

# Equip: Resources on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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The books of Ezra and Nehemiah often are trotted out at church just in time for a building campaign or a shift in vision. These Old Testament books about the Jewish return from exile and the literal and spiritual rebuilding undertaken give great lessons in leadership, priorities and faithfulness.

But it doesn't take long to realize, surrounding these important themes, there is a great deal of historical context that needs to be understood to exegete the texts properly.

For pastors and teachers, we can be grateful for the scholarship of those who have come before us, whose published commentaries aid in our work. The following commentaries served as useful resources for me as I taught an 18-week Bible study series on Ezra and Nehemiah at my church.

## ***The NIV Application Commentary: Ezra-Nehemiah* by Donna Petter and Thomas Petter**

The *NIV Application Commentary* series has become a favorite of pastors for its balance of both biblical exposition and life application. Each section is divided into three parts: "Original Meaning," "Bridging Contexts" and "Contemporary Significance." As such, reading any given section tends to walk you through the steps of preparing a sermon or Bible study.

Donna and Thomas Petter do an excellent job explaining the biblical text

succinctly, offering literary and historical context when helpful, without overwhelming the reader. Their applications are more hit-or-miss but always are thought-provoking. They also do an excellent job navigating exegetically difficult passages, such as those in Ezra dealing with ethnic “purity.”

In terms of bang for your buck, it’s difficult to beat the *NIV Application Commentary*, which is both scholarly and readable. I started my research with this volume each week and rarely was disappointed.

## ***Word Biblical Commentary: Ezra & Nehemiah* by H.G.M. Williamson**

The *Word Biblical Commentary* series is renowned for its robust scholarship. Williamson’s treatment of Ezra and Nehemiah is no exception.

Verse by verse, this commentary offers detailed textual criticism, engaging with both the manuscripts themselves and with outside scholarship. Extensive bibliographies are offered, and you always are confident while reading that you are dealing with an expert on the subject matter.

Pastors and teachers may struggle with the depth of scholarship, especially if your Hebrew is rusty (guilty!). I often found myself needing to go back and reread the paragraph I had just finished to make sure I was mining all the gold and not leaving something important behind.

Furthermore, Williamson won’t provide your sermon application for you. This is a critical commentary, not a pastoral one. So, don’t expect a tidy life application at the end of each section. But for the reader willing to buckle down and focus, this volume will reward you with information and insights.

# ***The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. 3: Ezra-Nehemiah* by Ralph W. Klein**

Perhaps my favorite multivolume commentary set is the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, which focuses on biblical exposition, but typically offers some sort of application-oriented “reflections” when appropriate. Entries are detailed but to-the-point, and the reflections rarely strain credulity.

Ralph Klein's work on Ezra-Nehemiah is useful, though not groundbreaking on both fronts. If this was your only commentary on the books, you would be helped by the information he provides and the larger exegetical point he makes. But if reading this alongside other commentaries, it is more likely to take the bronze medal than the gold, as is the case here.

## **Other commentaries**

Other highly regarded commentaries on Ezra-Nehemiah include those in the *Anchor Yale Bible* and *Zondervan Academic* series, both of which offer the kind of intensive treatment you get with Williamson's *Word Biblical Commentary*. These are doorstop books, far from light reading, but Ezra and Nehemiah require a little extra help for the expositor.

Hopefully, these commentaries will aid you as you seek to exegete Ezra and Nehemiah faithfully.

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