

Selecting Bible Commentaries

Guides to Commentaries

*The following books critique individual commentaries and commentary series.

Bauer, David R. *An Annotated Guide to Biblical Resources for Ministry*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.

Carson, D. A. *New Testament Commentary Survey*. 7th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013.

Evans, John F. *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works*. 10th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Glynn, John. *Commentary and Reference Survey*. 10th ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.

Glynn, John and Michael H. Burer. *Best Bible Books. New Testament Resources*. 9th ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018.

Gupta, Nijay. *The New Testament Commentary Guide: A Brief Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020.

Longman, Tremper III. *Old Testament Commentary Survey*. 5th ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.

Rosscup, James E. *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors*. Sun Valley, CA: Grace Book Shack, 1993.

Stewart, David R. *The Literature of Theology: A Guide for Students and Pastors*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Major Commentary Series

*Each commentary series aims for a particular type of reader, although the quality of individual volumes can vary. You can save considerable money by buying a whole commentary set at one time, even if some volumes in the series are not the best available on a particular biblical book.

Abingdon New Testament/Old Testament Commentaries (Abingdon, 1990s-)

Moderate scholarship. Not too technical, not too in depth, but enlarges upon NIB.

Anchor Bible Commentaries (Doubleday, 1960s-) *Anchor Bible*

One of the most expansive commentaries available in English. It includes volumes on the Apocrypha and accompanying reference volumes. Emphasis is not only on translation but on reconstructing ancient settings. Philology, historical background, and text are emphasized over theology. Thus, this is an indispensable tool for scholars but harder to grasp for pastors/laypeople. The quality of volumes varies from outstanding (frequently) to a few weak volumes. AB comes from a Catholic background but an ecumenical approach is used, with a moderate to liberal approach.

Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (IVP, 1998-)

Provides quotations from the often-neglected or inaccessible biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers. For each biblical passage, a selection of comments by major patristic exegetes is provided. Because both the general editors and the compilers of the individual volumes have had to select brief comments from vast bodies of patristic commentary, there is a sense in which this series functions as an “anthology of commentary” rather than a commentary proper. There is also the danger of taking the comments out of context. Still, recovering even a selection of this tradition of commentary from near oblivion is of great value.

Apollos Old Testament Commentary (IVP, 2002-)

A very good technical commentary written by Evangelical scholars.

Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker, 1992-)

Exceptional evangelical scholarship in a very readable style. The series is not yet completed.

Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill, 1964-68) and *Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1964-1969)

Although reflecting older scholarship (1960s), these are good examples of Arminian viewpoints.

Bible Speaks Today (IVP, 1986-)

Similar to NIVAC in that it quickly surveys the text and then emphasizes application. More valuable for sermon preparation and should be supplemented by other commentaries.

Black's New Testament Commentary (HarperSanFrancisco, 1950s-) also known as *Harper's New Testament Commentary*.

The updated volumes reflect recent and solid moderate scholarship.

Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Blackwell, 2005-); sometimes reprinted as *Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries*

More thematic than exegetical. The value lies in how church historians understood the passage.

Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Baker, 2005-)

Seeks to explain a theological understanding of Scripture texts. There is less exegetical detail in favor of doctrinal and theological themes that the Bible books reveal. It also refers more to the history of the interpretation of the Bible book.

Broadman Bible Commentaries (Broadman Press, 1969-1972)

Older, moderate Southern Baptist interpretation, with thin exegesis.

Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Lifeway, 2013-)

An evangelical homiletical commentary intended to guide pastors and church teachers to explain biblical passages. A lightweight explanation of the major ideas in each passage, rather than a verse by verse exposition.

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Tyndale, 2006-)

18 volumes are projected for the whole series, so it will be slim on exegesis. Even its own editors remark that it should be supplemented by detailed commentaries. Nevertheless, this is recent and readable, and expert scholars emphasize application aspects of the text. It has a promising start for its intended purpose.

Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Eerdmans, 1990s-)

Not the one volume commentary, but the individual books which are just now being produced. Excellent scholarship is at work here; most of it appears moderate to moderate-liberal. Emphasizes important recent socio-rhetorical features often missing in other commentaries.

Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary

A fairly good middle level commentary that relates each passage to the theology of other parts of the Bible.

Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Lexham, 2011-)

An excellent exegetical commentary from an evangelical perspective that interacts with the latest critical biblical scholarship.

Expositor's Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 1980s-)

Conservative, evangelical commentary and designed for busy pastors and serious laypersons. Most sections are simply too slim for major research. However, a few portions (e.g. Carson's Matthew commentary) are excellent and worthy of serious consideration. Don't confuse this with the older *Expositor's Bible* (Nicoll), which is quite dated.

Hermeneia (Fortress Press, 1971-)

This series provides a "critical and historical commentary to the Bible without arbitrary limits in size or scope." More than most series, this one takes an interest in textual criticism, history of religions, etc. and often offers innovative approaches to interpretation. *Hermeneia* assumes familiarity with biblical languages. Some of the volumes are English translations of German works and this has implications for the accessibility of some of the extensive bibliographies. This is cutting edge scholarship and should be used with caution.

International Critical Commentary (T & T Clark, 1895-1951; 1975-)

No series in English has been more diligent in providing as many aids to exegesis as possible, including linguistic, textual, archaeological, and historical backgrounds. Most of the original series are close to a century old, but the new replacement volumes (yet incomplete) promise include some very good works (e.g. Cranfield on Romans). The older works are fine for word studies, but less useful for theology. All are important to consider for detailed exegesis.

International Theological Commentary (Eerdmans, 1983-1998)

Shorter, less in depth than other scholarly commentaries to the point of being superficial. Moderate to some liberal exegesis. Its strength lays in its purpose of emphasizing theological meaning and using and presenting third world perspectives on the biblical text. Over twenty countries are represented in its writers.

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Westminster John Knox, 1980s-)

While not ignoring these endeavors, this series takes less interest in exegetical, historical, and grammatical considerations than in the formulation of an interpretation of the text. In other words, exposition is of paramount concern, and so this is a strong series for those involved in preaching. This is based on the *Revised Standard Version* and, since its appearance, the *New Revised Standard Version*. Moderate exegesis noted.

IVP New Testament Commentary (IVP, 1990s-)

Very good; evangelical, recent, and readable. It is not overly in depth and but based on scholarly research. Its pastor-friendly approach structures sections almost in sermonic fashion and includes application. This and NIVAC are similar in emphasizing application.

Keil and Delitzch Commentary on the Old Testament

Although a 19th century work, the detailed grammatical study of Hebrew has made this a classic. It should be supplemented with up to date works and their understanding of words verified against modern lexicons.

New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 1991-)

A Southern Baptist series reflecting current denominational views on the Bible. Though lambasted by critics as being sectarian when first produced, the passage of time has revealed that these volumes to reflect exceptional conservative scholarship, and add application and preaching suggestions as well. Like all commentary series, some books are stronger than others, but NAC is a good, and non-Baptists should take note.

New Cambridge Commentary (Cambridge, 2003-)

Although only a few volumes are out, they are well done and more in depth than the old Cambridge Commentaries. Nevertheless, they are still not deep and should be supplemented.

New Century Bible Commentary (Eerdmans, 1967-)

Beginning to show its age but still valuable contribution for lay persons; conservative to moderate.

New International Bible Commentary (Hendrickson, 1988-)

Slim in exegesis and takes a section by section approach. But it covers all the issues by including brief technical or text-critical notes. This is a valuable “starter” commentary.

New International Commentary on the Old Testament/New Testament (1950s-; 1980s-)

Combining a broadly conservative approach with high-level exegesis, this series is excellent for pastors. Volumes are gradually being revised or replaced. Greek and Hebrew is confined to the footnotes, so is useful to a wide audience. An excellent resource that is evangelical, scholarly, readable, and being updated.

New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1978-)

An exceptional commentary modeling the use of the tools of Greek word meaning and grammar, with generally conservative scholarship. When complete this will be one of the best for in depth research.

New Interpreter's Bible (Abingdon, 1994-2002)

The original *Interpreter's Bible*, which appeared a half-century ago, was widely used, but is now too dated. This revision replaces the original in recentness and quality. An overview volume is dedicated to general introductory articles, and introductions to sections of the Bible are interspersed throughout the other volumes. Generally, the commentary's interest is in the received text rather than in detailed textual criticism. It reflects recent and mostly moderate scholarship and is succinct in exegesis.

New Testament Commentary (Baker, 1954-2001)

Reflects Reformed exegesis started by Hendricksen and finished by Kistemaker. Useful notes for pastors, but not very technical exegesis.

NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 1995-)

Very good for pastors and lay persons. The emphasis on contemporary significance of the Bible results in less detail and depth of scholarship, but highly readable and relevant notes. Reflects good evangelical scholarship.

Old Testament Library (Westminster Press, 1960s-)

Reflects older, German, generally critical scholarship; moderately technical. Being updated. New Testament Library fits under here as well.

Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Lexham, 2016-2021)

A good basic commentary set for lay persons and pastors, written by a well-known evangelical New Testament scholar.

Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1990-)

A very fine set for pastors or serious Bible students. It offers outstanding interpretations that carefully consider alternative views, without being too technical.

Pentecostal Commentary (T & T Clark, 2003-)

Slim exegesis reflecting a Pentecostal viewpoint.

Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Smyth & Helwys, 2000-)

Good evangelical work reflecting a moderate Baptist perspective. User-friendly with CD-ROM and numerous sidebars.

Sacra Pagina (Michael Glazier, 1980-)

Admirable, first rate example of modern critical Roman Catholic scholarship.

Teach the Text Commentaries (Baker, 2013-)

A good simple guide for preaching or basic Bible teaching, It is less valuable for in-depth Bible study, due to limited detail about many specific interpretive issues. For each passage, there is a discussion of the main theme, the place in context, the cultural background, basic explanation of the meaning of the passage and illustration ideas.

Tyndale Old Testament/New Testament Commentaries (Tyndale, 1950s; 1980s-)

Although somewhat slim exegesis, a lot is still packed in a small space. Excellent for lay Bible study and busy pastors. Evangelical, fairly easy to read. A good inexpensive set for a personal library, but it should be used in conjunction with other commentaries, and generally the revised editions should be preferred over older editions.

Word Biblical Commentaries (Word Books, 1982-)

A very good commentary set reflecting conservative to moderate evangelical Protestant scholarship. Often offers good exegesis and word studies, but the format is somewhat awkward to use. A working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew helps. Some volumes are the their second revision.

Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Moody Press, 1988-)

A multi-volume commentary series reflecting conservative, evangelical scholarship. Similar to PNTC and NICNT. Do not confuse this with the superficial 1 volume *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*.

Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Zondervan, 2007-)

A good middle-level commentary series written by fine evangelical scholars.

Commentaries to Avoid for Serious Bible Study

General Recommendations

In general, avoid the following types of commentaries for serious Bible study:

- One or two volume commentaries over the entire Bible or over one testament (e.g., *Asbury Bible Commentary*, *International Bible Commentary*, *The IVP Women's Commentary*, *Moody Bible Commentary*).
- Devotional commentaries and homiletical commentaries that are basically collected sermons.
- Most commentaries older than 1960, due to advances in understanding of the religious world of the Bible (e.g the Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi manuscripts, etc.) as well as recent insights into ancient Greek and Hebrew.
- Study Bibles are useful for a first pass exploration of a passage, but lack the space to explore complicated interpretive questions and to consider alternative interpretations. They should be avoided for seminary research papers.

Examples of Commentaries to Avoid

The following are examples of commentaries that should be avoided for serious Bible study, because they are dated, devotional, homiletical (based on sermons), or too brief to offer much insight.

American Commentary on the New Testament

Analyzed Bible (G. Campbell Morgan)

Authur W. Pink commentaries

Barclay's *The Daily Study Bible* (warmly devotional)

Barnes' Notes

Bible Knowledge Commentary (unless dispensational exegesis is intended)

Boice's *Expositional Commentary*

Calvin's Commentary (unless Calvin's theology is intended for study)

The Cambridge Bible

B. H. Carroll's *Interpretation of the English Bible*

The Century Bible

Clarke's Commentary (unless Wesleyan exegesis is intended)

Collegeville Bible Commentary

Communicator's Commentary

Crossway Classic Commentary

Erdman's *Commentaries on the New Testament*

Ellicott's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

Epworth's *Preacher's Commentary*
Everyman's Bible Commentary
Excell's *Biblical Illustrator* and *Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*
Expositor's Bible (Nicoll)
Hastings' *Great Texts on the Bible* and *The Speaker's Bible*
Holman New Testament Commentary
Interpreter's Bible
Ironside (unless as an example of dispensational exegesis)
Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown's *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*
John Gill's Exposition of the Bible
Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*
Layman's Bible Commentary
Lenski's *New Testament Commentary* (dated and sometimes quirky exegesis, but at times useful comments on Greek syntax)
Liberty Bible Commentary
Life Application Commentary
Luther's Commentary (unless Luther's theology is intended for study)
Maclaren's *Exposition of Holy Scripture*
MacArthur Commentary (homiletical commentaries based on sermons)
Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Bible*
Meyer's *Commentary on the New Testament*
Moody Bible Commentary
Moffatt New Testament Commentary
Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*
People's Bible (Joseph Parker)
Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible (Leadership Ministries Worldwide)
Pulpit Commentary
The Randall House Bible Commentary
The Sermon Bible
Simeon's *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*
Thru the Bible (J. Vernon McGee)
Torch Bible Commentaries
Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary (unless studying dispensationalist exegesis)
Warren Wiersbe
Westminster Commentary
Wycliffe Bible Commentary (a basic one volume commentary)
Yeager's *The Renaissance New Testament*
Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (recent, good scholarship, but too thin to be used alone)