How to Use Biblical Commentaries

The Bible: An Introduction by Jerry Sumney

Commentaries grouped by level of accessibility

Even before turning to commentaries, you may want to read the entry on the biblical book you are studying in a Bible Dictionary. As it is in all kinds of materials, some Bible dictionaries are better than others. Many popular Bible dictionaries fail to take the scholarship of the last one hundred years into account. Among the few Bible dictionaries that are good, the following stand out: The Harper/Collins Bible Dictionary and the Mercer Bible Dictionary are good one-volume Bible dictionaries. Although it is a bit older, the most recent edition of *Eerdmans Dictionary of* the Bible can be useful. The best multiple volume Bible dictionaries are The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (which I prefer) and the Anchor Bible Dictionary. Other dictionaries that focus on specific parts of the Bible can also be useful (for example, the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels). One way to judge the value of a Bible dictionary is to see if the entries are signed. At the end of each entry, you will find the initials of the person who wrote that piece. You can then look them up in the front of the book to see who they are and where they teach or what they do. This information helps you evaluate what the person says in their entry; it helps you know whether they are really experts in the subject they are telling you about in the entry. If a Bible dictionary does not identify the authors of entries in this way, it usually means the entries are not written by experts on the topic, but rather by someone perhaps on an editorial staff who may or may not be qualified to speak about the subject. These are not good sources. Always use Bible dictionaries that identify who wrote each entry.

There are many commentary series that do not appear in the following list. Some of these may be very good, others less valuable. The list that follows includes series that are found fairly widely. The series that are listed here engage in critical readings of the biblical texts, that is readings that employ the kinds of analytical tools that scholars use. To do exeges is (getting to the meaning the original audience would have understood) you should use commentaries that focus on what the biblical books meant in their original setting, rather using commentaries that give primary attention to what a text tells people to do today. It is important to understand the text in its original context before making any contemporary use of it.

As you begin study of a passage (sometimes called a pericope), you should begin with the more accessible commentaries and move to the more technical. The more accessible commentaries will introduce you to the questions, issues, and problems involved with understanding a particular text. But they will usually simply give you the conclusions the author of that particular commentary on that issue. As you move to more detailed commentaries, these will give arguments for the position the author takes on an issue. The more detailed and technical a commentary is, the more it will be engaged with the disputes about the meanings of specific things in your passage. They might engage in a long discussion of the meaning of a word in first century Greek or about whether the categories Paul uses to discuss an issue are from philosophers or from rabbis. Or they might discuss what ideas another author is rejecting. The less technical commentaries will assume answers to these questions without letting you know why they chose that option; they may not even hint that there is a question about the matter. So, the more accessible commentaries are the place to begin, but you will need to move to more detailed commentaries to engage a text in more depth and detail.

Very accessible and brief

Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (most of these are over twenty years old) Westminster Bible Companion

Accessible but more lengthy

Abingdon New Testament Commentaries Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries Interpretation New Cambridge Bible Commentary Reading the New Testament The New Testament in Context

New International Biblical Commentary (many, but not all, these are from fairly conservative writers)

More lengthy and demanding, but still accessible to many readers

New Interpreter's Bible New Testament Library Old Testament Library Sacra Pagina Berit Olam

More demanding, in the sense that they are longer and expect the reader to know more before beginning to use them

Anchor Bible Commentary
Word Bible Commentary
New International Commentary on the New Testament
New International Commentary on the Old Testament

The following expect you to know Greek or Hebrew and to be ready to enter the conversation about issues at the level of scholars. While you will not be an expert, you may be able to follow the arguments (at least some of them) in these commentaries after you have worked through the less detailed and technical commentaries above.

International Critical Commentary
New International Greek Testament Commentary
Hermeneia

Select Commentaries and Additional Bibliography for Further Study

Genesis

Terence Fretheim, "Genesis," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 1:319-426, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

Westermann? 3 volumes but by Augsburg

Exodus

Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 1: 677-981, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, Westminister, 1974). Carol Meyers, Exodus, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Leviticus

Richard N. Boyce, *Leviticus and Numbers*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster, 2008)

Erhard Gerstenberger, Leviticus, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1996).

Baruch Levine, *Leviticus*, Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary (Phildelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989)

Numbers

Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 2:1-268, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Journeying with God: A Commentary on the Book of Numbers*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

Deuteronomy

Ronald Clements, "The Book of Deuteronomy," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 2:269-538, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 2002).

Joshua

Robert Coote, "Joshua," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 2:555-716, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).

Richard Nelson, *Joshua*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 1997).

John J. Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Westminster Bible Companion) (Louis ville: Westminster, 2002).

Judges

Alberto Soggin, Judges, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

- Victor Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Susan Niditch, Judges: A Commentary, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 2008).
- Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Westminster Bible Companion) (Louis ville: Westminster, 2002).

Ruth

- Victor Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Kirsten Nielsen, Ruth, Old Testament Library. Louis ville: Westminster, 1997.
- Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua*, *Judges*, *and Ruth*, Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville: Westminster, 2002).

1 & 2 Samuel

- Bruce Birch, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 2:949-1383, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).
- Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

1 & 2 Kings

- Walter Brueggemann, 1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA, 2000).
- Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *I Kings; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001)
- Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, II Kings; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988)
- Terence Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 2005)
- Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1987).
- C. L. Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 3:1-296, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

1 & 2 Chronic les

- Leslie Allen, "The First and Second Books of Chronicles, in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 3:299-659, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).
- Sara Japhet, I and II Chronicles, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 1993).
- Steven L. McKenzie, 1-2 Chronicles, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004)

Ezra

- Peter R. Ackroyd, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah; introduction and commentary, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM, 1973).
- Joseph Blenkinsopp, Ezra-Nehemiah, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 1988).
- R.J. Coggins, *The books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

- Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*; *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster, 1998).

Nehemiah

See under Ezra.

Esther

- S. White Crawford, "The Book of Esther," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 3:853-972, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).
- Jon Levenson, Esther; A Commentary, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 1997).
- Carey A. Moore, *Esther; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Job

- Samuel E. Balentine, Job, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, V.10 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006)
- Carol Newsome, "The Book of Job," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 4: 319-637, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
- Marvin Pope, *Job; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1979.

Psalms

- Richard Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentary. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.
- _____. Psalms 73-150, Abingdon Old Testament Commentary. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 1987).

J.C. McCann, "The Book of the Psalms," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 4: 641-1280, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

Proverbs

Richard Clifford, Proverbs, Old Testament Library (Louis ville: Westminster, 1999).

Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

Roland Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1998.

Raymond Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 5:17-265, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

Ecclesiastes

James Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987).

Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

Roland Murphy, Ecclesiastes, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1992).

Song of Solomon

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- Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- Renita J. Weems, "The Song of Songs," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 5:361-431, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

Isaiah

- Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah; Volume 1, Chapters 1-39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).
- Brevard Childs, Isaiah, Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
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- Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
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Adele Berlin, *Lamentations*, Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000. Kathleen O'Connor, "Lamentations," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 6: 1013-1072, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

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Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louis ville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

Katheryn Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 6: 1075-1607, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

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C. L. Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

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G. I. Davies, *Hosea*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

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Joel

Elizabeth Achtemeier, "The Book of Joel," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 7: 301-336, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

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Richard Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, New Century Bible. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

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Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, Berit Olam. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000.

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Jonah

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Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005)

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Nahum

- Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986.
- Duane L. Christensen, *Nahum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
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- Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.
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Romans

N.T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 10: 393-770. Edited by L. E. Keck. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

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