, American Puritanism, Armageddon, lost tribes, redeemer nation

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## ■ Introduction

The Boston magistrate, diarist, and lay theologian Samuel Sewall (1652–1730) left students of American Puritan millenarian eschatology with an interpretive problem. In his major work on biblical prophecy, *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica ad Aspectum novi Orbis configurata* (1697), and in other printed and manuscript sources,<sup>1</sup> he advanced a two-part argument that established to his satisfaction the site of the New Jerusalem, his term for the inaugural location and world headquarters of the millennial kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In the first half of his argument, Sewall proposed that the kingdom would begin in an unspecified site in America. “I conjecture the New Jerusalem will be erected in Columbina,” he wrote in a representative passage, in this case using a designation for America that he took from the early seventeenth-century English humanist Nicholas Fuller.<sup>3</sup> This portion of Sewall’s argument has never puzzled scholars because they can contextualize it within their larger interpretations of millenarianism in New England. The second half, however, has proved so vexatious that most Americanists writing about Sewall’s millenarianism either note it and then hasten by it, or else hasten by it without even noting it. Those few scholars who have endeavored to explain it do not properly account for it. In this second part, Sewall identified Mexico City as the specific American location where the millennial kingdom would begin following the destruction of Spanish colonial power during the decisive phase of the Battle of Armageddon.

There is no legitimate way for interpreters of Puritan millenarianism to avoid the second half of Sewall’s argument. The doctrine of the Mexican millennium was no passing fancy that might be dismissed on that basis but a nearly lifelong fascination. Sewall began to formulate the doctrine in the 1680s,<sup>4</sup> and once he explicitly articulated it in the 1697 edition of the *Phaenomena*, he continued to espouse it through his last extant discussion of biblical prophecy, a letter written

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Sewall, *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica ad Aspectum novi Orbis configurata* (Boston, 1697; rev. ed. Boston, 1727). Unless otherwise noted, citations come from the 1727 edition of *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica*, a slightly longer but substantively unchanged version of the 1697 original. Sewall also wrote *Proposals Touching the Accomplishment of Prophecies* (Boston, 1713), a shorter and less valuable work. His remaining discussions of biblical prophecy are scattered throughout *The Letter-Book of Samuel Sewall*, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections* 6:1–2 (1886–1888); *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729* (ed. M. Halsey Thomas; New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973); “The Samuel Sewall Papers,” Massachusetts Historical Society, microfilm P-87, 2 reels; and the handwritten annotation in “Books Owned by Samuel Sewall,” Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Thomas Prince Collection, H.10.1–H78.127.

<sup>2</sup> For Sewall’s usage of the term “New Jerusalem,” see *Phaenomena*, 31, and *Letter-Book*, 2:156, 273.

<sup>3</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 2:202; and Nicholas Fuller, *Miscellaneorum Theologicorum* (London, 1617) 181–82.

<sup>4</sup> In 1684 Sewall asked Cotton Mather to “give me your Reasons why the Heart of America [geographically unspecified] may not be the seat of the New-Jerusalem” (Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections* 4:8 [1868] 517). In 1688 Sewall told Edward Taylor that the crucial phase of Armageddon would be fought somewhere in Spanish America (*Letter-Book*, 1:82).

four months before his death in 1730.<sup>5</sup> The Mexican millennium, moreover, is so conspicuously present in Sewall's sources that no scholar could possibly overlook it. Indeed, he even included in the *Phaenomena* an itinerary for the future benefit of travelers from England who wanted to combine a pilgrimage to the "seat of New-Jerusalem" in Mexico City with a tour of English settlements in America, including those in New England.<sup>6</sup>

At first blush, little seems to be gained by scolding scholars for sidestepping the problem of the Mexican millennium. Sewall is an extremely idiosyncratic figure in the history of New England millenarianism: he had no known disciples despite his persistent efforts to convert contemporaries to his point of view,<sup>7</sup> and he found no precedents for a Mexican millennium even though he searched tirelessly for them in printed and manuscript sources.<sup>8</sup> The study of American Puritan millenarianism rightly focuses on other persons, and particularly on mainstream thinkers like the Boston clergymen John Cotton (1584–1652), Increase Mather (1639–1723), and Cotton Mather (1663–1728), the major millenarians in New England through 1730, the end point of this essay. Nevertheless, the Mexican millennium is directly relevant to the larger topic that interests students of Puritan eschatology: the normative millenarian tradition in New England. The challenge to understand Sewall's millennial doctrine is simultaneously the challenge to understand millenarian orthodoxy as John Cotton, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and other colonists defined it. Only when the dominant perspective is correctly identified—an achievement that to varying degrees has eluded students of American Puritan millenarianism—does the Mexican millennium make sense.

<sup>5</sup> Here, Sewall imagined climbing a "high mountain . . . over and above the huge Empires of Mexico and Peru" and marveling at the New Jerusalem below (*Letter-Book*, 2:272–73).

<sup>6</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 45–46.

<sup>7</sup> Sewall gave away over two hundred copies of the 1697 edition of the *Phaenomena*. For the names of the recipients, see "Papers of Samuel Sewall," reel 1, n.p. He also advertised the Mexican millennium in letters to (e.g.) Edward Taylor (*Letter-Book*, 1:171–78), Nicholas Noyes (1:178–79), John Wise (1:196–99), John Higginson (1:325–26), William Burnet (2:154–56), Benjamin Wadsworth (2:196–202), Experience Mayhew (2:202), and Robert Fleming, Jr., a Scottish Presbyterian minister resident in London ("Papers of Samuel Sewall," reel 1, n.p.).

<sup>8</sup> Sewall's sources refer to over a hundred interpreters of biblical prophecy, nearly all of them English and American Puritans, and the rest Anglicans, continental Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews. Sewall was unaware that two 16th-cent. Spanish Franciscans, Toribio de Benavente ("Motolinía") and Gerónimo de Mendieta, proposed that the millennial kingdom would begin in Mexico. For discussions of the relevant Motolinía and Mendieta sources, most of which remained in manuscript until the modern period, see John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), and Ralph Bauer, "Millennium's Darker Side: The Missionary Utopias of Franciscan New Spain and Puritan New England," in *Finding Colonial Americas: Essays Honoring J. A. Leo Lemay* (ed. Carla Mulford and David S. Shields; Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997) 33–49.

## ■ Interpretations of the Mexican Millennium

At least five Americanists have accepted the challenge of explaining Sewall's millennial doctrine. Each of these persons has addressed the three points that, in combination, provide a satisfactory explanation for the Mexican millennium as a problem in Puritan eschatology. The first is to elucidate Sewall's rationale for choosing Mexico City as the American location for the New Jerusalem; the second is to identify the human agents whom he expected to inaugurate the kingdom in Mexico; and the third, and most important, is to contextualize the Mexican millennium within the orthodox millenarian tradition in New England. None of these individuals has fitted the pieces together correctly, although one of them, Reiner Smolinski, came close to solving the puzzle.<sup>9</sup>

The secondary literature is otherwise an exercise in evasion. Several scholars have observed in passing that Sewall located the future New Jerusalem in Mexico but provide little or no evaluative comment.<sup>10</sup> Other interpreters have simply pretermitted the Mexican millennium, as though Sewall never advanced such a claim. Persons taking this approach include, among others,<sup>11</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch in 1975 and again in 1978 and Mason Lowance in 1980. Bercovitch and Lowance stated that Sewall expected the millennial kingdom to appear in "America" or "the New World," and they documented this characterization of his position exclusively on passages taken from the first portion of his argument, where he made the case for the kingdom commencing somewhere in America.<sup>12</sup> Bercovitch said nothing

<sup>9</sup> Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The Growth of Sewall's *Phaenomena Quaedam Apocalyptica*," *Early American Literature* 7 (1972) 64–75; James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) 65–70; Reiner Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England," *New England Quarterly* 63 (1990) 357–95, at 364, 378–80; Timothy Sweet, "What Concernment Hath America in These Things?": Local and Global in Samuel Sewall's Plum Island Passage," *Early American Literature* 41 (2006) 213–40; Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006) 187–89; and n. 49 below.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) 61; Oliver Scheiding, "Samuel Sewall and the Americanization of the Millennium," in *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630–1860* (ed. Bernd Engler, Joerg O. Fichte, and Oliver Scheiding; Trier: Wissenschaftlicher, 2002) 165–85, esp. 171–72, 177; and Richard Francis, *Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of an American Conscience* (New York: Harper, 2006) 195–96. Scheiding and Francis saw the Mexican millennium as an expression of Sewall's anti-Catholic prejudice; McDermott made no attempt to explain it.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Stein, "Transatlantic Extensions: Apocalyptic in Early New England," in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (ed. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 266–98, at 275–76; and David S. Lovejoy, "Between Hell and Plum Island: Samuel Sewall and the Legacy of the Witches," *New England Quarterly* 70 (1997) 355–67, at 357.

<sup>12</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) 107, 171; idem, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) 72; and Mason I. Lowance, Jr., *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England*

about Mexico, let alone about the kingdom originating there;<sup>13</sup> and Lowance hinted at the Mexican millennium but stopped short of explicitly acknowledging it.<sup>14</sup>

Bercovitch and Lowance stood in an interpretive tradition that long dominated the scholarly study of American Puritan millenarianism; in fact, they were probably the persons most responsible for establishing this tradition in the academy. Using textual evidence discussed elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> they argued that John Cotton, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and many other New Englanders believed that they were destined to “inaugurate the millennium” in America, the divinely ordained location for “the establishment of the long-awaited kingdom.” The clergy and their lay allies pursued this objective from the Great Migration of the 1630s through the First Great Awakening of the early 1740s, but they never accomplished it because backsliding colonists “prevent[ed] the realization of prophecy.” This sense of a “messianic national destiny” then became part of the Puritan legacy in America, developing over time into a settled conviction that the United States and its citizens were God’s chosen instruments for the renovation of the world. New England Puritan millenarianism thus provided the ideological foundation for the “redeemer nation” mythology, a claim assessed later in this essay.<sup>16</sup>

These two scholars portrayed Sewall as a conventional New England millenarian, a sure sign of something amiss in their analysis. Bercovitch quoted him as a spokesperson for Puritan orthodoxy about America’s millennial destiny, and Lowance stated that he “fully corroborates” the views of Increase Mather and others that America was “intended to be the seat of the New Jerusalem.”<sup>17</sup> They were able to construe Sewall as an orthodox millenarian only by leaving two points unaddressed. The first is his choice of Mexico as the American location of the New Jerusalem. When discussing John Cotton and other mainstream figures, these two scholars used the terms “America” and “the New World” to refer to New England, the portion of America where the Puritans resided and hence the place where they could pursue their presumed millennial ambitions. But when claiming that Sewall was a representative millenarian, Bercovitch and Lowance did not explain that,

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*from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 150–52.

<sup>13</sup> In the preface to the 2011 reprint of *Puritan Origins*, Bercovitch noted in passing that, for Sewall, “New Jerusalem would descend somewhere in South America” (xviii).

<sup>14</sup> Lowance included in his study a block quotation that contains a sentence in which Sewall designated “New-Spain” as “the place of New-Jerusalem” (*Language of Canaan*, 150). Lowance did not extract this sentence for analysis, and whenever he used geographical terms of his own choosing to characterize Sewall’s point of view about the site of the New Jerusalem, he adopted “America” and “the New World” and avoided “Mexico” and “New Spain.”

<sup>15</sup> See nn. 24–26 below.

<sup>16</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 42; and Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 51, 119, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 69 (218 n. 7); and Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 150. See also Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, 99 (223 n. 39), 100 (223 n. 40), 107, 113 (225 n. 4), 171; and idem, *American Jeremiad*, 72 (219 n. 10), 74 (219 n. 2). The parenthetical citations indicate occasions when Bercovitch quoted or paraphrased Sewall as a representative Puritan millenarian in the bodies of the two books but identified him by name only in the notes.

for him, Mexico, not New England, was the privileged location in America. The second is the question of human agency: there were no Puritans in Mexico to inaugurate the millennium.

Neither Bercovitch nor Lowance perceived the full extent of Sewall's millenarian heterodoxy. Not only was the second, or specifically Mexican, portion of his argument at variance with normative millenarian opinion in New England, but so too was the first, or generically American, portion of it. For this reason, the fundamental problem with their interpretation of Sewall is not that these scholars were unable to fit the Mexican millennium into their model for understanding Puritan millenarianism, but that they were using a defective model. Sewall, for his part, recognized that both halves of his argument departed from millenarian orthodoxy. In fact, his sources abound with evidence—accurate evidence—that American Puritan millenarians did not characteristically situate the future New Jerusalem in New England or anywhere else in America, nor did they see themselves as the persons destined to inaugurate it.

### ■ The Millenarian Mainstream in New England

The regnant form of millenarianism in New England designated Jerusalem as the inaugural location for the millennial kingdom. "I am far from being positive that Judea . . . must afford situation to the New Jerusalem," Sewall wrote in a rejoinder to colonial orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> The dominant perspective—Judeocentric millenarianism or Judeocentrism—awarded the privilege of establishing the kingdom to the two tribes of Judah and the ten lost tribes of Israel. In conjunction with their massive and miraculous conversion to Protestant Christianity, the twelve tribes would vanquish the Ottomans in the Middle Eastern phase of Armageddon. The Jews and the lost Israelites would then return to Palestine and inaugurate in Jerusalem the millennial kingdom, which Judeocentrists construed primarily as the restoration of the apostolic church to its original splendor. From their base in Jerusalem, the reunited descendants of Jacob would oversee the expansion of the millennial order throughout Europe, an expanse already prepared for the kingdom's arrival by the Protestant destruction of Catholicism in a separate phase of Armageddon, and to other parts of the world.<sup>19</sup> The Judeocentrist ranks in Puritan America included John

<sup>18</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 2:156.

<sup>19</sup> I introduced the word "Judeocentrism," which I then spelled with a hyphen, in "The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the 'Judeo-centric' Strand of Puritan Millenarianism," *CH* 72 (2003) 304–32. The prefix "Judeo" comes from Judah or Judea, the territory surrounding the city of Jerusalem. "Judeocentrism" thus points to the site of the future New Jerusalem and also to the people (Judahites, Judeans, Jews) who would establish it, with the additional stipulation that here the word "Jews" silently extends to the ten lost tribes of Israel. "Millenarianism" posits the future establishment on earth of the millennial kingdom of Rev 20:2–6; the term has no necessary association with the world-inverting ideology of the disinherited.

Cotton, Increase Mather, and Cotton Mather,<sup>20</sup> as well as many other colonists.<sup>21</sup> These American Puritans, moreover, were part of an international Judeocentrist movement that began in the early seventeenth century with Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede in England and with Johann Heinrich Alsted and others on the European mainland.<sup>22</sup>

The prevalence of Judeocentrism among New England millenarians can be documented directly from their own writings, without any guidance from Sewall. Several scholars, most notably Theodore Dwight Bozeman in *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (1988) and Reiner Smolinski in “*Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England*” (1990), have done precisely this. In combined effect, these two studies span the period of time covered in this essay. Bozeman focused on John Cotton and other first-generation New England millenarians, and Smolinski concentrated on Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and other members of the second and third generations, including Sewall, whom Bozeman had no reason to discuss. Bozeman and Smolinski not only showed that the established form of millenarianism in New England located the New Jerusalem in Palestine,<sup>23</sup> but they also exposed the chief problems with the supposition that the American Puritans anticipated that the millennial kingdom would commence in New England under their leadership. Bozeman observed, for instance, that texts that Bercovitch, Lowance, and others cited in support of the

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., John Cotton, *The Pourcing Out of the Seven Vials* (London, 1645) and *idem*, *A Brief Exposition with Practical Observations upon the Whole Book of Canticles Never Before Printed* (London, 1655); Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation* (London, 1669), *idem*, *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* (London, 1709), and *idem*, *A Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer* (Boston, 1710); and Cotton Mather, *Things to Be Look’d For* (Boston, 1691) and *idem*, *Theopolis Americana* (Boston, 1710). Cotton Mather abandoned Judeocentrism in the 1720s. See Reiner Smolinski, introduction to *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of “Triparadisus”* (ed. Reiner Smolinski; Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995) 21–37. Unless otherwise noted, all Mather citations in this essay come from his Judeocentrist period.

<sup>21</sup> Examples include Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (2 vols; London, 1660) 1:9–10, 2:32, 56–57, 60, 106; Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London, 1646) 4–8, 15–21; John Davenport, preface to Increase Mather, *Mystery*, A2–[A7]; Nicholas Noyes, *New-Englands Duty and Interest* (Boston, 1698) 2, 31–33, 66–68; John Oxenbridge, *A Double Watch-Word* (London, 1661) 41, 98–99, 115–16, and *idem*, “A Plea for the Dumb Indian” (1662–1667), Massachusetts Historical Society, ms. SBd-56, fols. 80, 82, 83, 105, 106, 112; and Edward Taylor in Mukhtar Ali Isani, “The Pouring of the Sixth Vial: A Letter in a Taylor-Sewall Debate,” Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings* 83 (1971) 123–29. Some colonists, most notably Roger Williams and John Eliot, were millenarians but not Judeocentrists. Others, such as John Winthrop, William Hubbard, and Solomon Stoddard, had little discernible interest in eschatology, whether millenarian or not.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Crome, *The Restoration of the Jews: Early Modern Hermeneutics, Eschatology, and National Identity in the Works of Thomas Brightman* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014); Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*; and Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1988) 230–36; and Smolinski, “*Israel Redivivus*,” 358–59, 364.

claim—John Winthrop’s “Modell of Christian Charity” (with its famous image of “a city on a hill”), John Cotton’s *God’s Promise to His Plantation*, Samuel Danforth’s retrospective *Errand into the Wilderness*, among others—contain no clear references to the millennial kingdom, let alone to a kingdom beginning in America.<sup>24</sup> Smolinski, more ambitiously, attacked the foundation of the older scholarship, the contention that the Puritans “literally and historically” viewed themselves as the new chosen people, America as the new promised land, and New England as the future site of the New Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> Smolinski explained that this claim was “diametrically opposed” to what John Cotton, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and other Judeocentrists professed.<sup>26</sup> For them, the children of Israel were the chosen people still, Palestine remained the promised land, and the City of David would become the New Jerusalem once Jacob’s converted and repatriated descendants had restored the apostolic church.

The revisionist historiography of Bozeman and Smolinski has since led many early Americanists, such as Janice Knight in 1994, Michael P. Winship in 1996, Joseph Conforti in 2001, Kristina Bross in 2004, Jeffrey Jue in 2006, and Jan Stievermann in 2016, to reject the proposition that the Puritans located the future New Jerusalem in New England.<sup>27</sup> But even though this thesis is no longer the article of nearly universal orthodoxy that it was in the colonialist scholarship of the late 1970s and the 1980s,<sup>28</sup> it continues to find adherents among specialists in the period,<sup>29</sup> and it remains a staple in broad surveys of American history, literature,

<sup>24</sup> Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 81–114, 193–229.

<sup>25</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 75. For similar statements, see Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 59, 116–17.

<sup>26</sup> Smolinski, “*Israel Redivivus*,” 358 (see also 364–66, 370–73, 382).

<sup>27</sup> Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 159–63, 166–67; Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 8; Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 26–31, 326 n. 27; Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 10–12; Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 176–77, 184, 190, 195–96, 203–4; and Jan Stievermann, *Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity: Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures in Cotton Mather’s “Biblia Americana”* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 179; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 89–90, 101–2, 215. All six of these scholars credited Bozeman’s *To Live Ancient Lives* with revising the literature about Puritan millenarianism, and most of them acknowledged Smolinski’s “*Israel Redivivus*” and Andrew Delbanco’s *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Delbanco differed from Bozeman and Smolinski in one notable respect. Although he criticized Bercovitch, Lowance, and others for claiming that Puritan millenarians expected the kingdom to begin in New England (72–80, 161, 217), he did not observe that American Puritan orthodoxy located the New Jerusalem in Judea. Another of Bercovitch’s critics, David Harlan, also overlooked Jerusalem (“A People Blinded from Birth: American History according to Sacvan Bercovitch,” *Journal of American History* 78 [1991] 949–71, esp. 953–59).

<sup>28</sup> For a roster of scholars through 1990 who endorsed the thesis, see Smolinski, “*Israel Redivivus*,” 390–92.

<sup>29</sup> Three examples since 2000 are Emory Elliott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Early American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 34, 57–58, 113–14, 120–21; Avihu



religion, and politics.<sup>30</sup> Sewall's sources readminister the corrective judgment with vivid geographical clarity. "The situation of Jerusalem is not so central," he wrote in the same passage where he charted the pilgrimage route from England to the New Jerusalem, "but that a voyage can be made from London, to Mexico, in as little time, as from London, to Jerusalem." Bercovitch's paraphrase of this statement ("Sewall add[ed] for the consolation of the English saints that Boston was no further from London than from Jerusalem") encapsulates the problem with his interpretation of American Puritan millenarianism. Not only did he mistake the word "Mexico" for "Boston" and thus bring Sewall into line with the supposed millenarian orthodoxy in New England, but, more importantly, he overlooked Sewall's characterization of the nature of orthodoxy itself.<sup>31</sup>

But as positive interpretations of millenarian orthodoxy, the studies of Bozeman and Smolinski are less satisfactory. Both scholars were necessarily polemical because their common purpose was to undermine the received wisdom about American Puritan millenarianism. For them, the important point to make about Jerusalem is that it was not Boston. Bozeman stated, for instance, that John Cotton "did not hold that New England had inaugurated, was called to inaugurate, or conceivably could inaugurate the millennium" because "the inaugural events . . . would occur far from American shores." This phrasing shows what Bozeman wanted to emphasize. Smolinski was more concerned than Bozeman with the positive side of Judeocentrism; nevertheless, he also stressed what New England

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Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 162–63, 173–74, 180, 254–55; and George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 6–7, 34–37, 132. These page numbers cite the authors' main discussions of millenarianism in New England prior to the First Great Awakening. None of the three books mention Smolinski's "Israel Redivivus." All three cite Bozeman's *To Live Ancient Lives* but without engaging his argument in any way (Elliott, 175; Zakai, 162 n. 108, 270 n. 139; McKenna, 377 n. 23). Zakai's earlier *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) likewise adopts the older model for understanding pre-First Great Awakening millenarianism. As with his book on Edwards, Zakai's 1992 study overlooks Smolinski and relegates Bozeman to two nonevaluative footnote references (121 n. 1, 156 n. 3).

<sup>30</sup> Conrad Cherry, introduction to *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (ed. Conrad Cherry; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 25–29; Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 31–33; Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) 64–65; Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1–8, 46–52; Ted Widmer, *Ark of the Liberties: America and the World* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2008) 30–38; Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) ch. 2; Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) 65–72; Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 1–14; and Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) ch. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 45; and Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 72.

millenarians rejected rather than what they affirmed. His American Puritans, like Bozeman's, located the New Jerusalem "in an entirely different country" and assigned the inaugural agency to "an entirely different people."<sup>32</sup> The same negative orientation, moreover, characterizes the later studies of Knight, Winship, Conforti, Bross, Jue, and Stievermann. None of the first four observed that the New England millenarian mainstream identified Palestine as the home of the New Jerusalem; Jue devoted a single sentence in a footnote to the matter; and Stievermann noted it only occasionally in the course of a lengthy study.<sup>33</sup>

## ■ The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel

The major point that does not receive proper attention from Bozeman and Smolinski is the millennial role of the lost tribes of Israel as distinguished from the Jews, the well-known people of Roman Palestine, Islamic Spain, Christian Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and other familiar locations. This distinction originated in the late tenth century BCE, when the death of King Solomon resulted in the division of the monarchy into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Biblical discussions of the period of the two monarchies often use the term "Israelites" to differentiate the ten northern tribes from the two southern ones.<sup>34</sup> The Assyrian destruction of the northern kingdom in the late eighth century BCE led to the Israelites' deportation and eventual disappearance—hence the phrase, "the ten lost tribes of Israel." Except for some fleeting references to the missing Israelites, the remainder of the historical narrative in the Hebrew Bible pertains to the inhabitants of the southern kingdom and their descendants, who became known as "Judahites," "Judeans," or "Jews."<sup>35</sup> Judeocentric millenarians held that both branches of Jacob's posterity, the Jews and the lost Israelites, would inaugurate the millennial kingdom following their conversion and repatriation. "What, shall they return to Jerusalem again?" Thomas Brightman wrote in a characteristic Judeocentrist passage. "There is nothing more certaine, the Prophets do everywhere directly confirme it and beat upon it."<sup>36</sup> This conviction rested on a literalist, and Christianized, reading of Isa 11:11–16, Jer 23:1–8, Ezek 37:15–28, and other

<sup>32</sup> Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 230; and Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," 358.

<sup>33</sup> Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 186 n. 60; and Stievermann, *Prophecy*, 90, 102, 355, 360.

<sup>34</sup> I follow the conventional Jewish and Christian enumeration of twelve tribes divided into two tribes and ten tribes. In point of fact, the Hebrew Bible is inconsistent about the total number of tribes and also about the way to divide them.

<sup>35</sup> This account of biblical nomenclature is highly stylized. There are many occasions, particularly in the postexilic books of the Hebrew Bible and throughout the New Testament, where the terms "Jews" and "Israelites" are used in other ways.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Brightman, *The Workes of that Famous, Reverend, and Learned Divine, Mr. Thomas Brightman* (London, 1644) 544. For similar statements, see Joseph Mede, *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede* (London, 1664) 1001; Cotton, *Powring Out*, 93–94, 137; Increase Mather, *Mystery*, 5–17; idem, *Discourse*, 24–28; and Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, [53].

prophetic texts which suggest that the Jews and the recovered Israelites will return to Palestine during the messianic era.

Bozeman and Smolinski consistently used the term “Jews” to designate the human agents who would initiate the kingdom in Jerusalem. This designation sufficed for their polemical purposes: the two revisionists, after all, only needed to establish that the millennial pioneers were not the New England Puritans. But as a descriptive term in academic discourse about Judeocentric millenarianism, the word “Jews” is inaccurate unless one explains that it extends to the lost tribes as well. Justification for adopting this shorthand usage certainly exists in Judeocentrist sources, which often refer to both Jews and Israelites as “the Jewish nation.” Bozeman and Smolinski, however, evidently restricted the word “Jews” to the Jews per se; in any case, neither scholar observed that Judeocentrists anticipated that the lost tribes, no less than the Jews, would return to Palestine and establish the kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

The lost tribes are the forgotten people in the literature about Judeocentric millenarianism, not only in the studies of Bozeman and Smolinski, but also in the work of Nabil Matar on English Protestant, particularly English Puritan, opinion about “the conversion of the Jews” or “the restoration of the Jews.”<sup>38</sup> Any proper interpretation of Judeocentrism must recognize that the Jews and the lost Israelites, not simply the Jews, were understood to be the people who would undergo a miraculous collective conversion to Christianity, defeat the Ottomans in the Middle Eastern phase of Armageddon, resettle Palestine, restore the apostolic church in Jerusalem, and supervise the spread of the kingdom to Europe—by this time purged of papal power through the Protestant victory in the northern phase of Armageddon—and to other places in the world. Moreover, any such interpretation must also address a number of issues easily overlooked when the millennial agents are seen simply as “Jews,” which is the word of choice for Matar no less than for Bozeman and Smolinski.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of the ten tribes in Isa 11:11–16, Jer 23:1–8,

<sup>37</sup> Bozeman discussed the lost tribes in his analysis of John Eliot but not in his interpretation of John Cotton and other Judeocentrists (*To Live Ancient Lives*, 271–72). Smolinski likewise talked about the lost tribes only in connection with persons who in differing ways stood outside the Judeocentrist movement: John Eliot, Thomas Thorowgood, Menasseh ben Israel, Gilbertus Genebrardus, and Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa (see his “*Israel Redivivus*,” 378–80; “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* [ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein; New York: Continuum, 2003], 441–66, at 448, 453; and introduction to Cotton Mather, *Threefold Paradise*, 23–24). Bozeman, Smolinski, and many other scholars seem to assume that the lost tribes deserve attention only insofar as a given early modern author accepted or rejected the claim that they were living in the New World.

<sup>38</sup> Nabil Matar, “The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: From the Reformation until 1660,” *Durham University Journal* 78 (1985) 23–36; idem, “The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: From 1661–1701,” *HTR* 78 (1985) 115–48; and idem, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) ch. 5. Like Bozeman and Smolinski, Matar discussed the missing Israelites only in relation to their possible dispersal into America, as though this were the sole matter of importance about the lost tribes.

<sup>39</sup> In their discussions of the “Jews” who were to be converted and repatriated, Bozeman,

Ezek 37:15–28, and other repatriationist prophecies created for Judeocentrists a set of problems that did not exist, or exist to the same degree, in the case of the actual Jews of the early modern period: determining to the extent possible the lost tribes' main place(s) of residence; pondering the logistics of repatriation for a people generally assumed to be vastly more numerous than the Jews; gauging the Israelites' present-day knowledge, if any, of their ancestral religious faith; and, above all else, establishing that the lost tribes still survived in an unassimilated condition nearly twenty-five centuries after their disappearance.<sup>40</sup>

## ■ Sewall's Case for Mexico

This inattentiveness to the Judeocentrist requirement that Israel reunite with Judah impairs the existing interpretations of Sewall's millenarianism; again, getting the formal components of the Mexican millennium correct means first getting the formal components of orthodox millenarianism correct. Sewall was as much a product of Judeocentrism as a critic of it: he kept the standard inaugural agents, the Jews and the lost tribes, and then moved the Judeocentrist armature of apocalyptic events, except for the European phase of Armageddon,<sup>41</sup> from Palestine to Mexico. In his formulation, Mexico was the place where the reunion of the twelve tribes would occur. "Christ shall . . . join Joseph and Judah's stick in this Mexican Valley," he stated in a paraphrase of Ezek 37:16–17, a passage that uses "Joseph" as a shorthand expression for Israel as distinct from Judah.<sup>42</sup> The lost tribes—for him, the Native Americans<sup>43</sup>—were already in the New World, as were some Jews, both conversos and former conversos. The American Indians, or at least a significant portion of them,<sup>44</sup> and the conversos and ex-conversos would then assemble in Mexico, where they would be joined by many Jews theretofore living in the Old World. Coincident

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Smolinski, and Matar made statements that accurately reflect what Judeocentrists thought about the Jews per se, but not what they thought about the ten Israelite tribes. For instance, Judeocentrists did not think that the Israelites had been banished from Palestine for rejecting Jesus, or that they remained unconverted because Roman Catholic idolatry and mistreatment had discredited the Christian religion in their eyes.

<sup>40</sup> For a general discussion of these issues in early modern Europe, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and for a more specifically Anglo-American study, see my "'Some Other Kinde of Being and Condition': The Controversy in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England over the Peopling of Ancient America," *JHI* 28 (2007) 35–56.

<sup>41</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 25–26, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 1:178. So important was Ezek 37 to Sewall that in 1688 he named one of his sons Joseph "in hopes of [its] accomplishment" (*Diary*, 175). Judeocentrists characteristically saw Ezekiel's valley as the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem (Brightman, *Workes*, 837; Cotton, *Powring Out*, 93; Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert* [London, 1641] 82–83; and Increase Mather, *Discourse*, 22–27).

<sup>43</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 2, 38, and *Letter-Book*, 1:22, 122, 176, 197, 2:273. For Judeocentrist opinion about the location(s) of the lost tribes, see n. 72 below.

<sup>44</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 2:155.

with their massive conversion to Protestant Christianity,<sup>45</sup> Jacob's now reunited descendants would defeat the Spanish, not the Ottomans, for control over the site of the New Jerusalem,<sup>46</sup> restore the apostolic church, the defining institution in the millennial kingdom, in Mexico City,<sup>47</sup> and then preside over the expansion of the kingdom throughout Christendom and the remainder of the world.<sup>48</sup> This transplanted form of Judeocentrism, then, provides the framework for Sewall's millennial doctrine, a point none of the scholars who have tried to locate the Mexican millennium within American Puritan millenarian eschatology correctly perceived, because none of them got the form of orthodoxy quite right.<sup>49</sup>

It was structurally an easy task for Sewall to substitute Mexico City for Jerusalem in the Judeocentric armature of events. The hard part was explaining why Mexico would host the New Jerusalem when the scriptural evidence pointed to Judea. As he compartmentalized this problem, he had to make one argument showing that

<sup>45</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 39, and *Letter-Book*, 2:42, 197–99.

<sup>46</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 26, and *Letter-Book*, 1:173, 174, 178. In 1696 Sewall asked Increase Mather, then president of Harvard, to set as a question for commencement debate whether or not the decisive phase of Armageddon would be fought in the New World; to make sure that the affirmative case received a proper airing, he offered to argue it himself. By his own admission, Sewall began writing the *Phaenomena* because Mather and the graduating class turned him down (*Letter-Book*, 1:163, 228). Lovejoy located the origins of the *Phaenomena* in Sewall's psychological needs following his public confession of sin for his part in sentencing Salem witches to death ("Between Hell and Plum Island," 360–61). Lovejoy overlooked Sewall's stated reason for beginning the *Phaenomena*, and he missed an important point of chronology: Sewall confessed his sin on January 14, 1697, two months after he started writing the work. A draft of the *Phaenomena* reads "Nov 14, 1696 incept" ("Papers of Samuel Sewall," reel 1, fol. 37).

<sup>47</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 2, 55, 61, and *Letter-Book*, 2:155, 273.

<sup>48</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 39–40, 61, and *Letter-Book*, 2:80. See also Sewall's discussion of Zech 8:23 in *Letter-Book*, 2:273, and his marginal notation in his personal copy of John Cotton's *Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* (London, 1644) 56, a passage where Cotton described the ever-expanding dimensions of the "pure Church, as it shall be constituted in the Jewish Church-State"; Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, H.27.14.

<sup>49</sup> Only Smolinski and Jue specified Palestine as the orthodox American Puritan alternative to Mexico. Isani thought that New England millenarians, Sewall excepted, located the kingdom's birthplace in "the Old World" ("Growth," 68–69). Davidson apparently assumed that the orthodox alternative was England (*Logic of Millennial Thought*, 67). Sweet observed that Sewall denied that the kingdom would commence in Jerusalem; however, he associated the Jerusalem-first perspective only with Joseph Mede and not with any member of the American Puritan millenarian mainstream, whose point of view he never explicitly characterized but seemed to construe as privileging New England ("What Concernment," 218 [Mede], 215, 229, 230 [New England's apparent primacy]). None of these five scholars perceived that Sewall's millennial doctrine, like Judeocentrist orthodoxy, postulated the reunion of the Jews and the Israelites at the site of the New Jerusalem. Isani recognized that Sewall anticipated that the Jews would move to Mexico but wrongly claimed that the lost tribes theory of the Native Americans' ancestry was "not so crucial" for Sewall, and that "he refrained from placing much weight upon" it ("Growth," 65–68). The other four understood that Sewall's choice of Mexico required the lost tribes theory, but they fell short on the Jewish side of the equation. Davidson, Sweet, and Jue did not account for the whereabouts of the Jews in the Mexican millennium; and Smolinski had Sewall send the bulk of the Jews back to Jerusalem, as if he were a conventional Judeocentrist on this point (*Israel Redivivus*, 364; and introduction to Cotton Mather, *Threefold Paradise*, 22).

the millennial kingdom would begin somewhere in America, and then a separate one establishing that it would commence in Mexico. Only then could he claim that central apocalyptic events would unfold in and around Mexico City.<sup>50</sup>

Sewall's primary argument for a generically American, as opposed to a specifically Mexican, inaugural location relied on the early modern identification of America as the fourth quarter of the world. But unlike Judeocentrists, who made this identification for the less ambitious purpose of establishing that the millennium would eventually reach the New World,<sup>51</sup> Sewall wanted to show that the kingdom would begin in America. To this end, he disqualified the three Old World quadrants from hosting the millennial capital because of their supposedly unsavory religious histories: Islam had become the dominant faith in portions of Asia and Africa, and Catholicism remained strong in Europe. "Asia, Africa, and Europe have already had their Turn," he stated, "and they ought not to envy, but to rejoice" that America has remained sufficiently unsullied to house the New Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup> Sewall argued secondarily that the image in Rev 10:2 of a "strong angel" placing his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth "signif[ie]d] Christ's taking possession of the Universe for himself. And I hold that He set his Right foot on the New World; and his left, on the Old." The millennial kingdom will arise in America because "the Right foot is the foot of Motion and Enterprise" and thus "excels the Left."<sup>53</sup> He also drew an analogy that presupposed the conventional Protestant wisdom that papal Rome was the new Babylon of Rev 17:5. The old Jerusalem was west of the original Babylon in Mesopotamia; therefore, "New-Jerusalem must be to the westward of Rome."<sup>54</sup>

Making a case for an explicitly Mexican birthplace was an even greater challenge. Sewall managed to locate only one biblical passage, the vision in Rev 4:6–8 of four creatures surrounding the divine throne, that he could use for this purpose. He said that these creatures represent the "Four Quarters of the World," and that the millennially privileged fourth creature, which the text identifies as an eagle, betokens Mexico because this "Royal Bird . . . was once the Standard of the

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Edwards faced a similar challenge in 1742, and he met it in a similar way. Hoping to show that the Great Awakening, then at its apex, was destined to begin in New England, he made one argument for America in general and a second one for New England in particular (*Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival of Religion in New-England* [Boston, 1742], in *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening* [ed. C. C. Goen; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972] 353–57). Edwards's bipartite argument was as strained as Sewall's. The Bible, after all, contains no obvious references to America, let alone to Mexico or to New England.

<sup>51</sup> Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 46–47; and Noyes, *New-Englands Duty*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, A2<sup>n</sup>, 34, and *Letter-Book*, 1:287, 2:156 (quotation). See also *idem*, *Proposals*, 4–6. Sewall placed Palestine in Asia (*Letter-Book*, 2:156, 199–200).

<sup>53</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 1:289–90, and *Proposals*, 7–8. Sewall observed in the first passage that Jesus had set his right foot on America "when the New-English Worthies Landed here," a statement that reads like the opening gambit in an argument for the Puritans' right to inaugurate the millennial kingdom. But as he explained in the second passage, the Puritans had captured the New World for Jesus only in the sense that they were the model Christians in America.

<sup>54</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 31.

Mexican Empire.<sup>55</sup> Sewall tried to buttress the case for Mexico by finding biblical evidence for a related point, the Spanish seizure of power over the future site of the New Jerusalem. The scriptures, he explained in an extended analysis of Dan 11, forecast the establishment of New Spain, “the Antichristian Plantation spoken of [in] Dan. 11.45.”<sup>56</sup> He also claimed that the Bible predicted the demographic catastrophe that resulted from the Spanish conquest and colonization of America. “There is no Verse in the whole Bible which doth so pathetically, and with so much Amplitude and Variety, foretell . . . the Blood & Slaughter of America,” he wrote of Rev 6:8, the account of the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, the one that brought death through warfare, pestilence, and famine to its quarter of the world. “Las Casas,” he continued in the same passage, “gives an account of Twenty Millions Slain [and] Destroy’d . . . by Spanish Cruelties” and “sent to Hell” by Spanish missionary neglect.<sup>57</sup>

Sewall wanted to find support for these two geographical arguments, such as they were, in millenarian texts written by American Puritans or by other early modern authors. But despite his extensive research, he uncovered no precedents for a specifically Mexican inaugural location,<sup>58</sup> and he found only one precedent, and a poor one at that, for a millennial kingdom originating in America. To begin with, this single precedent was distant in time, appearing in a statement that the English Puritan William Twisse made in a 1635 letter to the Judeocentrist patriarch Joseph Mede. Sewall tried to transform the antiquity of Twisse’s statement into a virtue by claiming that “the newness of it in its return after so considerable a space of time will . . . render it gratefull.”<sup>59</sup> Far more troublesome for Sewall, however, was the fact that Twisse retracted his claim about the American origin of the millennial kingdom in the very passage where he broached this possibility, and then gave Mede the credit for convincing him that “the place of New Jerusalem” was “the land of Jury [Jewry]” and not America:

Heretofore I have wondered in my thoughts at the Providence of God concerning that world, not discovered till this old world of ours is almost at an end, and then no footsteps found of the knowledge of the true God, much less of Christ. And then considering our western plantations of late, and the opinion of many grave divines concerning the Gospel’s fleeing westward; sometimes I have had such thoughts, why may not that be the place of New Jerusalem? But you have handsomely and fully cleared me from such odde conceits.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Sewall, *Proposals*, 1, and *Phaenomena*, B1<sup>v</sup>, 4–6.

<sup>57</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 8–9. “Las Casas” was Bartolomé de las Casas, whose *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (Seville, 1552) appeared in English translation in 1583, 1656, and 1689.

<sup>58</sup> See n. 8 above.

<sup>59</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Mede, *Works*, 979 (Twisse’s letter). Twisse did not identify the clergymen he had in mind when he referred to “the opinion of many grave divines concerning the Gospel’s fleeing westward.” Examples in print by this time included John White, *The Planters Plea* (London, 1630) 12–16;

Sewall discounted Twisse's retraction, on one occasion by saying that "First Thoughts are sometimes the best," and on another by pretending that Twisse had never recanted his original statement ("Renowned Dr. Twisse's problem, why may not that be the place of New Jerusalem? was never answered," he wrote, as if Mede had not answered the query to Twisse's satisfaction).<sup>61</sup>

Having salvaged the precedent, Sewall then cited it in the opening paragraph in the body of the 1697 edition of the *Phaenomena*: "One that has been born, or but liv'd in America . . . may ask, Why may not that be the place of New-Jerusalem? . . . [T]his was set up by Dr. Twisse above threescore years ago." When he published the revised version of the *Phaenomena* in 1727, Sewall continued to give Twisse the place of honor in the first paragraph of the work; he simply changed the chronological reference from "above threescore years ago" to "above Ninety years ago."<sup>62</sup> Thirty years of research into Puritan sources and thirty years of residence in Massachusetts Bay lay between the two editions of the book. Yet in the interim, Sewall had uncovered no better precedent for an American inaugural location than a dated and disavowed statement made by someone who was not a New England Puritan. His inability to find a single American Puritan precedent makes perfect sense within the revisionist framework of Bozeman and Smolinski, whose orthodox New England millenarians looked to Jerusalem; at the same time, Sewall's failed quest should disconcert any scholar who still wishes to argue that mainstream American Puritan millenarians anticipated that the millennial kingdom would first appear in the New World.

## ■ The Redeemer Nation

The prevalence of Judeocentrism in early New England erodes the foundation of what Sacvan Bercovitch and Mason Lowance considered to be the legacy of New England millenarianism: the transfiguration of the United States into the redeemer nation, the heir to ancient Israel as the land with a special destiny in God's plan for history. With acknowledged precedents,<sup>63</sup> these two scholars argued that New

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Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (London, 1630) 341; and George Herbert, "The Church Militant," in *The Temple* (London, 1633), lines 235–36 ("Religion stands on tip-toe in our land, / Readie to passe to the American strand"), lines 247–48 ("Then shall Religion to America flee:/They have their times of Gospel, ev'n as we"), and lines 260–61 ("Yet as the Church shall thither westward flie, / So Sinne shall trace and dog her instantly"). None of these persons was suggesting that the millennium would begin in America.

<sup>61</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 54, and *Letter-Book*, 1:177. A partial precedent for an American millennium existed in John Eliot's "Learned Conjectures" (1653). See my *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 83–90. Sewall was evidently unaware of Eliot's "Learned Conjectures," which was published in Thomas Thorowgood's *Jews in America* (London, 1660) and not in his better-known *Iewes in America* (London, 1650).

<sup>62</sup> The reference to Twisse appears on p. 2 in both the 1697 and 1727 editions of the *Phaenomena*.

<sup>63</sup> Loren Baritz, *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: Wiley, 1964) chs. 1–2; and Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) chs. 2–3.



England millenarians bequeathed to later Americans a body of millennial rhetoric that shaped national self-identity during the First Great Awakening, when revivalist preachers carried Puritan sources throughout the Atlantic seaboard, and also after the creation of the Republic, when this rhetorical inheritance lived on even though Puritanism no longer survived as a discernible movement.<sup>64</sup> “During the eighteenth century,” Lowance maintained, “the Great Awakening extended this paradigm [of a ‘messianic national destiny’] to the time of the American Revolution and enlarged what had been a parochial New England idea into a national conception of America as the location of Christ’s millennial fulfillment.”<sup>65</sup>

The proposition that American Puritan millenarianism elevated New England, and in time the United States, to world-redemptive status continues to appeal to Americanists for the same reason it fascinated Bercovitch and Lowance: it enables scholars to chart a master narrative of national self-aggrandizement that commenced in seventeenth-century New England, continued through the First Great Awakening and the War for Independence, and then endured through the Second Great Awakening, the westward expansion of the nineteenth century, and the quasi-colonialist ventures of the twentieth century. “New chosen people, city on a hill, promised land, destined progress, New Eden, American Jerusalem,” Bercovitch wrote in a summary of the “flexible forms of symbol and metaphor” that he traced from seventeenth-century New England into eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century America.<sup>66</sup> In the forty or more years that have elapsed since the appearance of Bercovitch’s work in the mid-1970s, many Americanists have disseminated his argument through professional publications<sup>67</sup> and through countless college and university courses on American history, literature, religion, and politics. As a result, educated Americans no longer hear about their nation’s special mission in the world simply through time-honored venues like evangelical sermons and political speeches; they also learn through scholarly works and undergraduate lectures that their forebears all the way back to the Puritans believed in America’s “messianic national destiny.” To be sure, Bercovitch was not championing America’s duty to redeem the world. For him, as for the many academics who likewise identify as political liberals, this master narrative is a colossal tale of national arrogance. But the same narrative, when embraced or exploited by political conservatives, becomes an edifying saga of American exceptionalism that is now nearly four centuries old. Thus, no matter how much they might deplore this outcome, Americanists of the past four decades have helped to legitimate the ideology of contemporary political conservatism.

<sup>64</sup> Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, ch. 5; idem, *American Jeremiad*, chs. 4–6; and Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, chs. 8–11.

<sup>65</sup> Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 119. For similar statements, see Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, 108, and *American Jeremiad*, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 92.

<sup>67</sup> See the titles in n. 30 above.

But whether recounted by the Left or the Right, this national narrative is flawed from the standpoint of the persons who supposedly first began to tell it, the New England millenarians. John Cotton, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and all other colonists who stood in the dominant Judeocentrist tradition believed that Palestine—not New England or America—would become the redeemer nation once the Jews and the Israelites had fulfilled their divinely appointed destiny. John Cotton anticipated that “all Christendome [shall be] bedewed with Heavenly light and grace” radiating from Jerusalem; Increase Mather wrote that the repatriated and converted twelve tribes “shall shortly become the most glorious Nation in the whole world, and all other Nations shall have them in great esteem and honour”; and Cotton Mather said that “the Jewish Nation” will be “marvellously filled with Heavenly Influences transcending any that the By-past Ages have had Experience of.”<sup>68</sup> Had these Judeocentrists been speaking about New England, and had they been talking about themselves, then Bercovitch and Lowance would have reason to conclude that American Puritan millenarianism laid the foundation for the redeemer nation mythology.

No less than these Judeocentrists, Samuel Sewall awaited the restoration of the twelve tribes to divine favor and the concomitant birth of the millennium. “The New Jerusalem is so styled, because the Citizens thereof will be mostly Jews,” he stated in 1723, applying the word “Jews” to both Judah and the lost Israel. Then in August 1728, he observed in one of his last diary entries that

a Noble Rainbow was seen in the Clouds after great Thundering and Darkness, and Rain: One foot thereof stood upon Dorchester Neck, the Eastern end of it; and the other foot stood upon the Town [of Dorchester]. It was very bright, and the Reflection of it caused another faint Rainbow to the westward of it. For the entire Compleatness of it, throughout the whole Arch, and for its duration, the like has rarely been seen. It lasted about a quarter of an hour. The middle parts were discontinued for a while, but the former Integrity and Splendor were quickly Recovered.

Sewall interpreted the rainbow as an emblem of the chosen people, again identified simply as “Jews.” They were estranged from God during the still-ongoing “middle parts” of their history, but they would recover their “former Integrity and Splendor” at the dawn of the millennium: “I hope this [rainbow] is a sure Token that Christ Remembers his Covenant for the beloved Jews, . . . and that He will make haste to prepare for them a City . . . whose Builder and Maker is God.”<sup>69</sup>

What made Sewall’s vision possible was his support for the lost tribes theory.<sup>70</sup> Those New England Judeocentrists who commented on the Indians’ ancestry saw the Native Americans as “Tartars,” an early modern designation for the ancient

<sup>68</sup> Cotton, *Brief Exposition*, 187; Increase Mather, *Mystery*, 11; and Cotton Mather, *Things to Be Look’d For*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> Sewall, *Letter-Book*, 2:155–56, and *idem*, *Diary*, 106.

<sup>70</sup> See n. 43 above.

Scythians, the seminomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe.<sup>71</sup> These millenarians characteristically held that the lost Israelites were unassimilated ethnic minorities living in Asian territories dominated by larger population groups like the Persians, the Mongols, and the Chinese.<sup>72</sup> From these locations the Israelites could travel overland to Palestine when the time came for reunion with the Jews. Judeocentrists in New England had two main reasons for rejecting the lost tribes theory. First, it created a massive logistical problem, for the American Indians, if Israelites, would need to return to Palestine.<sup>73</sup> Sewall diminished the size of the problem by proposing that the Jews, whom he assumed were far less numerous than the Indians, would move from the Old World to Mexico. He also noted that this transoceanic migration was under way, for impressive “Numbers of Jews are [already] seated in the New World.”<sup>74</sup> Second, the lost tribes theory necessarily elevated the Native Americans, a widely disparaged people in Puritan New England,<sup>75</sup> to millennial grandeur. In Increase Mather’s words, the lost Israelites and the Jews “shall be acknowledged and respected in the world above any other Nation or people.”<sup>76</sup> Sewall’s sources, in contrast to those of most other colonists, abound with expressions of sympathy for the Indians.<sup>77</sup> “The English Nation, in shewing Kindness to the Aboriginal Natives of America, may possibly shew Kindness to Israelites unawares,” he stated in the

<sup>71</sup> [Thomas Shepard], *The Day-Breaking . . . of the Gospell with the Indians* (London, 1647) 14; Oxenbridge, “Plea,” fol. 78; Increase Mather, *Dissertation*, 32–33; and Cotton Mather, *Genesis* (ed. Reiner Smolinski; vol. 1 of *Biblia Americana: America’s First Bible Commentary*; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 752–53. John Cotton said without further specification that the Native Americans were “gentiles” (*An Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* [London, 1655] 209).

<sup>72</sup> Cotton, *Powring Out*, 93; Oxenbridge, “Plea,” fols. 78–83; Taylor in Isani, “The Pouring of the Sixth Vial,” 129; Increase Mather, *Mystery*, 55–56; idem, *Discourse*, 24; and Cotton Mather, *Joshua–2 Chronicles* (ed. Kenneth P. Minkema; vol. 3 of *Biblia Americana: America’s First Bible Commentary*; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 611. Shepard did not comment on the whereabouts of the lost Israelites.

<sup>73</sup> Oxenbridge held that some lost Israelites had migrated to America; however, he kept the size of the Israelite population in America within maneuverable limits by claiming that most of the lost tribes remained in the Old World, where they survived as unassimilated minority populations, and then by insisting that the small numbers of Israelites in America were ethnically distinct from the Indians (“Plea,” fol. 80). Cotton Mather suggested in 1727 or 1728 that some of the missing Israelites had reached the New World and intermarried with the Native Americans (*Threefold Paradise*, 298). By this time, Cotton Mather was no longer a Judeocentrist.

<sup>74</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 37–39, 48. Sewall instanced the conversos in Spanish and Portuguese colonies and the ex-conversos in New York, Rhode Island, Jamaica, Barbados, and other Protestant settlements in the New World.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of Puritan derogation of the Native Americans, see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) ch. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Increase Mather, *Mystery*, 58. For similar statements about the millennial preeminence of the twelve tribes, see n. 68 above.

<sup>77</sup> See Francis, *Judge Sewall’s Apology*, chs. 9, 13–14.

*Phaenomena*.<sup>78</sup> Once the millennium began in Mexico City, the Native Americans and the Jews would surpass all other peoples in global esteem. “New-Jerusalem will . . . wonderfully dilate, and invigorate Christianity . . . in Asia, in Africa, in Europe, and in America,” he wrote elsewhere in the work.<sup>79</sup>

Samuel Sewall was surely the only American Puritan who said what scholars once thought all New England millenarians believed: “God hath chosen America to be . . . the Seat of the New Jerusalem” and “the Inheritance of his Ancient People.” Yet Sewall was not saying what these scholars would have supposed. For him, the coming “Seat of the New Jerusalem” was Mexico City, not Boston, and God’s “Ancient People” were the original children of Israel—the Native Americans and the Jews—and not typological prefigurements of the New England Puritans. The twelve tribes thus defined America’s place in millennial geography and made the New World the future home of the redeemer nation. “Shout, Sing triumphantly, O America! America! America!”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, A2<sup>r</sup>. The qualifiers that Sewall incorporated into this passage (“may possibly,” “unawares”) did not mean that he had developed reservations about the lost tribes theory. His support for the theory remained strong from 1686 through his last extant discussion of biblical prophecy in 1729 (*Letter-Book*, 1:22, 2:273). He included the qualifiers to encourage colonists who doubted the lost tribes theory to “shew Kindness” to Indians, just in case the theory proved to be correct.

<sup>79</sup> Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Sewall, personal annotation to Rev 15:5 in *Annotations upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament* (ed. John Downname et al.; London, 1645); Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, H.43.5. Sewall, a skilled bookbinder, disassembled the original volume, interspersed blank leaves between each set of printed pages, rebound the volume, and then used the blank leaves for his exegetical comments.