



Commentaries

Their Use and Abuse

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Not Good Reasons For Buying A Commentary

- ▶ This commentary was recommended by...
- ▶ This commentary agrees with my interpretation
- ▶ This commentary looks good on the shelf
- ▶ I need a commentary on _____, so this one will do



Common Questions

- ▶ What is a commentary?
- ▶ Why and how are commentaries helpful?
- ▶ Why should I bother to do my own work?
- ▶ How can I get the most out of a commentary?
- ▶ Are there different types of commentaries available?



Basic Questions When Buying

- ▶ Does the author cover the assigned book in one volume?
- ▶ Does the author list a bibliography for further study?
- ▶ Does the author cover all the verses, or summarize?
- ▶ Does the author cover difficult texts and offer possible meanings with supporting arguments?



Basic Questions When Buying

- ▶ Does the author work from the original Hebrew / Greek, or from an English translation?
- ▶ Does the author seek to find and explain the inspired writer's original meaning of the text? Does he engage in exegesis or eisegesis?
- ▶ Does the author have a theological bias? (see below)



Basic Questions When Buying

- ▶ Does the author discuss how this book of the Bible fits in with the entire Bible message?
 - ▶ Does this author use many Bible cross-references to help explain the text? (The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself!)
 - ▶ Does the author cover all main “background” issues in the introduction? (Some introductions are very basic.)
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Basic Questions When Buying

- ▶ Does the author rely heavily upon what modern “scholars” say about a verse or how extra-biblical texts can “shed light” on what the Bible says?
- ▶ Does the author cover the text-critical problems or issues with a passage?



Theological Spectrum of Commentaries

Liberal

No Inspiration

No authority

No supernatural

No prophecy

Late Dates

Religion Evolved

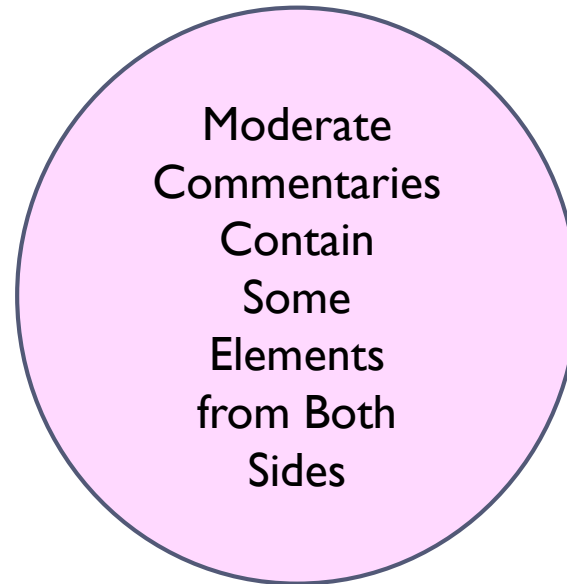
JEPD Theory

Q Source

Literary Emphasis

Speculative

Moderate



Conservative

Inspiration

Authority

Supernatural

Prophecy

Early Dates

Religion Revealed

Mosaic Authorship

Four Gospels

Salvation Emphasis

Definite

Theological Spectrum of Commentaries

Liberal

Fortress Press

Abingdon

Doubleday

Harper & Row

Oxford

Moderate

WJK Press

Eerdmans

Concordia

Zondervan

Pres. & Ref.

Conservative

Broadman & H.

Baker Book House

Crossway

Inter-Varsity Press

Moody Press

Nelson

Kregel

Hendrickson

Tyndale

Bethany House



Denominational Bias in Commentaries

Commentaries authored by denominationalists often contain the following bias...

- ▶ Calvinism
- ▶ Premillennialism
- ▶ Pluralism / Denominationalism
- ▶ Liberalism / Modernism



Institutional Bias in Commentaries

(Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ)

Commentaries authored by some brethren often contain the following bias...

- ▶ Institutionalism
- ▶ General benevolence
- ▶ Social gospel / fellowship hall
- ▶ Criticism of “Anti-ism”



Institutional Bias in Commentaries

(Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ)

- ▶ Christian Church: The Bible Textbook (College Press)
 - ▶ Christian Church / Churches of Christ: The College Press NIV Commentary
 - ▶ Churches of Christ: GA Commentaries, The Living Word (ACU Press), Truth for Today, Burton Coffman Commentaries, The Truth Commentaries, Bible Commentary (E.M. Zerr)
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Commentary Focus

Commentaries focus on the following areas of study...

- ▶ Technical / Semi-technical
 - ▶ Exposition / Analytical (exegetical)
 - ▶ Application / Devotional
 - ▶ Homiletics / Preaching
 - ▶ Mixed (two or more of the above)
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Commentary Choices

(Books or Bible Software)

Commentaries come in the following choices with their respective “pros and cons”...

- ▶ **One-Volume** - including Study Bibles (less expensive, less space, brief coverage, some passages not covered)
 - ▶ **Multi-Volume Sets** (more expensive, more space, more coverage, some weak / strong volumes, unequal quality, multiple author vs. single author bias)
 - ▶ **Individual** (individual quality, more expensive, limited focus, limited bias, risk of narrowed interpretation)
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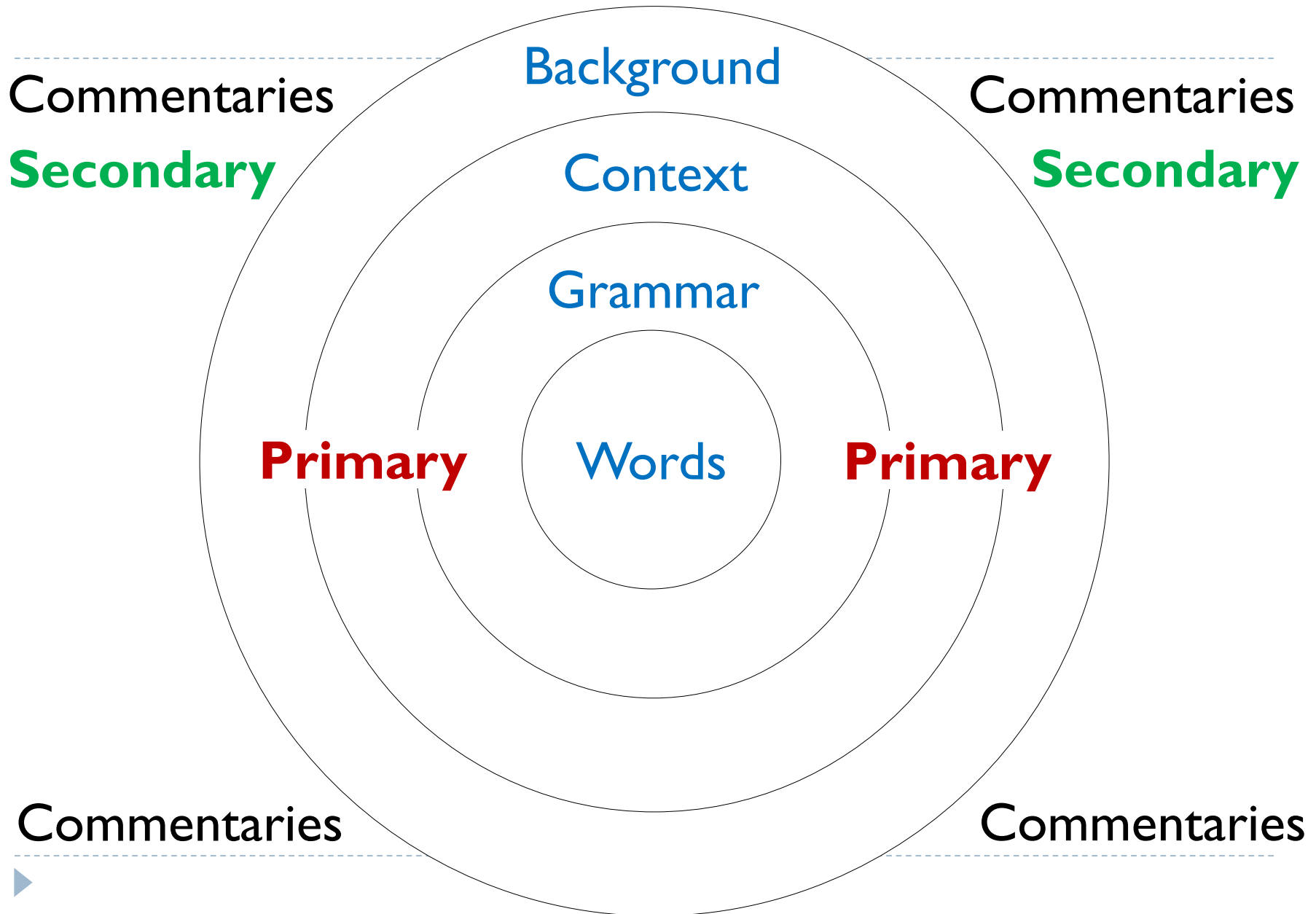


Commentary Recommendations

- ▶ Bestbiblecommentaries.com
- ▶ Old Testament Commentary Survey (Tremper Longman III) and New Testament Commentary Survey (D.A. Carson), published by Baker Book House, is revised every few years



When To Use A Commentary



Good Uses

- ▶ Helpful in locating background information (authorship, date, place, audience, occasion, etc.)
 - ▶ Helpful in learning Bible people, history, geography, customs, textual-criticism, etc.
 - ▶ Helpful in doing Hebrew / Greek word studies
 - ▶ Helpful in locating Bible cross-references
 - ▶ Helpful in summarizing various views about a verse
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Commentaries Abused

- ▶ Reading the commentary before reading the Bible and its context
 - ▶ Reading one commentary to determine the correct interpretation of a difficult passage (I use the “all or nothing” rule)
 - ▶ Reading a commentary without critical thinking
 - ▶ Reading a portion of a commentary out of context
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Commentaries Abused

- ▶ Not coming to some “closure” after reading commentaries; that is, a firm interpretation and application of the biblical text
- ▶ Following denominational bias in a commentary (see above)



Closing Reminders

- ▶ Commentaries are written by men / women and are subject to fallibility (error); they are not the final authority on a Bible text; use all commentaries (even those by brethren) with great care and caution
 - ▶ Don't be bullied by a commentary to take a particular position; you may be right and the author wrong
 - ▶ Use a commentary as an aid or a resource tool to help you use your own mind and common sense
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Closing Reminders

- ▶ The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself; Bible cross-references should be consulted first
- ▶ A priority must be placed on “searching the Scriptures” (Acts 17:11), not on reading the commentaries
- ▶ There is one Bible from God, but “many books” from man (Eccl. 12:9-12) ... don't forget which one saves!

