Commentaries grouped by level of accessibility
Even before turning to commentaries, you may want to read the entry on the biblical book you are studying in a Bible Dictionary. As it is in all kinds of materials, some Bible dictionaries are better than others. Many popular Bible dictionaries fail to take the scholarship of the last one hundred years into account. Among the few Bible dictionaries that are good, the following stand out: The Harper/Collins Bible Dictionary and the Mercer Bible Dictionary are good one-volume Bible dictionaries. Although it is a bit older, the most recent edition of Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible can be useful. The best multiple volume Bible dictionaries are The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (which I prefer) and the Anchor Bible Dictionary. Other dictionaries that focus on specific parts of the Bible can also be useful (for example, the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels). One way to judge the value of a Bible dictionary is to see if the entries are signed. At the end of each entry, you will find the initials of the person who wrote that piece. You can then look them up in the front of the book to see who they are and where they teach or what they do. This information helps you evaluate what the person says in their entry; it helps you know whether they are really experts in the subject they are telling you about in the entry. If a Bible dictionary does not identify the authors of entries in this way, it usually means the entries are not written by experts on the topic, but rather by someone perhaps on an editorial staff who may or may not be qualified to speak about the subject. These are not good sources. Always use Bible dictionaries that identify who wrote each entry.

There are many commentary series that do not appear in the following list. Some of these may be very good, others less valuable. The list that follows includes series that are found fairly widely. The series that are listed here engage in critical readings of the biblical texts, that is readings that employ the kinds of analytical tools that scholars use. To do exegesis (getting to the meaning the original audience would have understood) you should use commentaries that focus on what the biblical books meant in their original setting, rather using commentaries that give primary attention to what a text tells people to do today. It is important to understand the text in its original context before making any contemporary use of it.

As you begin study of a passage (sometimes called a pericope), you should begin with the more accessible commentaries and move to the more technical. The more accessible commentaries will introduce you to the questions, issues, and problems involved with understanding a particular text. But they will usually simply give you the conclusions the author of that particular commentary on that issue. As you move to more detailed commentaries, these will give arguments for the position the author takes on an issue. The more detailed and technical a commentary is, the more it will be engaged with the disputes about the meanings of specific things in your passage. They might engage in a long discussion of the meaning of a word in first century Greek or about whether the categories Paul uses to discuss an issue are from philosophers or from rabbis. Or they might discuss what ideas another author is rejecting. The less technical commentaries will assume answers to these questions without letting you know why they chose that option; they may not even hint that there is a question about the matter. So, the more accessible commentaries are the place to begin, but you will need to move to more detailed commentaries to engage a text in more depth and detail.
Very accessible and brief
Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (most of these are over twenty years old)
Westminster Bible Companion

Accessible but more lengthy
Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
Interpretation
New Cambridge Bible Commentary
Reading the New Testament
The New Testament in Context
New International Biblical Commentary (many, but not all, these are from fairly conservative writers)

More lengthy and demanding, but still accessible to many readers
New Interpreter’s Bible
New Testament Library
Old Testament Library
Sacra Pagina
Berit Olam

More demanding, in the sense that they are longer and expect the reader to know more before beginning to use them
Anchor Bible Commentary
Word Bible Commentary
New International Commentary on the New Testament
New International Commentary on the Old Testament

The following expect you to know Greek or Hebrew and to be ready to enter the conversation about issues at the level of scholars. While you will not be an expert, you may be able to follow the arguments (at least some of them) in these commentaries after you have worked through the less detailed and technical commentaries above.

International Critical Commentary
New International Greek Testament Commentary
Hermeneia
Select Commentaries and Additional Bibliography for Further Study

Genesis
Westermann? 3 volumes but by Augsburg

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

Joshua

Judges

*Ruth*

*1 & 2 Samuel*

*1 & 2 Kings*
Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *I Kings; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001)
Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988)

*1 & 2 Chronicles*

*Ezra*


Nehemiah
See under Ezra.

Esther


Job


Psalms


Proverbs


Ecclesiastes


Song of Solomon

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel
Hosea

Joel


Amos
Richard Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, New Century Bible. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,
2000.

Obadiah
of Nahum, Obadiah, and Esther*, International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids:
Paul R. Raabe, *Obadiah; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor

Jonah
Abingdon, 1996).
______. Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah, Guides to Biblical

Micah
Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah; A New Translation with Introduction
Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah
Malachi

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John


Acts


Romans

1 Corinthians


2 Corinthians


Galatians


**Ephesians**


**Philippians**


**Colossians**


**1 Thessalonians**


**2 Thessalonians**


1 and 2 Timothy and Titus

Philemon

Hebrews
**Craig R. Koester, Hebrews: a new translation with introduction and commentary, Anchor Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press.**

James


1 and 2 Peter


1,2,3 John


Jude


Revelation


