Selecting Bible Commentaries

Guides to Commentaries

*Several books critique individual commentaries and commentary series. Some of the best are not part of a series.


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.


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.

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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.


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.


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 exceptionable 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.


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 Hendricksen 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-)

A 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, 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-)

A good middle level commentaries series by fine evangelical 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*
Ironsides (unless as an example of dispensational exegesis)
Jamieson, Fausset, 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)