
Judges through Esther

By

Richard P. Belcher, Jr., Ph.D.

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Virtual Campus

RTS Distance Education

The Virtual Campus of Reformed Theological Seminary offers students the convenience of home study with the quality of on-campus instruction. This course is based on classroom lectures using the GUIDE approach to learning.

Each lesson contains the following:

- G**etting Started To prepare adequately for each lesson, a reading assignment and audio lecture are listed.
- U**nderstanding To maximize student learning, the purposes and objectives for the lesson are given.
- I**nvestigating To integrate readings, lectures, and outline, students are encouraged to notate information in a manner that will prove beneficial for study and examination. The study guide allows space for note-taking to expand the outline.
- D**eveloping To further develop the concepts presented, suggested readings and applications are offered.
- E**valuating To help students summarize and synthesize the material covered, study questions are provided.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Judges through Esther

OOT510 2 hours

Dr. Richard Belcher, Jr.

Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual

Professor

Dr. Richard “Dick” Belcher is the Professor of Old Testament. He is an ordained minister in the PCA and pastored an urban nondenominational church in Rochester, NY for ten years before pursuing the PhD. This pastoral experience in an unusual and challenging setting gives him great insight into the practical, modern issues that will be faced by future pastors studying with him at RTS. He graduated from Covenant College and received his MDiv. from Covenant Seminary. He also received an S.T.M. from Concordia Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. is from Westminster Theological Seminary.

Dr. Belcher has published a book entitled *The Messiah and the Psalms* which attempts to show that not just the traditional Messianic psalms relate to Christ but that all psalms relate to either the person (humanity and deity) or work of Christ (prophet, priest, king). It lays a foundation for that approach and then goes through several different types of psalms to see how they relate to Christ. He is currently working on a commentary on Ecclesiastes.

Course Description

An analysis of each book in this section of the canon from a literary, historical, and theological perspective. Each book is placed in the context of redemptive history to show its relationship to what has gone before and how it furthers the progress of redemption, which ultimately leads to Christ. There is an emphasis on how to interpret narrative and characters in a story.

Course Objectives

- 1) To understand the structure and message of each book covered in this course.
- 2) To understand how each book fits into the progress of the unfolding history of God’s people.
- 3) To understand how these books lay a foundation for the coming of Christ.
- 4) To become comfortable teaching and preaching from narrative, with special attention given to how to deal with characters in a story.

Required Textbooks

Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. Hereinafter IOT.

Merril, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests*, 2nd ed.: A History of Old Testament Israel, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008

Pratt, Jr., Richard L. *He Gave Us Stories*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993.

Whitcomb, Jr., John C. *Chart of Old Testament Kings and Prophets*. 5th revised edition. Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1977. This chart can be found at the BMH website (www.bmhbooks.com).

Additional Recommended Readings

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

All required books are available through the RTS Online Bookstore at www.rts.edu/bookstore.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Judges through Esther

0OT510 2 hours

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Online Student Handbook

The Online Student Handbook has been designed to assist you in successfully navigating the online Virtual campus experience, whether you are taking a single course or pursuing a certificate or degree program. In it you will find valuable information, step-by-step instructions, study helps, and essential forms to guide you through every aspect of your distance education opportunity from registration to graduation. Please use this resource as your first-stop reference manual. You will find it located at the RTS/Virtual website (<http://virtual.rts.edu>) under the Student Services tab.

Requirements in Brief

Follow the Study Guide provided.

Listen to all Recorded Lectures.

Complete all Readings.

Participate in Forum Discussions (with other students and Professor)

Take one Final Exam.

Write a Course Paper

Submit Mentor Report/Course Application Paper

Required Readings (5%)

The biblical books Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther must all be read. In addition, (1) *IOT* on the biblical books that are covered in this course (pp. 119-198), (2) All of *History of Israel*, (3) *He Gave Us Stories*, Part II (pp. 107-308).

Forum Discussions (10%)

The student is to participate in the forum discussions in the Virtual Classroom for 10% total points. You must make a minimum of 5 posts on the Student to Student Discussion Forum for 5%, and answer the “Introduction” and four Topical Question responses on the Student to Professor Discussion Forum for 5%.

Research Paper (40%)

A research paper is required that will focus on a character of a narrative (see “Guidelines for the Research Paper” pp. x-xi).

Examination (40%)

There will be one exam with two parts. Part 1 will be an essay exam based on the lectures. Part 2 will be the identification of key historical terms from the readings and the lectures. Students will be given the key terms ahead of time in the Course Glossary.

Mentor Report/Course Application Paper (5%)

Each MAR student must submit a completed Mentor Course Report Form at the conclusion of the course. For students who are not registered in the MAR program, you must submit a 200-word Course Application Paper communicating how this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life.

Assignments

Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall in the Virtual Classroom, using the upload links provided. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time. No late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

Contact Information

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COURSE OUTLINE
Judges through Esther
OOT510 2 hours
Dr. Richard Belcher, Jr.
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Lesson One

Interpreting Narrative: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives

Lesson Two

Kingship: the Restoration of Human Dominion

Lesson Three

Introduction to Judges: Israel's Failed Mission

Lesson Four

The Downward Spiral of the Canaanization of Israel

Lesson Five

Ruth: Covenant Loyalty Brings Covenant Blessings

Lesson Six

Samuel and the Crisis of Leadership

Lesson Seven

Saul: a King Like the Other Nations

Lesson Eight

David: God's Choice for a King

Lesson Nine

David: the King After God's Own Heart

Lesson Ten

Solomon: the Worldwide Glory of God's Kingdom

Lesson Eleven

Elijah: the Prophetic Fight Against Idolatry

Lesson Twelve

Elisha: Yahweh's Power to Deliver

Lesson Thirteen

Covenant Curse: the Exile of the Kingdoms

Lesson Fourteen

Ezra: Laying the Foundation for Restoration

Lesson Fifteen

Nehemiah: the Need for Continuing Reform

Lesson Sixteen

Esther: the Hidden Providence of God

Lesson Seventeen

Chronicles: Looking to the Past in Hope for the Future

GUIDELINES FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

Judges through Esther

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The paper must deal with a character in one of the narratives in Judges to Esther, whether a judge, king, prophet, leader, or some other fairly major character. The paper should cover how the author portrays the character (characterization) and what the author is trying to convey through this particular character in the narrative. It would be helpful to present a misuse of the character or another view of the character as a contrast to your development of the character.

The following questions may need to be addressed in the paper:

- a) What function does the narrative serve in the context of the book?
- b) What major idea is the author of the narrative trying to establish?
- c) What is the meaning of the narrative to the original reading audience?
- d) What major OT concepts, institutions, or ideas does the character relate to or develop?
- e) Is there any legitimate connections to Christ in your character or narrative?
- f) What is the meaning of the character for God's people today?

The following are criteria that will be used to evaluate the paper:

- a) Cogency of argument - how well does the argument hang together, and how well are pertinent and fundamental points brought out?
- b) The use of sources: a variety of commentaries should be examined (both older and modern commentaries should be examined), and at least one journal article must be cited.
- c) The paper should be 10-15 pages, double-spaced with one inch margins on all sides, except the left margin should have a 1 1/4 inch margin.

Do not leave extra space between paragraphs!

- d) Please number the pages.
- e) You are expected to use as much Hebrew as you are able.
- f) Use the guidelines in the current edition of *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, by Kate L. Turabian.

Sample first references for books, journal articles, and an article in a book:

Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996) 120-25.

David M. Howard, Jr., "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *TrinJ* 9 (1988): 19-35.

Gary N. Knoppers, "The Historical Study of the Monarchy: Developments and Detours," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 207-35.

Philip J. Nel, "מֶלֶךְ (*mlk*)," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem VanGemeren; 5 vols; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 2:956-65.

Second shortened footnote references:

Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 122.

Howard, "The Case for Kingship," 34.

Knoppers, "The Historical Study of the Monarchy," 222-25.

Nel, "מֶלֶךְ (*mlk*)," 960.

COURSE APPENDIX
Judges through Esther
OOT510 2 hours
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OUTLINES FOR THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

* Students will be required to reproduce a selection of these outlines on the Final Exam.

Judges

- I. The Failure of the Conquest (1:1-3:6)
- II. The Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance (3:7-16:31)
 - A. Othniel (3:7-11)
 - B. Ehud (3:12-20)
 - C. Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31)
 - D. Gideon and Abimelech (6:1-9:57)
 - E. Jephthah (10:6-12:7)
 - F. Samson (13:1-16:31)
- III. The Depths of Apostasy and Canaanite Influence (17:1-21:25)

Ruth

- I. The Devastation of a Family: Naomi's Emptiness (1:1-22)
- II. The Provision of Food: Boaz' Faithfulness (2:1-23)
- III. The Proposal of Marriage: Ruth's Faithfulness (3:1-18)
- IV. The Provision of Seed: Naomi's Fullness (4:1-17)
- V. The Genealogy of Perez: the Connection to David (4:18-22)

1, 2 Samuel

- I. Israel's Need for a King (1 Samuel 1-7)
 - A. Shiloh Narratives: Samuel (1-3)
 - B. Ark Narratives: the Demise of Eli (4-7)
- II. The Rise and Fall of Saul (1 Samuel 8-15)
 - A. Saul Becomes King (8-12)
 - B. God Rejects Saul (13-15)
- III. The Rise of David, Israel's Promised King (1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 4)
 - A. David in Saul's Court (16-20)
 - B. David and Saul Estranged (21-31)
 - C. David's Rise to Power in Judah (1-4)
- IV. The Reign of David, Israel's Greatest King (2 Samuel 5-20)
 - A. The Consolidation of His Rule (5-9)
 - B. The Question of David's Heir (10-20)
- V. Epilogue (2 Samuel 21-24)

1, 2 Kings

- I. The United Kingdom (1 Kgs 1:1-11:43)
 - A. The Rise of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:1-2:46)
 - B. Solomon's Reign (1 Kgs 3:1-11:43)
 - 1. The Wisdom of Solomon
 - 2. The Glory of Solomon's Kingdom
 - 3. The Decline of Solomon
- II. The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kgs 12:1-2 Kgs 13:25)
 - A. The Rise of Idolatry (1 Kgs 12:1-16:34)
 - B. Elijah's Opposition to Idolatry (1 Kgs 17:1-2 Kgs 1:18)
 - C. Elisha's Work as Prophet (2 Kgs 2:1-13:25)
- III. The Fall of Israel (2 Kgs 14:1-17:41)
- IV. The Fall of Judah (2 Kgs 18:1-20:21)

Ezra/Nehemiah

- I. The Restoration of Worship (Ezra 1-6)
 - A. The Return from Exile (Ezra 1-2)
 - B. The Construction of the Temple (Ezra 3-6)
- II. The Establishment of the Community in the Law (Ezra 7-10)
 - A. The Authorization of Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 7-8)
 - B. The Problem of Intermarriage (Ezra 9-10)
- III. The Restoration of Jerusalem in Rebuilding the Walls (Nehemiah 1-7)
 - A. Nehemiah's Mission (Nehemiah 1-3)
 - B. Opposition to the Mission (Nehemiah 4-6)
 - C. Completion of the Mission (Nehemiah 7)
- IV. Covenant Renewal (Nehemiah 8-10)
 - A. The Reading of the Law (Nehemiah 8)
 - B. The Confession of Sin (Nehemiah 9)
 - C. The Sealing of the Covenant (Nehemiah 10)
- V. The Resettling of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11-13)
 - A. The Repopulation of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11)
 - B. The Dedication of the Wall (Nehemiah 12)
 - C. Further Reforms (Nehemiah 13)

Esther

- I. Ahasuerus and the Elevation of Esther (1-2)
- II. Haman and the Plot against the Jews (3)
- III. Mordecai and the Intervention of Esther (4-5)
- IV. Ahasuerus and the Honoring of Mordecai (6)
- V. Esther and the Hanging of Haman (7)
- VI. Esther and the Salvation of the Jews (8:1-9:19)
- VII. Jews and the Feast of Purim (9:20-32)
- VIII. Ahasuerus and the Elevation of Mordecai (10)

Chronicles

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| I. The Identity of God's People | (1 Chr 1:1-9:34) |
| II. The Ideal United Kingdom | (1 Chr 9:35-2 Chr 9:31) |
| III. Judah During the Divided Kingdom | (2 Chr 10:1-28:27) |
| IV. The Reunited Kingdom | (2 Chr 29:1-36:23) |

COMMENTARY SERIES OF THE OT

The Anchor Bible (AB)

The object of this series is to make the Bible accessible to the modern reader through exact translation, extended exposition, and reconstruction of the ancient setting. The authors are from a variety of backgrounds, including Protestants, Catholics, and Jewish scholars. Most sections include Notes on the translation of the text and Comment on the text.

The Apollos Old Testament Commentary (AOTC)

This series takes its name from Apollos, the Alexandrian Jewish Christian who taught the Scriptures powerfully (Acts 18:24-25). It seeks to combine a focus on the original text with an emphasis on giving insight for application to preachers, teachers, and students of the Bible. The format is very similar to WBC, with each author giving a translation, notes on the translation, an analysis of form and structure, an exposition of the text, and then explanation for today. The notes on the text are easier to read than WBC (larger font), and some authors give more attention to the Explanation Section. Many British Evangelicals contribute to this series.

The Bible Speaks Today (BST)

A series that attempts to expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to do this in a readable format. The series is not a commentary series nor a series of sermons, but an exposition of the text.

The Evangelical Press Study Commentary Series

This series is published by Evangelical Press of Great Britain and is distributed in the USA through Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company. It wants to bridge the gap between the technical and the popular by making the technical understandable. The series takes an exegetical approach that is practical, designed for pastors to use in sermon preparation and for students to use in Bible study. It is written from a Reformed perspective, including some RTS professors.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC)

A twelve volume work covering the Old and New Testaments written by expositors for expositors with the goal of making clear the meaning of the text at the time it was written. Each book of the Bible covered includes an "Introduction." Besides the expository comments there is a brief section of "Notes" that deals with the Hebrew or Greek (with the use of Hebrew and Greek characters). The series is based on the NIV and is generally consistent with a pre-mill position, although not all expositors are pre-mill.

The Forms of the Old Testament Literature (FOTL)

This series is not a typical commentary series but approaches the text from a form-critical perspective analyzing each book and text from that angle with the goal of helping pastors and students engage in their own analysis of the text. There is a focus on the structure of the text with discussions of genre. Contains bibliographies and glossaries.

The Geneva Series of Commentaries

Reprints of classic, older commentaries. Although they need to be supplanted by new commentaries, many are excellent, and most are good devotional reading.

Hermeneia

The term Hermeneia in the ancient Greek-speaking world referred to the detailed, systematic exposition of a scriptural work. This series is a critical and historical commentary series without arbitrary limits in size or scope utilizing the full range of philological and historical tools for interpretation. It makes full use of the ancient Semitic and classical languages and is international and interconfessional in its selection of authors. Most sections of the commentary include a translation, notes to the translations, and interpretation.

International Theological Commentary (ITC)

The goal of this series is to make the OT come alive for the church with an emphasis on the theological interpretation of the Hebrew text and an emphasis on the importance of the NT for understanding the OT. It is also international in the choice of its authors. The focal concern of the series is the proclamation of the biblical message. Covers large sections of the text in an expositional format.

Interpretation

This series is designed to meet the needs of students, teachers, and ministers by integrating the results of historical and theological work in the exposition of the text. The format is not a word-by-word analysis but expository essays on the text, with application to faith and life. Based on the RSV and NRSV.

The New American Commentary (NAC)

This series is a continuation of An American Commentary published at the end of the nineteenth century. Its aim is to enable pastors and students to read the Bible with clarity and proclaim it with power. It focuses on communicating the theological structure and content of each biblical book by trying to show how each section of a book fits together. Based in the NIV. Written from a Baptist perspective and some writers are classical dispensationalists.

The New Century Bible Commentary (NCB)

This series attempts to be a verse-by-verse exposition while interacting with contemporary discussions. Based on the RSV. Brief in format.

The New International Biblical Commentary (NIBC)

The goal of this series is to break down the barriers between the ancient and modern worlds so that the power and the meaning of the biblical text can become transparent to contemporary readers. The series tries to bring together probing, reflective interpretation of the text with biblical devotion, what is called “believing criticism.” Follows a more expositional format.

The New International Commentary on the OT (NICOT)

An excellent series written from an evangelical perspective, with many Reformed writers, that has limited discussion of the Hebrew with good exposition of the text. Excellent on the historical situation with some emphasis given to NT appropriation.

The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB)

The general aim of the series is to bring the best in contemporary scholarship into the service of the church to enhance preaching, teaching, and study of the Scriptures. This is a multivolume work covering Old and New Testaments. The first volume in the OT has general articles dealing with the interpretation of the Bible, reading the Bible from various ethnic perspectives, and backgrounds to the Bible. Each commentary on the book of the Bible begins with an Introduction. Each unit of the text includes an Overview, the NIV and NRSV translation in parallel columns, a Commentary section which focuses on the final form of the text, and a Reflection section, which gives several trajectories of possible interpretations. The authors come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including a few evangelicals (like WC Kaiser).

The NIV Application Commentary Series (NIVAC)

The primary goal of this series is to help with the difficult task of bringing an ancient message into a modern context so that the series works through the process of moving from the original meaning of a passage to its contemporary significance. However, the series is not popular exposition or devotional. Each passage is broken into the format of Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance. The section on Bridging Contexts is meant to analyze what is timeless in the passage and how that is determined. The Contemporary Significance section helps identify contemporary situations that are compatible with those faced by the original audience and explores a variety of contexts in which the passage might be applied today.

The Old Testament Library Series (OTL)

Many of the older commentators in this series wrote from an historical critical view, although some of the newer commentators write from a literary standpoint. Volumes vary widely in their approach and usefulness.

The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (TOTC)

The aim of this series is to provide the student with a handy, up-to-date commentary on each book, with the primary emphasis on exegesis. Major critical questions are discussed in the introductions and additional notes. The commentary series is based on the RSV.

Word Biblical Commentary (WBC)

The format has several parts: (a) a bibliography section that can be helpful for finding journal articles for your papers; (b) a translation from the Hebrew with Notes explaining the translation; (c) a "Form/Structure/Setting" section which deals with genre issues and the views of modern scholarship; (d) a "Comment" section which gives the exposition of the text; and (e) an "Explanation"

section which deals with the relevance of the text. Its aim is to be useful to the scholar, student, and minister.

JUDGES-ESTHER COMMENTARIES

Judges

Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. NAC. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999.

There are very detailed discussions concerning most issues in the introduction. The purpose of the book is not an apology for kingship, since it is more concerned about Israel's spiritual state than her political state [not either/or?], but was written to alert the nation to the spiritual decline during the reign of Manasseh. Discusses the problem of using the judges as role models, and may need to be better nuanced in his comments on Hebrews 11. The major theme of the book is related to the Canaanization of Israelite society during the settlement period, which has implications for God's people today.

Brettler, Mark Zvi. *The Book of Judges*. OT Readings. Routledge Press, 2002.

This is not a traditional commentary but deals with the major stories of Judges focusing on their meaning (how to read them). The author argues that Judges is essentially a political tract that affirms the legitimacy of Davidic kingship.

Cundall, Arthur E. and Leon Morris. *Judges and Ruth*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968.

The introduction to the Judges commentary (by Cundall) is substantial covering the field well with an emphasis on how the failure to drive out the Canaanites was key to the overall decline of Israel's political and religious life. Briefly discusses the moral problems raised by the judges' behavior (Samson is a mirror of the society).

Davis, Dale Ralph. *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible. Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000.

The author justifies not writing an introduction to the book of Judges and expressly affirms a theocentric approach. Good explanation of the text using literary and historical aspects when it helps to explain the text. Good for sermon and teaching preparation, and for a laugh at times as the author writes with a sense of humor. At times goes with a more positive assessment of a judge (Barak not lacking in faith and Jephthah not ignorant of the law).

Matthews, Victor H. *Judges and Ruth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

This commentary balances academic depth with practical application of the text. He looks at the theological purposes of larger literary units and then evaluates smaller units and key terms. The commentary is written for the preacher and student of the Bible who has limited knowledge of the biblical languages.

Wolf, Herbert. "Judges." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, volume 3, edited by Frank Gaebelin, 375-506. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

A fairly brief introduction that argues for an origin of the book in the early monarchy to show that Israel's spiritual condition determined its political and material situation and that Israel failed to realize her divinely intended goal without a king. Brief, but solid explanations of the text.

Younger, K. Lawson. *Judges/Ruth*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

This commentary is a canonical, rhetorical-type interpretation of the book which gives a coherent message to the whole book and allows the message of the book to speak to believers today. Good discussion of using the judges as role models in light of the downward spiral of the judges in the book (see the discussion of Samson especially). Excellent for preaching purposes. The sections on Contemporary Significance are helpful.

Ruth

Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. NAC. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999.

This commentary offers a thorough discussion of all the major issues of the book of Ruth in a clear and concise way. The aim of Ruth is to explain how in the providence of God the divinely chosen king David could emerge from the dark period of the judges. The book's interest in the Davidic house is best interpreted against the backdrop of the renaissance of the dynasty of David, and if written after Manasseh, only the reign of Josiah (640-609) qualifies as a period for the origin of Ruth. The author draws several parallels between David and Josiah (from 2 Kings 22-23), including the extension of jurisdiction over the northern area by Josiah. A date in the period of Josiah respects the chronological and cultural distance between the composition of 4:7 and the events described in the rest of the chapter. After examining different genre possibilities, the author concludes that Ruth is a short story due to its historical character (Block defines the genre as an independent historiographic short story). Part of the purpose is to expose the character of the participants, but the primary point is to honor David by reminding people of the noble characters in the family history. Block divides the book into four main acts followed by a genealogical postlude.

Bush, Frederick W. *Ruth, Esther*. WBC. Dallas: Word Books, 1996.

The strength of this commentary is its emphasis on the presentation of the characters in Ruth. The characters are revealed as positive from the beginning, not developed, demonstrating how they live out chesed as an encouragement for us to emulate them. Based primarily on the language of the book, Ruth is placed in the early postexilic period.

Campbell, E. F. *Ruth*. AB 7. New York: Doubleday, 1975.

This commentary has discussions of levirate marriage, kinsman redeemer, removal of sandal, and other ancient social conventions related to the book of Ruth.

Cundall, Arthur E. and Leon Morris. *Judges and Ruth*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968.

A brief introduction lays out the evidence for the date of Ruth with the author coming to the conclusion that a period early in the monarchy best satisfies the conditions, especially in light of David's interactions with non-Israelites. The book was not written to necessarily counter exclusivist tendencies in the post-exilic period, nor does it merely supply a missing genealogy of David, nor is it just a tale of friendship, but rather it shows something of the relationship between God and man. Although the book reflects the period of the judges, it is placed in the Ketubim in the MT because of its liturgical connection to the Feast of Weeks, although it is unclear when this may have taken place, since the LXX places Ruth after Judges.

Hubbard, Jr., Robert L. *The Book of Ruth*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

A solid commentary that sees Ruth as displaying ordinary people living extraordinary lives of faithfulness. Good discussions of the canonical order of Ruth, the role and function of the genealogy at the end of the book, the genre of the book (a short story), and the legal background to the book. The author favors a pre-exilic date for the book and a setting in the reign of David or Solomon when the presence of so many foreigners in Solomon and David's administration could have presented a problem, with the nod going to Solomon partly because he came to power through a palace coup. The themes include the hidden providence of God and the necessity of human faithfulness, which is used by God to accomplish his purposes.

LaCocque, André. *Ruth*. Translated by K. C. Hanson. Continental. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

The author dates the book to the era of Ezra and Nehemiah with the intention to counteract the policy toward foreigners typical of that era. He defines the genre as novella. Unlike many he accepts the genealogy as integral to the book, although fictional in origin. The social setting, especially the negative attitude in Judah toward foreigners, has profoundly shaped his interpretation. The ruling religious elites pursued a rigid, meticulous interpretation of the law (especially the prohibition against Moabites and intermarriage with non-Israelites) instituted by Nehemiah. A female author invented Ruth the Moabite to argue that only love (*chesed*) triumphs, which means only a generous interpretation of Torah prevails over meticulous but narrow observations. This work is more a reading of Ruth than actual commentary. Its success depends on whether the language of Ruth requires a postexilic date and whether the thematic configuration best fits the Ezra-Nehemiah era. A major question is whether the author pays the genealogy of David the importance it deserves because of his views on the social setting of the book.

Linafelt, Tod, and Timothy K. Beal. *Ruth and Esther*. Berit Olam. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999.

The commentary on Ruth by Linafelt highlights what is unresolved and perplexing in the narrative and refuses to settle on a single, unequivocal meaning in some places, such as the issue of providence or the hand of God at work behind the scenes. The purpose of the book is also ambiguous, but it has connections to both Judges and Samuel. He sees the genealogy at the end of Ruth as an ironic, negative statement about the monarchy about to emerge. This commentary is an interesting but a frustrating read.

Matthews, Victor H. *Judges and Ruth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

This commentary balances academic depth with practical application of the text. He looks at the theological purposes of larger literary units and then evaluates smaller units and key terms. The commentary is written for the preacher and student of the Bible who has limited knowledge of the biblical languages.

Nielson, Kirsten. *Ruth*. OTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

A cautious conservative reading of Ruth using new literary criticism. Ruth is read intertextually comparing Ruth 4 with Genesis 38. The author argues for an early date for Ruth.

Younger, K. Lawson. *Judges/Ruth*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

A little light on some introductory issues in that some things are left in the air, such as the specific date and purpose of the book. Good discussion of the kinsman-redeemer and succinct and to the point in the Original Meaning sections - highly useful.

Samuel

Arnold, Bill T. *1 & 2 Samuel*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

This commentary wrestles with issues of interpretation arguing for three levels - universal related to creation, national related to Abraham and the nation, and individual. Samuel answers two questions: what is the acceptable nature of the monarchy (1 Samuel 1-15) and who can serve suitably as king (1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 24)? Theological themes other than kingship that are discussed: the concept of the Messiah, use and abuse of power, and the nature of repentance as demonstrated in Samuel, Saul, and David. A solid commentary.

Baldwin, Joyce G. *1 & 2 Samuel*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

A solid brief commentary that focuses on the most important things to understand the text and how theology is revealed in human lives.

Bergen, Robert D. *1, 2 Samuel*. NAC 7. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002.

An excellent discussion of the various purposes for the writing of Samuel (history, literary, apology for David, and theology). He offers good characterizations, especially of Saul. A solid commentary.

Campbell, Anthony F. *1 Samuel*. FOTL. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

This analysis deals with diachronic issues in a final chapter and at the end of the book is a ten page glossary where the author defines the genres encountered in Samuel. He develops a five-step approach to reading the book: read the text, contemplate the structural analysis, read the text again with the proposed structure in mind, read the commentaries, and interpret the text for today. A better name for this approach than form criticism might be narrative criticism (a literary approach).

The author sees a Prophetic Record at the heart of Samuel, which revised large portions of the DH counterbalancing the enthusiastic account of the emergence of kingship.

Kings

Cohn, Robert L. *2 Kings*. Berit Olam. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000.

Appreciation for the macrostructure of 1-2 Kings suffers a bit because different authors treat 1 and 2 Kings. This work is a literary approach that presents a continuous reading of the narrative trying to appreciate literary choices made in the composition. 2 Kings is divided into four units with thematic threads running through the units, such as divine control of history exemplified in the prophecy-and-fulfillment schema, the covenantal expectations of the two kingdoms that are not met, and the appeal to divine mercy as the basis of hope for the future.

Fritz, Volkmar. *1 and 2 Kings*. Continental. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

This commentary has no substantial introduction, no compendious bibliography, no thorough text-critical review, and no attention to the theological thrust of the text. There is attention to a selection of historical perspectives, the history of the development of the books of Kings, and the contribution of archaeological, epigraphic, and topographical detail.

House, Paul R. *1, 2 Kings*. NAC. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995.

This commentary is geared for the “reading pastor” and the introduction covers the field well. The author develops a Theological Exegesis format with an emphasis on history, literary aspects, canonical connections, theological details, and the significance of the text for today. Under the last category the author discusses the analogy of audience and how the text is to be applied. At the end of each major section of the commentary there are canonical, theological and application implications given. The author accepts Noth’s theory of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole and wrongly appeals to Harrison for support.

Walsh, Jerome T. *1 Kings*. Berit Olam. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996.

This commentary begins with a primer on narrative criticism that sets forth basic terminology and methodology. It focuses on four major characters: Solomon, Jeroboam, Elijah, and Ahab. A final chapter looks at the whole book from a narrative viewpoint. The structure is confusing if one tries to look at one passage and one wonders if the four character pattern has been imposed on the text. However, the author is especially good at characterization.

Wiseman, Donald J. *1 & 2 Kings*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

The overall aim of this commentary is to make the text better understandable to lay people. The author is also interested in archaeology. The purpose of Kings is to show the judgment of God against disobedience as a warning and an encouragement to follow God.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Berlin, Adele. *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001.

This commentary has a very extensive introduction which deals with why the book was written and explains it as the authorizing book for Purim. The author believes the book of Esther is mere imaginative storytelling and is impossible as history. It is a comic story for a carnivalesque holiday and so is the most humorous book in the Bible. It should be read as a farce vulgarizing the Persian emperor and court through satire and exaggeration. But one wonders how chapters 3-5 fit the comedy mode.

Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. NAC. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993.

The commentary keeps technicalities to marginal notes and writes in a readable style focusing on how the text should be interpreted. He sees Esther as an historical narrative with literary appeal. All three books emphasize the hand of God working unseen in the outcome of events. A good commentary for preachers and teachers.

Fox, Michael. *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

This book focuses on the issue of character, which is the strength of the book. The first part of the book is a commentary that also traces the movement and shaping of character. Then issues such as historicity, dating, and genre are covered. The rest of the book is an analysis of the main characters of the book, including Vashti, Xerxes, Haman, Mordecai, Esther, the Jews, God, and the world. The last chapter looks at the three versions of Esther and their relationship to each other. Although the author believes the book is a fictional creation with legendary features, the legend is true to history.

Jobes, Karen. *Esther*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

The author understands the book of Esther as both historical and literary, but argues that some of the historical problems can be solved by the legitimate use of poetic license where something in the story is for literary effect and not historical accuracy as we define it today. A good commentary with a balanced discussion of the issues.

Chronicles

Dillard, Raymond B. *2 Chronicles*. WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1987.

This commentary emphasizes the theological aspect of the book and the relationship between Chronicles and Kings. The author works with a wide variety of sources and uses them to proclaim a message to his own people.

Hill, Andrew E. *1 & 2 Chronicles*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

A substantial commentary that combines historical, literary, and theological themes to

understand the message of Chronicles. Chronicles presents a theology of hope to the postexilic community by not only telling the story of Israel, but the story of God in history.

Knoppers, Gary N. *1 Chronicles 1-9*. AB. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

The first of two volumes with a 90 page Introduction that includes the relevance of textual criticism, the use of earlier biblical books by the Chronicler, authorship, editions, date, and a helpful summary of recent studies on Chronicles.

Pratt, Jr., Richard L. *1 and 2 Chronicles*. A Mentor Commentary. Fearn: Mentor, 1998.

The purpose of Chronicles is to direct the restoration of the kingdom during the early postexilic period. The author develops the major themes of Chronicles with emphasis on how this applies to the church today. An excellent readable commentary.

Selman, Martin J. *1-2 Chronicles*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

A commentary that focuses on the message of the text rather than merely offering information about cultural and historical details. The introduction is particularly good. The author gives a full length treatment of the genealogies and is committed to the historical reliability of Chronicles.

DATES OF THE RULERS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

Judah	B.C.	Israel	B.C.
Rehoboam	930-913	Jeroboam I	930-909
Abijah	913-910	Nadab	909-908
Asa	910-869	Baasha	908-886
Jehoshaphat		Elah	886-885
coregent	872-869	Zimri	885
Jehoshaphat		Tibni	885-880
total reign	872-848	Omri	885-874
Jehoram		Ahab	874-853
coregent	853-848	Ahaziah	853-852
Jehoram		Joram	852-841
total reign	853-841	Jehu	841-814
Ahaziah	841	Jehoahaz	814-798
Athaliah	841-835	Jehoash	798-782
Joash	835-796	Jeroboam II	
Amaziah	796-767	coregency	793-782
Azariah (Uzziah)		Jeroboam II	
overlap with Amaziah	792-767	total reign	793-753
Azariah (Uzziah)		Zechariah	753
total reign	792-740	Shallum	752
Jotham		Menehem	752-742
coregency	750-740	Pekah	752-732
Jotham		Pekahiah	742-740
official reign	750-735	Hoshea	732-723
Jotham			
total years	750-732		
Ahaz			
overlap with Jotham	735-732		
Ahaz			
official years	732-715		
Hezekiah	715-686		
Manasseh			
coregent	696-686		
Manasseh			
total reign	696-642		
Amon	642-640		
Josiah	640-609		
Jehoahaz	609		
Jehoiakim	609-598		
Jehoiachin	598-597		
Zedekiah	597-586		

From Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (new rev ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1983), 10.