

## *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*

**Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber, eds. *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 1118 pp. \$39.00. ISBN: 9780800699161 (vol. 1).**

**Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez, eds. *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 771 pp. \$36.00. ISBN: 9780800699178 (vol. 2).**

---

The *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* is a two-volume set that covers the texts of the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament. The first volume covers the Old Testament and Apocrypha, and also includes a few introductory articles for reading Ancient Near Eastern Texts in modern times. The second volume covers the New Testament. This volume also includes introductory articles on issues pertaining to New Testament studies. Multiple authors contributed to this volume in various styles and with varying degrees of mastery.

The primary audience for this commentary set is the college or graduate student, or, perhaps, anyone wanting to acquire a basic introduction to issues and interpretation of the Bible. The information provided in these volumes is intended to give the reader access to the context of these ancient documents, the history of interpretation, and the current scholastic climate. These three layers of commentary accompany every section of the ancient texts that are analyzed. The goal of the commentary is not to be exhaustive, but rather, with its focus on students, it is meant to summarize and be a bridge to other documents that will offer a more extended discussion of particular passages or issues related to the Bible.

Outside of the introductory articles already mentioned, the commentary divides each passage of the Bible into three main sections. The first is the “Text in its Ancient Context,” which addresses the linguistic and historical context of the biblical text. The second is the “Text in the Interpretive Tradition,” which discusses the way other interpretive traditions have understood the passage throughout history. This section focuses mainly on Jewish and Christian interpretations, but, when appropriate, it will give attention to Islamic interpretation. The final section is the “Text in Contemporary Discussion,” which focuses on the recent history of interpretation, including discussions of recent interpretive trends (e.g., feminist interpretation).

The style of this commentary varies from author to author and therefore has a wide range of styles. For example, Matthew J. M. Coomber writes his article, “Reading the Old Testament in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts,” in an engaging, personal style. He includes personal anecdotes like his thought-provoking interaction with his students on the first day of his Old Testament survey class. Included in this article is a vignette noting that most of his students’ only experience from the Bible comes from *Veggie Tales* — something that usually does not make an appearance in scholarly works. Yet this does not compromise the high level of scholarship that Coomber provides in his article.

The reader will encounter a different style when reading Lawrence M. Wills, who offers a more formal style in his article “Negotiating the Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity.” Here the style is a little more distant, but it does not detract from the information provided.

There are two primary strengths of this commentary series. First, despite the weakness that will be mentioned in this review, the volumes are largely objective concerning their respective topics. Since the volumes are intended to cover current trends in interpretation, the reader will find that most approaches to interpretation are given some coverage. Biblical literalism and feminist, LGBT, Jewish, and Islamic interpretations are all covered when relevant to the discussion of the text. A good example of this is Coomber’s essay cited above. Coomber presents the various interpretations proffered by biblical literalists and historical critics alongside feminist criticism and LGBT interpretation. The interaction with these methods of interpretation is largely descriptive, especially in the case of Coomber, and is beneficial to the student who

needs to be introduced to the contemporary debates. This provides the reader with a good foundation for understanding these differing schools of interpretation, which are present in the wide spectrum of interpretive schools today. If the first goal of interaction is to understand a particular viewpoint, then this commentary will provide the student a decent starting point for gaining an understanding of that perspective.

Finally, I would be remiss not to comment on an area of the commentary in which I specialize, Genesis 22. In this section of the commentary (vol. 1., 113–114; 116; 118–119), Rodney S. Sadler Jr. gives a good deal of attention to the wordplay in Hebrew between Genesis 12 and 22, while not belaboring the point with details about the Hebrew language. He shows how the wordplay is important for the overall interpretation of the passage and makes it palatable to the reader. This allows students who do not know the biblical languages a glimpse into the rhetorical world of the original reader. He also takes time to address most modern readers' concern about a God who demanded that Abraham sacrifice his son by pointing out that in the end, Isaac was not sacrificed. He places the focus of the text on Abraham's faithfulness — as the original author did — without distracting his readers with too much influence from Immanuel Kant. Overall, the treatment of Genesis 22 is concise, yet thorough, informative, and engaging. I would point students to this section of the commentary as a fair summary of the meaning of Genesis 22. This sampling of the commentary serves as a good example of what the rest attempts to accomplish.

There is one primary weakness of this commentary series. First, though it would be hard to call this set largely subjective, as stated previously, the bibliographic references in some sections leave much to be desired. Generally this would be considered a weak critique. However, since the stated goal of this commentary is to connect students with diverse documents to show how these texts have been interpreted through history, the inclusion of foundational documents in the bibliography would help the student connect with these documents. For example, in the article "Jesus and the Christian Gospels," only the "Two-Source Hypothesis" is mentioned (117–119). No other approaches are mentioned, such as the "Multi-Source Theory" or the "Two Gospel Hypothesis" put forward by Johann Jacob Griesbach. Additionally, B. H. Streeter, who was the proponent of the "Two Source Hypothesis," is missing from the bibliography — thus not connecting the student with primary documents for this view. Nor are the works of those who followed him mentioned. Since the stated goal of the commentary is to introduce the reader to diverse documents, we should first also introduce the student to foundational documents. If Lady Gaga can make the bibliography of one essay (vol. 2, 27), certainly Streeter could make it, too, since his view is summarized.

However, this weakness is not present in all sections of the commentary. Neil Elliott's essay "Situating the Apostle Paul in His Day and Engaging His Legacy in Our Own" consults authors from a variety of spectrums and backgrounds. Rudolf Bultmann, Heikki Räisänen, and Scott McKnight all make an appearance in the discussion. For an essay that focuses on Paul's historical context, authors James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright are appropriately mentioned.

I would recommend this purchase. First, I would recommend it because the primary target audience is college and masters' students. Second, I think the information contained within these volumes provides students with an overview of particular topics related to scripture in a way that could provide students with help in the first stages of their research.

Dougald W. McLaurin III  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC