

Book Reviews

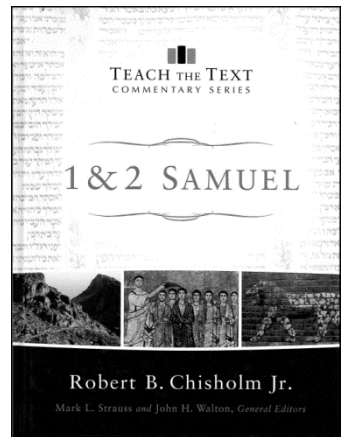
The *Journal* uses the standard abbreviation ‘hc’ to denote hard cover. The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) has been included with all books when available. We begin this section with “**Book Reviews**”, organized according to the four divisions of theology.

Biblical Theology

1 & 2 Samuel. Robert B. Chisholm Jr. *Teach the Text Commentary Series*, gen. eds. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013, 352 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-8010-9225-1

The Teach the Text commentary series is a welcome addition to the range of commentaries that seek to bridge the gap between hardcore scholarship and devotional commentary. Publication of this new series began with four volumes in 2013 and now in 2016 stands at eight Old Testament volumes and six New Testament volumes out of a planned twenty-two and fifteen respectively.

The practical aim of the series is to simplify the task of “pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis” (p. ix). Negatively, the aim of the commentaries is to avoid detailed discussions of technical issues not clearly connected to the main purpose of the text, while at the same time avoiding the “lack of hermeneutical sophistication” (p. ix) often found in devotional commentaries. For the sake of conciseness the commentary for each preaching unit is strictly limited to six pages (p. ix). More importantly, for sound exposition and effective communication, “the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical author’s ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching” (p. xi).



For each unit the “Big Idea” and “Key Themes” are clearly highlighted. The commentary is divided into an “Understanding the Text” section, a “Teaching the Text” section, and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The “Understanding the Text” section is further divided under the headings “The Text in Context,” “Historical and Cultural Background,” “Interpretive Insights,” and “Theological Insights”. In the “Illustrating the Text” sections, the authors provide at least two and sometimes four illustrations for a passage, so usually something will be found helpful. Illustrations come from a wide range of types and sources such as biography and autobiography, poetry, history, classical and modern literature, film and television, the Bible, observations about human experience and culture, personal stories, and Greek mythology.

The endnotes and index are sufficiently detailed to be helpful and the separation of “Recommended Resources” in the bibliography is useful. The commentaries include many colour photos and illustrations of ancient artefacts and biblical sites, which primarily add visual appeal and interest rather than insight.

Chisholm is a well-respected Old Testament scholar. His introduction to 1 and 2 Samuel is brief, but it provides a very helpful overview of how 1-2 Samuel functions as the theological and literary centre of the Former Prophets. After briefly demonstrating that there are many patterns from Judges that the narrator uses to characterize Samuel, Saul, and David (p. 2-3), he provides clear focus for our understanding of 1-2 Samuel when he states, “the narrator’s overriding concern is to demonstrate that David (not Saul) is the Lord’s chosen king and the heir to a covenant promise that guarantees the realization of God’s purposes for his people Israel” (p. 5). Unnecessarily, he expends two full pages of the introduction clarifying his purpose and approach (p. 5-7).

Chisholm consistently and carefully unfolds the place of each passage in relation to the history of Israel recorded in the Former Prophets and in relation to themes developed from the Pentateuch. Thus, he provides many helpful insights from antecedent Scripture and then frequently develops these insights to show how the events and the actions and words of characters in 1-2 Samuel anticipate later events and people in redemptive history. This reveals that Chisholm’s key to interpreting each passage is primarily the broad canonical and theological context of 1-2 Samuel.

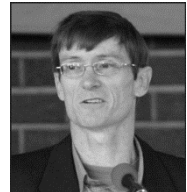
The author both clearly states and avoids the danger of using Old Testament narratives simply to teach moral lessons or principles that are not central to the purpose of the passage. Thus, for example, 1 Samuel 2:12-36 may be used to illustrate poor parenting, but if teaching from this passage the focus should be on its central theme of respect for the Lord (p. 19). The author also points out that how the Lord does something with someone on one occasion does not make it normative for future believers and situations. Thus, for example, observing what the Lord did with Saul (1 Sam 10:1-6) should not lead present-day believers to expect signs to prove God’s will (p. 61).

Chisholm repeatedly reminds the reader that the positive portrait of Samuel is inseparably linked to and essential to the presentation of David as the Lord's chosen leader to replace Saul and to fulfil His covenant purposes (e.g., p. 44, 47). He also frequently highlights the tragedy in the plot concerning Saul. For example, he notes that Jonathan is revealed to be Saul's son only after Saul has forfeited his dynasty (1 Sam 13:16), which means Jonathan's demonstration of such courage, faith, and promise (1 Sam 14:1-15) is all in vain as far as the future of Saul's dynasty is concerned (p. 87).

Chisholm assumes that the first readers of 1-2 Samuel and the Former Prophets as a whole, were the exilic community (see p. 6). Therefore, usually at the end of the Theological Insights section, he interprets the message of the passage for the exilic community (e.g., p. 78), and then, in the "Teaching the Text" section, he effectively translates the meaning of the passage from its original settings to the situations of today's readers.

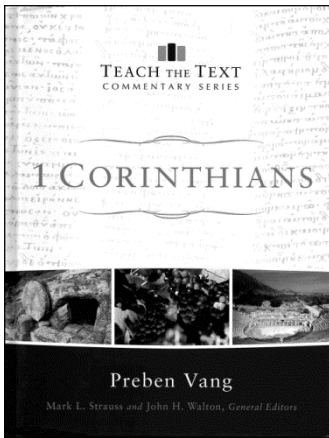
Overall, although I was initially skeptical about a commentary series that could potentially cater for lazy pastors, Bible teachers, and students, I was happy to find that these commentaries still leave readers with plenty of their own work to do. For this reason, I would definitely recommend the Teach the Text commentary series as one of the first resources that preachers and teachers should use to check that they are on the right track with their interpretation and to find those extra insights, pointed applications, and helpful illustrations. In particular, I am impressed by Chisholm's commentary on 1-2 Samuel and would especially recommend it for its attention to the function and message of 1-2 Samuel within its broad canonical and theological context.

Reviewed by Dr. Greg Phillips, a Zimbabwean who is the dean/registrars and a lecturer/facilitator at Dumisani Theological Institute, King William's Town, Eastern Cape, SA.



1 Corinthians. Preben Vang. Teach the Text Commentary Series, gen. eds. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014, 272 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-8010-9234-3

For general observations on the purpose and format of this commentary series, see the review on 1 & 2 Samuel. The author, Dr Preben Vang, was not known to me before, and has not written any other biblical commentaries, but he has coauthored the book *Telling God's Story: The Biblical Narrative from Beginning to End* (B&H, 1st ed., 2006; 2nd ed., 2013). At the time of publication, Dr Vang had served for seventeen years on the faculty of Palm Beach Atlantic University.



In the introduction to 1 Corinthians, Vang primarily emphasizes the importance of understanding background issues such as culture, literary forms, “historical and social contexts, and religious and theological vocabulary” because “they help us avoid reading our own culture and understanding into the text” (p. 2). In this regard, Vang provides very helpful insights on the status and culture of Corinth as a new Roman city (p. 2). In particular, he highlights that “patron-client relationships ... were a significant undercurrent in Paul’s relationships with his audience and churches” (p. 4). In fact, this background of the patron-dependent

culture, including the idea that God is the Patron of the church, His people (p. 166), remains very much in focus throughout and is definitely one strength of this commentary. Vang’s discussion of the pagan background of the issue of veiling in 1 Corinthians 11:12-16 is also illuminating (p. 146-148).

The commentary is divided into thirty-six preaching units for the sixteen chapters of 1 Corinthians. For each passage, besides addressing the relevant cultural context, Vang’s interpretation predominantly focuses upon the specific arguments and words (grammar) within each passage rather than on the broader canonical, literary or historical context. He frequently explains individual word forms in order to bring out more clearly the meanings, contrasts and wordplays intended by Paul (e.g., p. 35-36, 52-53, etc.).

In addition to the commentary units, Vang furnishes the reader with five two-page Additional Insights chapters which are well-focused on important issues: Corinthian law; Meat sacrificed to idols; Roman homes and households; Paul’s body metaphor; and, Women, worship, and prophecy. Furthermore, Vang adds significant value to this commentary by including several “sidebar” notes within the commentary units that bring refreshing insight and perspective on subjects of interpretation and application. For example, in the sidebar for 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 on “Holiness and Sanctification” he argues against the common understanding that “holy” primarily means separate. Instead, he argues, “holy” primarily means belonging to God and only in a secondary manner means “separate” because what belongs to God is exclusive to God (p. 13). Other sidebars address such diverse topics as “The Corinthian Cliques” (p. 24), “The Body and the Soul” (p. 87), “Guidance for Exercising Gifts” (p. 181), “Baruch and the Resurrection Body” (p. 213), and “Steadfastness” (p. 221).

As a Reformed evangelical, I was generally comfortable with Vang’s interpretation of the text, but occasionally I thought the issues deserved more clarification. For example, concerning prophecy mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10b he states,

Nothing in the text itself, however, suggests that Paul equates prophecy with something comparable to a modern-day prepared sermon, although it may certainly include elements of such. Rather, the hints he gives allude to a spontaneous empowerment from the Spirit that allows the gift's recipients to speak words that reveal God's presence and guidance in a specific situation (14:3, 24-25, 30-31, 37) (p. 168).

In this case I think it would have been helpful if Vang had briefly clarified his view and summarized one or two alternative views, especially since his comments on 1 Corinthians 14 do not add much more interpretive precision.

I found the "Teaching the Text" applications by Vang to be very incisive in bringing home the message of each passage for today's audiences. Concerning 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, he says, "We must be constantly aware of the disparity between secular wisdom and Christian wisdom. For example, the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* does not become a good Christian discipleship manual just because we add a scriptural proverb to each of the habits" (p. 32).

Another strong challenge to culture-compliant Christianity is found in Vang's comments on 1 Corinthians 4:6-13. He says, "It is easier to apply the culture's success norms to ministry than to risk a 'lack of success' for the sake of one's witness to Christ" (p. 56).

Overall, although this commentary lacks depth in some areas of interpretation, it will provide pastors and Bible teachers and students with many helpful insights on applying 1 Corinthians to the cultural contexts of the Church today.

Reviewed by Greg Phillips

***A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 3 (90-150).* Allen P. Ross. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013, hc, 1018 pp. ISBN 978-0-8254-2666-7**

A. P. Ross is currently professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School. He taught at Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry and Dallas Theological Seminary. Some of his works include *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew*, along with *A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 1 and 2*, both covering Psalms 1-89. The first two volumes I had the pleasure of reviewing for this journal in 2013 and

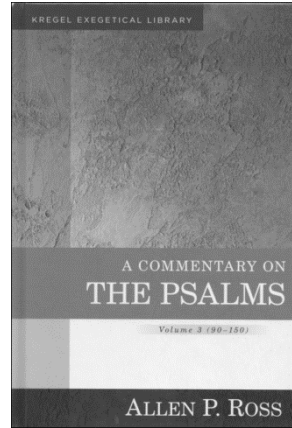
2015. For a more extensive review I refer you to my comments in those issues of the journal.¹

There is no change in the layout of this commentary from the previous volumes. In all three he lays out his chapter studies in the following format:

- In the “Text and Textural Variants” section, he renders a fresh translation of the text and explores a variety of other translations and textural variants that have been a part of the history of the Psalm’s interpretation.
- In “Composition and Context” he explores the authorship based on the headings, internal evidence, or use of the psalm elsewhere to pinpoint the where the psalm falls in the history of redemption.
- The “Exegetical Analysis” structures the psalm with headings and sub-headings to allow one to deliver the psalm in preaching.
- The section on “Commentary in Expository Form” focuses our thoughts on words or phrases which bring the main thrust of the psalm to the fore.
- Lastly, “Message and Application”, as the title suggests, helps us apply any Christological areas or more generally areas of the life of the believer that the psalm highlights.

The titles he gives for each psalm are also worthy of attention. As noted in earlier reviews of these volumes, Ross gives helpful one-sentence summaries, but the titles themselves also provide the same to focus our attention. They are also helpful if we are looking for a psalm on a particular subject. Each one succinctly summarizes the main message of the psalm and provides the exegete with a bird’s-eye-view of the psalm. For example, Psalm 90 “Learning to Live Wisely”, Psalm 100 “Jubilant Praise to The Lord Our Maker”, Psalm 103 “God’s Gracious Benefits for Frail and Sinful Believers” or Psalm 119 “The Word of the Lord and the Life of Faith”.

One area that has troubled many in their reading of the Psalms is what we call the “Imprecatory Psalms” – those which call for the Lord to punish the wicked. How does Ross view these imprecations? Commenting on Psalm 109 he says, “His (the psalmist’s) prayer is written as one who knows what it means to be hounded to death, suffer malicious slander and be repaid with evil for all the good he has done. But it ceases to be personal vengeance as he turns his wishes over to the Lord in a prayer, thereby leaving it to the Lord to deal in justice with his adversary” (p. 326).



¹ Kent Compton, review of *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, by Allen P. Ross, *Haddington House Journal* 15 (2013): 44-47. And, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, by Allen P. Ross, *Haddington House Journal* 17 (2015): 48-49.

Commenting on Psalm 140 verses 9-11, he writes, “It is a prayer in harmony with talionic justice – may they reap what they sow. But it is not an expression for personal revenge, but an expression of God’s just rule” (p. 846). He further states, “The psalmist is only praying for what he knows God does, and will do, in restoring justice to the land” (p. 847) Ross concludes,

As we have seen with other imprecatory psalms, Christians are cautious about praying down such wrath on their enemies. They have been taught to forgive and to pray for their enemies. And yet when the persecution becomes unbearable, as it is in parts of the world today, praying for God to do now what we know he is going to do eventually seems appropriate. In fact, an imprecatory prayer might sound a warning for those who oppose the faith. (p. 849)

Where do these commentaries fall on a technical level? According to Ross,

“The selections made for the bibliography ... were made with the same idea in mind – what resources will be helpful and practical for bible expositors to use in their study of the Psalms. There were many that were popularly written, and many that were technical; my selections for the most part lie between these two descriptions....” (p. 11-12)

In fact, the bibliography is an impressive forty-one pages itself!

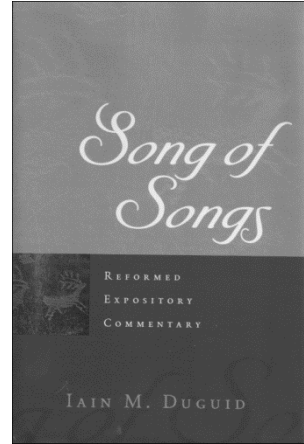
The completion of this set provides the church with a wonderful corpus of a pastorally practical and academically rigorous unpacking of the Psalms. This makes the price, I believe, worth it. The Psalms were seminal in shaping the life and thought of the Lord Jesus, shaping the early church understanding of the life of the church, and even today give us a map for Christian life and worship. To have solid resources in such important areas are essential, making these volumes a worthy acquisition that will repay itself many times over!

Reviewed by Kent I. Compton who is the minister of the Western Charge of the Free Church of Scotland on PEI and a trustee of Haddington House.



***Song of Songs*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Iain M. Duguid. Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R, 2016, 168 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-59638-948-9**

Iain Duguid's most recent commentary on the Song of Songs comes on the heels of an earlier commentary he published on the same book of the Bible in 2015 with the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series. In his preface to the Tyndale commentary, Duguid explains the relationship that exists between these two books. He says that the *research* that went into studying the Song of Songs formed the content of the Tyndale commentary, whereas the *sermons* that came from his research form the content of this present volume (p. 9).¹



In keeping with the view set forth in the Tyndale commentary, the book is approached from the perspective of wisdom literature that relates both to human love in all its brokenness and imperfections and, by implication, to divine love in all its glory and perfection. He writes, “The Song is designed to show each of us how far short of perfection we fall, both as humans and as lovers, and to drive us into the arms of our true heavenly Husband, Jesus Christ, whose love for his bride is truly perfect” (p. xx).

The book is arranged into twelve chapters. Instead of providing a verse-by-verse commentary as he did in his earlier book, each chapter develops a central theme addressed in the unfolding drama of these two lovers. Some of the areas considered include: the longing for intimacy and affirmation, the craziness of love, the notion of belonging to one another, the costliness of love and the strength of love. In each chapter, he briefly explains the scene and how this longing of the heart shows itself in our lives today before ultimately pointing to the love of God in Christ and the comfort of resting in His love.

As one might expect, the book provides plenty of practical application for those who are married and those pursuing marriage. But, the reader will appreciate the author's conscious effort to relate to a wider audience in addressing these themes. He speaks about pornography, adultery, divorce, those who are widowed, and those who struggle with same sex attraction. In so doing, he shows that the message of the book is relevant for everyone.

As a commentary, this could provide a helpful model for pastors looking to preach Christ from the Song of Songs. But this book deserves to be read

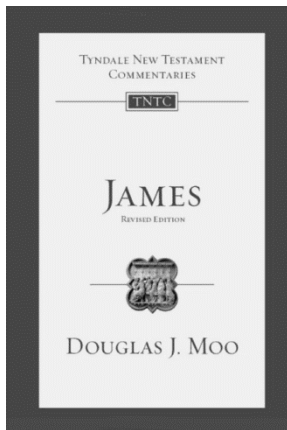
¹ Iain Duguid, *The Song of Songs: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 19 (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 2015), 9.

by a much wider audience. I find myself agreeing with Dale Ralph Davis, who writes, “If someone asks me how to best to prepare for marriage, I will be tempted to say, ‘Study the Songs of Songs and read Duguid’s commentary.’” This book will take the reader by the hand and help them to appreciate marriage and human love without idolizing it. As the apostle Paul points out, marriage pictures the love of Christ for His church (Eph. 5:25ff). The fruit of such a study for the believer would be a fresh reminder that “Jesus’ relationship with you is not merely legal; it is also deeply affectionate... God reveals his heart of love for you on the pages of Scripture and desires that you come to know and love him in the same way that he already knows and loves you” (pp. 92-93).

Peter Aiken serves as Pastor of Birchwood Church in Charlottetown, PEI. He is married to Michelle and they have four children.



***James: An Introduction and Commentary, Revised Edition.* Douglas J. Moo. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, series ed. Eckhard J. Schnable. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015, 238 pp., softcover. ISBN 978-0-8308-4287-2**



This second edition, published in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series (vol. 16), is a revision of the first 1985 printing, occasioned in particular by the appearance of a number of significant contributions to the field of Jamesian scholarship; such as, the work of Bauckham (1990, 1999), Deppe (1990), Hartin (1991), Johnson (1995), Brosend (2004), Taylor (2004), Nienhuis (2007), McKnight (2011) and Allison (2013) to name some. Particularly unfortunate though is the apparent absence of interaction with the notable works of Cheung, *The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of James* (2003/2007), and Lockett, *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James* (2008), which may be a more recent representation of a growing direction in Jamesian studies.

This work reads easily and divides into an introduction and commentary separated logically by an analysis, which is really a book outline that sets a six-section ‘chapter’ order for the commentary portion. The introduction covers, in order: the ecclesial reception history of James’ letter, its authorship, the letter’s circumstance, the nature of the letter and the theology of the letter.

For the purposes of the TNTC series, the introduction suggests a meas-

ured consideration of a selective representation of the scholarly breadth of Jamesian research and the theological issues in the letter.

In the introduction on ‘the circumstances of the letter’, Moo correctly identifies the unsavory influence of the world, economic inequality and also the class-conflict that was exacerbated by such difference, as part of the socio-cultural context of the addressees. However, Moo seems to forget (pp. 45, 72) that one cannot assert poverty existed to such a proportionally high degree in the communities. That is too much of a sweeping generalization when one reads 4:2-4, 13-14; 5:1-6. Perhaps Moo is here keeping an overly cautious distance from Liberation theology (p. 210). Regardless, this approach raises the concern in this section that conclusions about the social-cultural status of the addressees seem to be rushed, that an adequate consideration of all possibilities seems to be remiss.

Further, concerning the audience, Moo first states James, “sought to maintain good relationships with Judaism” (p. 35) and “the implied Jewish audience of the letter is in keeping with the New Testament and early Christian portrayal of James as one who ministered among the ‘circumcised’ (Gal. 2:9)” (p. 45) inclusive of non-Christian Jews, yet Moo after states that James’ intended audience was “limited” (p. 77) to groups of Christians (pp. 39, 106). It would seem that though Moo entertains the possibility of also a non-Christian audience (p. 35), his exclusively metaphoric interpretation of the expression ‘the twelve tribes’ and the term ‘diaspora’ seems to exclude the real possibility that James’ letter was designed to include exhortative, pastoral material not just for believers but also protreptic (writing intended to persuade or instruct) material for God-fearing Jews (2:19). This expedited curious approach to the identities of the letter’s addressees of course filters into the commentary and guides interpretation.

Understandably the brief treatment of certain issues in the text is determined by the purposes of the commentary series, yet even so some topics would have deserved further development; in particular, the significant topic of double-mindedness. Notable exceptions to this criticism are Moo’s favourable treatment of faith and justification and also the topic of prayer in James (pp. 69, 221-236).

The commentary is comprised of six parts or ‘chapters’, five of which (2-6) each contain multiple sub-sections according to that part’s subdivisions. The analysis / outline is: Address and Salutation (1:1), Trials and Christian Maturity (1:2-18), True Christianity Seen in its Works (1:19-2:26), Dissensions Within the Community (3:1-4:12), Implications of a Christian Worldview (4:13-5:11) and Concluding Exhortations (5:12-20).

After the brief introductory section (1:1), the first major portion of James is section two, 1:2-18. This has what Moo calls a ‘loose coherence’ that is fixed on the theme of trials / temptations. It is James’ main concern to encourage Christians undergoing trials to persevere with steadfast endurance rooted in genuine faith, to continue with a loyalty to God resulting in obedience to His word.

The third section of James (1:19-2:26), Moo contends, returns focus to the word of God and the law, and uses it to illuminate the particular issue of discrimination within the community. The end result of this is the well-known declaration that “James rebukes believers who think that they can be justified or saved by means of a faith that does not manifest itself in consistent works” (p. 105), that justification does not occur through or on the basis of works but that neither is one justified without those works (p. 150). According to Moo, 2:26 restates the central theme of the passage: faith without deeds is dead.

Additionally, Moo claims that the 2:14-26 passage in its entirety is the theological climax of James’ call to a pure religion. In this section, a number of points could have been addressed with added clarity; for example, the explanation Moo offers for “the word planted in you” (1:21). Though he is correct to note that ‘receive the word’ is not a command to be converted but to accept its precepts and live by them, he is not as explicit as he could be. That is, the phrase may elicit thought of the Torah (a written copy of the law of nature) and the understanding (as espoused by Philo & Stoics) that all in humanity have received the implanted logos (law of nature), a reference James has capably ameliorated. Unlike the unbelieving, Moo says, they are able to receive the implanted word; they should differ from others in that they have been made able to resist desires and anger and to produce the fruits of righteousness.

Next, Moo judges that the circumstance described in 2:1-13 is more likely a worship service than a judicial assembly, yet the reasons for this consensus choice are rather thin. Also, 2:19 is as Moo observes taken from Deut. 6:4. Yet there is no note of Deut. 6:5, a verse that would have strengthened James’ case for the full Christian faith that he writes about.

Moo notes that section four, 3:1-4:12, begins and ends with warnings about the sin of impure speech. Between these bookends, James focuses on the problems of dissensions and disputes; the source of these, as Moo rightly notes, is the central section theme of envy, selfish and arrogance. The importance of envy as the key theme holding together 3:13-4:3 is developed nicely by Moo as he follows the observations of Johnson on the passage’s significant features (p.167-170).

Section five spans 4:13-5:11 and is unified by the theme of the Christian perspective on the period of time in which the Church lives, such that this theme touches each major topic in the section. James here clearly demonstrates his concern with practical theology (pp. 217-218). In the final section, 5:12-20, James treats oaths and prayer, and this is followed by a “fitting”, “appropriate” closing summons to action (pp. 236, 237). Moo’s observations on the Jamesian presentation of prayer and practice in community are succinct and well balanced.

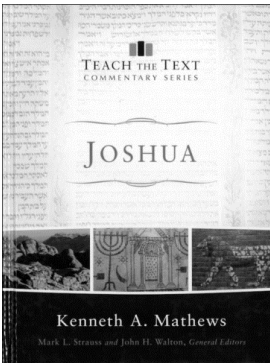
It is always a formidable challenge to put together an equitable study on a Bible book for the benefit of a broad, trans-denominational, non-academic audience. On this count Moo has fared relatively well. Examining a wider

spectrum of research and synthesizing its most salient contributions, Moo has rewritten an introductory commentary that should and will appeal to the Church and pastors alike, helping them to gain their theological footing and assisting them to strive toward a better understanding and application of the Epistle of James.

Reviewed by Dr. Frank Z. Kovács, a visiting scholar at the University of Toronto, Department for the Study of Religion, a senior lecturer for the Greenwich School of Theology, UK, and a trustee of Haddington House.



Joshua. Kenneth A. Matthews. Teach the Text Commentary Series, gen. eds. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016, 222 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-8010-9217-6



One could be forgiven for being skeptical about a new commentary series on two fronts. First, the need for such, and second, the ability of the volume at hand to live up to the claim of uniqueness which warrants its production. It was a pleasant experience then to be introduced to the new “Teach the Text” commentary series from Baker Books, edited by Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton.

I was introduced to this volume part way through my sermon series through the book of Joshua and in hindsight wish I had it earlier on. I found it fulfilled its intent and was a great companion to my favorite balanced commentaries¹ without lacking any of the depth of some of my more technical ones.²

When evaluating a commentary, I first ask if the author evidences a relationship with the Author of Scripture and whether the book they are commenting on is in their estimation the inspired, inerrant word of God. Kenneth Matthews gives ample evidence to affirm both of those questions. That being established, I had a level of trust that this commentary would draw me to the text and the God Who stands behind the text, and I was not disappointed. Matthews does an excellent job of giving an overview of the “forest” (theo-

¹ D. Ralph Davis. *Joshua: No Falling Words*. (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012) and David Jackman. *Preaching the Word: Joshua: People of God's Purpose*. R. Kent Hughes, gen ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

² Marten H. Woudstra. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Joshua*. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr, gen. eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) and David M. Howard Jr. *The New American Commentary: Joshua*. E. Ray Clendenen, gen. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H, 1998).

logical affirmations and themes, historical background, and author biography), covering the material in enough detail without getting bogged down. He then moves systematically through the “trees”, providing for each section of the text an understanding of it followed by suggestions for teaching and illustrating it.

Another test of the value of a commentary is how it handles controversial or hard to understand portions of the text. Joshua doesn't have too many of these sections, but Matthews handles the conquest of Canaan very well with an additional insights article on pages 54-55. He also does a good job covering the sin of Achan (pp. 62-67), the Gibeonite deception (pp. 80-85) and the sun standing still (pp. 86-91, with another additional insights article on pp. 92-95).

One caution I would offer is not to use Matthew's illustrations directly as written. Borrowed sermon illustrations are a pet peeve of mine, especially ones that are outdated and outside the culture and context of the audience. While Matthew's illustrations are generally current and personal, I would suggest following his example as opposed to lifting and using his illustrations directly.

I could see this work being used as a college textbook and could serve as the sole commentary for a pastor working through Joshua. I heartily recommend this volume to all exegetes who wish to faithfully proclaim the Word of God to their people.

Reviewed by Jeff Eastwood, the lead pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Charlottetown, PE, Canada. He is the husband of Melanie and father of four. He also serves on the council of The Gospel Coalition (TGC) Atlantic Canada.



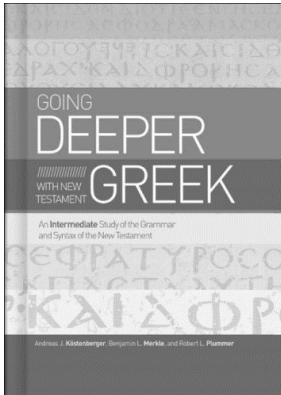
***Going Deeper with New Testament Greek.* A. J. Köstenberger, B. J. Merkle, and R. L. Plummer. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016, 550 pp., hc. ISBN 978-1-4336-7908-7**

This new volume is intended to fill a gap between introductory grammars of Koine Greek (of which there are now several of very good quality) and technical, reference grammars (of which there are few, and, as far as I am aware, none published recently in English). For many years, I have used a ‘reader’ of NT Greek by William Mounce (Zondervan) as a textbook for students who wished to progress in their knowledge and experience of Greek. But that was primarily a collection of annotated texts; there was little teaching material. The more recent reader by Rodney Decker (Kregel) is similar in form, though it includes a wider range of texts and some more developed teaching material.

Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer have now written a book that at-

tempts to gather together the strengths of various kinds of books in a way that will stretch the intermediate student of Greek without being overwhelming. The authors are all experienced teachers of Greek. Köstenberger is well known as the author of several excellent commentaries and other books. Plummer has become well known as a result of his excellent ‘Daily Dose of Greek’ videos (<https://dailydoseofgreek.com>), which are highly recommended to all who wish to work on their Greek skills.

The book is composed of fifteen chapters, most of which deal with a particular feature of Greek. So chapter titles include, ‘Genitive Case’, ‘Tense and Verbal Aspect’, ‘Participles’, and ‘Infinitives’. The final three chapters are somewhat different and deal with broader issues: ‘Sentences, Diagramming and Discourse Analysis’, ‘Word Studies’, and ‘Continuing with Greek’.



In most chapters, the format is similar. First, there is a short discussion of how understanding of the feature of Greek helps to make sense of a particular verse or passage. Then, following a brief statement of the objectives of the chapter, there is a substantial portion of explanation of the various ways in which the particular element of the language is used. The discussion is typically arranged

in a clear, orderly manner by using many section headings and frequently presenting material in helpful charts. Plenty of examples are included, all of which come with English translation. Thus even students who lack confidence in reading Greek may benefit from the discussion. There is usually a brief explanation of the particular point illustrated by the example. Following the discussion of the grammatical feature, a summary of the material is laid out in a clear chart. In the next section, knowledge of the grammatical feature that has been studied is reinforced through exercises based on portions of the Greek NT (without translation). Then comes a section of vocabulary, broken into ‘vocabulary to memorise’ and rarer ‘vocabulary to recognise’. Finally, each chapter concludes with a reading passage from the Greek NT (usually around ten to fifteen verses, depending on the passage). This passage is accompanied by quite extensive notes on the text (a total of around ten to fifteen pages for each passage, depending on the complexity of the issues it raises). The notes parse more challenging forms and briefly discuss textual variants, possible translations, and grammatical or syntactical features. This reading with guidance notes accomplishes much the same function as the Mounce’s reader, but now the readings are integrated into a more structured teaching (and, to a certain extent, reference) tool.

I have adopted this book as the main text for a ‘Greek Texts’ module (3rd year Bachelor’s degree level) at Highland Theological College, and I look forward to giving the book a full trial as a teaching tool and to receiving feedback from my students. At this stage, I think that there are a number of

notable features of the book. The first is that it has been written to be read (see the comments of the authors on pages 1-2 of the preface). The text is written with a warm, engaging tone, with an emphasis on clarity and encouragement. While this leads to a longer book, it also makes the book particularly valuable to those who may have studied Greek in the past and now wonder if there is any way they can revive it. The second is that it is well-informed on issues that have been debated in recent scholarship on Koine Greek. Thus, there is a valuable, up-to-date discussion of ‘verbal aspect’ (pages 229-41) that would be particularly valuable for preachers who learned Greek some years ago to read. Likewise, with respect to the middle voice, the concept of ‘deponency’ is questioned, supported by relevant references to recent studies (pages 196-97). This is not to say that the discussions are complete or that all scholars would agree with the positions adopted, but this book will alert readers to major issues in Greek scholarship and, hopefully, save preachers from perpetuating untenable positions on the meaning of particular passages in the Greek NT.

Interestingly, like the proverbial bus, after a distinct lack of such a book, two came along at once! A book with a similar intention, written by D. L. Mathewson and E. B. Emig, entitled *Intermediate Greek Grammar, Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), was published within a few months of the book by Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer. Mathewson and Emig’s book provides many of the same benefits as *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek* and is itself a very valuable resource. Theological libraries should certainly hold both volumes in their stock. If an individual is unable to purchase both books for herself or himself, it is quite a fine judgement as to which one to choose. I would generally recommend that readers try to view a portion of both books and decide from experience which one they prefer. I would slightly favour *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek* because it is somewhat more accessible for a reader who requires some extra encouragement to develop competence in Greek.

It is a good time to be a life-long student of Greek! I hope that *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, along with the many other excellent resources that have recently become available, will be widely used so that many people will become better readers of the Greek NT.

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