

This resource is intended to expose you to other commentary series or authors outside of the BSM coursework. Inclusion here should not be equated with endorsement of exegetical conclusions or theological positions.

Selections from Gupta's Commentary Guide

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Introduction

A Long History

Biblical commentaries are not a new phenomenon. In their more modern form, they have been around for well over 100 years, but throughout Christian history, theologians have dedicated themselves to spending time patiently working through a biblical book, considering various questions and conundrums arising from the text, and pondering its meaning for today. And no doubt the work of writing biblical commentaries will continue on into the future. Every generation has new perspectives to offer, sometimes new insights into the text, and fresh questions to bring from the challenges and opportunities of culture.

Why Read New Commentaries?

I myself have written a few commentaries and I sometimes get the question: *Why would we need new commentaries? If the Bible is ancient, and many commentaries have been written, hasn't it all been said?* Yes—and no. Yes, we have good theological and exegetical commentaries that have covered the whole Bible carefully. But many scholars, including myself, believe that there are always new things to discover and learn. And, yes, we can continue to improve on what has been done before. That doesn't dismiss or reject p 2 commentaries of a previous generation, but we are always making new findings in archeology, our understanding of ancient history, and newly discovered ancient parallel literature (like the Dead Sea Scrolls), and we are advancing in our understanding of the Greek language from the era of the earliest Christians.

If I am being honest, some new commentaries don't really offer much new material, which is precisely why a book like this one is handy. Pastors, students, and sometimes even scholars benefit from tips about which commentaries offer the most insight.

A Warning

Be Wary of Free Online Commentaries

I know that it is tempting to Google information and hope for free academic resources online. And sometimes your wishes come true. But often what is available for free is public domain because it is very, very old. Now, that doesn't automatically mean it is useless. But it is often the case that these older commentaries suffer from some problems that have been corrected in recent years. For example, an earlier generation drew a sharp distinction between "Judaism" (Jewish life and culture) and "Hellenism" (Greek life and culture), and biblical authors and their perspectives were believed to have fit into just one of these categories. But we know now that, just as is the case with modern people like you and me, we are influenced by many different kinds p 3 of cultural factors. So it is with the biblical authors and characters.

You might have access to online resources through a library subscription or institutional databases. In that case, you might be able to access really useful and accurate resources. How do you know? My general rule of thumb, and it is not foolproof but just a somewhat arbitrary dividing line, is to look at commentaries published in 1980 or more recently. Here are some other questions to ask:

- Is the commentary by a reputable author? Does she or he have a reputable academic qualification?
- Is the commentary produced by a reputable academic publisher?
- Is the commentary part of a series? Is the series edited by a professional?

- Is the commentary endorsed (look at the back cover) by respected academics?
- Does the series description offer a specific type of methodology for the commentary?

Be warned: people can say whatever they want in commentaries. You might be getting faulty information. So, knowing the author is trustworthy is very important. I get lots of emails from church people who ask me, “I heard this p 4 theory. Is it correct?” or, “My pastor gave this interpretation. Is it legitimate?” Often, the answer is no: someone came up with a clever idea, and it is just a guess or a possibility.

Pastors Write Good Commentaries, Right?

Anyone can write a good basic commentary, so I have no doubt pastors can do that well. But often pastors don't have the time to do heavy research in Greek, engage with other major academic commentaries, or carefully analyze ancient parallel or related literature. So, commentaries by pastors tend to be helpful from a theological, pastoral, or devotional point of view, but rarely do they break new exegetical or historical ground. If you are looking for a devotional commentary, there are many capable pastors who have invested in this work. If you want an academic commentary, there are very few pastors capable of this.

How to Use a Commentary

This question might seem superfluous. “You just pick it up and read it, right?” Yes, but why are you reading it, and how do you use the information? Before I address that, I want to make one important caveat. Many pastors and students of the Bible jump right into studying commentaries and neglect to give ample time to studying the Bible itself. Don't use commentaries as replacements for examining the Bible yourself. I find that sometimes my students underestimate what they can learn for themselves from patient, slow, and careful reading of Scripture. It's still more insightful to p 5 read the New Testament in Greek, but even if you sit down with the English New Testament you can glean much from reading, reading, and re-reading.

Okay, so how do you use a commentary? First, make sure you look at not just the exegetical and theological *opinions* of the commentary writer but especially their *evidence*. How do they support their claims? Secondly, use commentaries to broaden your horizons. You might naturally pick a series or author to read because you agree with their work. That's normal and fine. But it is important to read commentary writers who are outside of your preferred tradition. They will see things in a different way and open your eyes to different aspects of interpretation. This is true also when it comes to reading commentaries written by authors who live in Africa, Asia, or Latin America (see the section in this book on commentaries by women and people of color). The perspective of another person, especially outside of your culture, can illuminate your interpretation of Scripture.

Thirdly, if you are a Christian, I would warn you not just to use commentaries to acquire information and establish your views but also as opportunities to grow in your own faith. Put another way, include your commentary reading in your own formation. There are several commentary series that could help with that, but three good ones are The Story of God Bible Commentary, The NIV Application Commentary, and the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary.

p 6 Should I Buy a Whole Set?

Unless you are getting it dirt cheap, conventional wisdom says no. There are many good series available, but the individual volumes are hit and miss. Most academics (like myself) collect individual volumes based on the author, how ground-breaking the book itself is, or both. For a few series, I have the majority of the volumes. But mostly I have a hodge-podge collection.

What about Single-Author Series?

There are some series where a single author has written all of the volumes (e.g., James Moffatt). In more recent years we have seen this kind of series from N. T. Wright (The New Testament for Everyone, Westminster John Knox) and Grant Osborne (Osborne New Testament Commentaries, Lexham Press), for example. The upside to this kind of series is the ability to learn about material across the entire New Testament from a trusted scholar or teacher. Naturally, one person can hardly have depth of knowledge and expertise covering all areas of the

New Testament. Thus, these single-author series serve well as a supplement to, not a replacement of, more traditional commentaries.

One-Volume Commentaries (OVCs)

You may or may not be aware that there are many good reference volumes that are one-volume commentaries. These would be multi-contributor, but the whole Bible is discussed in commentary form in one book. They tend to be large for obvious reasons, but the individual commentaries within are necessarily brief (for example, Philemon might [p 7](#) get ten pages). I own about five of these, and they are handy quick references, especially for consulting biblical books with which I am not as familiar. Pastors and other teachers of the Bible should have at least a few of these on hand.

Technical

There are a couple of excellent OVCs that provide more detail and academic-style notes. I would recommend *The Oxford Bible Commentary* and the *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*.

Semi-Technical

In this category I would suggest *The New Interpreter's One Volume Commentary* and *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

Non-Technical

I have not found non-technical OVCs; instead the key resource that fits this category would be study Bibles (see below).

Perspective OVCs

There are several good thematic or perspective-based OVCs. Check out *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, the *Africa Bible Commentary*, and the *South Asia Bible Commentary*. There is another excellent resource called *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*.¹

Commentaries by Women and People of Color

The reality of biblical commentaries is that the vast majority of them are written by white male scholars. There is nothing wrong with white male scholars—some of the best commentaries have been written by them! But it is becoming more widely recognized that women and people of color have had major disadvantages in terms of finding prominence and positions in academia that would put them in positions to be invited to write commentaries. And it is also acknowledged that women and people of color have much to contribute to biblical interpretation and study. Today, academic institutions, societies, and academic publishers are increasingly recognizing and addressing the need for more diverse voices in biblical interpretation. In fact, college and seminary students often reach out to me asking [p 106](#) for reading recommendations from black scholars, women scholars, “Majority World” scholars, and so on. Therefore, I saw the need to compile a basic list of commentaries written by women and people of color. I am aware that the list below is not comprehensive. I am not familiar with every commentary and series in print. Also, I am not always sure of the heritage, ethnicity, and sociocultural identity of the author. Please forgive any sins of commission or omission here! Looking at this list, it is a bit discouraging for me—it seems very short. But the good news is that I know of several commentaries currently being written or in production by women and people of color, so the future looks very bright on this matter.

¹ Nijay K. Gupta, *The New Testament Commentary Guide: A Brief Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1–7.

Matthew

Jeannine K. Brown (**Teach the Text, THNTC**)
Anna Case-Winters (**Belief**)
Barbara Reid (**New Collegeville Bible Commentary**)

Mark

Mary Healy (**Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture**)
Marie Noonan Sabin (**New Collegeville Bible Commentary**)
Sharyn Dowd (**RNT**)
Adela Yarbro Collins (**Hermeneia**)
Morna Hooker (**BNTC**)
PHEME PERKINS (**NIB**)
Kim Huat Tan (**NCCS**)

Luke

Diane Chen (**NCCS**)
p 107 Justo González (**Belief**)
Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III (**NCBC**)
Judith Lieu (**Epworth**)
Sharon Ringe (**Westminster Bible Companion**)

John

Jo-Ann Brant (**Paideia**)
Susan Hulen (**Westminster Bible Companion**)
Jey Kanagaraj (**NCCS**)
Gail R. O'Day (**NIB**)

Acts

Ajith Fernando (**NIVAC**)
Beverly Gaventa (**ANTC**)
Heidi Hornik and Mikeal Parsons (**Blackwell through the Centuries**)

Romans

Sarah Heaner Lancaster (**Belief**)
Solomon Andria (**Africa Bible Commentary**)

1 Corinthians

PHEME PERKINS (**Paideia**)
Maria Pascuzzi (**New Collegeville Bible Commentary**)

2 Corinthians

Linda Belleville (**IVPNTC**)
Mitzi Minor (**SHBC**)
Maria Pascuzzi (**New Collegeville Bible Commentary**)
Aída Besançon Spencer (**Daily Bible Commentary**)
Margaret Thrall (**ICC**)

p 108 **Galatians**

Ronald Y. K. Fung (**NICNT**, 1988)
L. Ann Jervis (**NIBC**)
Samuel Ngewa (**Africa Bible Commentary**)

Ephesians

Lynn Cohick (**NCCS, NICNT**)
Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (**Wisdom**)
Margaret MacDonald (**SP**)
PHEME PERKINS (**ANTC**)
Thomas B. Slater (**SHBC**)
Bonnie Thurston (**RNT**)

Philippians

Lynn Cohick (**SGBC**)
Morna Hooker (**NIB**)
Carolyn Osiek (**ANTC**)
Elsa Tamez (**Wisdom**)
Bonnie Thurston (**SP**)

Colossians

Cynthia Kittredge and Claire Colombo (**Wisdom**)
Margaret MacDonald (**SP**)
Marianne Meye Thompson (**THNTC**)
Bonnie Thurston (**RNT**)

1-2 Thessalonians

Linda McKinnish Bridges (**SHBC**)
Beverly Gaventa (**Interpretation**)
Florence Gillman (**Wisdom**)
Abraham Smith (**NIB**)
Bonnie Thurston (**RNT**)

p 109 1-2 Timothy, Titus

Jouette Bassler (**ANTC**)
Linda Belleville (**Cornerstone**)
Margaret Davies (**Epworth**)
Annette Bourland Huizenga (**Wisdom**)
Samuel Ngewa (**Africa Bible Commentary**)
Aída Besançon Spencer (**NCCS**)

Philemon

Alicia J. Batten (**Wisdom**)
Cain Hope Felder (**NIB**)
Carolyn Osiek (**ANTC**)
Bonnie Thurston (**SP**)

Hebrews

Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg (**Wisdom**)
Dana Harris (**EGGNT**)

Mary Healy (**CCSS**)

James

Mariam Kamell (Kovalishyn) and Craig Blomberg (**ZECNT**)

Sophie Laws (**BNTC**)

PHEME PERKINS (**Interpretation**) C. Jeanne Serrão (**New Beacon**)

1-2 Peter, Jude

Dennis Edwards (**SGBC**) (1 Peter)

Karen Jobes (**BECNT**) (1 Peter)

Andrew Mbuvi (**NCCS**) (2 Peter and Jude)

Ruth Anne Reese (**THNTC**) (2 Peter and Jude)

Rebecca Skaggs (**Pentecostal Commentary**)

p 110 1-3 John

Karen Jobes (**ZECNT**)

Judith Lieu (**NTL**)

Marianne Meye Thompson (**IVPNTC**)

Revelation

Priscilla Benham (**Pentecostal Commentary**)

Brian Blount (**NTL**)

Catherine Cory (**New Collegeville Bible Commentary**)

p 111 Appendix 1

A Quick List of Recommended Commentaries

Matthew

Keener, France (NICNT), McKnight (SGBC)

Mark

France (NIGTC), Hooker (BNTC), Garland (NIVAC)

Luke

Green (NICNT), Garland (ZECNT), Johnson (SP)

John

Brown (AB), Keener, Thompson (NTL), O'Day (NIB)

Acts

Keener, Johnson (SP), Gaventa (ANTC), Pinter (SGBC)

Romans

Jewett (Hermeneia), Dunn (WBC), Moo (NICNT), Wright (NIB), Bird (SGBC)

1 Corinthians

Fee (NICNT), Garland (BECNT), Hays (Interpretation)

2 Corinthians

Harris (NIGTC), Garland (NAB), Hafemann (NIVAC)

p 112 Galatians

Keener, Hays (NIB), Oakes (Paideia)

Ephesians

Lincoln (WBC), Bruce (NICNT), Cohick (NCCS), Roberts (SGBC)

Philippians

Fee (NICNT), Hellerman (EGGNT), Bockmuehl (BNTC), Hooker (NIB), Cohick (SGBC)

Colossians

Dunn (NIGTC), McKnight (NICNT), Thompson (THNTC), Garland (NIVAC)

1-2 Thessalonians

Weima (BECNT), Johnson (THNTC), Gaventa (Interpretation), Byron (SGBC)

1-2 Timothy, Titus

Johnson (SP), Dunn (NIB), Fee (NIBC)

Philemon

McKnight (NICNT), Longenecker (Paideia)

Hebrews	Attridge (Hermeneia), Koester (AB), Johnson (NTL), Guthrie (NIVAC), deSilva (Perseverance in Gratitude)
James	Allison (ICC), Kamell/Blomberg (ZECNT), McKnight (NICNT), Moo (TNTC)
1 Peter	Achtemeier (Hermeneia), Elliott (AB), Green (THNTC), Jobes (BECNT), Edwards (SGBC)
p 113 2 Peter	Bauckham (WBC), Frey, Green (BECNT), Moo (NIVAC)
Johannine Epistles	Brown (AB), Jobes (ZECNT), Lieu (NTL), Smith (Interpretation), Burge (NIVAC)
Jude	Frey, Bauckham (WBC), Green (BECNT), Moo (NIVAC)
Revelation	Beale (NIGTC), Koester (AB), Boxall (BNTC), Blount (NTL), Paul (TNTC) ²

² Nijay K. Gupta, *The New Testament Commentary Guide: A Brief Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 105–113.