COMMENTARIES AND IMPORTANT MONOGRAPHS
ON BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Recommended by the Department of Biblical Studies, Princeton Theological Seminary
Revised 2010


Leviticus. This sometime overlooked book has been blessed by several recent and excellent commentaries. One fine theological commentary is Samuel Balentine, Leviticus, Interpretation (Westminster John Knox, 2003). Jacob Milgrom is a Jewish scholar who has spent a lifetime studying Leviticus. He published a three-volume commentary on Leviticus in the Anchor Bible series, but he has also released a more compact but still thorough one-volume commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics (Augsburg Fortress, 2004). One could also note two other possibilities from a more evangelical perspective: Gordon Wenham, Leviticus

**Numbers.** One scholar some decades ago called the book of Numbers the “junk room of the Bible” since he could not make sense of what seemed to be the disorganized jumble of genres and texts in Numbers. Fortunately, several recent commentaries have sought to revise that view with attention to the careful structure and theological fruit of this sometimes neglected book. Options include Dennis Olson, Numbers, Interpretation (Westminster John Knox, 1996); Timothy Ashley, Numbers (New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1996); Katharine Sakenfeld, Journeying with God, A Commentary on the Book of Numbers (Eerdmans, 1995), and Jacob Milgrom, JPS Torah Commentary on Numbers (Jewish Publication Society, 1990) among many others.


**1-2 Samuel Commentaries:** For the theological interpretation of 1-2 Samuel, start with Walter Brueggemann’s First and Second Samuel ( Interpretation, 1990) or Eugene H. Peterson’s First and Second Samuel (Westminster Bible Companion, 1999). Antony F. Campbell has published a much more recent set of commentaries (1 Samuel, 2003; 2 Samuel, 2005) in the FOTL series. Campbell is sensitive to issues of the book’s development without losing sight of the fact that this text is a part of the Jewish-Christian canon. Normally, the Old Testament Library is a good theological series. However, for Samuel, the OTL volume by Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg (I & II Samuel) may overwhelm the pastor with too much historical and compositional data, although students with a more historically-oriented interest will find it helpful for tracing the lines of argumentation back through early twentieth-century European thought. Kyle McCarter’s very technical two book series is an invaluable resource for advanced students.
looking for text-critical data (I Samuel, 1980; II Samuel, 1984; Anchor Bible), and Ralph Klein’s I Samuel (Word Bible Commentary, 1983) is a good semi-technical volume in the same vein as Campbell’s.


Isaiah. For most of the twentieth century, scholars have tended to treat the book of Isaiah in three parts—First Isaiah (chapters 1-39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55), and Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66). More recently, however, some commentators have deemed it important to read the book as a whole, regardless of the different origins of the parts. In this mold are the works of John Goldingay in the New International Biblical Commentary series (Hendrickson, 2001) and Brevard Childs in the Old Testament Library series (Westminster/John Knox, 2001). Also recent are the commentaries that focus on the history of the Bible and its reception. In this category are the Church’s Bible, with Isaiah edited by Robert L. Wilkens with Angela R. Christman and Michael J. Hollreichen (Eerdmans, 2007) and John Sawyer’s The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity (Cambridge University Press, 1996).


magisterial commentary that attends to the minute details of Ezekiel’s text, which one expects from Hermeneia commentaries. Outdated in some ways (e.g., intense focus on redactional arguments), it is still an important resource.


**“Minor Prophets”**. For these shorter prophetic books, three commentaries covering these books as a group are particularly recommended for their theological emphasis. These are *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (NIB) vol. VII (Abingdon, 1996), various authors listed below under individual books; William P. Brown, *Obadiah through Malachi*, Westminster Bible Companion, (Westminster John Knox, 1996); and Elizabeth Achtemeier *Nahum – Malachi*, Interpretation (John Knox 1986). Brown highlights general theological and ethical themes, while Achtemeier makes more explicit reference to Christian doctrines and NT passages.


**Nahum.** The NIB author (see above) is Francisco O. García-Treto; see also Brown and Achtemeier, above. Julia Myers O’Brien, *Nahum* (Sheffield Academic/ Continuum, 2002) offers


**Haggai.** The NIB author (see above) is W. Eugene March; see also Brown and Achtemeier, above. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. gives a theologically focused reading for the church in his *Rebuilding with Hope: Haggai and Zechariah*, International Theological Commentary (Eerdmans, 1998). Since most scholars associate Zechariah chs 1-8 with the era of Haggai, some commentary series combine these into a single volume. Representative is David Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, Old Testament Library (Westminster John Knox 1984), who provides detailed attention to the historical setting of these materials, along with literary analysis. A lengthier and more technical treatment is available from Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 1987).

**Zechariah.** The NIB author (see above) is Ben. C. Ollenburger; see also Brown and Achtemeier, above. Also theologically focused is Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *Rebuilding with Hope: Haggai and Zechariah*, International Theological Commentary (Eerdmans, 1998). The book of Zechariah is in two quite distinct parts, chs. 1-8 and 9-14. As noted above under Haggai, major commentary series combine the first half of Zechariah with the book of Haggai (see listings above). The second half of Zechariah, chs 9-14, is sometimes correspondingly combined with Malachi in one volume (see listing below).

**Malachi.** The NIB author (see above) is Eileen M. Schuller, O.S.U.; see also Brown and Achtemeier, above. For a more detailed work, showing connections with Zechariah 9-14, see David Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, Old Testament Library (Westminster John Knox, 1995).

**Psalms:** There are numerous commentaries on the Psalms. The most helpful for preachers are probably James Mays’s volume in the Interpretation series (John Knox, 1994) and J. Clinton McCann’s contribution in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 4 (Abingdon, 1996). There are not many great commentaries that deal with the details of the Psalms. Erich
Zenger’s commentary in the Hermeneia series is the best of these, though only the volume on Psalms 51-100 has appeared in English (Fortress, 2005). Also helpful is Hans-Joachim Kraus’s commentary published originally in German but translated into English and published by Fortress press in 1988-89. Not to be missed, though, not strictly a commentary is Patrick D. Miller’s *Interpreting the Psalms* (Fortress, 1986).

**Job.** In recent years, a number of commentaries have been published that help the reader appreciate the literary excellence and theological contributions of the book. Arguably the best among these is Carol Newsom’s work in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume IV (Abingdon, 1996). For a consistently sensitive theological reading of the book, Samuel E. Balentine’s volume in the Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series is without peer (Smyth and Helwys, 2006). Especially interesting in this work are the numerous forays into the reception history of the book in literature, music, and the visual arts. Other noteworthy commentaries include David J. A. Clines’s three-volume contribution in the Word Biblical Commentary series (Word, 1989-2009) and Norman Habel’s volume in the Old Testament Library series (Westminster, 1985).

**Proverbs.** For detailed exegesis, there are now two important works: Michael V. Fox’s two volumes in the Anchor Bible series (volume 1 by Doubleday, 2000; volume 2 by Yale University Press, 2009) and Bruce K. Waltke’s two volumes in the New International Commentary series (Eerdmans, 2004). The best theological treatments of the book are Raymond van Leeuwen’s contribution in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume V (Abingdon, 1997) and Christine Roy Yoder’s commentary in the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries series (Abingdon, 2009).


Another three-volume resource for commentaries on the lectionary preaching texts (Old Testament, Gospels and Epistles) from the Revised Common Lectionary is *The Lectionary Commentary, Theological Exegesis for Sunday’s Texts* (Eerdmans, 2001).

**Song of Songs.** The Song is also now well served by good English language resources. M. Pope’s behemoth of a commentary in the Anchor Bible series (*Song of Songs* [AB 7C; New York: Doubleday, 1977]) remains a classic, idiosyncratic to be sure, but chalked full of all kinds of delightful tidbits and still very much worth consulting. Two of the most well rounded commentaries on the Song—both solid philologically and literarily inclined—are M. Fox’s *The Song of Songs and the and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985) and J. C. Exum’s *Song of Songs* (OTL; Louisville: WJK, 2005). R. Murphy’s slim volume in the Hermeneia series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) is also solid. For those with German, Y. Zakovitch’s *Das Hohelied* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004) is highly recommend, especially for his wonderful literary sensibility. O. Keel’s *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

**Ecclesiastes.** There used to be a dearth of good theological commentaries on Ecclesiastes, but the situation has changed. The most detailed treatments of the book that also pay attention to the theological issues are C. L. Seow’s commentary in the Anchor Bible series (Yale University Press, 1997) and Craig Bartholomew’s work published by Baker Academic Press in 2009. For pastors and lay people, William P. Brown’s volume in the Interpretation series may be especially helpful.


**Esther.** The story of this biblical heroine has captured the imagination of Jews (and Christians) over the centuries, and there are a number of commentaries that attend well to the book’s literary dimension. Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (University of S. Carolina Press, 1991) is a rich study that focuses on Esther as a literary work and considers also the theological significance of a book that never mentions God. Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, OTL (Westminster John Knox, 1997) incorporates rabbinic material in addition to standard historical-critical words. Sidnie White Crawford, “The Book of Esther,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 3 (Abingdon, 1999) offers helpful reflections for the preacher, including the story’s ethical implications for today.
