

Equip: Resources on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

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First and Second Samuel are part of the section named Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. This section of four books includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Samuel and Kings were not divided into two books, respectively, until their scroll length in the Greek translation required it.

The Former Prophets told the story of Israel from a prophetic perspective from their entry into the land of Canaan until their exit from that land in 586 B.C.

The narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel are a rich source for exposition and proclamation. While I was the pastor of the South Main Baptist Church of Pasadena, I regularly used these books as preaching and teaching texts.

I did a summer series in 2003 titled “No Man Is an Island.” I explored the significant life of David, not as a solitary life, but a life challenged and enriched through his relationships with Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, Goliath, Nathan, Bathsheba, Absalom and Mephibosheth.

I also explored the causes and resolution of conflict through examining in these books the conflict seen in the people of Israel who were at odds over supporting or opposing the establishing of kingship, the conflict experienced between Saul and Samuel, Saul and David, David and Goliath, and family conflict (David’s children).

I also have taught these books regularly to seminary students for more than 40 years as an adjunct professor in Old Testament. I am delighted to share with you some of the resources that have been valuable in my study of these books.

***NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Samuel* by Bill T. Arnold**

One of the best resources is the commentary written by Bill T. Arnold in the *NIV Application* series.

Arnold is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. He has a bachelor's degree from Asbury College, a Master of Divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary and a doctorate from the Hebrew Union College.

He has been the Paul S. Amos Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Director of Hebrew Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary since 1995. And he is a Sunday school teacher.

Arnold's classroom scholarship and his Sunday school room expertise allows him to exploit the format of the *NIV Application Commentary* series: "Original Meaning," "Bridging Contexts" and "Contemporary Significance." He is skilled in his comments in all three sections.

I especially appreciate his assessment and application of the covenant God made with David (2 Samuel 7). Arnold is not fond of the conditional/unconditional language some use to describe and distinguish between the covenants God made with Abram (Genesis 12), with Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19-24) and with David. He explains and defends his position well.

***Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel* by Ralph Klein**

Another commentary I have found helpful is by the late Ralph Klein (1 Samuel) in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series—first published in 1983

and revised in 2000. Klein was a reconciling figure in the 20th-century conflict within the Lutheran Church.

He was ordained in 1966 by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. He taught at the Christ Seminec (Seminary in Exile) at St. Louis but then concluded his career by teaching for almost 20 years at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America).

The format of the *Word Biblical Commentary* is “Form/Structure/Setting,” “Comment” and “Explanation.” Unless the reader is interested in the literary critical background of the text, skip the first section. Klein is at his best in his contributions through the second and third sections.

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: First and Second Samuel by Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann’s commentary in the *Interpretation* series is my favorite commentary on the Books of Samuel. The subtitle to this series is “A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,” and I believe it accomplishes both of those things.

Brueggemann is currently one of the most prominent Old Testament interpreters. He is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and chose Psalm 119:105 as his ordination verse.

He taught at the Eden Theological Seminary (1961-1986) and the Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia (1986-2003). He has authored more than 100 books, including an introduction to the Old Testament and a massive Old Testament theology.

I don't agree with everything Brueggemann has said or written, but I always have been challenged and enriched by his profound theological insights.

In the introduction to this commentary, Brueggemann declares he intends to exegete each text in the Books of Samuel with the "whole story," or big picture, in mind.

I appreciate his work as it emphasizes the theological implications and affirmations within the biblical text. He expertly maneuvers the narrative that relates the significant socio-political transformation within Israel, the transition between being led by judges and being led by kings.

These three commentaries are my first "go to" resources, but others are helpful as well.

Other helpful resources

***Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Samuel* by Joyce Baldwin**

Joyce Baldwin was Anglican by faith tradition and one of the leading biblical scholars of her time. She trained for mission service with the China Inland Mission, but she only served a few years in China before the Communist revolution.

She championed the cause of women in ministry when her church did not ordain women.

Her Samuel commentary is very readable for the lay reader.

New American Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel by Robert Bergen

Robert Bergen, a Southern Baptist, received his undergraduate education at Hardin-Simmons University and did his graduate work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He was the associate dean of academic administration and the distinguished professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Hannibal-LaGrange University for 30 years until his retirement in 2018.

Bergen's work is a fine example of the exegetical thoroughness and the quite conservative perspective of this series. His favorite text from these books is the one regarding the special friendship bond between Jonathan and David.

Ron Lyles is pastor emeritus of South Main Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas, where he was the senior pastor for 40 years. He has been an adjunct professor at [Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology](#) and [Houston Christian University](#) and is an adjunct professor at [Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary](#) and [Stark College and Seminary](#). He also was a writer for BaptistWay Press, now [GC2 Press](#). The views expressed in this resource article are those of the author.