

A Pastor's Perspective — On Commentaries

“How Do I Choose a Commentary?” by R. Larry Overstreet

English speaking Christians are blessed with multitudes of good commentaries. A church member can choose from one volume commentaries on the whole Bible, like *The Moody Bible Commentary*, or a two volume set on the Bible, like *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Pastors, however, generally seek more depth and precision from their commentaries. Even here a plethora of commentaries are available. How a pastor chooses depends on what is desired from the commentary.

For an overview of what the distinctions are between commentaries, a pastor can consult several sources. Herb Bateman has a four minute video where he identifies the difference between devotional commentaries, expositional commentaries, and critical exegetical commentaries <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSyLMVFHIXo>. There are also books on the subject: D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 13th ed. (2013); Tremper Longman III, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 5th ed. (2013); and John Glynn, *Commentary and Reference Survey*, 10th ed. (2007).

Commentaries have distinct theological perspectives. Some tend toward a more “liberal” viewpoint while others take a “conservative” position. They can vary in content from Arminian to Calvinistic, from Covenant Theology to Dispensationalism. Many pastors tend to focus only on commentaries that agree with their own theological tendency. However, some scholars are worth reading, even if you don't hold to their same interpretive stance. For example, Darrell Bock wrote excellent commentaries on Luke and Acts, and even though a pastor may not share his progressive dispensationalist view, they are worthy of consideration.

Commentaries can be of an exegetical nature and aimed at readers who are biblical scholars, or they can be of a devotional character. Pastors are often interested in those which are expositional, stressing the significance of texts, or those which are homiletical, emphasizing how to communicate a text.

Commentary sets usually have some volumes which are of good quality and others which are not as helpful. Focusing your purchase on particular books and seeking the best commentaries on those books is frequently a better choice. Instead of buying many commentaries on a Bible book, buy a few which are among the best.

Various seminary websites provide recommendations concerning commentaries. One that I frequently use is www.denverseminary.edu. Click on the website's “Resources” link. You will find detailed lists of both an annotated Old Testament bibliography and an annotated New Testament bibliography in the online *Denver Journal*, vol. 19 (2016). The New Testament section divides its commentary listings into three categories: critical commentaries using the Greek text, mid-level commentaries using the English text (Greek references in footnotes), and commentaries which focus on application. A helpful feature is that at least one book in each section is marked with an asterisk which identifies it as a priority. Although the Old Testament section does not divide its listing into categories, it does mark volumes for priority use with an asterisk, and also identifies those which are evangelical.

Good commentaries are some of the tools we use in ministering God's Word. We must never forget, however, that it is the Word that we preach and teach. God's authority only rests in His Word, but good commentaries help us understand that Word better.

© September 15, 2016
Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies

For any copying and distribution of this material please contact hwbatemaniv@gmail.com