Selecting Bible Commentaries

Guides to Commentaries

*Several books critique various commentaries and series:


**Major Commentary Series**

*Few commentary sets are uniformly good. However, the cheapest way to buy commentaries is to buy a whole set at one time, even if some volumes are not the best available on that book.*


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.


Exceptional evangelical scholarly treatment. Only a few have been published but each one is outstanding so far.

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*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.


The updated volumes reflect recent and solid moderate scholarship.

*Blackwell Bible Commentaries* (Blackwell, 2005-)

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

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

Just launched to fill a methodological need, i.e., theologians’ understanding of Scripture texts. Thus, 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. This series has a promising beginning.

*Broadman Bible Commentaries* (Broadman Press, 1969-1972)

Older, more moderate Southern Baptist interpretation, but the exegesis is thin.

*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.

*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.


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

**NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 1995-)**

Excellent 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-)**


**Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1990-)**

Outstanding without being too technical. Each volume produced so far has been quite good.

**Pentecostal Commentary (T & T Clark, 2003-)**

Another series just underway. Slimmer exegesis but reflective of a Pentecostal viewpoint.

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

Superb offerings so far though still several volumes from being completed. Evangelical and reflects more moderate Baptist sympathies. User-friendly with CD-ROM and numerous sidebars.

**Sacra Pagina (Michael Glazier, 1980s-)**

Admirable, first rate example of modern critical Roman Catholic scholarship.
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 the revisions should be used 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-)

Forthcoming series with a promising lineup of scholars.

**Examples of Commentaries to Avoid for Serious Bible Study**

*In general, avoid any one volume commentary over the entire Bible or over one testament (unless studying methodology, e.g., *Asbury Bible Commentary*, *International Bible Commentary*, *The IVP Women’s Commentary*, etc.). The following commentaries should be avoided for serious Bible study, because they are devotional, too brief to offer much insight, or too dated.*

*American Commentary on the New Testament*  
*Analyzed Bible* (G. Campbell Morgan)  
*Barclay’s The Daily Study Bible* (warmly devotional)  
*Barnes’ Notes*  
*Bible Knowledge Commentary* (unless dispensational exegesis is intended)  
*Boice’s Expository 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 (overly homiletical)
Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible
Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament
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)