

Complete Your Commentary Section

Loretta was frustrated. Twice in one week she had been asked questions that would involve Old Testament commentaries. She hadn't been able to help because, as church librarian, she had to admit her supply of commentaries was woefully inadequate.

One question had come from an adult Sunday school teacher who wanted to know what commentaries she had on Genesis. "I'm going to be teaching the first 11 chapters of Genesis in the fall," he said, "and I'd like to do some reading on those chapters ahead of time."

"I'll look into it for you," Loretta had said.

The second question had come from a member of the congregation, who had asked a question about the coming of Elijah in Malachi.

"I'll look into it for you," Loretta had said again.

And she had. She had pored over catalogs, including one that listed hundreds of commentaries. But how could she find the one that were right for her library?

That dilemma faces hundreds of church librarians. There are so many commentaries in print that it takes an expert who is sensitive to the needs of a local congregation to select the right ones for your library. Tremper Longman III's *Old Testament Commentary Survey* (Baker) is helpful. You might also want to consult Douglas Stuart's *A*

Guide to Selecting and Using Bible Commentaries (Baker) and D. A. Carson's *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Baker), though the former is out of date.

In addition, I have put together a brief, up-to-date guide to what I think are the best commentaries for the average church library. When no title is given, the book title is the name of the Bible book. To save space, I've identified series titles with abbreviations most of the time; see the chart on page 12 for

the series titles and publishers.

Because the New Testament is so important to our faith, I have not necessarily limited myself to one volume for each New Testament book.

To start with, every church library should have a good, one-volume Bible commentary for quick reference. Widely regarded as the best such commentary is *The New Bible Commentary: Twenty-First Century Edition* (InterVarsity).

Pentateuch

On the first five books of the Old Testament there are a number of good commentaries. Outstanding on Genesis is Victor P. Hamilton's *The Book of Genesis* (NICOT, 2 vols.), though Gordon Wenham's *Genesis* (WBC, 2 vols.) is also excellent, if more demanding.

There is no one commentary on Exodus that is entirely satisfactory for the church library. You can choose between R. Alan Cole's *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC), which is short but reliable, and John I. Durham's *Exodus* (WBC), which is somewhat demanding and not always evangelical.

On Leviticus you have a choice between Gordon Wenham's *The Book of Leviticus* (NICTO), short but easy to read, and John E. Hartley's *Leviticus* (WBC), thorough but sprinkled with translated Hebrew words.

The best commentary by far on Numbers is Timothy R. Ashley's *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT). It is filled

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with good information and is not difficult to read or understand.

The late Peter Craigie has left us with the legacy of his excellent commentary on Deuteronomy, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT).

Historical Books

In the absence of a completely satisfactory commentary on Joshua, you can take your pick between Marten H. Wouldstra's short *The Book of Joshua* (NICOT) and Trent C. Butler's *Joshua*

(WBC), academic but accessible.

There is no really good commentary on Judges either, but Daniel I. Block's work on Judges and Ruth (New American Commentary, Broadman and Holman) will do until a longer, more detailed work is written.

Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.'s *The Book of Ruth* is a model of what a commentary for church library reference sections should be (NICOT).

Neither 1 nor 2 Samuel has a good evangelical commentary devoted to it,

so Joyce G. Baldwin's *1 & 2 Samuel* (TOTC), excellent for such a brief treatment, is your best choice.

Likewise, 1 and 2 Kings have not received the attention of evangelical scholars they deserve. Donald J. Wiseman's *1 & 2 Kings: An Introduction & Commentary* (TOTC) crowds a lot of good information into a small space.

H. G. M. Williamson's short but competent and evangelical commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles (Sheffield Academic) will meet the needs of most church li-

Select List of Bible Commentary Sets

by Dr. Leslie R. Keylock

The following sets are the best exegetical commentaries, i.e., they explain what the Bible meant. I have not included devotional commentaries, i.e., Matthew Henry's, John MacArthur's, and Warren Wiersbe's, which, like sermons, explain what the Bible means for today. Most commentary sets contains both strong and weak volumes, so I don't recommend that you purchase complete sets for your library.

Abbreviation	Series/Publisher	Volumes	Grade	Comments
BEC	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Baker	5 of 19	A	Evangelical, incomplete
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary, Hendrikson	28	B	Mostly evangelical, paperback
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans	16	A	The best set for church libraries, evangelical
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans	19	A	Best set on OT for church libraries, evangelical
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eerdmans	11	B	Easier to use than the title suggests
NTC	New Testament Commentary, Baker	12	B	By only two scholars, evangelical
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentaries, Eerdmans	8	A	Excellent overall, but incomplete
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Eerdmans	21	A	Brief, paperback, evangelical
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, InterVarsity	28	A	Brief, paperback, evangelical, many dated
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary, W Publishing	56	C/A	C for OT (many liberal), A for NT (all evangelical)

braries, and his outstanding commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah (WBC) is demanding but useful.

Nothing matches Joyce G. Baldwin's short but thorough *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC).

Poetical Books

David J. A. Clines' two-volume commentary on Job (WBC) is sprightly, personal, organized, and clear as a pane of glass, one of the greatest commentaries ever written.

The three volumes of Peter C. Craigie, Marvin E. Tate, and Leslie C. Allen in the Word Biblical Commentary series are the best treatment of the Psalms.

Surprisingly, there is nothing that is really valuable on Proverbs. The best volume for the church library is the brief work by Derek Kidner in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series.

Tremper Longman III has done an excellent job on Ecclesiastes (NICOT), a book that has few good evangelical commentaries but several outstanding ones by liberals and Jews.

G. Lloyd Carr's *The Song of Solomon* (TOTC) is good and informed, but the 764 pages of Marvin H. Pope's *Song of Songs* (Anchor Bible, Doubleday) have been called "one of the best commentaries written on any book of the Bible" (Tremper Longman III).

Prophets

It used to be hard to find a good evangelical commentary on Isaiah, but John N. Oswalt's two-volume *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT) is outstanding.

J. A. Thompson's *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT) is unrivaled as the best evangelical work on this book.

On Ezekiel, the enormous two-volume work of Daniel I. Block (NICOT) is the evangelical choice.

Joyce G. Baldwin's short commentary on Daniel (TOTC) is the best evangelical work, though the radical evangelical work by John Goldingay (WBC) has a lot more information.

On the shorter prophets, five vol-

umes belong in your library: Douglas Stuart's *Hosea-Jonah* and Ralph L. Smith's *Micah—Malachi* (WBC) and the three volumes in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament that have appeared so far: Leslie C. Allen's *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*; O. Palmer Robertson's *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*; and Pieter A. Verhoef's *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*.

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Gospels and Acts

On such an important book as Matthew's Gospel, you should probably have three commentaries. Though it does contain Greek words, Donald A. Hagner's two-volume commentary (WBC) always translates them and is filled with the rich wisdom of this devout scholar's years of study. Robert Gundry's *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Eerdmans) has long been one of my favorites. It is rich, thorough, and provocative, though his view of the wise men or astrologers at Jesus' birth needs to be disregarded. And Craig S. Keener's *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans) is an amazing tour de force from a younger evangelical scholar, though the 300 pages of bibli-

ography and indices are more than any church member will ever use.

The longtime favorites on Mark have been William Lane's *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT) and Robert A. Guelich's *Mark 1—8:26* (WBC), which is more demanding. When Guelich died suddenly before he finished commenting on Mark, however, the gifted Craig A. Evans stepped in and completed it in *Mark 8:27—16:20* to produce the most thorough evangelical commentary on this Gospel. Robert H. Gundry's *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Eerdmans) is also outstanding.

Perhaps the short, simple paperback by Craig A. Evans is the most user-friendly commentary on Mark's Gospel (NIBC). Anything you can't find in that volume you should be able to find in Darrell Bock's enormous two-volume commentary (BEC), which is encyclopedic but up-to-date and readable.

Pride of place among commentaries on John goes to D. A. Carson's *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC) and the more demanding work by George R. Beasley-Murray (WBC).

On Acts there are two excellent paperbacks and a more detailed hardcover by the prince of evangelical New Testament scholars. David John Williams' paperback commentary originally appeared in the Good News Commentary but is now part of the New International Bible Commentary series. I. Howard Marshall's *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* is one of the longest—and best—in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. The old classic work, however, is that of the late F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, in the New International Commentary on the New Testament.

Paul's Letters

Douglas Moo's masterful treatment of Romans, *The Epistle to the Romans*, first appeared in the discontinued Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary series but is now part of the New International Commentary on the New Testament. Thomas R. Schreiner's volume in the

Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament is an equally masterful work by a younger evangelical.

Without peer on 1 Corinthians is the work of Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in the New International Commentary on the New Testament. There is no outstanding evangelical commentary on 2 Corinthians that I know of; Douglas Stuart recommends Victor Paul Furnish's work in the Anchor Bible (Doubleday) as one that "can be used profitably by persons of any theological persuasion."

The four prison epistles have good commentaries available. My favorite on Galatians is Richard Longnecker's volume in the Word Biblical Commentary, though Ronald Y. K. Fung's *Epistle to the Galatians* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament is less demanding and might be considered.

On Ephesians, Marcus Barth's two volumes in the Anchor Bible (Doubleday) are widely regarded as the best, but evangelicals may prefer the excellent but demanding work of Andrew T. Lincoln (WBC).

Philippians is well treated by three excellent commentaries. Gordon D. Fee's superb one is probably the best for the evangelical church library (NICNT). However, Moises Silva's volume in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament and the older work of Gerald F. Hawthorne (WBC) would also be worthy additions.

With Colossians, for some reason, commentaries on other books are often included. F. F. Bruce's contribution to the New International Commentary on the New Testament also includes his comments on Philemon and Ephesians, and Peter T. O'Brien's work (WBC) includes Philemon.

On Paul's Thessalonian correspondence both I. Howard Marshall (Regent College) and F. F. Bruce (WBC) are equally good.

On the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), William D. Mounce's thick volume (WBC) is the one to buy.

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General Letters

On Hebrews, both F. F. Bruce (NICNT) and William L. Lane (2 vols., WBC) are excellent, though the latter would be my first choice.

You won't go wrong with Ralph P. Martin's commentary on James (WBC), Peter H. Davids' *First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT), Michael Green's *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC), and I. Howard Marshall's *Epistles of John* (NICNT) or Stephen S. Smalley's (WBC) on 1, 2, and 3 John.

Revelation

Finally, David E. Aune's enormous three-volume work on Revelation (WBC) should answer any questions anyone might have on this popular but difficult book.

When all your commentaries have arrived, display them in your library, invite all your Sunday school teachers to view your marvelous collection, and serve punch and cookies to make it a party.

Dr. Leslie R. Keylock was professor of Bible and theology at Moody Bible Institute for almost 13 years before he retired.