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INTRODUCTION

The study of the Bible will always lead to questions that the student cannot answer himself or herself. Over the centuries of Christian interpretive history a variety of perspectives about how to solve this dilemma have arisen. Central to Christianity has been the role of spiritual leaders, and of the importance of Christian community.

One of the prominent ministries in early Christianity was that of the teacher.¹ The understanding of God's will by His people centered on God revealing that will to His people through individuals called by God to communicate it. What they spoke orally to God's people over time was preserved in written form with the documents of the Bible. This impacted the way for God's people to know that divine will for their lives. These written words now

¹Coming off just one root stem in the Greek NT is a large number of words dealing with teaching: διδάσκω, διδάσκαλος, νομοδιδάσκαλος, καλοδιδάσκαλος, ψευδοδιδάσκαλος, διδασκαλία, έτεροδιδασκαλέω, διδαχή, διδακτός, διδακτικός [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 2:135.] And this is but one set of words connected to the idea of teaching.

Topics 33.224--33.250, "Teach," in the Louw-Nida Greek lexicon deal with the core idea of 'teach' (The meanings in the sub-domain of Teach may be regarded as relating to a process of 'causing someone to learn or to know' and hence overlapping with Domain 27 Learn and Domain 28 Know, but the meanings in the Sub-domain Teach involve a more continuous process of formal and informal instruction.) [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).] These include:

33.224 διδάσκω; διδαχή^a, ης f; διδασκαλία^a, ας f: to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting; **33.225 κατηγέω^a:** to teach in a systematic or detailed manner; **33.226 παιδεύω^a; παιδεία^a, ας f:** to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behavior; **33.227 διδακτός, ή, όν:** (derivative of διδάσκω 'to teach,' 33.224) pertaining to that which is taught; **33.228 θεοδιδάκτος, ον:** pertaining to being taught by God; **33.229 σωφρονίζω:** to instruct someone to behave in a wise and becoming manner; **33.230 ύποτίθεμαι:** to provide instruction as to what should be done; **33.231 νουθετέω^a; νουθεσία^a, ας f:** to provide instruction as to correct behavior and belief; **33.232 άνατρέφω παρὰ τούς πόδας** (followed by the genitive): (an idiom, literally 'to be trained at the feet of') to be given extensive and formal instruction by someone; **33.233 διδακτικός, ή, όν:** (derivative of διδάσκω 'to teach,' 33.224) pertaining to being able to teach; **33.234 όρθοτομέω:** to give accurate instruction; **33.235 έτεροδιδασκαλέω:** teach that which is different from what should be taught; **33.236 διδαχή^b, ης f; διδασκαλία^b, ας f:** (derivatives of διδάσκω 'to teach,' 33.224) the content of what is taught; **33.237 παραδίδωμι^c:** to pass on traditional instruction, often implying over a long period of time; **33.238 παραλαμβάνω^f:** to receive traditional instruction; **33.239 παράδοσις, εως f:** (derivative of παραδίδωμιε 'to instruct,' 33.237) the content of traditional instruction; **33.240 πατροπαράδοτος, ον:** pertaining to teaching which has been handed down from the ancestors; **33.241 αίρεσις^b, εως f:** the content of teaching which is not true; **33.242 έντρέφω:** to provide instruction and training, with the implication of skill in some area of practical knowledge; **33.242 έντρέφω:** to provide instruction and training, with the implication of skill in some area of practical knowledge; **33.243 διδάσκαλος, ον m:** (derivative of διδάσκω 'to teach,' 33.224) one who provides instruction; **33.244 παιδευτής^a, ού m:** (derivative of παιδεύωα 'to train,' 33.226) one who provides instruction for the purpose of proper behavior; **33.245 καθηγητής, ού m:** (derivative of καθηγέομαι 'to guide, to explain,' not occurring in the NT) one who provides instruction and guidance; **33.246 ράββι** (a borrowing from Aramaic): a Jewish teacher and scholar recognized for expertise in interpreting the Jewish Scriptures; **33.247 ραββουνι** (an Aramaic transcription): an honorific title for a teacher of the Jewish Scriptures, implying an important personal relationship; **33.248 νομοδιδάσκαλος, ον m:** a person who is skilled in the teaching and interpretation of the law (in the NT referring to the law of the OT); **33.249 καλοδιδάσκαλος, ον m and f:** one who teaches what is good and morally right; **33.250 ψευδοδιδάσκαλος, ον m:** one who teaches falsehoods.

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 412-415.]

had to be read and studied. The role of communicator originally centered in a prophet or preacher now shifts to that of a teacher whose prior study of the written Word enables them to help others come to an understanding of that Word. In Judaism, this person was the scribe who by the end of the first century was labeled the rabbi. As a copyist of the written word, his exposure to this material in theory at least gave him greater insight as to its meaning that he could orally communicate to God's people. In the early church the teacher played a critically important role as one who both understood the written Word of the Old Testament and the emerging traditions regarding what Jesus had said and done in His days on earth. During the apostolic era of the first century substantial overlapping between preacher and teacher existed, although in very broad terms preacher centered on proclamation of the Gospel to outsiders while teacher centered on communicating the Gospel to believers. The key here is the term εὐαγγέλιον that included not just how to be saved through Christ, but also all the implications of that salvation for obeying God and serving Christ.

From the second century on the concepts of preacher and teacher undergo change. The spiritual leader of the local congregation shifted from preacher to priest who administered the sacraments to the laity in order to transmit concretely the grace of God to the followers of Christ. Although understanding the will of God remained important, it no longer was central, regular participation in the mass in order to receive the elements of the Eucharist became central. Learning the will of God from written scriptures increasingly shifted to a specialized group of priests living in monasteries. They kept the leaders of the church informed and instructed. Only some of that instruction would be passed down to the laity. Personal study of both the Old Testament and the emerging Christian scriptures of the New Testament grew less and less among the laity and centered itself increasingly into the hands of the specialized priests in monasteries.

Not until the Protestant reformation with Martin Luther was there a major shift back toward all believers learning the scriptures and understanding God's Word individually and personally. Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers stressed the importance of every Christian having personal understanding of the scriptures. His translation of the Bible into the middle German of his time played a huge role in all of this. This model was duplicated in its essence by all of the reformers on both sides of the English channel. The role of the local church pastor now took on the central focus of both preaching and teaching the Gospel based on careful study of the written scriptures. This gave impetus to training of these local leaders in the now existing universities in the Christian scriptures.

Out of this emerging pattern will come the first commentaries on the Bible in the modern era.² To be sure, commentaries of some sort had existed as far back as the second century AD. The beginning of modern commentary writing dates from the release of the first volume of the *Meyers Kritisches Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* in 1832. From this point on scholarly commentaries would be written following some understanding of principles of exegeting scripture using modern historical based approaches.

Additionally out of this period of modern Bible study comes the development of various tools for doing Bible study. Some of these are targeting highly trained church pastors and university professors. Others are provided for seminary students preparing for Christian ministry. Increasingly a growing segment targets the lay person with minimal or no background training in studying the Bible. Since the late 1900s a large portion of these materials have been developed only in electronic form for use either with Bible study software loaded on to a personal computer and / or made available through internet web servers. This recent trend has witnessed an explosion of new tools for doing Bible study -- many very good tools, but a lot of thoroughly shoddy tools too. In the last five years the current dominating trend has been the adaptation of these tools as apps for smart devices such as the iPad, iPhone etc. One of the positive patterns over the past decade or so has been the growing amount of solid tools for doing Bible study available on the internet or as computer software.³



²For more details on this subject see my article "History of Commentary Writing," [cranfordville.com: http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioComExp.html#History](http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioComExp.html#History).

³After developing and teaching a MA seminar in the mid 90s at SWBTS in Fort Worth on "Computers in Ministry" I have been using the Logos Systems software increasingly for doing intensive Bible study. Currently I have well over seven thousand volumes in my personal library in electronic form. Prior to moving to Germany in 2008, I had a print library of close to 3,000 volumes located on bookshelves scattered all through our home in North Carolina. Amazingly now, I can carry my almost 8,000 volume library in my shirt pocket on an external computer drive! It would be entirely possible to access all this material using a smart phone.

The dilemma today for Bible students becomes how to make effective use of this substantial number of tools for doing Bible study, both in print and electronic forms. This brings us to the purpose of this chapter: to address that dilemma with some practical information about these tools along with suggestions concerning their use.

6.1 Primary verses Secondary Tools

This concept is vitally important for learning how to properly use commentaries etc. for Bible study. Yet the concept is elusive in its meanings. That is, it means different things in different settings.⁴ In the general fields of education and doing research understanding these terms is critically important for learning how to do researched based writing. Generally speaking, a primary source is a writing coming out of the time period under study, while a secondary source is a writing either about a primary source or something written much later after the time period being studied.

But in the field of religious studies this pair of terms has various meanings depending on the setting in which they are used. In the particular setting here, the two terms are relatively easy to distinguish. The primary source is the Bible. Everything else written to help us understand the Bible is a secondary source.

Why is it important to make these distinctions? A very important theological principle is at stake here. As Protestant heirs of Luther and the other reformers in the 1500s, the principle of sola scriptura is critically important to our religious heritage and belief system. Our firm belief is that the Bible alone stands as the sole authority for defining proper belief and Christian practice. Everything else -- tradition, liturgy, personal interpretation -- stands ultimately under the exclusive authority of Christian scripture as the standard of validity. The genuineness of our claim to Christian commitment is determined exclusively by whether or not it falls within the framework of biblical principle or not. This grows out of the conviction that the Bible is the revealed will of God for all humanity for all time.

Thus when we sit down to do Bible study every aid we turn to for help in this endeavor is a secondary tool for understanding the primary tool, our Bible. These secondary tools are intended to help us discover God's will from the pages of scripture for ourselves; never to tell us God's will on their own. None of them has the divine breath of God saturating them as does the scripture. They represent only a scholarly opinion about the possible meaning of the biblical text. We can thus profit immensely from the more advanced study of a biblical text done by the writer. But his or her interpretive opinion remains just that -- an opinion. It is not the Bible! Ultimately our own study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit must lead us to personal conclusions about the meaning of the biblical text. Clearly conclusions informed and strengthened by insights from these secondary tools will be stronger and more substantive. But these conclusions must be our own rather than the adoption of someone else's ideas.

The approach to Bible study in this material has been intentionally developed -- along with many more advanced technical procedures using the biblical languages -- with this Protestant heritage clearly in mind. The concern always is how to preserve this principle in the methods of Bible study being set forth. One of the very real dangers of many publications on doing Bible study is their paying only lip service to this Protestant heritage and then proceeding to lay down guidelines that either weaken or completely ignore this heritage.⁵ My concern has consistently remained over this half a century of ministry to devise principles of Bible study that enhance this principle and always keep it central in importance.

What we need to do now is to take a look at those secondary tools that are available for us to utilize. This will lead to some practice uses at the end with the application to Third John.

⁴One helpful introductory discussion of this topic is provided by the library services of Princeton University: "What is a Primary Source?" at <http://www.princeton.edu/~refdesk/primary2.html>. This is a general discussion for undergraduate students working on a term paper research project.

⁵Most of this happens by a naive adoption (usually unconsciously) of modern western ways of thinking and then applying them to the biblical text as though the ancients also thought the same way. The clearest expressions of this corrupting influence will be dramatically seen on the extremes of the theological spectrum of both the left and right sides. The result is a corrupted western cultural religion that is nothing but a pale expression of biblical Christianity. It takes deep insight into modern culture as well as into the biblical world to recognize this corruption easily. But once those skills are developed the Bible student quickly senses the very distasteful aspects of so much of contemporary Christianity and will long for greater insights into the biblical Christianity set forth in the pages of the Bible. Then the study of the Bible indeed becomes life transforming! God now has a free hand to remake us according to His eternal plan, as Paul asserted in Ephesians 2:4-10.

6.2 Types of Secondary Tools

What kinds of secondary tools are available for Bible study?

First one needs to distinguish between print tools and electronic tools. Then in the electronic tools category between computer software tools and internet based tools. These are the three distinct categories of materials available to assist you in the study of the Bible. Both print and software tools will mostly be cost based tools. That is, you will have to purchase them, or, as with all software, you purchase the lease rights for installing and using the tools on your computer. One never buys outright computer software! You only purchase the right to use a copy of the software. Regarding trends in today's world everything is rapidly shifting to the electronic format and away from the print format. It will be possible to buy a print copy of most of these tools for the foreseeable future, but the price distinction between the higher cost of the print copy and the lesser cost of the electronic copy is steadily getting larger, and will continue to do so in the future. Add to this is the exploding market for smart devices such as iPads, iPhones etc. that have specific apps enabling the use of most of these secondary tools on these 'sub-computer' devices. Regarding the internet based tools some are free, but most of the quality tools are subscription based with a small annual fee. Sometimes the subscription route is the least expensive way to gain access to quality study tools.

Most of the electronic based tools have emerged simply as a mirror copy of the print book format. To this point no distinctive electronic Bible study tool has emerged without an antecedent in print book form. The only possible exception would be to so-called Bible study software programs. But normally such software is little more than an operating system for the use of standard tools such as concordances, dictionaries etc. At some point in the future this will inevitably happen. The advantage, therefore, of the electronic tool over the print book is speed and thoroughness of use. One can do a concordance search through an internet Bible search site enormously quicker than by looking it up in a print book. Another benefit for those recording notes in their studies is that the data collected via an electronic source can be easily copied and pasted into a computer document file for writing and storage. This is much more efficient than copying a quote from a print text. In today's world, even the use of the biblical language material is easily copied and pasted when the electronic source is using the contemporary unicode font system, which is the case increasingly.

Throughout the discussion I will use a series of icons to refer to the type of tool each product is:



= printed book; = computer software; = smart device app; = internet tool. This will help to distinguish which category of secondary tool the product belongs to.

Second, different types of tools have emerged over the past two centuries that provide helpful assistance with Bible study. By design, each tool is intended to save you time through collecting relevant data into a single place for quick reference and study. Learning how to best use each kind of tool is important for doing effective Bible study. In a wood working shop the carpenter would have different tools for different purposes. His skills depend on his knowing how to best use each tool. The same is true for Bible study. Also, just as it takes time and practice to learn how to best use each of those wood working tools, the same will be true with these Bible study tools.

Now let's take a look at each of these kinds of tools.

6.2.1 Introductions

In the late 1800s a new discipline in biblical studies emerged that was focused on producing a single volume book which provided a background summary of all the books of the Bible. It emerged out of the developing critical studies of the Bible. By critical is meant technical study done from specific methodologies such as Historical Criticism. The growth of this discipline has been in parallel to the teaching of religious studies in universities and divinity schools on both sides of the Atlantic. Historically most schools required at least one semester for an introduction to the Bible of all beginning students in church related institutions. Although this pattern is declining in today's world, many of the church schools, especially among evangelical Protestants, still require one or two semesters of such study as a part of the required core curriculum for the bachelor's degree. Most every divinity school or theological seminary retains these requirements.⁶

⁶For those without background understanding, the distinction between a divinity school and a seminary at its simplest point is this. A divinity school is a department or college inside a university, and is usually attached to the graduate school program of the university. A seminary, on the other hand, is an independent institution operating at a graduate school level. In most programs in both North America and in Europe the basic degree offered in both types of schools is a master's degree. The student must complete a bachelor's degree at an

One other important point needs to be put on the table in order to avoid confusion over book titles and content. An important distinction exists between publications with titles containing the word “Introduction” and the word “Survey.” The Introduction type publication will place dominate emphasis on background issues of methods of study, the so-called ‘reporter questions’ about authorship etc regarding the documents of the Bible. On the other side, the Survey type publication will place dominate emphasis on a summation of the contents of each book of the Bible. Some attention may or may not be given to these background issues. Put another way, an Introduction is stressing the history of interpretation and methodology while the Survey is emphasizing the contents of the Bible. Some overlapping will nearly always be present, but these dominate patterns will distinguish the two types of approaches.



One very recent and growing trend is for the publisher of the printed textbook to also create a web site for the textbook containing a wide variety of materials including Powerpoint materials, practice quizzes, graphics files containing maps etc. Usually a separate secured section for the university professor is available with additional materials to aid in the use of the textbook in the class room. Over time the pattern will be to shift more and more of the textbook material to the internet with a subscription basis for students, professors, and schools.⁷



A growing number of originally print book Introductions and Surveys are becoming available in electronic format, usually in connection to some particular Bible study software. For example, Logos Systems software has available fifteen introductions in all three categories. Normally the price for these electronic versions will range from about 50 to 70 per cent of the cost of the parallel print version.

These materials come in three varieties. First is the inclusive one or two volume covering the entire Bible. More common, however, is separate publications for either the Old or New Testaments. This structure is largely dictated by the orientation of the anticipated university course for which the publication is designed as a required textbook.

6.2.1.1 Introductions to the Bible

A listing of general introductions to the Bible either in the Introduction format or especially in the Survey format will be considerable shorter than a similar list for either of the testaments. The reason is again functional. Most universities and divinity schools require separate courses for introduction to each of the testaments, rather than combining everything into a single course.



Unfortunately when trying to access the internet for an overarching introduction to the Bible, most of the sites that show up with a Google search or something similar are Religion 101 type courses offered by different schools all across the theological spectrum. Quite a large number of individuals, and a few churches, have developed an introduction to the Bible type web site. One interesting spin-off is the surprising number of web sites built around a powerpoint set of slides for such a program. The negative aspect, however, is the shallowness of the vast majority of such sources, along with incorrect information. Very few of the many that I looked at were built around careful scholarship, and also reverent scholarship. At this level the internet is going to offer a few web sites with a general article on the Bible, such as the Wikipedia article “Bible” at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible>. But these are more in the form of a Bible dictionary article, rather than as a more detailed textbook.



Among print volumes one of the standard general introductions to the Bible is John William Drane, *Intro-*

accredited university prior to enrolling either in a divinity school or a seminary. In North America, this beginning degree is the Master of Divinity degree.

One should note that the MDiv degree is a ‘professional degree’ rather than a research degree. Some schools offer in addition a Master of Arts degree oriented to some field of religious studies research. Increasingly the MA in Religion is the stepping stone to the PhD degree program with a strong emphasis on advanced research. This is true in spite of the fact that most MA degrees have a requirement of between 30 and 45 credit hours of study, while the MDiv degree ranges between 60 and 100 credit hours. The difference is between general preparation for ministry in some phase of church life (MDiv) and developing specialized advanced research skills (MA) in anticipation of a teaching career. For the last three or so decades the MDiv has been the route to the DMin (Doctor of Ministry degree), which is also a professional degree. Most schools in both North America and especially in Europe will not recognize a DMin degree as qualifying one to teach at the university level.

⁷For an example of this, see *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary and Theological Survey* by Mark Allan Powell at IntroducingNT.com.

ducing the Bible. 2nd ed. (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2011).⁸ Professor Drane, adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, has produced an introduction to the Bible and separate introductory publications to each of the testaments. He examines each of these in a manner that is typical for publications of this kind all across the English speaking world. Each of these publications will reflect a Protestant perspective on the Christian Bible. Using this volume as an example, let's take a look at how such publications are organized by looking at the Table of Contents page of Drane's *Introducing the Bible*, original edition.

| Contents | | |
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| 1. Introducing the Old Testament | Growing insecurity New prosperity and false security National revival Assyria on the move | 10. God and the World |
| The story Escape from Egypt National decline Understanding the story The story and the faith Ordering the books Types of literature Sections of the Hebrew Bible | 6. Judah and Jerusalem | Discovering God in nature and history Thinking about the world Understanding the Genesis stories The stories as literature The message of the stories Men, women and God In relation to the earth In relation to God In relation to each other Broken relationships and new beginnings The root of the problem Searching for the answer |
| 2. The Founding of the Nation | Danger and uncertainty False confidence Reform in Jerusalem The Assyrians move in Assyria's final fling Reform and renewal A lost book The Babylonians Jeremiah and the fall of Jerusalem | 11. Living as God's People |
| National identity The founders Early expressions of faith The birth of the nation The exodus The covenant To the promised land | 7. Dashed Hopes and New Horizons | Belief and behaviour Discovering God's will through wisdom Understanding 'wisdom' Wisdom in practice Discovering God's will in the Law The ten commandments The book of the covenant Deuteronomy Priestly laws From theory to practice Criminal law Civil law Family law Social law Explaining God's will The Old Testament ethic is theological The Old Testament ethic is dynamic The Old Testament ethic is social The Old Testament ethic is personal |
| 3. A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey | Facing up to disaster By the rivers of Babylon A new beginning Back to Jerusalem Confusion and despair Renewing the covenant Building the walls Handing on the Law | 12. Worshipping God |
| Canaan and its history The emergence of Israel Armed struggle Peaceful infiltration Social revolution The judges | 8. The Challenge of a New Age | Worshipping a holy God God is infinite God is good God is love Places of worship The tabernacle or tent of Yahweh's presence Local sanctuaries The Temple The synagogue The character of worship Singing and music Prayer Dance and drama Sacrifice Times for worship The sabbath day The Passover The harvest festivals |
| 4. 'A King Like Other Nations' | A new empire Jews and Greeks Emerging tensions National pride and religious zeal Keeping the faith Esther Judith Tobit The end of the story | |
| Samuel and the ark Saul David David's rise to power A new king and new ways The old ways and new ideas Solomon The empire Alliances The Temple Arts and science Balancing the books After Solomon Society and religion The psalms Wisdom What is wisdom? | 9. The Living God | |
| 5. The Two Kingdoms | Who is God? God is invisible God and the forces of nature God and the philosophers What is God like? An active God Finding God in later history A personal God Words for describing God When God is absent Personal alienation National despair How can God be known? God's grace God's word | |
| A kingdom divided Back to the old ways Political changes Religious problems New alliances Prosperity again Decay and collapse | | |

⁸John Drane's survey provides an engaging general introduction to the persons, events, and cultural contexts of the Bible. Arranged historically, Drane's text takes readers through the Bible with numerous special articles that highlight historical and interpretative controversies that figure significantly in contemporary scholarship. This leading introductory textbook provides students with an accessible and critical understanding of biblical literature. Revisions to the second edition include: Rich, full-color interior design / Chapter openers listing overarching themes / New glossary." ["Introducing the Bible," amazon.com]

13. From Hebrew Bible to Old Testament

- Questions of belief
 - Searching for solutions
 - Making connections
- Questions of behaviour
 - Revisiting history
 - Moral tensions
 - Texts and readers
- Glimpses of a different future
 - A new covenant
 - A messiah
 - A new world

Other Books on the Old Testament

14. The Beginning of the Story

- From Jesus of Nazareth to early Christianity
 - A new faith
 - Opposition
 - Changing the world
- The Greek heritage
 - Hellenism
 - Philosophy
 - Religion
- Palestine and its people
 - Hellenism and Judaism
 - Jews and Romans
 - Herod the Great
 - The three Herods
- Religious loyalties
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 - Pharisees
 - Zealots
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15. Jesus' Birth and Early Years

- Jesus grows up
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 - Jesus and his family
- John the Baptist
- Jesus is baptized
- Jesus decides his priorities

16. Who was Jesus?

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- The Messiah
- The Son of God
- The servant

17. Understanding Jesus' Death

- Opposition and conflict
- Jesus on trial
- Understanding the death of Jesus
 - Jesus' death as a battle
 - Jesus' death as an example
 - Jesus' death as a sacrifice
 - Jesus' death as a ransom
 - Jesus in the place of others

18. The Resurrection

- The belief of the early church
- The evidence of Paul
- The gospel traditions
- The disciples
- Facts and faith about the resurrection
 - The 'resurrection fact' was a subjective experience
 - The 'resurrection fact' was a theological creation
 - The 'resurrection fact' was a later belief
- What does the resurrection mean?

- The resurrection and Jesus' identity
- The resurrection and new life
- The resurrection and future hope

19. What is God's Kingdom?

- The kingdom of God
- A new way of being

20. Understanding the Gospels

- What is a gospel?
 - The gospels and Graeco-Roman biography
 - Gospel writers on the gospels
- Preaching and writing
 - Old Testament texts
 - Words of Jesus
- Putting the gospels together
- New light on old problems
 - Did Q really exist?
 - Who were the gospels for?

21. Four Portraits of Jesus

- Mark
 - Ancient evidence
 - The author
 - The readers
 - The date
 - Mark's purpose in writing
 - Mark's ending
- Luke
 - The date
 - Luke's purpose in writing
- Matthew
 - The structure of the gospel
 - Matthew's purpose in writing
 - The author
 - The date
- John
 - Structure
 - The character of the fourth gospel
 - John and the synoptic gospels
 - John's purpose in writing
 - Author and date

22. Engaging with the Wider World

- Back to Jesus
 - Keeping the Law
 - Religion and race
- The church is born
- The church grows
- The conflict begins
- Moving beyond Jerusalem
 - Into Judea and Samaria
 - Widening horizons

23. Introducing Paul

- Paul's early life
- Significant influences in Paul's life
 - Paul and Judaism
 - Paul and the philosophers
 - Paul and the mystery religions
- Paul and the earliest church
 - Christians and the Old Testament
 - The church and Israel
 - To the Jews first
 - Jews and Gentiles
 - Paul and Jerusalem
 - Paul and the teaching of Jesus

24. Paul the Persecutor

- Persecution
- The Damascus road

- Paul and the Jerusalem Christians
- Paul and the Gentiles

25. Into All the World

- From Antioch to Cyprus
- The first Gentile churches
- Judaizers
- Paul the letter writer
- Paul writes to the Galatian churches
 - The letter and its argument
 - Where did Paul get his authority?
 - Christians and the Old Testament
 - Freedom and legalism
- The Apostolic Council

26. Paul the Missionary

- Back to Galatia
- Philippi
 - Converts
 - Imprisonment
- Athens
- Corinth
- Paul writes more letters

27. Paul the Pastor

- Ephesus
 - The impact of the gospel
 - Prison again?
 - Advising the churches
- Paul and the church at Corinth
 - Bad news from Corinth
 - Paul writes 1 Corinthians
 - Paul visits Corinth
 - Another letter
 - Good news from Corinth
 - Paul writes 2 Corinthians
- 1 Corinthians
 - Life in Christ
 - Life in the world
 - Life in the church
- More arguments in Corinth
 - Facing up to problems
 - What is an apostle?
 - Looking to the future
 - Authority and charisma
- Looking towards Rome
- Romans

28. Paul Reaches Rome

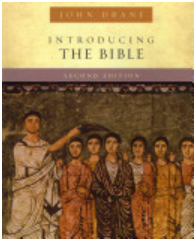
- The collection for Jerusalem
- Under arrest
- Destination Rome
- Letters from prison
 - The church at Colossae
 - The church at Ephesus
 - The church at Philippi
 - Timothy and Titus

29. The Church and its Jewish Origins

- Christians and Jewish morality
- James
- Christians and Jewish ritual
- Hebrews
- Christians and the covenant with Israel
- 1 Peter
- Hope for the future
- Revelation

30. The Enemies Within

- The book of Revelation
- The letters of John



Although this is a lengthy illustration, it will enable us to better understand how such publications are organized, and thus how they can be helpful for Bible study.

Notice several aspects of the arrangement of the contents:

1) Chapters one through thirteen cover the Old Testament.

2) Chapters fourteen through thirty-one cover the New Testament. Immediately one can sense the Christian orientation of the publication since more space is devoted to the New Testament, in spite of the content of the biblical books being heavily weighted toward the Old Testament volume wise.

3) Prof. Drane follows the typical sequencing of the chapters. He begins in chapter one with a brief overview of scholarly study of the Old Testament. Then beginning with chapter two a historical sequence becomes the organizing pattern and is followed through chapter eight. Beyond the historical books of the Pentateuch through Esther, the other biblical books are inserted in the appropriate time period of their understood composition. This includes the books of the prophets which are treated as a part of the historical story of Israel from its beginnings to the close of the Old Testament era.

Then chapter eight somewhat transitions into an overview of Old Testament theology in chapters nine through twelve. Only a few of the more central doctrinal themes in the Old Testament are treated. Chapter thirteen brings this section to a close with a discussion of applicational issues touching on the relevance to the Old Testament in today's world.

4) Chapters fourteen through thirty-one focus on the New Testament. Here a similar organizing pattern of the content is followed. Chapter fourteen touches on NT background issues of formal history etc. as preparatory to studying the New Testament.

Chapters fifteen through twenty-one center on Jesus and the gospels. Chapters fifteen through nineteen center on an interpretive summary of the content of the four gospels with a theological focus. Chapter twenty summarizes gospel study in the modern era, and is then followed in chapter twenty-one with a brief summation of each of the four gospels.

Chapter twenty-two centers on Acts with a brief overview of contents and interpretive issues prior to the apostle Paul. Chapters twenty three through twenty-eight deal with the apostle Paul. A combination of chronological sequencing of his ministry from Acts and his letters is developed. Background interpretive issues are presented in chapter twenty-three. Chapters twenty-four through twenty-eight will present the story of Paul with a blending of the Acts narrative and the various letters of Paul presented at appropriate points in the story.

Chapters twenty nine through thirty cover the remaining materials in the New Testament, with the two fold emphasis on Jewish Christian writings and those of the apostle John.

Chapter thirty one somewhat parallels chapter thirteen with an emphasis on application of NT study to today's world.

5) For those with background experience in teaching, the arrangement of this sets up some teaching challenges. It is approximately 730 pages in length with the content divided into thirty-one chapters. When used in a one semester university class, this means that approximately two chapters per week must be covered in the

'False prophets'

Docetism

1 John

Jude and 2 Peter

31. Reading and Understanding the New Testament

Beginning where we are

Starting points

Influences

The text's own context

The sociological context

World-view

Personal perceptions

Discovering the message

Other Books on the New Testament

Section I: The Old Testament¹

Part One: Formative Experiences (Chapters 1-4)

1: Introducing the Old Testament 14

2: The Founding of a Nation 38

3: New People in an Old Land 57

4: "A King Like Other Nations" 74

Part Two: Crisis and Hope (Chapters 5-8)

5: Two Kingdoms 102

6: Judah and Jerusalem 125

7: Dashed Hopes and New Horizons 149

8: The Challenge of a New Age 178

Part Three: Standing before God (Chapters 9-12)

9: God and the World 203

10: Living as the People of God 218

11: Worship 240

12: From Hebrew Bible to Old Testament 267

Section II: The New Testament

Part Four: Jesus at the Center (Chapters 13-18)

13: The Beginning of the Story 288

14: Jesus' Birth and Early Years 318

15: Jesus and His Message 330

16: Stories and Signs 350

17: Crucifixion 376

18: Resurrection 395

Part Five: The Gospels and Acts (Chapters 19-21)

19: Understanding the Gospels 409

20: Four Portraits of Jesus 428

21: Engaging with the Wider World 449

Part Six: The Apostle Paul (Chapters 22-25)

22: Paul: From Persecutor to Apostle 471

23: Travels and Letters 495

24: Paul and His Churches 521

25: The End of the Journey 546

Part Seven: Christian Self-Definition (Chapters 26-28)

26: The Church and its Jewish Origins 571

27: Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Organization 605

28: Reading and Understanding the New Testament 628

¹A brief synopsis of the second edition illustrating the changes between the first publication and the revision.

class discussion. If the teacher uses sources beyond this text book then the average of 50 pages per with this text is added to assignments in other text sources as well.⁹ One can hear students groaning and wailing over having so much reading to do!

And this doesn't touch the financial factor. Drane's introduction costs \$65 for a paperback copy at Amazon.com, which means some discount off the suggested retail price. The electronic version is a little better price wise at \$55 at Logos.com. One would need to remember for this volume that it represents a combination of Drane's two other very popular publications, *Introducing the Old Testament* (\$24.95 at Logos / \$39 hardcover print at Amazon) and *Introducing the New Testament* (\$28.95 at Logos / \$43.20 paperback print at Amazon). Thus this 'two-volumes-in-one' publication is capable of being used in a variety of classroom settings.

6) John Drane represents solid Protestant scholarship. He is Scottish by birth and educated in the UK, but has spent a considerable part of his teaching career in the US.¹⁰ Very active in British evangelical circles, he has also served as a leader in international circles with a strong missionary emphasis.

Thus some general observations in making use of such general introductions. **First**, be sure to pay attention to the background of the author. His training at specific schools will profoundly shape his perspective. The denominational heritage he or she comes out of will play an important role also. Having this background understanding can enable you to much better understand where the author is coming from in the approach to the various topics.

Second, note who the publisher of the book is. In the religious publishing world a wide diversity of publishing houses produce religious materials.¹¹ Drane's book comes from Fortress Press, which is traditionally one of the major Lutheran publishing houses in the US. This highlights one caution here: an American Lutheran publishing house publishing a Scottish evangelical's book doesn't logically register. One must understand that most of the major mainstream religious publishers in the past several decades have reached out to publish books etc. of individuals coming across a wide diversity of theological viewpoints. This is certainly true of Fortress Press. But for most of these publishers the high standards of scholarly work will still be in place, thus meaning that Drane's work contains established scholarly content.

Third, begin by paying attention to the Table of Contents page to see how the author is approaching the survey of the biblical materials. Three foundational subject areas will be covered by substantive publications: biblical background issues on scholarly approaches; overview of the content of the biblical books; and theological understandings of the religious teachings of the Bible. Sometimes, as with this volume of Drane, an additional emphasis on how to study the Bible will be tossed in as well. When all these subject areas are covered, the publication will be much more useful in doing Bible study.

6.2.1.2 Introductions to the Old Testament

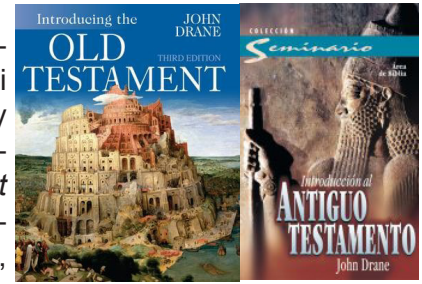
⁹During the almost forty years that I had some level of teaching responsibility, I was fortunate to not have to teach a one semester introduction to the Bible course. In the beginning years of teaching at SWBTS in Fort Worth, I did teach a two semester introduction to the New Testament set of courses at the master's level. But I discontinued teaching these courses after the first six years and began teaching only upper level master's and mostly PhD. seminars for the remainder of the twenty four years at the seminary. The transition to Gardner-Webb University in 1998 meant that I came into the Department of Religious Studies. Thus I began teaching the one semester each course on the Old Testament (Religion 101) and on the New Testament (Religion 102). This proved to be highly challenging to try to do reasonable justice to covering each testament in a single semester of classroom teaching. Every professor teaching these kinds of courses faces large challenges in adequately covering the course content but with the biblical materials and the textbook content.

¹⁰“Drane began an academic career as one of the founders of the religious studies program at the University of Stirling, Scotland, in partnership with Stewart Sutherland and the late Glyn Richards. At the beginning of this century he was appointed to teach Practical Theology in the Divinity School at the University of Aberdeen, though by the end of 2004 he had resigned from that post and is currently a self-employed consultant working with churches of many different denominations throughout the United Kingdom as well as internationally. He is also an adjunct professor in New Testament and Practical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, California as well as being a Visiting Scholar at Spurgeon's College in London and a Visiting Fellow of St John's College, Durham. A course on theology and culture which was originally offered in Aberdeen is now part of the curriculum at International Christian College in Glasgow, and he also teaches occasional courses at Cranmer Hall, an Anglican theological college in the University of Durham.” [“John Drane,” wikipedia.org]

¹¹A reasonably complete listing of religious publishers is available at “Christian Publishing Companies,” wikipedia.org. Some background explanation is given that will help you understand the orientation of the publisher.



The same dilemma faces you regarding the more specialized introductions to the Old Testament. The internet based sources are either course syllabi by a university or articles on the Old Testament in the format of a Bible dictionary article.¹² When it comes to the print publications, a huge variety of choices exists.¹³ Once again we will turn to John Drane's *Introduction to the Old Testament* as a typical example of how such books are organized. The most recent publication is the third revised edition released in 2011. Additionally a Spanish edition, *Introducción al Antiguo Testamento*, of an earlier English edition is now available from Zondervan Publishing House. (for \$20).



When one compares the Table of Contents to the new third edition to that which is listed above in his *Introduction to the Bible*, you will discover very few differences. Some chapter headings and subheadings are re-worded with minor material added to reflect updates in scholarly study of the OT. The same methodological approach is retained.¹⁴

How can an introduction to the Old Testament help me in my Bible study? This is the bottom line issue for our study here. Let me suggest some ways where such publications can be of help. First, when beginning a study of a passage in a new biblical book some of the background issues about authorship etc. need to be explored in order to have a better understanding of the historical context of the passage. The introductions can be very helpful here. Second, when looking at the literary setting, and perhaps the internal history setting, of your passage, the summation of that passage in an introduction can be very helpful. Third, in order to gain insights into the 'big picture' of both the Old Testament and the history of how scholars have understood it, there are few better sources than the introductions. These publications will go into greater detail than Bible dictionary type articles on the Old Testament, e.g., "Old Testament," wikipedia.org.

6.2.1.3 Introductions to the New Testament¹⁵

¹²Some very isolated exceptions to this exist on the internet. A few older, widely used Introductions to the Old Testament can be downloaded as a pdf file on to your computer for use in study. One widely used textbook is Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek. Additional Notes*, at CCEL is available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/swete/greekot.pdf>. This particular textbook approaches the Old Testament from the perspective of the Septuagint.

Additionally one can find powerpoint sides connected to some particular OT introduction. For example, see "Introduction to the Old Testament: Powerpoints," at www.angelfire.com.

Also supplementary web sites for use with print publications are increasingly common. For example, see Oxford University Press' site for *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament* at <http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195332728/>

¹³Here are some recommended by John Drane in his OT introduction: Boadt, Lawrence, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, New York: Paulist Press, 1984 (Scheele Library – BS1140.2.B63); Collins, John J., *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004; Dick, Michael B., *Reading the Old Testament: An Inductive Introduction*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008; Dillard, Raymond B. & Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, 1994; Stanley, Christopher D., *The Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. These will cover a wide range of theological perspectives as well as study methodologies.

Michael Marlowe in his web site, Bible-researcher.com, also recommends a select number of introductions: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/ot-bibliography.html>. The seven that he lists all fall inside a conservative evangelical approach. Paul Tanner at his web site has a listing of both OT introductions and surveys: <http://paultanner.org/English%20Docs/OT%201/Extra/OTBibliog.pdf>.

¹⁴John Drane's survey textbook provides an engaging general introduction to the persons, events, and cultural context of the Old Testament. Arranged historically, Drane's text takes readers through the books of the Old Testament with numerous special articles spelling out in greater detail both historical and interpretative controversies. Additional coverage centers on the meaning and implications of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people.

Revisions to the third edition include:

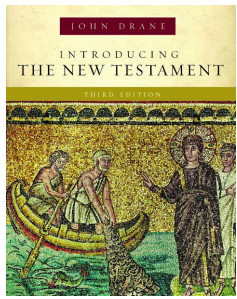
- Rich, full-color interior design, now in paperback
- Chapter openers guide readers to the overarching themes
- Expanded table of contents accommodates use as textbook
- New glossary"

[“Introduction to the Old Testament,” fortresspress.org]

¹⁵One related type of website to the Introduction to the New Testament type of material is the NT Gateway sites. Mark Goodacre



A similar situation with introductions to the New Testament will prevail as with those introducing the Old Testament. But one can find more internet based materials for New Testament studies. In regard to the print publications of Introductions to the New Testament, the range of materials is overwhelming.¹⁶



Once more we turn to John Drane's *Introducing the New Testament* as an example of how such textbooks are organized. The third revised edition of this text was released in 2010 by Fortress Press.¹⁷ With this revision Prof. Drane has rearranged considerably the content of the textbook from the original publication included in the above *Introducing the Bible*. The essential structure and organization have been retained, but a lot of updating and re-writing of the details have taken place from the original publication to this latest edition. The chart on the right represents the ToC of the third edition.

Contents

- 1: The Beginning of the Story 10
- 2: Jesus' Birth and Early Years 46
- 3: Jesus and His Message 66
- 4: Stories and Signs 86
- 5: How to Live like Jesus 109
- 6: Crucifixion 124
- 7: Resurrection 147
- 8: Understanding the Gospels 161
- 9: Four Portraits of Jesus 187
- 10: Can We Trust the Gospels? 208
- 11: Engaging with the Wider World 224
- 12: Paul: From Persecutor to
- 13: Travels and Letters 278
- 14: Paul and His Churches 303
- 15: The End of the Journey 329
- 16: What Does it Mean to Be a
- 17: The Church and its Jewish Origins 375
- 18: Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Organization 411
- 19: Reading and Understanding the New Testament 437
- Other Resources on the New Testament



A few older but still helpful print publications are now available for free on the internet in electronic format. Louis Berkhoff's *Introduction to the New Testament* is available as a free download in a variety of formats at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/berkhof/newtestament.html>. Also available is *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Richard Heard published by Religion Online. Very controversial but quite recently published is *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* by Bart Ehrman. This publication is not for the beginner! From an evangelical perspective is *An Introduction to the New Testament* by D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo. This is available as a free pdf download. An older classic is *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Edgar J. Goodspeed at earlychristianwritings.com. Helpful also is *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* by Robert M. Grant, published by the University of Chicago Press. Although not published as an Introduction, the web site of Father Felix Just, S.J., *E.N.T.E.R.*, functions pretty much as an introduction to the New Testament and represents a Roman Catholic perspective. Very different is the highly conservative Baptist web site of Barry D. Smith containing a survey of the New Testament, *The New Testament and Its Content*. These free internet based introductions will provide you with a wide variety of viewpoints across the theological spectrum. They are produced by credible scholars.



Again, the manner of use in Bible study for these introductions will be similar to what was recommended

at Duke University has perhaps the best one (not the least because cranfordville.com is listed as a recommended site) called simply NT Gateway at <http://www.ntgateway.com/>. Although much of the material is intended for the professional NT scholar, a great deal of it is quite useful generally. The *Biblical Resource Index Page* is especially helpful in recommending a variety of other gateways for biblical studies.

¹⁶Most highly inclusive bibliography listings will include hundreds of publications. One very helpful gateway into this massive bibliographic database on the internet is "New Testament Bibliographies," at New Testament Gateway. A very helpful listing on NT introductions is the one provided by Vanderbilt University, pp. 22-23 at http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/bibliographies/new_testament.pdf. This pdf file with 42 pages of bibliography can be downloaded for use on your computer. Another helpful site is "New Testament B bibliography #1: Surveys, Introductions & Reference Works," at creighton.edu by William Harmless.

¹⁷Written for a broad audience, John Drane's survey textbook provides a solid historical foundation for understanding the persons, events, and cultural context of the New Testament. Arranged historically, Drane's text takes readers through the world of the first Christians, the life and teaching of Jesus, the origins and growth of the Early Church, the life, mission and letters of Paul, how the Gospels were composed, Revelation, and how the New Testament was formed and has been interpreted and used by later generations.

"What's New in the Third Edition:

- Full-color interior
- Chapter introduction
- Extensive glossary for helpful reference"

[*Introducing the New Testament: Third Edition,* Fortress Press]

above for the OT publications. The greater abundance of these introductions will enable you to develop a broader understanding of both the general content of the books in the NT as well as the interpretive issues connected to the New Testament.

6.2.2 Commentaries

“Of the writing of commentaries there is no end!” some scholar is supposed to have said many centuries ago. Clearly that seems to be the case in today’s world.¹⁸ A biblical commentary is inseparably bound to the idea of exegesis of scripture.¹⁹

Commentaries come in all shapes and sizes, and have very distinct purposes for intended use.²⁰ The Merriam-Webster online dictionary contains several definitions.²¹ The one most applicable to our use of the word is 2. a., “a systematic series of explanations or interpretations (as of a writing).” Historically, the English word ‘commentary’ comes from the Latin *commentor* and *commentare*.²² The noun and verb form *commentor* contains a range of meanings connected to the idea of thinking about, study, forming an understanding of something.²³ Thus a Bible commentary is comprised of the notes or annotations of an interpreter in order to make clear his interpretive

¹⁸“No attempt has been made to estimate the number of commentaries that have been written on the Bible. In Calmet’s *Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (1722) at least 1400 titles are listed, some of them extending to many volumes. In addition, there are hundreds of titles on related subjects, which occupy thirty-two columns of text. A century and a half later, in an article on ‘Commentary,’ *McClintock and Strong’s Cyclopedia* (1867–81) contains a ‘chronological conspectus of professed commentaries on the whole canonical Scriptures,’ listing 165 commentaries covering the entire Bible. In the article on the NT, 114 more are listed. There are also separate lists of commentaries on all the books of the Bible (e.g., 105 commentaries on the book of Daniel). About that time Charles H. Spurgeon published his famous *Commenting and Commentaries* (1876) in which he listed 1437 titles. Nearly a century later Donald Guthrie in his *New Testament Introduction* listed more than 800 titles, most of which were published since the lists of McClintock and Strong and of Spurgeon.

“Ancient commentaries were numerous also. C. H. Turner, in a lengthy article on ‘Greek Patristic Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles’ (HDB, 5:484–531), lists 115 titles down to the 8th cent., and there were others on the Gospels, Acts, and General Epistles.”

[Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1, A-C, Revised, Full-Color Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 2009), 962.]

¹⁹For a detailed explanation of the nature and role of commentaries on the Bible see my article “Explanation of Commentaries,” at cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioComExp.html>. Much of the material here is a summarized, simplified presentation of this article.

²⁰“Etymologically, a commentary (from Lat *commentor*) denotes jottings, annotations, memoranda, on a given subject or perhaps on a series of events; hence its use in the plural as a designation for a narrative or history, as the *Commentaries* of Caesar. In its application to Scripture the word designates a work devoted to the explanation, elucidation, illustration, sometimes the homiletic expansion and edifying utilization, of the text of some book or portion of Scripture. The primary function of a good comm is to furnish an exact interpretation of the meaning of the passage under consideration; it should also show the connection of ideas, the steps of argument, and the scope and design of the whole, in the writing in question.” [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 1:737.]

²¹1. a : an explanatory treatise —usually used in plural; b : a record of events usually written by a participant —usually used in plural; 2. a : a systematic series of explanations or interpretations (as of a writing); b : comment; 3. a : something that serves for illustration or explanation <the dark, airless apartments and sunless factories ... are a sad commentary upon our civilization — H. A. Overstreet>; b : an expression of opinion. [“Commentary,” Merriam-Webster.com]

²²commentor

comment.or V 1 I 1 PRES PASSIVE IND 1 S; **commento, commentare, commentavi, commentatus** V (1st) TRANS [XXXES] uncommon; delineate, sketch; (humorously) demonstrate on face (cudgel/beat); commentor, commentari, commentatus sum V (1st) DEP [XXXBO]; think about; study beforehand, practice, prepare; discuss, argue over; imagine; commentor N 3 I NOM S M; commentor N 3 I VOC S M; **commentor, commentoris** N (3rd) M [XTXEO] uncommon; inventor, deviser; machinist (L+S)

[William Whitaker, *Dictionary of Latin Forms* (Logos Bible Software, 2012).]

²³“**commentor**: 0. *comminiscor, to meditate, think over, study, deliberate, weigh, prepare* (mentally): *commentandi causā convenire, deliberation: aliquid: causam: futuras mecum miserias: de populi R. libertate.* — Esp., of preparation for a speech: *paratus, cum complurīs dies commentatus esset.* — Of writings, *to prepare, produce, compose, write: mimos.* — *To declaim, exercise in speaking, practise oratory: commentabar declamitans cum M. Pisone: cottidie: pro meo iure in vestris auribus.* — *To meditate, purpose: quod te commentatum esse declarant.*” [Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (Medford, MA: American Book Company, 1890).]

understanding of a particular biblical text.²⁴

One feature of modern biblical commentaries in particular that is immediately noticeable is the varying amount of detail in the comments by the interpreter. Some possess very minimal notes, while others will contain many pages on a single verse of scripture. Another feature will be the structural arrangement of commentaries that follow the sequential pattern of book, chapter, and verse listing in the Bible as their organizing structure.

In the listing below we begin with those volumes that contain the least amount of comment on the scripture text and move toward those with increasing detail. On the beginning side of this scale the commentaries will be only one volume in length. But with increased detail in comments the commentary will quickly expand into a series of books containing as many as a hundred or more volumes.

Also important to note is that the multi-volume commentaries especially (topic 6.2.2.3 below) will tend to go one of two directions in orientation. On one side, some will seek to be all inclusive. Thus the expanded details are attempting to cover most all aspects of biblical interpretation. On the other end of the scale, a growing number of commentaries will specialize in one interpretive aspect of exegesis, e.g., *A Handbook on the Letters of John*.²⁵ This volume is part of the *UBS Handbook* series. These volumes are primarily prepared for Bible translators in order to help address translation issues being faced in the biblical text.²⁶ But they also are excellent summarizing kinds of commentaries and are packed full of interesting illustrations for addressing Bible translation issues. These often make excellent sources for illustrating issues in both teaching and preaching from a biblical text. Also in this second category are those commentaries that stress one particular interpretive method, e.g., Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. When seeking specific answers to one aspect of the interpretive process, these type commentaries can be extremely helpful.

Another helpful insight has to do with the general orientation of a commentary. In doing historical interpretation of a biblical text the emphasis will be on the 'then' meaning and the 'now' meaning of the text. Let me chart out the orientation of commentaries in this regard:

Historical Meaning emphasis: the 'then' meaning.

²⁴“COMMENTARY (from Lat. commentarius ‘annotation’). † A work which explains, analyzes, or expounds upon a biblical book or the whole of Scripture. In its original sense it comprised a narrative or historical account, and as such certain works are cited as sources for the Chronicler’s history — the Commentary on the Book of Kings (2 Chr. 24:27) and the ‘story’ (Heb. miḏrāš ‘exposition’; NIV ‘annotations’; JB ‘Midrash’) of the prophet Iddo (13:22).

“In Jewish practice, the earliest commentaries on Scripture were those developed for the Jews who returned from the Exile, many of whom could no longer understand the Hebrew language. Originally oral Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew text (Neh. 8:8), these explanations were much later written down. Two basic types of midrash developed, the halachic midrash which deals with the legal portions of the canon and the haggadic midrash, a homiletical exposition of the nonlegal portions. The Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew text dating to the postexilic period; an early form of exegetical work, it is actually a paraphrase. The Talmud represents a collection of rabbinical interpretations of the Law, commenting upon the written law and applying it to Jewish conditions in the period from ca. the fourth century B.C. through the sixth century A.D. Extensive rabbinical exegesis in the Middle Ages sought to determine the literal sense of the Scriptures, as well as their allegorical, ethical or homiletical, and mystical meanings.

“With the acceptance of the New Testament writings as authoritative, the early Christians developed various means of verse-by-verse exposition on the books of both the Old and New Testaments. Although the earliest known work is that of the Gnostic Heracleon (ca. A.D. 180), many of the Church Fathers produced works which are significant not only for their treatment of the biblical text but also for the foundation they provided for Christian doctrine. Among the early commentators two distinct schools of interpretation developed. That of Origen and the Alexandrian commentators was highly allegorical, focusing on the literal, moral, and spiritual aspects of the books. The Antiochian school, represented by Chrysostom, was quite literal and employed a grammatical style of exegesis.

“Since the advance of biblical criticism in the nineteenth century, commentaries have sought to elucidate the text in terms of its historical setting (author, date, and, more recently, social, political, and economic matrices), literary character (genre, structure, and function), textual reliability, and philological and grammatical insights. Other works are more popular, stressing exposition of the various passages and their application to contemporary circumstances.”

[Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 229-30.]

²⁵Haas, C., Marinus de Jonge and J. L. Swellengrebel. *A Handbook on the Letters of John*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.

²⁶“The UBS Handbooks are detailed commentaries providing exegetical, historical, cultural, and linguistic information on the books of the Bible. They are prepared primarily to assist Bible translators but are also helpful for others who wish to study, reflect on and communicate the Scriptures. Although the commentaries are based on the original biblical languages, it is not necessary to know these languages to benefit from the commentaries.” [“USB Handbook Series,” UBS.org]

Exegesis = by definition the emphasis is dominantly or exclusively on the historical meaning
Most highly technical commentaries are exegetical commentaries (note topic 6.2.2.3.3).

Application Meaning emphasis: the 'now' meaning.

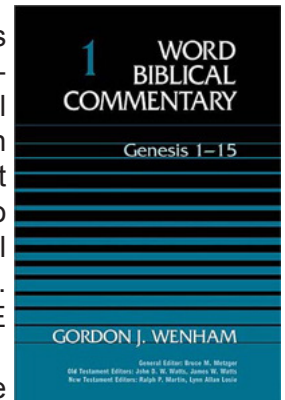
Exposition = by definition and practice the emphasis is upon applicational meaning of the biblical text
Several types of applicational emphasis will be found

Expositional emphasis (topic 6.2.2.3.2) on the relevancy of the historical meaning to today's world

Devotional emphasis (topic 6.2.2.3.1) pure application to particular modern situations, often without adequate historical meaning basis.

Homiletical emphasis (topic 6:2.2.3.3) dominate emphasis on sermon outlines and suggestions.
These can include teaching suggestions as well.

One should notice that the more limited the comments are, the tendency will be to stress the historical meaning sometimes to the exclusion of applicational meaning. A few multi-volume commentary series do a good job in covering both the exegetical and expositional perspectives in the biblical text. One of the best ones is the *Word Biblical Commentary* in 59 volumes for the entire Bible. Although expensive at \$700 for the electronic version at Logos and about \$50 per volume for the print edition, the set is an excellent addition to one's library. Additionally, when a commentator produces a single volume on one biblical book (topic 6.2.2.4), the approach can be exegetical, expositional, devotional, or inclusive. For example, Mills, M. S. *Letters from John: A Study Guide to I, II and III John*. (Dallas: 3E Ministries, 1997) attempts a simple expositional approach to these three letters of John.



An additional note that is important is to identify the theological viewpoint taken by the commentator. At the beginning this is not so easy to determine, but gradually it becomes clear. A starting point is always with the publisher and gaining some awareness of the general theological and religious positions reflected in their publications.²⁷ For example, if you are looking for a strongly conservative evangelical view point, a publication from Baker Books will most likely provide it. On the other hand, Augsburg Fortress Press is the official publishing agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and will generally reflect viewpoints compatible with this denominational perspective.



In addition to the publisher, checking the background of the author of the commentator is helpful for understanding his or her theological perspective. How can this information be discovered? If a print edition is being used, the preface and the book cover jacket will normally contain important information about the training and orientation of the author. Increasingly, biographical articles about these writers is showing up on the internet, and thus a Google search using their name will reveal substantial information about them. Sometimes the lessor known authors do not have much, if any, information about them on the internet, but those well established authors will have an abundance of information posted about them.²⁸

Why is it important to develop this understanding about an author? Several factors come into the picture here. The more you know about the training, religious heritage, career orientation etc. concerning an author, the easier it is to understand where that person is coming from in his or her interpretive conclusions about the biblical text. Without some such understanding it may be difficult at times to make sense of the comments found in the commentary. Every writer -- whether consciously or unconsciously -- will reflect in the interpretive conclusions reached his or her background and especially their religious heritage. If you spent time reading a lot of the later

²⁷One helpful point of reference that provides some insight here is the listing of Christian publishing companies at wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Christian_publishing_companies. This link is more of a gateway with links at the first stage to articles in wikipedia, but these will contain links to the official web site of the individual publisher. Additionally, it is not complete by any means, although containing listings for quite a large number of publishers.

²⁸As an interesting personal discovery, try typing in your full name in a Google search or one of the other search engines. On Dec. 11, 2012, I typed in *Lorin L Cranford* out of curiosity and got 25,900 hits where my name surfaces across the internet. If you have concern about how your name is surfacing in the internet, Google Com has a utility service called Google Alerts that allow you to set up a tracking service across the internet so that when your name -- or other personal information -- shows up somewhere on the internet you will be alerted and a hyperlink to that site will let you check it to be sure it is a legitimate use. Unfortunately, there is no possible way to prevent your name and at least some information about you from surfacing on the internet. And this is true for individuals who have never touched a computer or accessed the internet!

1800s and early 1900s technical German commentaries on the New Testament, as I have done over the years, it is amazing how the apostle Paul comes across in these publications like he was a contemporary German Lutheran Theology Professor! This doesn't necessarily invalidate the value of the commentary, but it does urge great caution about the interpretive conclusions reached by the commentator. And this sort of thing will be true to some extent of every commentary writer!

Another category of reasons for learning all that is possible about the commentary writer is that on occasion you will want to find a writer who will reflect a specific theological etc. viewpoint. For example, if I want to see how someone highly trained in literary critical analysis of the biblical text understands a particular passage, one of the individuals I would turn to first is my friend Charles Talbert, a legendary Baptist NT scholar from North Carolina. But if I want to see how a British evangelical scholar would understand the passage, I would turn to both I. Howard Marshall and F.F. Bruce to see what they say. I have been privileged to know both these men over the years, and my knowledge of their views comes out of a long standing friendship as well as the kinds of sources described above. Hopefully, you can see the point of why it is important to know all you can about the commentary writers.

Just turning to some commentary with little or no understanding about the author can easily become more confusing than helpful. And this is especially the case after the second commentary is examined and it comes to significantly different conclusions than the first commentary did. But with having some background knowledge about the authors, one can more easily understand how and why individual conclusions were reached. This is crucial for evaluating the value of the interpretive conclusions.

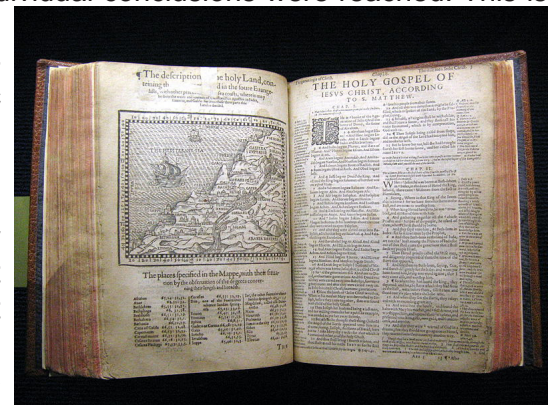
Now, let's take a look at the various categories in seeking to acquaint ourselves with what is available both in print and in electronic formats.

6.2.2.1 Study Bibles

A study Bible will contain both the translated biblical text plus very summary commentary notes on each book of the Bible. The very first one of these in the modern era was the Geneva Bible released first in 1560 that contained an English translation, mostly that of Tyndale, of the Bible along with study notes reflecting the theological views of John Calvin. Additionally it was the first English Bible to use both chapter and verse numbers that had been developed by Stephanus. The larger size editions also contained woodcut illustrations, maps, and explanatory tables. Each book contained an introductory article. It was these features that the royal leadership of England so objected to because they contradicted the teachings of the Church of England at many points. Both the Bishop's Bible and the subsequent revision of it, the King James Bible, were intended to counteract the influence of the Geneva Bible which was the most widely read and used English Bible during the 1500 and 1600 hundreds.

In today's world, the number of such publications both in print and electronic forms is overwhelming.²⁹ One can literally pick a particular translation and match it with some particular theological viewpoint; then choose a certain study Bible to suit one's own taste. I don't recommend such, but it is certainly possible to do.

One of the most widely used study Bibles in the English speaking world today, especially as a required textbook in introductory Bible survey courses in universities, is the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. The fourth edition released in 2009 comes either with or without the Apocrypha and is based on the New Revised Standard Version English translation. In paperback it is \$20



Geneva Bible with Notes etc.

The Third Letter of JOHN

Third John has the form of a private letter from the Elder (see the Introduction to 2 Jn) to a certain Gaius, who is well known for showing hospitality to traveling missionaries (vv. 5-8). Because 3 John does not refer to the dissidents of 1 and 2 John, some interpreters hold that the Elder is not the same person who wrote those letters. However, the similarity of language in the conclusions to 2 John (vv. 12-13) and 3 John (vv. 13-15) makes it more likely that the same person is writing 3 John. Demetrius, whom the Elder recommends in v. 12, may have brought the letter to Gaius. The early Christian mission was dependent upon hospitality (Mt 10:40-42; Acts 16:14-15; Rom 16:1-2). However, the Elder is not writing to continue a relationship that is already well established. Verses 9-10 speak of a letter to a church in the region that was rejected. A certain Diotrephes not only refused hospitality to persons associated with the Elder, he even excluded others who did so from the church. Thus, 3 John appears to be seeking an alternate source of support in the region.

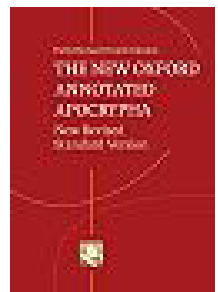
Has Diotrephes given the Elder a dose of the medicine prescribed in 2 John 8-11? Perhaps, though in that case one might suppose that the Elder would have distinguished his emissaries from dissident teachers. In the language of ancient diplomacy, refusing hospitality to someone's envoy implied rejecting the message he bears and the sender as well (cf. 1 Macc 14:21-23). The Gospel of John uses similar language about Jesus as God's emissary (John 13:20). Verses 9-10 indicate that the rift between Diotrephes and the Elder is serious, but provide no evidence about its cause.

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.
 2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. 3 I was overjoyed when some of the friends^a arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.
 5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends,^b even though they are strangers to you; 6 they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; 7 for they began their journey for the sake of Christ,^c accepting no support from non-believers.^d 8 Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.
 9 I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put

^a Gk brothers ^b Gk for the sake of the name ^c Gk the Gentiles


1-2: Letter opening and health wish. This secular opening (contrast 2 Jn 1-3) indicates that this is a private letter from the Elder (of 2 Jn 1) to Gaius. Beloved (vv. 2,5,11) indicates the relationship of friendship and hospitality that this letter seeks to establish (see Introduction). 3-12: Letter body. The Elder hopes that Gaius will provide a permanent base of support for traveling missionaries. 3-8: Other missionaries have given a glowing report about Gaius, testified to your love before the church (v. 6). Traveling missionaries need to receive help from fellow Christians so that they will not have to turn to unbelievers (v. 7). 9-11: The Elder is turning to Gaius because a prominent Christian in the region,


[415 NEW TESTAMENT]



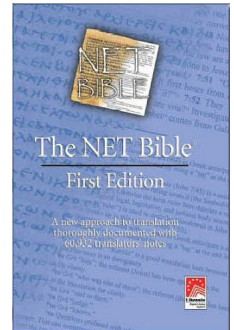
²⁹For example, the very conservative Christianbook.com seller lists 1,602 separate study Bibles mostly just with English translations.

and in hard cover \$35 in print versions. To my knowledge, it is not yet available in electronic format. The scanned sample page from Third John of the NOAB on the right illustrates a much simpler format design than is true of those study Bibles produced fifty years or more ago. Publishers now seek to make their publications easier to read and understand.

 Study Bibles in electronic format have not yet caught on extensively. Although I am not certain of the reason, I suspect a lot of it has to do with the very complex layout of most print edition study Bibles and the expectancy of readers to see this format reproduced in electronic format. And at a reasonable price! Logos.com has a few study Bibles available in their massive collection of religious publications. Most popular is their *NET Bible* at \$10 with over 60,000 footnotes attached to this distinctive Bible translation. They also have available the *ESV Study Bible Notes* (\$40), which contains the study notes of the *ESV Study Bible* released in 2009. This electronic contains everything in the study Bible except the *ESV* translation. But for \$50 you can get the complete *ESV Study Bible* with text and comments. The *ESV* is a recent evangelical translation of the entire Bible. The study notes also reflect an evangelical theological point of view.

 About the only internet available study Bible thus far with a parallel print version is the *NET Bible*. Their website contains the translation along with the extensive footnotes mentioned above with the electronic version from Logos.³⁰ This material is made available through the Bible.org foundation.³¹

For gaining the most basic information about a book of the Bible, or a very minimal com-



³⁰The web site listing on Third John is a good illustration of how this is set up, which is quite helpful: <https://net.bible.org/#!bible/3+John+1:1>. The text and the notes are set up in parallel columns. Additional format structures are possible, as well as hyperlinks to their database of articles related to the scripture passage. Although one will only get an evangelical perspective here, it seems to be done well from an inclusive evangelical viewpoint.

Translation: 1:1 From¹ the elder,² to Gaius³ my dear brother, whom I love in truth.⁴

Notes: ¹tn The word “From” is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to indicate the sender of the letter.

²tn Or “presbyter.”

³tn The author’s self-designation, the elder, is in keeping with the reticence of the author of the Gospel of John to identify himself. This is the same self-designation used by the author of 2 John.

³sn Little reliable information is available concerning the identity of the person to whom 3 John is addressed. Because the name Gaius was very common in the Roman Empire, it is highly unlikely that the person named here is to be identified with any of the others of the same name associated with Paul (1 Cor 1:14, Rom 16:23 [these two references are probably to the same person]; Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4). A 4th century tradition recorded in the Apostolic Constitutions 7.46.9 (ca. a.d. 370) states that John the Apostle ordained Gaius as bishop of Pergamum, but this is questionable because of the relatively late date. The only certain information about this individual must be obtained from 3 John itself, and there is not a great deal there. It is obvious that this person is well known to the author, but it is not so certain whether they had met personally or not, because the report of Gaius’ conduct toward the brothers is received secondhand by the author (v. 3). Nor can it be determined with certainty whether Gaius belonged to the same local church as Diotrephes (v. 9), or was himself the leader of another local congregation. It is clear that the author regarded him as orthodox (v. 3) and a valuable ally in the controversy with the secessionist opponents and their false Christology discussed at length in 1 John.

⁴tn The prepositional phrase ἐν ἀληθείᾳ (en alhqeia) in 3 John 1 is similar to 2 John 1, although it is not qualified here as it is there (see 2 John 1). This is not merely the equivalent of an adverb (“truly”), but is a theological statement affirming the orthodoxy of Gaius, to whom the letter is addressed. “Truth” is the author’s way of alluding to theological orthodoxy in the face of the challenge by the opponents (see 1 John 3:19).

³¹From their web site:

“Bible.org is a broadly evangelical website with free access to the *NET Bible* with 60,237 translators’ notes and a collection of thousands of biblically based articles, Bible studies, sermons, and various other trustworthy Bible study resources. Our authors are carefully scrutinized for their faithfulness to accuracy and truthfulness in interpreting scripture. We believe there are core essential beliefs that are fundamental to our faith and we strive to ensure all of our resources remain faithful and consistent to those foundational biblical beliefs. We also understand the broader doctrinal issues we deal with at bible.org will have a range of interpretations within the Christian community and believe we should grant one another grace in interpretations of the non-essential beliefs. In fact, our resources are here to help one another establish a biblically sound theology and to grow and mature in our Christian faith and understanding of God and His Word in a community of grace.” [“Doctrinal statement,” Bible.org]

A variety of computer device apps for Kindle, iPhone etc are available free for downloading the translation itself. These do not contain the extensive notes but do have the feature that allows the user to create his or her own notes. These are available at www.netbible.org in the Download section.

ment on a paragraph of Bible text, the study Bible can be quite helpful. This kind of limited information can be especially helpful when first beginning the study of either a Bible book or of a passage inside the book. The introductory article to each Bible book should provide some answers to the Compositional History questions, although not much basis for their conclusions will be provided. For example, note what information can be gleaned from the NOAB introductory article on Third John.³²

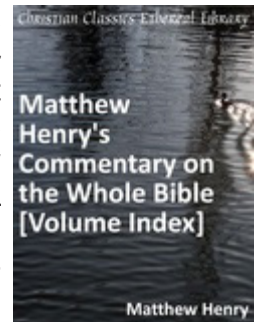
But don't turn to a study Bible expecting to find answers to detailed questions or questions about specific non-basic issues coming out of a passage of scripture text. Study Bibles are not designed, nor intended, to answer questions like these.

6.2.2.2 Single Volume Commentaries³³

Regular commentaries can come in a variety of sizes. Just above a Study Bible in the amount of commentary material, usually, is the single volume commentary. Three basic categories surface here. First, these publications cover the entire Bible in a single volume. Or, they will cover either the Old or New Testaments in a single volume. They can be very summary in nature with less than 200 pages in the volume, but some can go into much greater detail and thus become a publication with up to two thousand pages in a single volume. Normally, they will contain at least an introductory article to each book of the Bible along with summary notes on paragraphs on biblical texts. Additionally, many will contain outlines of the Bible book, as well as general articles on related topics to Bible study. These come in print editions, electronic forms, and some of the older, out of copyright date, ones are available free on the internet.

6.2.2.2.1 Entire Bible

Of those that cover the entire Bible, one of the oldest and best known commentaries is Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).³⁴ It is available in electronic format at Logos.com (\$20). He published this project in 1701, and it has been updated a few times over the past two hundred years. Because it is a copyright expired publication, almost every Bible gateway on the internet will have an electronic copy available online. At the CCEL website the entire volume can be used either online or downloaded on to one's computer. Although greatly out of date, the commentary none the less does contain helpful expositional oriented treatment of the biblical text. For a beginning Bible study, this material can be



³²Third John has the form of a private letter from the Elder (see the Introduction to 2 Jn) to a certain Gaius, who is well known for showing hospitality to traveling missionaries (vv. 5-8). Because 3 John does not refer to the dissidents of 1 and 2 John, some interpreters hold that the Elder is not the same person who wrote those letters. However, the similarity of language in the conclusions to 2 John (vv. 12-13) and 3 John (vv. 13-15) makes it more likely that the same person is writing 3 John. Demetrius, whom the Elder recommends in v. 12, may have brought the letter to Gaius. The early Christian mission was dependent upon hospitality (Mt 10.40-42; Acts 16.14-15; Rom 16.1-2). However, the Elder is not writing to continue a relationship that is already well established. Verses 9-10 speak of a letter to a church in the region that was rejected. A certain Diotrephes not only refused hospitality to persons associated with the Elder, he even excluded others who did so from the church. Thus, 3 John appears to be seeking an alternate source of support in the region.

Has Diotrephes given the Elder a dose of the medicine prescribed in 2 John 8-11? Perhaps, though in that case one might suppose that the Elder would have distinguished his emissaries from dissident teachers. In the language of ancient diplomacy, refusing hospitality to someone's envoy implied rejecting the message he bears and the sender as well (cf. 1 Macc 14.21-23). The Gospel of John uses similar language about Jesus as God's emissary (John 13.20). Verses 9-10 indicate that the rift between Diotrephes and the Elder is serious, but provide no evidence about its cause.

³³This study will only treat commentaries produced in the modern era. A rich history of commentary writing precedes the modern era that reaches back prior to the Christian era with the scribal interpretations of the Law of Moses. Although somewhat outdated, the following article presents a useful history of commentary writing: Cornelius Aheme, "Commentaries on the Bible," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1913. Also some help is available at "List of biblical commentaries," wikipedia.org, although the listing structure limits its value. Because a commentary represents the written conclusions of the Exegesis of the scripture text, the article "Exegesis," wikipedia.org is of some additional help as well.

³⁴It should be noted that originally this was a multi-volume commentary series, but in the usual format available today it is a single volume.

helpful. One should note that this is not an exegetical commentary.³⁵ Rather, it stands somewhere between a devotional and an expositional commentary. The clear implication is that no answers to detailed historical questions will be found in this commentary.

Additionally from a more inclusive perspective is *The New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary* on the Bible, last revised in 2010.³⁶ The earlier *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary*, as well as the NIB multi-volume commentary set, is available online (for subscription) at MinistryMatters.com, the web based Bible study site of Abingdon Press from the United Methodist Church. Along similar inclusive perspectives is the *HarperCollins Bible Commentary* in a single volume edition; the last revised edition was released in 2000. The previous edition in 1988 is available in electronic format at Logos.com for \$30. From an American evangelical perspective is *The New Bible Commentary*, from InterVarsity Press (1994) and is available in electronic form at Logos.com (\$40). From a more UK evangelical perspective is the *New International Bible Commentary*, from Zondervan Press (1979) and is available also in electronic format from Logos.com (\$26). Somewhat unique in its perspective is the *Africa Bible Commentary* from Zondervan Press (2006); it is also available in electronic format at Logos.com (\$32). Available both in print and electronic format is *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*; from Thomas Nelson (1953) and from Logos.com (\$50).

The above listings represent only a small sampling of the large number of publications available. Most of the better ones will come these days in both a print edition and an electronic edition. Just a few will be available as internet based commentary, and normally only with subscription fees attached. The free ones generally are going to be very old and out of date simply because the copyright restrictions have expired and they can be uploaded and used royalty free by the web site owner. Of course, in format appearance on a web page the distinction between a Study Bible, a single volume commentary, and a multi-volume commentary series is significantly blurred. But in terms of the amount of content the distinctions remain the same as with a print edition.

Once again a wide variation of theological perspective, along with commentary approaches exist in these single volume commentaries. The full spectrum of doctrinal viewpoint can be found. Also the existing methodologies range from technical to rather shallow devotional approaches.

The value of this tool is simply that typically more detail in comments on the scripture text will be found in this kind of volume than in a study Bible. This means that more of your questions arising from a scripture passage will likely be found in such a commentary.

6.2.2.2 The Old Testament

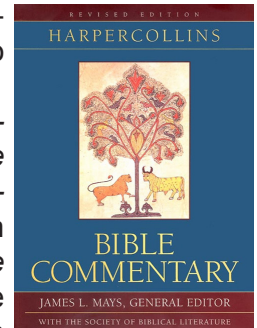
The difference here is mainly that instead of a single volume covering the entire Bible it covers only the Old Testament. One of the older but still quite popular such publications is Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996). Originally published in the late 1800s as a ten volume commentary set on the Old Testament, the abridged one volume commentary on the Old Testament is also available. The English translation of this very conservative German Lutheran commentary was first released in the 1880s. It is available in print edition (\$90 for 10 vol. set), electronic format (10 vol set @ \$120 at Logos.com), and on the internet (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/kad/index.htm>). The publication has undergone a few revisions over the past decades.

Sometimes the single volume will be narrowed down to include only a portion of the Old Testament such as the Pentateuch. For example, James E. Smith, *The Pentateuch*, (2nd ed. Old Testament Survey Series. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1993). Additionally, sometimes a well known writer will publish commentaries on a

³⁵Another somewhat similar very popular one volume commentary on the Bible is the Henry Hampton Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook With the New International Version* (Completely rev. and expanded. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000). This particular edition from Logos.com comes with the NIV translation, but it first appeared with the KJV translation well over a century ago. Unlike the Matthew Henry commentary, this publication has been periodically updated and expanded to the present 900 pages. But in style and content both these publications are very similar. It also appears in print, electronic, and internet based versions.

³⁶"Pastors and students who want a one-volume commentary to complement the New Interpreter's Study Bible will be pleased to find in this resource the quality of scholarship that is a hallmark of other New Interpreter's Bible resources."

Interested individuals will find on one side *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* with the NRSV translation. On the other side of this single volume commentary is *The New Interpreter's Bible*, a 12 volume commentary set on the entire Bible.



select few books of the Bible, rather than it in its entirety. An example of this is John Calvin, Genesis, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001). The internet version, and listing, is available at Christian Classics Ethereal Library.³⁷ John Calvin wrote commentaries on many OT books but not all of them. His works in English translation are available also in internet, electronic, and print versions.



Again the advantage here is greater detail than with be true with the first two categories of Study Bible and single volume commentary on the entire Bible. But because so much of this material will have been written well over a century ago, it will have limited value in addressing many of the interpretive issues. Most of the approaches to Bible study in use today were developed after these volumes were written. But for understanding the viewpoints of well known Christian leaders in the early modern era, these kinds of volumes can be very useful.³⁸

6.2.2.2.3 The New Testament

The Bible student will discover some single volume commentaries on the New Testament as well.³⁹ As with the single volume commentaries on the Old Testament, many of these on the NT will be an abridged version of a multi-volume set on the NT. For example *The Expositor's Bible Commentary -- Abridged Edition: New Testament* by Zondervan Publishing House (published 1994; print edition \$35). The electronic format version comes bundled together with the OT volume and together are \$56 at Logos.com. The older multi-volume series (5 volumes for the NT, published in 2012 for \$220, & 8 volumes for the OT, also released in 2012 for \$355) has been completely revised and now is set with the NIV English translation. The electronic version of the EBC with the entire Bible in 12 volumes is the previous edition (1992) and is available at Logos.com for \$130.⁴⁰ Thus the abridged version provides the core comments without all the footnotes and more technical materials.

The same advantage of the single volume work just on the NT holds true as it did for those containing just the OT: more detailed comments. Plus, with an abridged version of a multi-volume commentary set you get the essence of the more detailed multi-volume commentary. For example, here are the comments on Third John 1 from the abridged version of the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*:⁴¹

³⁷The entire 46 volume collection of Calvin's commentaries on various portions of the Bible is available in electronic format at Logos.com for \$150. These are reduced to 22 print volumes and are available at Amazon.com for \$195.

³⁸Just a sampling of such commentaries available free on the internet includes Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; John Lightfoot, *Commentary on the Gospels*; Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*; A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*; John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*; Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*.

³⁹An interesting set of materials is available free on the internet through a retired Texas Baptist pastor and university professor, Dr. Bob Utley. These materials include audio commentary clips on the NT along with downloadable print materials that also are usable on the internet in pdf format. Check out <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/> He has a wide variety of materials; follows sound principles of biblical interpretation, and 'has his head screwed on right' theologically. They are written for serious laymen study of the scripture.

⁴⁰This illustration with the EBC illustrates a common pattern. The electronic version of popular print editions will not appear until at least two to three years after the print edition is released. Several factors seem to be involved here. The publisher has a higher margin of profit on the print edition and thus plans to market it first until the sales level off. Then an electronic version is contracted with companies such as Logos Systems for distribution of this version at a lower price and thus lower profit margins. Over the next decade this pattern will change with the massive shift toward ebook reader devices taking place now.

One alternative in place but without a great deal of popularity is for the publisher to include a CD copy of the print commentary. The problem that this approach has encountered is that the CD stands alone and is not integrated into some particular Bible study software package with the substantial advantages in indexing etc. that this brings. The only advantage of the stand alone CD copy of a print volume is that one can do copy and paste quotations into documents being written. Thus it saves some typing time. But the enormously greater range of features built into a Bible study software package such as Logos Systems make the use of a commentary or commentary set integrated into such a system much more useful.

One newly emerging advantage of the Bible study software packages is the development of apps so that these programs can be used on iPads, Kindles, Android devices etc.

⁴¹Kenneth L. Barker, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Abridged Edition: New Testament) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 1114.

INTRODUCTION

For comments on the background, purpose, authorship, and date of this letter, see the introduction to 1 John.

EXPOSITION

I. Salutation (1)

Third John is a genuine letter written by “the elder” to a man named Gaius in another community. Although the letter is highly personal, it is also clearly official; the elder expresses thoughts that are meant to be shared with other members of the community. Concern for the situation in the church is the occasion for writing. The letter implies that Gaius was in an especially influential position and commends and supports him.

1 The “elder” (cf. comment on 2Jn 1; also the introduction to 1 John) addresses Gaius as “my dear friend”; his warm affection for Gaius permeates the letter. Although the name “Gaius” occurs elsewhere in the NT (cf. Ac 19:29; 20:4; Ro 16:23; 1Co 1:14) and is common enough in the literature of the time, his identity, aside from what is said of him in this letter, is unknown to us. He may have been a member of the church Diotrephes appears to have headed. But whether he held any official position in it is uncertain.

Regarding “in the truth,” see comment on 2Jn 1.

But here are the comments from the multi-volume series, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, on the same text:⁴²

Exposition of 3 John

I. Salutation (1)

Third John is a genuine letter written by “the elder” to a man named Gaius in another community. Although the letter is highly personal, it is also clearly official. The elder expresses thoughts that are meant to be shared with other members of the community. Concern for the situation in the church is the occasion for writing. The letter implies that Gaius was in a specially influential position and commends and supports him.

1 The elder (cf. comment on 2 John 1 and Introduction to 1 John: Authorship and Date) addresses Gaius as “my dear friend,” and his warm affection for Gaius permeates the entire letter. Although the name Gaius occurs elsewhere in the NT (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14) and is common enough in the literature of the time, his identity, aside from what is said of him in this letter, is unknown to us. He may have been a member of the church Diotrephes appears to have headed. But whether he held any official position in it is uncertain. The pronoun in the phrase “whom I love in the truth” is emphatic but probably not, as Westcott suggests, in contrast to the attitude of some other detractors of Gaius.

On NIV’s rendering of *en alētheia* as “in the truth,” see note on 2 John 1.

The distinctions are more noticeable in comparing the abridged version to *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* notes on the same scripture text:⁴³

ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΥ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗ ΤΡΙΤΗ¹ THE THIRD EPISTLE

Vv. 1–4. Address and Commendation. “The Elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in Truth. Beloved, in all respects I pray that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I was exceedingly glad when brethren would come and testify to thy Truth, even as thou walkest in Truth. A greater gladness than this I have not—that I should hear of my children walking in the Truth.”

Ver. 1. ὁ πρεσβύτερος, see Introd. pp. 159 ff. ἐγώ, see note on 2 John 1 ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, see note on 2 John 1.

From this comparison of essentially three versions of one commentary series, hopefully the differences between the approaches become clearer. Generally the essential difference is at the point of amount of detail. With a few of these kinds of commentary situations, the differences are much greater than with the EBC examples above.⁴⁴

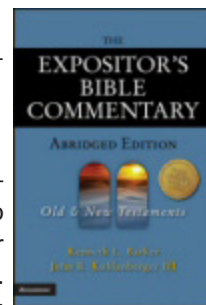
⁴²Glenn W. Barker, “3 John” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 12: Hebrews Through Revelation, ed. Frank E. Gaeblein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 370-71.

⁴³David Smith, “The Epistles of John” In *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Volume V: Commentary (New York: George H. Doran Company), 205.

⁴⁴For example, compare the differences between the *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* and the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* series on 3 John 1:

1:1–4 INTRODUCTION: APOSTOLIC JOY

John hoped that the external prosperity of Gaius and the believers matched the prosperity of their souls (1:2). John referred to himself as the “Elder,” a less authoritative designation than “apostle” (cf. 2 John 1:1). The letter was addressed to Gaius, possibly the Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), the Gaius of Corinth (Rom. 16:23), the Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), or Gaius the bishop of Pergamos (Apostolic Constitutions, 7.40). Perhaps Gaius had been recently ill. John began the letter with a prayer for Gaius’s health and prosperity. For the phrase “living in the truth” (1:3), see the note on 2 John 1:4. John used the term “children” to refer to his spiritual children, those who had been converted or disciplined under his ministry.



Consequently, the direction to follow with these categories of commentaries depends entirely upon the amount of detail needed to answer questions arising from the scripture text. Most of the time, the more detailed commentary is going to answer more of the questions generated from the biblical text.

6.2.2.3 Commentary Series⁴⁵

Here we take a new direction in order to amplify more clearly the different kinds of commentaries available for use.⁴⁶ I will somewhat arbitrarily limit the discussion to four of the more important and common categories of commentaries. Although the above single volume commentaries on either the entire Bible or one of the two testaments will dominantly follow one of these categories, most of the commentaries will come in a multi-volume series on either the entire Bible or else on either the OT or, more commonly, the NT. Much of this material is taken

[Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 721.]

1. THE MESSAGE TO GAIUS (1–8)

1. The writer again announces himself not by his personal name but by the title by which his readers evidently knew him, the elder. See commentary on 2 John 1. The recipient of the letter is called Gaius. Several men named Gaius appear in the pages of the New Testament—Gaius of Corinth, who after his baptism by Paul became host to the apostle and to ‘the whole church’ (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23), and who, according to Origen, was traditionally thought to have been the first Bishop of Thessalonica; Gaius of Macedonia, linked with Aristarchus of Thessalonica as one of Paul’s companions, who suffered in the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29); and Gaius of Derbe, who traveled with Paul on his last journey from Greece through Macedonia at least as far as Troas and was probably his church’s delegate for the transmission of the collection for the poor in Judea (Acts 20:4). According to the fourth-century so-called ‘Apostolical Constitutions’ (7.46.9), it was this last Gaius of Derbe to whom the third letter of John was sent and whom John appointed the first Bishop of Pergamum. This latter suggestion has attracted some commentators. Indeed ‘there is nothing unlikely about it, but the document is late and there is no early support for its statement’ (Dodd).

Since ‘Gaius’ was ‘perhaps the most common of all names in the Roman Empire’ (Plummer), it is safer to resist the attempt to identify the Gaius of this letter. We do not know who he was. It is clear, however, from the terms in which John writes, that he occupied a position of responsibility and leadership in the local church. Visiting evangelists seem to have stayed with him rather than with others, and the elder would hardly have written so outspokenly of Diotrephes to any but a church leader. Although we can only guess his identity and his position, John leaves us in no doubt of his personal affection for him. He calls him his *dear friend*¹, and three times addresses him directly by the same term *agapēte*, ‘beloved’ (RSV) or ‘my dear friend’ (NEB). See verses 2, 5 and 11. John’s love for him was *in the truth*. As in 2 John 1 there is no definite article in this phrase. Dodd quotes two letters from an Egyptian farmer in AD 110 in which he sends greetings to ‘all who love you (or us) truly’. Nevertheless, the RSV and NIV are certainly right to translate the expression here not ‘in truth’ (RV), or ‘sincerely’, but *in the truth*, the truth being the sphere in which their mutual love existed and flourished. Perhaps their relationship to each other was more personal even than this, and the reference to ‘my children’⁴ hints that Gaius owed his conversion to John.

[John R. W. Stott, vol. 19, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 225-26.]

⁴⁵One helpful publication reflecting an evangelical viewpoint that provides an annotated bibliography on commentaries is Jim Rosscup, *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Works* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2004). Although the print editions are helpful, they quickly become outdated. Such annotated bibliographies available on the internet generally are better simply because of the ease of doing updating of the listing. One such web site is Michael Marlow’s “Biblical Commentaries Online,” bible-researcher.com. One particular value -- and limitation at the same time -- is that Marlow lists only commentaries available online. From a conservative evangelical perspective the “Annotated Old Testament Bibliography - 2009,” at Denver Seminary is helpful with listings of a variety of tools including commentaries. For the NT a more inclusive listing is Jon Weatherly’s “An Annotated Bibliography of Reference Works and Commentaries on the Greek New Testament,” at Marquette University. One advantage of this site is its pdf format which makes it easily down loadable for future reference off your computer. Also of use for bibliography study on commentaries as well as other interests is Mark Goodacre’s *NT Gateway* site.

⁴⁶ One very helpful listing is the *Commentary Product Guide* provided by Logos.com. It lists all of the multi-volume commentary sets which are available in electronic format from this software company. All of their listings are also available in print edition as well from the original publisher. This provides a quick reference for one seeking to learn what commentaries are available in electronic form as well as in book form. Plus it provides a convenient price listing for comparative shopping purposes.

TYPES OF COMMENTARIES With Dominant Emphasis



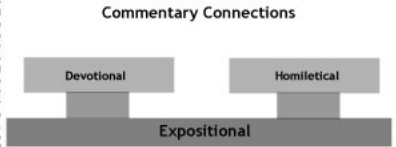
Categories of Commentaries with Dominant Emphasis:

- 6.2.2.3.1 Devotional Commentaries
These commentaries center on the "Now" meaning with applicational thrust
- 6.2.2.3.2 Expository Commentaries
These commentaries center on the "Now" meaning with explanation emphasis
- 6.2.2.3.3 Exegetical Commentaries
These commentaries center on the "Then" meaning with or without "Now" thrust
- 6.2.2.3.4 Homiletical Commentaries
These commentaries center on the "Now" meaning for sermon preparation

from my article “Annotated Bibliography: Commentaries and Articles on the New Testament,” at cranfordville.com.

As the chart on the right indicates, the focus here is on which aspect of the interpretation process receives the primary emphasis. Clearly some commentaries zero in exclusively on just one aspect of the ‘then’ and ‘now’ meanings of a scripture text, and completely exclude the other.

The **expositional commentary** is foundational to all commentaries centering on applications of the text. The **devotional commentary** aims to inspire greater commitment to the scriptural principles in the text. The **homiletical commentary** aims to provide insight for preaching and teaching the principles in the biblical text. The **exposition** builds off the exegetical understanding of the scripture text.



But most commentaries will contain some elements of both sides of the interpretive process, the exegetical and the expositional. The two basic kinds of commentaries will be the Expository and the Exegetical commentaries, with the latter stressing the ‘then’ meaning of the text and the former the ‘now’ meaning of the text. Both the Devotional commentaries and the Homiletical commentaries focus on the ‘now’ meaning of the biblical text but with different objectives. The Devotional commentary aims to inspire deeper Christian commitment, while the Homiletical commentary seeks to provide ideas for preaching sermons from the scripture passage.

These differences are very important to understand. They will determine in large measure the particular format of the commentary, how the scripture text is approached, the level of detail given in the comments including how much technical material is included, along with many other dynamics shaping the structure of the commentary. From the end user side, knowing which category of commentary a particular publication falls into enables the user to go directly to the specific type of commentary needed for the study purposes of the moment without wasting loads of time trying to find help from commentaries.

It is also important to understand how different kinds of commentaries are connected to one another, when they are written well. Ultimately foundational is the Exegetical Commentary which centers on establishing the historical ‘then’ meaning of the text. Whatever is concluded from the detailed analysis of the text in terms of the most likely intended meaning of the writer to his initial targeted audience must become foundational to any perceived contemporary application of the text to the modern world. This historical meaning establishes legitimate boundaries of possible text meaning that must not be violated by the subsequent expositional understanding of the text. The move to the ‘now’ meaning is the exposition of the text. A well written expositional commentary will explain the understood text meaning in modern terms that should be relatively easy to understand. In the process of bridging over the then meaning to the now meaning the emphasis will shift to identifying timeless spiritual truths and principles expressed in the text. These perceptions should then be expressed in contemporary terms that the reader can easily understand.

Coming off the understood expositional meaning of the text will be a series of efforts to apply the text meaning to varying contemporary meanings. We focus in this study on two major types of such commentaries. The Devotional Commentary, when done properly, will seek to inspire the modern reader to deeper commitment to the perceived spiritual principles found in the biblical text. A wide variety of methods at inspiring the reader will be employed by the commentator. Another type is the Homiletical Commentary. Here the commentator seeks to provide the reader with sermon helps in the preparation of sermons based on the scripture text. These helps can range all the way from suggesting core sermon ideas to detailed sermon outlines complete with illustrations and applications. Often this type of commentary provides useful insight for teaching the passage in a Bible class of some kind. Ideally both the Devotional and the Homiletical commentaries will be built off a carefully developed exposition of the scripture passage that is then based on solid exegesis of the text.

What I want to do in the discussions below is simply to provide introductory explanation of the nature and function of each category. Some typical examples of good commentaries in each category will be supplied as well. What is given is by no means exhaustive. Representative examples of differing theological perspectives will be given as well.⁴⁷

⁴⁷I vigorously disagree with statements such as the following:

“Therefore it behooves the judicious student of God’s Word to restrict himself or herself to Conservative Commentaries.”

Such narrow minded thinking means that the Bible student only studies materials that he or she will already be in agreement with. Put your minds in neutral and stop thinking in your study! Thus the cultural and theological blinders are drawn ever tighter into a highly biased and uninformed theological perspective.

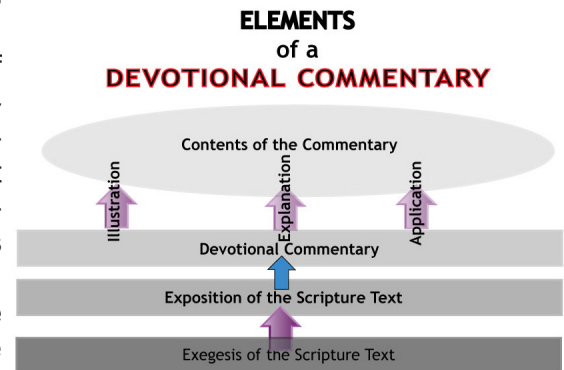
Far healthier spiritually and biblically is to first know your tool and then to deliberately examine a wide range of differing viewpoints. The legendary theology professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth during the 1920s through 1940s, Dr. W.T. Conner, used to tell his students when he required them to use secondary tools that they disagreed with theologically: “If an old cow grazing in the pasture has enough sense to graze around the cockleburs in order to get to the grass, surely you boys have enough sense to graze around the bad stuff in order to find the good stuff.” He would go on to remind his students that one can learn from any viewpoint. As a professor I always demanded that my students ‘cross fertilize’ their own viewpoints with those of others who differed

6.2.2.3.1 Devotional Commentaries

One of the more popular types of commentaries is the so-called devotional commentary. But it also represents the most diverse category of Bible commentary. This diversity has several aspects. For one thing, the varying qualities of commentary writing are more extreme than in any other category of commentaries. Unfortunately, a high percentage of devotional commentaries are of a very low, often questionable, quality. One of the reasons for this is the frequent tendency of commentators here to completely by-pass the above interpretive process. Consequently, the commentary has no exegetical foundation, and at times, not even an expositional foundation. Proof texting, i.e., eisegesis, of scripture runs wild in this category of commentary. Thus the 'inspiration' factor comes solely from the head of the commentator with little or nothing to do with the biblical text. Associative word games with translation words in the text is the way much of this is done.

One example of this sort of thing is the rather popular *Daily Study Bible* by William Barclay.⁴⁸ Produced originally for the early morning daily fifteen minute radio devotional of the British BBC radio network, Barclay took a word or combination of words that caught his fancy and expounded on them for the radio broadcast. Barclay's very liberal Anglican theology denied the resurrection, the virgin birth, and a host of other bedrock Christian doctrines. His appeal was in his treatment of the first century history in the background of the text. He had a gift for making ancient history come alive to a modern reader. But the biblical text in terms of its historical meaning is pretty much ignored in favor to new meanings based on the modern world with little or no relevance to the ancient meaning.

One important quality to look for with Devotional Commentaries is the balance of the three essential elements of any good such commentary: explanation, illustration, and application. The ratio of these elements will vary depending on the objective of the commentator, but every such commentary should contain these elements. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Look carefully at the nature and quality of the illustrations. Are they naturally connected to the biblical text ideas? Or, contrived? Are the illustrations taken from the life experience of the commentator? Or canned and artificial? Do the applicational insights naturally connected to the explanation given for the biblical text? Or, do they seem to come out of nowhere with little obvious connection to the scripture? Finally, does the provided explanatory meaning of the text seem to be based on a solid foundation of exegetical study? Or, does the proposed meaning seem artificial and disconnect-



from them. This is true education and learning, rather than the indoctrination method advocated in the above approach. This latter approach trusts in the leadership of the Holy Spirit to guide the student into proper understanding of the biblical text, as per John 14:16-17, "16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. 17 He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth." The former indoctrination approach elevates the authority of supposed skilled commentators to a supreme role.

48 The Logos.com marketing promotion of this commentary series illustrates why one must always be skeptical of the glowing descriptions of any commentary series:

For almost fifty years and for thousands of readers, *The Daily Study Bible* commentaries have been the ideal help for both devotional and serious Bible study. Now, with the release of *The New Daily Study Bible: New Testament*, a new generation will appreciate the wisdom of William Barclay. With clarification of less familiar illustrations and inclusion of more contemporary language, *The New Daily Study Bible* will continue to help individuals and groups discover what the message of the New Testament really means for their lives.

A fantastic commentary set for pastors, teachers, students, and laity, the words of Barclay continue to inspire readers today with his scripturally sound exegesis. Barclay's purposefully accessible writing style is evidence of his passion for bringing the Word of God to laity as well as biblical scholars. His thoroughly-researched works begin with important historical background, clarifying the context in which each New Testament book was originally written. Then, launching into commentary, Barclay discusses the Scriptures a handful of verses at a time.

Most all of this is pure 'marketing hype'! Virtually nothing said here can be objectively validated. Additionally, it is actually misleading to potential customers. And this comes from Logos.com, which is one of the most reliable publishers of religious oriented materials. Don't assume that the marketing promo material is correct from ANY religious publisher! They are just as prone to misleading statements about products being marketed as any other publisher. And this is especially true of the US religious publishers who are enormously more driven by the profit motive than elsewhere in the world. Net published book sales in the US alone during 2010 reached \$28 billion dollars, with religious books making up \$1.35 billion of that amount. Religious publishing is a huge business especially in the US.

ed to the clear ideas in the scripture? Pay close attention to the explanations of meaning to sense whether or not the commentator has so re-contextualized the biblical passage that it sounds entirely modern without any clear signals of its ancient setting in the biblical world.

As with all commentaries, pay close attention to the background of the commentator as well as the commentary publisher. This will provide essential signals of where the commentator is coming from theologically and culturally. Although a devotional commentary written in the African country of Ghana for rural Ghanaians would be interesting to read, it probably is not going to provide much inspiration for living the Christian life in urban America. With this category of commentary especially, the cultural orientation of both the writer and the reader play a significantly more important role.

Among the better Devotional Commentaries, one should consider the following. One of the earliest modern devotional commentaries -- and among the best -- was *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament* [*Expositions of the New Testament*] produced by Adolf von Schlatter from 1887 to 1910. Unfortunately the multi-volume series has never been translated into English and currently is out of print even in the original German.⁴⁹ It was through these commentaries that I first discovered this legendary German New Testament scholar from a Swiss Baptist background.



A relatively recent commentary series that is mostly devotional, although designed largely for Sunday School teachers, is the *Formations Commentary* by Cecil Sherman. This five volume set, covering the entire Bible, comes out of Dr. Sherman writing the Sunday School lessons for the Formations series of SS lessons published by Smyth-Helwys for almost fifteen years prior to 2006.

One of the difficulties here is that very few commentary series seek to be a true devotional commentary. Most of them will be dominantly an Expository Commentary with some devotional sections included. The Devotional Commentary more often than not in today's world will be individual volumes published in connection with a single biblical book or a small section such as the letters of John.⁵⁰

6.2.2.3.2 Expository Commentaries

What is the difference between a devotional commentary and an expository commentary? In theory the difference should be between how much emphasis is given to application and how much emphasis is given to explaining the historical meaning in modern terms and settings. The Devotional commentary centers on the former and the Expository commentary on the latter. In reality, however, the line of distinction between these two types of commentaries is seldom ever drawn this clearly.

By design most expository commentaries are intended to build off a solid exegetical foundation of the 'then' meaning of the biblical text. The second stage is to present that meaning in contemporary explanation, usually with but a minimum of more technical explanation. This explanation of meaning may allude to the biblical languages but these original language texts will be transliterated from the original alphabet structure into the Latin based alphabet that is foundational for all modern western languages.

Usually for one without any prior knowledge of the biblical languages this type of commentary will prove to be the most useful. The key to helpfulness, however, is going to be the level of detail given in the explanation sections of the commentary. Usually the more volumes the greater the detail, although sometimes greater volume means more fluff than real substance. Also close attention to how the commentary is formatted needs to be given. Some formats will prove to be helpful, while other may not be so helpful.

One of the older but standard evangelical commentaries in this category is *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. This twelve volume set covers the entire Bible with helpful explanations of

⁴⁹This is true except for used books. Interestingly an electronic version is available for free at OnlineBibel.Org: <http://www.bijbels-tudie.org/downloads/ger/naw.php>.

⁵⁰Logos.com offers a variety of devotional commentaries. Many of them are in the classic commentary series meaning that these commentaries were written originally in the late 1800s to the middle 1900s. One or two exceptions are the 32 volume *Focus on the Bible Commentaries* and *The Bible Speaks Today* series (22 vols on NT). To this list can be added *The Life Application Bible Commentary* (17 vols).

Third John 1

Greek alphabet / Transliterated Text

Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

Ho presbyteros Gaio to agapeto, hon ego agapo en aletheia.



the meanings of the biblical text. The newer revised version by Zondervan uses the NIV translation of the Bible rather than the KJV as did the original version of the commentary. Here is a sample of how this commentary works with its comments on 3 John 1:⁵¹

I. Salutation (1)

Third John is a genuine letter written by “the elder” to a man named Gaius in another community. Although the letter is highly personal, it is also clearly official. The elder expresses thoughts that are meant to be shared with other members of the community. Concern for the situation in the church is the occasion for writing. The letter implies that Gaius was in a specially influential position and commends and supports him.

1 The elder (cf. comment on 2 John 1 and Introduction to 1 John: Authorship and Date) addresses Gaius as “my dear friend,” and his warm affection for Gaius permeates the entire letter. Although the name Gaius occurs elsewhere in the NT (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14) and is common enough in the literature of the time, his identity, aside from what is said of him in this letter, is unknown to us. He may have been a member of the church Diotrefes appears to have headed. But whether he held any official position in it is uncertain. The pronoun in the phrase “whom I love in the truth” is emphatic but probably not, as Westcott suggests, in contrast to the attitude of some other detractors of Gaius.

On NIV’s rendering of *en alētheia* as “in the truth,” see note on 2 John 1.

Also from an evangelical viewpoint is the *Tyndale Bible Commentary* sets. This 49 volume combined OT and NT set covers the entire Bible and is very popular among American evangelicals. The commentary is a little more detailed as is clear from this example taken from 3 John 1:⁵²



1. THE MESSAGE TO GAIUS (1–8)

1. The writer again announces himself not by his personal name but by the title by which his readers evidently knew him, the elder. See commentary on 2 John 1. The recipient of the letter is called Gaius. Several men named Gaius appear in the pages of the New Testament—Gaius of Corinth, who after his baptism by Paul became host to the apostle and to ‘the whole church’ (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23), and who, according to Origen, was traditionally thought to have been the first Bishop of Thessalonica; Gaius of Macedonia, linked with Aristarchus of Thessalonica as one of Paul’s companions, who suffered in the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29); and Gaius of Derbe, who traveled with Paul on his last journey from Greece through Macedonia at least as far as Troas and was probably his church’s delegate for the transmission of the collection for the poor in Judea (Acts 20:4). According to the fourth-century so-called ‘Apostolical Constitutions’ (7.46.9), it was this last Gaius of Derbe to whom the third letter of John was sent and whom John appointed the first Bishop of Pergamum. This latter suggestion has attracted some commentators. Indeed ‘there is nothing unlikely about it, but the document is late and there is no early support for its statement’ (Dodd).

Since ‘Gaius’ was ‘perhaps the most common of all names in the Roman Empire’ (Plummer), it is safer to resist the attempt to identify the Gaius of this letter. We do not know who he was. It is clear, however, from the terms in which John writes, that he occupied a position of responsibility and leadership in the local church. Visiting evangelists seem to have stayed with him rather than with others, and the elder would hardly have written so outspokenly of Diotrefes to any but a church leader. Although we can only guess his identity and his position, John leaves us in no doubt of his personal affection for him. He calls him his dear friend (1), and three times addresses him directly by the same term *agapēte*, ‘beloved’ (RSV) or ‘my dear friend’ (NEB). See verses 2, 5 and 11. John’s love for him was in the truth. As in 2 John 1 there is no definite article in this phrase. Dodd quotes two letters from an Egyptian farmer in AD 110 in which he sends greetings to ‘all who love you (or us) truly’. Nevertheless, the RSV and NIV are certainly right to translate the expression here not ‘in truth’ (RV), or ‘sincerely’, but in the truth, the truth being the sphere in which their mutual love existed and flourished. Perhaps their relationship to each other was more personal even than this, and the reference to ‘my children’ (4) hints that Gaius owed his conversion to John.

Still within the evangelical perspective is the more detailed New International Commentary. This 44 volume combined set on both testaments provides more technical discussion but still at a layman’s level of presentation. Once more an example from 3 John 1 illustrates how it presents the commentary:⁵³



TEXT, EXPOSITION, AND NOTES

Address and Greeting (1–4)

⁵¹Glenn W. Barker, “3 John” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 12: Hebrews Through Revelation, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 371.

⁵²John R. W. Stott, vol. 19, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 225-26.

⁵³I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 81-82.

1 *The elder.*

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2 *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*

3 *It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to live according to the truth.* 4 *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are living according to the truth.*

1 This is one of the few letters in the New Testament addressed to an individual Christian.¹ His name was Gaius, which was as common then as John or James today. We must assume that a more precise identification of the recipient was written on the package containing the letter or that fuller instructions regarding delivery were given to the messenger (probably Demetrius, v. 12) who carried it; in the letter itself it was sufficient to address the recipient by his personal name. We know nothing about him beyond what can be gleaned from the letter. He was a member of one of the churches over which the writer of the letter exercised some oversight, but there is no indication whether or not he held any particular office in it. There are no positive reasons for identifying him with any of the other bearers of the same name in the New Testament, although this has not stopped earlier commentators from offering guesses.

The writer refers to himself simply as “the elder.”² He thus writes in token of the position of authority and respect which he holds in the church, so that this is not a private letter but rather has the force of an official communication. Presumably the writer was not known to his friend by his personal name, perhaps because of his greater age and the respect which went with it. But although there is this sense of distance between the two men, there is certainly no lack of warmth in the tone of his greeting. He speaks of Gaius with affection as his friend, literally his “beloved,”³ and strengthens what could have degenerated into a conventional expression by commenting that he loves him in truth. While this phrase could simply mean “truly, really,”⁴ the usage elsewhere in these letters suggests that the elder is thinking of the kind of love which is consistent with the Christian revelation; it is not only genuine and heartfelt, but is the kind of love shown by God himself.⁵

It is surprising that the letter does not contain a specific word of greeting at this point, as is universally the case in other letters in the New Testament (see especially 2 Jn. 3).⁶ It is possible that “whom I love in the truth” or the following expression of good wishes is regarded as an equivalent; but since it was normal to include both a greeting and a prayer, this explanation is not altogether satisfactory. Nor does the presence of a closing greeting v. (15) compensate for the omission here.⁷

One can tell just from this example that more details are presented. Observe the use of footnotes which provide additional information and references for further study. This level of expository commentary will tend to answer more of the interpretive questions raised from studying the biblical text than the less detailed summary types.

It would be entirely possible to go through almost the full range of theological and Christian denominational viewpoints with a similar set of expository type commentaries ranging from rather summary to substantially detailed comments. In the English speaking world of today, especially on the American English side, this is the most popular category of commentaries that are being produced in our day. And the numbers of these commentaries expand almost daily.⁵⁴

As is true with the above examples and also with a rapidly growing percentage of expository commentaries, these volumes are available in both print and electronic format. And on the electronic side, a high percentage of them can be also loaded on to a hand held device such as an iPad or Kindle (Android) with an appropriate *app*. Not only will you have your Bible readily available, but also multiple sets of commentaries as well.⁵⁵ The convenience of having these materials so readily available is a real plus to purchasing the electronic versions of these commentaries.

6.2.2.3.3 Exegetical Commentaries

The exegetical commentary will focus primarily on deriving the historical meaning, the ‘then’ meaning, of the biblical text and in the more detailed versions will put a lot of very technical information on the table in its comments. This type of information will usually be grouped by category into notes, summaries, theological concepts, literary forms and patterns etc. The ways of grouping the materials are about as diverse as the different commentaries themselves. Usually some knowledge of the biblical languages is assumed. But those without such skills

⁵⁴I would recommend something like the Logos *Commentary Product Guide* online listing as a good starting point for checking out the wide range of options available. The advantage of web listings such as this one from Logos is that you know that the listed publications are available both in print and electronic formats.

⁵⁵As an example At the time of the writing of this chapter in January 2013, I just received my “Christmas present,” a new Kindle Fire HD device. I am in the process of loading my entire Logos system collection on to this hand held device which contains several thousand Bible commentaries, plus other publications as well. Within the Logos system is also the availability of *biblica.com*, which allows me additionally to access this complete collection online through my account with Logos. This is a very nice additional feature of the Logos system.

can often still make very profitable use of these commentaries.

Continuing to illustrate from specific examples I will go to the *Word Biblical Commentary* series. This 59 volume evangelical commentary on both testaments represents the finest technical scholarship among evangelicals internationally. The volume of the content will tend to be substantially greater than with expository commentaries even though the number of volumes in a particular set may be similar or even less. With these kinds of commentaries you may be looking at upwards of a thousand pages per volume!



In order to illustrate the difference here excerpts from different pages will be taken from volume 51 containing Third John 1:⁵⁶

A Plea for Help (3 John 1–15)

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Translation

1 *The presbyter to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. . . .*

Form/Structure/Setting

3 John is a short letter, roughly comparable in length to 2 John, and (like the earlier letter) sufficiently brief to have been contained on a single sheet of papyrus. The presbyter, who appears to have been pastorally responsible for more than one Johannine congregation (probably in Ephesus), including the readers of 2 John and the church to which the recipient of 3 John belonged, addresses to an individual, Gaius (v 1), a moving plea for help. Through him the elder may have been addressing the congregation of which Gaius was a member (note vv 3–4, 8–9), and recapitulating the situation which existed in the Johannine community as a whole. . . .

Comment

1. This is the only Johannine letter of the three to be addressed to a named individual. Paul's letter to Philemon is similarly personal, and among NT epistles affords the "closest analogy" to 3 John (Marshall, 81). The present missive to Gaius may have been brought to him by Demetrius (see v 12). . . .

Explanation

3 John is so brief, and its contents are so allusive, that it is difficult to speak about the situation from which it arose with any certainty. Nevertheless, it is clear that serious problems had beset one of the congregations in the Johannine community. For political reasons Diotrophes, who loved "to put himself first" (v 9), had assumed leadership of the church. In that position he was acting with an arrogance which called in question his allegiance to the truth, as well as his obedience to the love command. Knowing the situation, the presbyter had communicated with the congregation (v 9a); and even before that, perhaps, he had sent some emissaries to investigate the situation and act as mediators (v 3). But these indirect pleas had been unsuccessful (v 9b), and so the presbyter himself now proposes an urgent visit (v 10a, 14). Meanwhile he writes to Gaius (in 3 John), and enlists his support in the pending confrontation with Diotrophes. He does this first by asking him to receive hospitably some itinerant brothers, who were possibly lending their own strength to the presbyter's cause (vv 5–8), and secondly by inviting Gaius to stand with him in the defense of Christian love and truth (cf. vv 1–4, 6, 11). . . .

What should become very clear is the dramatic increase in detailed comments by this kind of commentary. The excerpts taken above cover about three pages of a thirty plus page commentary on this very short document in the New Testament.⁵⁷ With this particular series, you will notice from the above example that the commentary is still very useful for one who doesn't know either Greek or Hebrew. What is helpful to know is that the final section, **Explanation**, will attempt to move the commentary over into an expository mode with modern day summary

⁵⁶Stephen S. Smalley, vol. 51, 1, 2, 3 *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 341-344, 364-365.

⁵⁷Of course some of you who have been in my Bible study classes using the materials produced for the BIC commentary series at cranfordville are thinking to yourself, "That's nothing; you should see the thirty page handouts on four or five verses that we get in the class just about every week!"

explanations of the text.

Just one more example from an English language series in order to illustrate the highly technical treatment of the biblical text. The International Critical Commentary series published by T&T Clark in the UK has been around for well over a century. It is currently in the third series of volumes with periodic revisions being done to reflect advancements in biblical scholarship. The original series was the most intensive linguistically with extensive quotations from many different ancient and modern language sources, usually without English translation. The most recent series has toned down the heavy use of foreign language materials in large part because biblical scholars in general at the beginning of the twenty-first century are not nearly as linguistically proficient as they were at the end of the nineteenth century! Additionally a wide range of theological perspective will be reflected by the various commentators in the series. The publisher's intent has been all along to make the series very diverse ecumenically.



Note the difference with the comments on verse one of Third John:⁵⁸

NOTES ON 3 JOHN

1. ὁ πρεσβύτερος] Cf. 2 Jn. 1 note.

Γαίω] Three persons of this name are mentioned in the N. T. (1) Gaius the Macedonian, who is mentioned together with Aristarchus in connection with the tumult in the theatre at Ephesus (Ac. 19:29). They are described as Macedonians, fellow travellers of S. Paul. (2) Gaius of Derbe, one of S. Paul's companions on his last journey to Jerusalem. (3) Gaius of Corinth. Cf. Ro. 16:23, Γαίος ὁ ξένος μου καὶ ὄλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας: 1 Co. 1:14, Κρίσπον καὶ Γάιον, whom S. Paul mentions as the only Corinthians, besides the household of Stephanas, whom he had baptized himself. Of this Gaius, Origen says that according to tradition he was the first Bishop of Thessalonica. Cf. Origen, Comm. in Ro. x. 41, "*Fertur sane traditione maiorum quod hic Gaius primus episcopus fuerit Thessalonicensis ecclesiae.*" Dom Chapman's ingenious attempt to connect the Epistle with Thessalonica on this ground is not convincing (see Introd.). Coenen (ZWT., 1872, p. 264 ff.) has attempted to show that Gaius of Corinth is intended in the "fictitious" address of this Epistle, on the ground of the similarity of the conditions prevailing here and at Corinth, as testified by the Pauline Epistles. The similarities are of too general a character either to compel identification or even to make it probable. Coenen's interpretation of ὁ ἐρχόμενος (2 Co. 11:4) as a "pillar apostle whom S. Paul's opponents threatened to invite to Corinth to overthrow his authority," is certainly not helped by the statement in our Epistle of the Elder's intention of paying a visit to the Church of Gaius. But perhaps it is not necessary now to spend time in dealing with the theory that the two smaller Johannine Epistles owe their origin to the desire of the "great unknown" to gain credence for the view that his more important forgeries (the Gospel and First Epistle) were really the work of the son of Zebedee. As Windisch says, "III. (i.e. 3 Jn.) für Fiktion zu erklären, widerspricht allen gesunden Sinnen." The statement in *Const. Apostol.* vii. 46, that Gaius was the first Bishop of Pergamus, is of too slight historical value to guide our conjectures as to the recipient of this Epistle (vid. Introd.). Bartlet's suggestion of Thyatira does not claim more than relative probability. But all such attempts at identification of the Church or the individual addressed are mere speculation. Where our knowledge is inadequate the building up of hypothesis is of the nature of pastime rather than of serious work. Truer scholarship is seen in Harnack's less interesting judgment, "Gaius, to whom (the Epistle) is addressed, receives no title of honour. That he occupied a prominent position in his Church is clear from what follows." In Commentaries, if not in periodicals, the rule should be remembered that "there is a time to keep silence."

τῷ ἀγαπητῷ] A favourite word of the writer of these Epistles, in which it occurs ten times, though it is not found in the Gospel. For its use in salutations, cf. Ro. 1:7, 16:5, 8, 9, 12; Col. 4:9, 14; 2 Ti. 1:2; Philem. 1.

ὄν... ἀληθεία] Cf. 2 Jn. 1 (notes).

εγω] om. boh-cod.

As is clear from this example, in order to make full use of this commentary one would need to know Greek, Latin, and German, as well as English. This is rather typical of the older volumes in the first two series of this set. But in spite of these challenges, the reader without these linguistic skills can still profit from the comments.

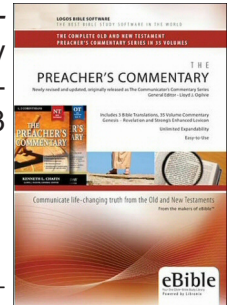
Once again, there are many, many commentary series of exegetical commentaries. Most of them will reflect intensive biblical text analysis with high level skills. The theological perspectives will cover the full gambit of possible viewpoints.

6.2.2.3.4 Homiletical Commentaries

This category is but one of several possible categories of highly specialized types of commentaries. Traditionally such specialized commentaries focused on those who were preparing to preach or teach a passage of scripture. In the last couple of decades newer patterns have emerged that emphasize a particular interpretive approach to understanding scripture.

⁵⁸Alan England Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912), 180-82.

On of the very popular homiletical commentary series is the 35 volume *Preacher's Commentary*. It falls on the side of this category that provides “sermon starters.” These are summary paragraphs suggesting how a passage of scripture could be approached for preaching purposes in today’s world. An example from this set will illustrate what I am describing here from 3 John 1-8. I will omit the printing out of an English translation text portion.⁵⁹



NO GREATER JOY

[3 John 1-8 printed here]

This letter is written “to Gaius.” Who is this man? In Acts 19:23–41 we have the narrative of Paul’s terrifying and very close call at Ephesus when he was opposed by the silversmiths and the worshipers of Artemis. In that text we hear of a Macedonian named Gaius who was identified as a companion of Paul. There are two other possibilities, however—the Gaius in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and the Gaius of Derbe in Acts 20:4. The name Gaius is a common first-century name; in fact, according to Barclay, “in the world of the New Testament Gaius was the commonest of all names.”¹

As this letter opens, we are immediately struck with the fact that John is employing a more formal letter-writing style than that which we noted in 1 and 2 John. The familiar vocabulary word choices of John are used, but the compositional style is more highly structured and precise.

The crisis concerning hospitality that was the concern of 2 John is a matter of concern also in 3 John. If 2 John states the mandate on the negative side, then 3 John states the mandate on the affirmative side. If we place the two texts together, we have a very wise and encouraging counsel in the matter of hospitality toward strangers.

On the other side of homiletical commentaries is the very old and somewhat outdated, but still quite popular *Pulpit Commentary*. This 77 volume set provides just about everything from exposition of the passage to what are called ‘sermon briefs,’ i.e., sermon outlines with summary suggestions for developing each point of the outline. Sandwiched between ‘Exposition’ and ‘Homilies’ are what is labeled ‘Homiletics.’⁶⁰ Let me illustrate this with selected quotes from the volume containing Third John.⁶¹



EXPOSITION

FROM very early times some have held the opinion that the Second Epistle is addressed to a community, which is spoken of allegorically as “the elect lady,” her “elect sister” being a sister community; but at no time does there seem to have been any doubt that the Third Epistle is addressed to an individual. It certainly would be an extravagant hypothesis that Gaius symbolizes a Church.

Vers. 1–4.—INTRODUCTION. Address and occasion. Respecting the address and the title of “the elder,” see note on 2 John 1. Ver. 1.—To Gaius the beloved (Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ). This is additional reason for thinking that κυρία in the Second Epistle is not a proper name; if it were we should probably have the same formula as we have here Κυρία τῆ ἐκλεκτῆς. The name Gaius occurs elsewhere in the New Testament four times (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14); as it was as common in the Roman Empire as John Smith is among ourselves, at would be rash to infer that the Gaius addressed here is the same as any of those mentioned elsewhere. In all probability there are at least four persons of this name in the New Testament. In the opening of this Epistle also we have to remark the characteristic repetition of the word “truth,” which occurs four times in the first four verses. Deeds, in which Gaius and Demetrius were rich, not words, of which Diotrefes was so prodigal, are what win the approbation and love of the apostle. The thing which he hates is unreality; the object of his special adoration is “the truth;” “to walk in the truth” is nothing less than to follow in the footsteps of the Lord. . . .

HOMILETICS

Vers. 1–14.—An apostolic pastoral to a Christian man. We have here another priceless fragment, giving us a glimpse into the actual Church life of the first century, and of the Christian deeds and difficulties of one of its honoured members. We have no other inspired letter to a private Church member. This serves a double purpose. It enables us to picture, in outline, Gaius, with his Christian work, his character, and his trials. It enables us also to picture a Church as to its fellowship, its constitution, and to work. Gaius was a member of a Christian Church (ver. 9, τῆ ἐκκλησίας), though we do not know of which. He was, apparently, one of St.

⁵⁹Earl F. Palmer and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 35, 1, 2 & 3 *John / Revelation*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 83-84.

⁶⁰Marketing material from the publisher about the contents and their arrangement:

- **Exposition:** Commentary on the passage, with exegetical, interpretive, theological, historical, and geographical observations. Written by the author of that volume.
- **Homiletics:** A guide for preaching or teaching through the passage, with personal application, devotional insights, and observations about the rhetorical structure of the passage. Written by the author of that volume.
- **Homilies:** Actual sermons from various contributors, covering a couple of verses or a pericope. Typically, a brief introduction followed by 2-5 “points” with a number of references to other passages that provide biblical context.

⁶¹3 *John*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 1-6.

John's own spiritual children (ver. 4, τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα), who gave the apostle unfeigned joy (ver. 3), as, beholding his steadfast grasp of the truth (ver. 3) and his upright walk, he regarded this as the greatest gift of God's grace (ver. 4) he could desire to receive. His reputation was so well maintained (ver. 6) that the apostle felt sure enough of his true spiritual prosperity to warrant him in cherishing the wish that he might make as much progress and be in as good health in a worldly as he was in a religious point of view (ver. 2). Gaius was not only a helper of his own Church, but a lover of the brethren, even though they might be strangers to him (ver. 5, Greek); for when men had gone forth among the Gentiles, taking nothing from them, and had spread abroad the Name (ver. 7), it was the delight of Gaius to help such forward on their journey (ver. 6). Still, his work was not easy. Diotrophes, who loved office, was probably jealous of the influence which Gaius had acquired by his unambitious service (vers. 5–9); so that John takes occasion to assure Gaius that what he has done he has well done (ver. 5), and that when he (the apostle) next visits the Church, he will put Diotrophes to shame (ver. 10). It is interesting to note that here, as in his Second Epistle, he speaks of himself as "the elder" (ver. 1). The various expressions in the letter which touch upon the Church life of those days, do, when gathered up and set in order, put before us a Church picture unique in the New Testament writings. . . .

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Ver. 2.—Ideal prosperity. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper," etc. The Authorized Version of this verse seems to carry the meaning that St. John valued physical health and secular prosperity above everything else. The original does not convey such a meaning. Revised Version, "Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

I. THE APOSTLE PRAYS THAT HIS FRIEND GAIUS MAY HAVE TEMPORAL PROSPERITY AND PHYSICAL HEALTH. From the expression of this desire in so brief a letter, we may infer that St. John regarded these things as of great importance. 1. Secular prosperity is desirable. Non-success in business is to be deprecated. For our own sake, for the sake of our families, and for the sake of our usefulness, prosperity in temporal things is desirable. Wealth is a wonderful power; and in the hands of a wise man it is a great boon both to himself and to others. 2. Physical health is desirable. Health of body, for many obvious reasons, is one of God's best gifts to man. It is important also for other reasons which are not obvious to all. The state of the body exercises a great influence upon the mind and soul. It is the organ and agent of both; and, if it be unhealthy, our impressions of the outward will be untrue, and our influence upon the outward will be limited and feeble. Our spiritual feelings and expressions are considerably toned and coloured by our physical condition.

II. THE APOSTLE INDICATES THE REMARKABLE SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY OF HIS FRIEND GAIUS. This is clear from his making his spiritual prosperity the measure of the desired bodily health and temporal prosperity. The neat verse also contributes evidence of this prosperity of soul. It was seen in his growing acquaintance with the truth and his growing conformity to the truth. "Brethren ... bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth." Perhaps Gaius himself needed this assurance of his spiritual prosperity. "The words of the apostle seem to imply," says Dr. Binney, "that the health of Gaius was somewhat enfeebled. This might affect his feelings, and render the actual prosperity of his soul, while visible to others, unperceived by himself; his excellence was obvious to all who knew him, though bodily infirmity or mental depression concealed the truth from his own consciousness. On this account he was addressed by John in the words of encouragement—words delicately but strongly conveying the apostle's confidence in his spiritual state, and assuring him, at the same time, of his constantly sharing in his supplications and prayers." This spiritual prosperity is more important than material progress and success.

III. THE APOSTLE MAKES THE PROSPERITY OF HIS SOUL THE MEASURE OF HIS PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SECULAR PROSPERITY DESIRED FOR GAIUS. This is profoundly significant. Unless our spiritual prosperity be at least commensurate with our temporal prosperity, the latter ceases to be a blessing. All the worldly wealth which a man possesses which is more than proportionate to the wealth of his soul, he will do well to get rid of at once, or by Divine grace bring the wealth of his soul into proportion with it. Without this correspondence we cannot use wealth aright, riches will injure us, the material will crush the spiritual in us. When outward riches are more than proportionate to his godliness and grace, they are a curse to their possessor. But when there is a proportion between the two, wealth is a blessing worthy an apostle's prayer. What astounding revolutions would take place if this prayer were universally realized! What transformations in health! Many now hale and strong would become weak and sickly. Many now diseased and feeble would become sound and vigorous. What transformations in circumstances! Many pampered sons and daughters of riches and luxury would come to poverty and want. Many of the indigent would pass from the abode of penury to the palace of ease and plenty. "A terrible wish this," says Binney "if it were offered for and were to take effect upon many a professor: it would blast them in body and ruin them in circumstances; it would render them, like the Church that thought itself rich and increased in goods, 'poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.' " Shall I offer this prayer for you? If this prayer were realized, the physical would bear the true proportion to the spiritual, and the temporal to the eternal. Learn how far secular wealth is desirable.—W. J. . . .

In the more recent trends, the specialized commentaries tend to focus on one of the newer approaches to interpreting biblical texts. For example, quite interesting is *The Africa Bible Commentary*, that reflects applicational efforts centered on the various cultures in Africa. The *Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* series is an 8 volume set on the New Testament centering on socio-rhetorical methods of interpreting the biblical text. Older but still useful is John Lightfoot's 4 volume *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*. The New Testament is interpreted against the backdrop of Rabbinic Judaism in the ancient world. *The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook* series in 20 volumes treats the text of the New Testament from the view of

Bible translation issues for modern Bible translators. It is quite helpful for illustrations and multi-cultural issues in communicating the text of the Bible; there is a comparable OT series also.

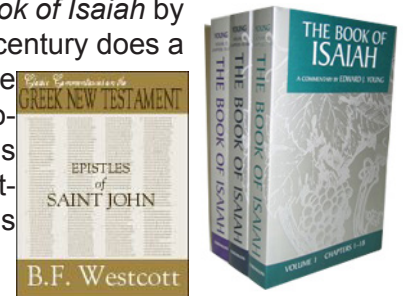
These are but a few samples of the kinds of commentaries now available for purchase in both print and electronic formats.⁶² As is clear, the variety is almost limitless. Unfortunately the range of quality is limitless from very good to exceedingly bad.

What I have recommended to seminary and religious studies students over the years is to start out building one's personal library with the basics. If at all possible, go to a nearby library where there are extensive copies of commentaries -- private church related university libraries are the best place -- and explore a variety of commentaries with study in the library. Do this before purchasing any commentary! This will provide you with some sense of whether a given commentary will be useful to you in your study of scripture. As you discover different commentaries to be quite helpful, then consider either the less expensive electronic version or shop around in both used book stores and discount book retail outlets for a good buy. With just a little bit of effort you can find the desired set of commentaries for 50 to 80 per cent off of the suggested retail price. I have purchased literally several thousand commentaries over my half century of ministry from 1960 until today, but I have never ever paid the full retail price for any of them! The internet is increasingly a good place to discover real bargains.

6.2.2.4 Individual Volumes

An entirely different category of commentaries is those publications which cover only a single book or short section of books, e.g., the letters of John, and are not a part of a multi-volume set covering one of the two testaments or the entire Bible. They differ from the single volume commentary in what is covered. The single volume commentary will cover either the entire Bible or one of the testaments in a single volume (or two volumes). Usually these individual volumes will be produced by one author who has a special interest in a particular section of the Bible.

An older but still valuable publication is the three volume set just on *The Book of Isaiah* by Edward J. Young. The well known OT scholar in the early part of the twentieth century does a detailed line by line exegesis of the text of Isaiah. Something of a class are the publications of B.F. Westcott; this legendary British New Testament scholar produced volumes on Hebrews, Ephesians, letters of John, and John. These types of commentaries can range all the way from a devotional to expository to exegetical commentary. Westcott works at a more advanced level in his publications as the following example on Third John 1 illustrates.⁶³



ΙΩΑΝΟΥ Γ

The letter is marked throughout by personal circumstances, and is broken up into short paragraphs which are severally suggested by these. After the salutation (v. 1) St John (1) expresses in general terms his joy at the tidings of Gains which he hears (2-4); and (2) specially approves his hospitality towards missionary brethren (5-8). In contrast with this generosity (3) he condemns the ambitious self-assertion of Diotrephes (9, 10); and then (4) gives his witness in favour of Demetrius (11, 12); and so (5) concludes (13-15).

1. The salutation.

The salutation stands in contrast by its brevity with the salutations in the other personal letters of the New Testament. The wish of blessing is transposed in another form to the following verse.

¹*The Elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth.*

1. Ὁ πρεβύτερος] 2 John 1 note.

Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγ.] The name 'Gaius' (Caius) occurs Acts 19:29 (a 'Macedonian'); 20:4 ('of Derbe'); 1 Cor. 1:14 (a Corinthian); Rom.

⁶²As already mentioned, the Logos.com Commentary Product Guide is an excellent listing of a wide range of different kinds of commentaries in one place. It lists commentaries in both electronic and print form, contains extensive descriptions of contents, layouts, authors etc. for each of the listings.

⁶³*The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text With Notes and Essays*, ed. Brooke Foss Westcott, 4th ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London; New York: Macmillan, 1902), 233-35. Logos Systems has bundled a wide variety of these individual volumes together under the common title *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* etc. This is an excellent way to build a digital library with older but solid commentaries at 'dirt cheap' prices. For example the 14 volumes bundled together under this title sell together for \$200. Most of these are out of print and available copies at used book dealers will typical be several times the price of the same volume in this Logos System structure.

16:23 (a Corinthian). There is nothing to identify this Gaius with any one of these. Another is mentioned as having been made bishop of Pergamum by St John (Const. Ap. 7:46). The position which Gaius occupied in the church to which he belonged is not shown by the letter. The epithet 'beloved' is afterwards used as a title of address (vv. 2, 5, 11). It occurs several times in salutations of St Paul: Rom. 16:12; Philem. 1 ('the beloved'); Rom. 16:5, 16:8, 16:9 ('my beloved'); 2 Tim. 1:2 ('my beloved child'). ὁ ἐγὼ ἀγ.] The emphatic personal pronoun (2 John 1) seems to point to some gainsayers with whom the apostle contrasts himself. Compare 'thou' (σύ) in v. 3.

ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.] Comp. 2 John 1 note. ἐν ἀληθείᾳ ἀγαπᾷ ὁ κατὰ Κύριον ἀγαπῶν (Œcumen.).

6.2.2.5 Commentary Articles

This final category of commentaries is very distinct. In the world of academic study of the Bible most every divinity school and seminary has its own theological journal. Most of the professional Bible societies also publish a journal. In the field of New Testament studies two of the best known such journals in the English speaking world are the *Journal of Biblical Literature* and the Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. The Society of Biblical Literature is the largest such organization of biblical scholars and is based in the United States. The Society for New Testament Studies is an European based professional group of New Testament scholars and is limited to less than 400 of the assumed best NT scholars in the world. Most of these type journals will function at an advanced exegetical level in the articles centered on interpretive issues found in various biblical texts. Thus their value to the general public may be somewhat limited because of their technical orientation. But sometimes the journals produced by different religious schools are much less technical in orientation and thus have value to a much broader readership.



The key value of these kinds of journals is that they provide the most up to date literature available for interpretive help in studying the Bible. Typically these journals will issue two to four volumes each year containing a couple of hundred pages or so of material. Many of the journals have been published for a long time, e.g., the JBL journal began publication in 1881. Over the decades quite a large accumulation of materials has come together. This tradition of journal publication had its beginning in Germany, and still today the best and most extensive publications for biblical studies are in the German language. Occasionally these journals will contain articles in English as well as many other modern western languages, e.g., *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*. The journals produced by professional organizations of biblical scholars tend to be very multi-cultural and international in viewpoint. Usually, the university produced journal will represent the views of its own faculty, if not exclusively then dominantly. Both perspectives have a proper role, but the reader needs to understand this background difference.



6.2.3 Concordances

Not only is the commentary an indispensable secondary tool for serious Bible study, a good concordance is equally important. And the good news about them is that they are free, at least in the digital, internet format. And this format is actually far better and easier to use than the printed book forms.

First, let's make sure everyone understands what a concordance is? First and foremost a Bible concordance is a tool for looking up words and phrases as they are found in the Bible. The graphic on the right illustrates this with the use of an internet based concordance. If we wanted to find the places where the personal name "Gaius" shows up in the Bible, a couple of simple steps would produce the product you see in the graphic here.

Second, why is a concordance important? Before turning to commentaries and other secondary tools, a concordance is

The screenshot shows a search interface for the name "Gaius". The search bar contains "Gaius" and the search button is labeled "Search". Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Bibles (5)", "References (170)", "Bible Study (2)", "Pastors", and "Help". The "References (170)" tab is selected. Below the tabs, there are filters for "Filter Results: All books" and "Translation: New Revised Standard". The search results are sorted by "Book of the Bible" and "Most relevant search result". The results are as follows:

- Acts 19:29 NRS**
The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them **Gaius** and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.
Read Acts 19 | View in parallel | Compare Translations
- Acts 20:4 NRS**
He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by **Gaius** from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.
Read Acts 20 | View in parallel | Compare Translations
- Romans 16:23 NRS**
Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.
Read Romans 16 | View in parallel | Compare Translations
- 1 Corinthians 1:14 NRS**
I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and **Gaius**.
Read 1 Corinthians 1 | View in parallel | Compare Translations
- 3 John 1:1 NRS**
The elder to the beloved **Gaius**, whom I love in truth.
Read 3 John 1 | View in parallel | Compare Translations

the first step. The reason for this is that your first effort in understanding the meaning of “Gaius” in 3 John 1 is to see whether that word surfaces elsewhere in the Bible. A concordance is the best way to discover this. Often when reading through other places in the Bible where the word is found, a much clearer understanding of the term emerges. For example, with Gaius in 3 John we have almost no biographical data provided beyond his relationship to the Elder who wrote the letter to him. But in four other places the name Gaius shows up. In the two passages in Acts (19:29 & 20:4) the name shows up. But are these the same fellows? Most likely not. Because the Gaius in 19:29 is said to be from Macedonia and was a traveling companion with Paul while he was in Ephesus, while the Gaius in 20:4 came from Derbe in Galatia and traveled with Paul from Corinth to Jerusalem. When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (16:23) a fellow by the name of Gaius lived in Corinth and hosted not only Paul but his home was a meeting place for the Christian community. Most likely, this is the same Gaius that Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 1:14. So we have our third Gaius in the pages of the Bible, and very likely the 3 John 1 refers introduces a fourth Gaius to us. All of a sudden we begin realizing that the name Gaius in the ancient world was very common, something like John or Jack in the US. The next step, that we will discuss below, is to check out these conclusions through using a Bible dictionary.

Why is this important to use the concordance, when we could have gone directly to the Bible dictionary? An important interpretive principle is at stake here. Scripture must interpret scripture! More formally known as *usus loquendi*, the idea is that the first and the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself!

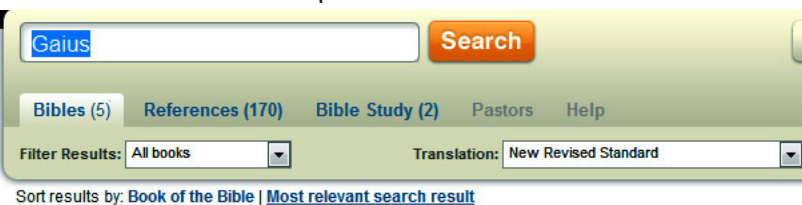
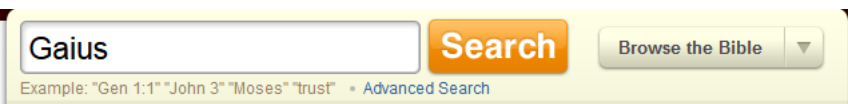
Let me mention the more popular printed concordances. Traditionally the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and the *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* have been the most widely used concordances until the arrival of digital concordances on the internet in the late 1990s. Strong's concordance was first published in 1890 and lists every word found in the King James Version of the Bible in alphabetical sequence with the scripture references. Young's concordance was first published in 1879 and is also based on the KJV translation. It is somewhat different in format with greater treatment of the Greek and Hebrew words behind the English words in the KJV. Both of these print versions have been periodically updated and enhanced, but are now largely irrelevant because of the digital concordances available over the internet. To be sure, many other print versions of concordances also exist that are based on different English translations which will naturally have different sets of words for its translation of the Bible.

Among the many options for an internet based concordance the merits and advantages of each depend on several factors. They are not alike beyond some very basic features.

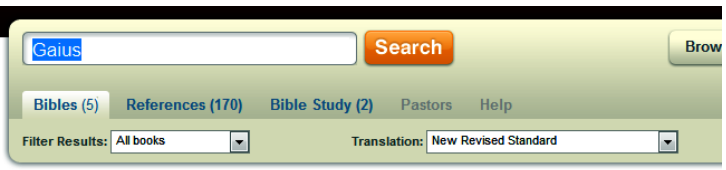
The basic features begin with the so-called Search box. Each internet site will come up with a default translation, but that can be reset to the desired translation one wishes. The number of different translations available is one place where differences between these digital concordances will surface. The better ones will provide a wide range of two dozen or more English translations plus several options in at least a dozen other modern languages. In order to customize the search by changing to the desired translation, one will need to go to the “Advanced Search” feature provided.

The second feature that is particularly useful is sometimes labeled “Filter Results.” Although this label can change, what it does is permit you to determine how much of the Bible you want to search. This ranges from individual books of the Bible to the entire Bible itself. This is an extremely useful feature. For example if you wanted to know whether Paul ever referred to Gaius, the search could be set to the writings of Paul and only instances of Gaius' name would show up inside the letters of Paul. Such a feature is particularly useful for searches with words like ‘love’ which would generate a listing of many hundreds of scripture texts for the entire Bible.

Once the search is completed it is then possible to do a copy and paste procedure of the listing in order to copy this material directly into your document, if that is desired. Some clean up editing may then need to be done in order to get the formatting to conform to that of the document that you are working on. One alternative procedure that I use quite often is a screen capture process that produces a graphic file picture of whatever part of the listing you desire. The graphics used here have been created this way through a free add-on utility for the Firefox web browser and then edited somewhat with Photoshop software.



Although a growing number of these kinds of internet concordances are available, the two that I have found most useful are the *Bible Study Tools* site and the *Bible Gateway* site. The differences in how they generate search can complement one another as a side-by-side comparison illustrates:



Quick Search Results: Gaius

Showing results from:

Keyword search results
6 Results

1. **Acts 19:29**
The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them **Gaius** and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.
[Acts 19:28-30 \(in Context\)](#) [Acts 19 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)
2. **Acts 20:4**
He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by **Gaius** from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.
[Acts 20:3-5 \(in Context\)](#) [Acts 20 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)
3. **Romans 16:23**
Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.
[Romans 16:22-24 \(in Context\)](#) [Romans 16 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)
4. **1 Corinthians 1:14**
I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and **Gaius**,
[1 Corinthians 1:13-15 \(in Context\)](#) [1 Corinthians 1 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)
5. **3 John 1:1**
[*Salutation*] The elder to the beloved **Gaius**, whom I love in truth.
[3 John 1:1-3 \(in Context\)](#) [3 John 1 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)
6. **3 John 1:2**
[*Gaius Commended for His Hospitality*] Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.
[3 John 1:1-3 \(in Context\)](#) [3 John 1 \(Whole Chapter\)](#) [Other Translations](#)

Acts 19:29 NRS
The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them **Gaius** and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.
[Read Acts 19](#) | [View in parallel](#) | [Compare Translations](#)

Acts 20:4 NRS
He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by **Gaius** from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.
[Read Acts 20](#) | [View in parallel](#) | [Compare Translations](#)

Romans 16:23 NRS
Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.
[Read Romans 16](#) | [View in parallel](#) | [Compare Translations](#)

1 Corinthians 1:14 NRS
I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and **Gaius**.
[Read 1 Corinthians 1](#) | [View in parallel](#) | [Compare Translations](#)

3 John 1:1 NRS
The elder to the beloved **Gaius**, whom I love in truth.
[Read 3 John 1](#) | [View in parallel](#) | [Compare Translations](#)

One senses from the options listed underneath each of the verses brought up by the search that it is possible to see more than just the verse where the searched word shows up. The first option "in Context" will bring up the paragraph where this word is found; the second option "Whole Chapter" brings up the entire Bible book chapter and the third option "Other Translations" allows you to quickly check to see whether the same translation word was used in other translations, or whether a different translation used a different word to translation the biblical word. The Bible Study Tools example on the right gives you the entire chapter option, but also includes the option of viewing the passage in two translations set in parallel to one another. The third option "Compare Translations" will bring up a large number of translations of that same verse that enable you to glance at how the word was translated across many different translations.

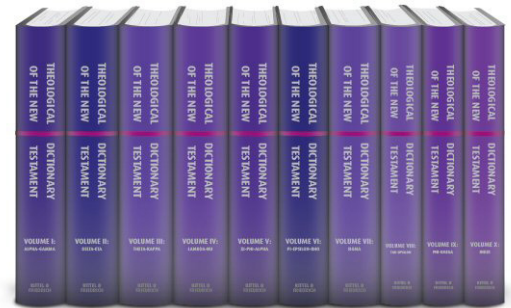
Additionally both of these Bible study websites can be set so that your concordance search can include the available Bible dictionaries, commentaries etc. that is a part of the individual website database. The BST site includes a free account option where you can enter notes connected to specific Bible verses for future reference in your own study. Both sites have an audio feature that allows the user to click on a audio reading of the Bible passage being studied. Bible Gateway also contains smart device apps capability for the iPad, iPhone, and Android devices such as Kindle. The BST site does have the Apple iPhone and iPad apps but not yet for Android devices.

Additionally, it should be noted that most of the Bible study software programs such as Logos will have features comparable to a concordance built into their software. This will enable doing similar kinds of searches

offline. Plus the advantage here is that because of the massive indexing of all of the contents in your Bible study software, these searches can extend way beyond just a translation of the Bible. This can be especially helpful in certain instances.

6.2.4 Bible Dictionaries

A Bible dictionary is simply a dictionary with listings related to the Christian Bible in some manner or another.⁶⁴ Some of the older sets will use the term encyclopedia, but that label is no longer popular. And as is true with most of the other tools the more detailed publications usually are in multi-volume sets. Increasingly one needs to carefully distinguish a Bible dictionary from the many other types of religious oriented dictionaries dealing with a wide range of topics connected to religion in general. For example, the *Dictionary of Theological Terms* by Alan Cairns contains definitions of theological terms, rather than just Bible terms. For example the word ‘trinity’ would be in this dictionary, but not in most Bible dictionaries because the word doesn’t surface inside the Bible. One of the most detailed such theological dictionaries is the ten volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel in the original German editions. Over 2,300 theological significant Greek words in the NT are treated in this series.

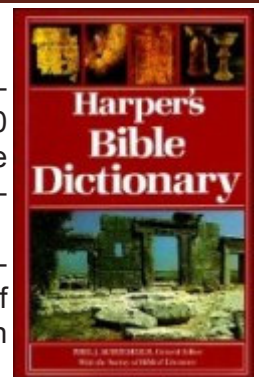


The Bible dictionary, however, is the most important category of such tools for the beginning Bible student. Sometimes the articles will be little more than extended introductions to the books of the Bible, but this is only one kind of article that is found in such publications.

In the English speaking world, Bible dictionaries began to be published as books from the middle 1800s onward: *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* (1863); *Cassell’s Concise Bible Dictionary* (1893, 1896); *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible* (1898-1904) et als. Sometimes these early publications underwent subsequent revisions in order to update them, but many of them have not been updated. Often on Bible study websites these dictionaries mentioned here will appear as available for use. The reason for this is that the duration of time in the US copyright has long since expired and the web site can use the database free of royalty payments. Unfortunately the better and more recent Bible dictionaries are mainly available in print form. And if in digital form, only as a part of a purchased Bible study software or in a subscription based internet site.⁶⁵



At the top of the list of Bible dictionaries available online in a subscription fee structure is *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* at Ministry Matters com. This Abingdon Press publication has been among the best multi-volume Bible dictionary sets for many, many years. This five volume set contains some 8,400 entries on terms connected to the Bible, written by over 900 different scholars from all over the world. But the ‘grand daddy’ of all Bible dictionaries in the English language is the six volume *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* with over 7,200 pages containing more than 6,000 entries written by 600 plus scholars internationally.



On the other end of the scale for Bible dictionaries, one of the best single volume publications is the *Harper’s Dictionary of the Bible*. It is concise, represents a wide diversity of theological perspective but is scholarly at the same time. An illustration from this publication concerning Third John will reflect the pattern for the more concise dictionaries:⁶⁶

⁶⁴“A Bible dictionary is a reference work containing encyclopedic entries related to the Bible, typically concerning people, places, customs, doctrine and Biblical criticism. Bible dictionaries can be scholarly or popular in tone.” [“Bible dictionary,” wikipedia.org]

⁶⁵For example, in my digital library with Logos I have over a hundred Bible dictionaries along with other types of religious oriented dictionaries. In the product listing for Dictionaries available through Logos systems, they list 873 different dictionaries, almost half of which are Bible dictionaries.

⁶⁶Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper

John, the Letters Of

John, the Letters of, three brief writings at the end of the NT before Jude and Revelation. 2 and 3 John are in epistolary form. The longest, 1 John, has neither salutation nor conclusion but is clearly a written communication to a group of Christians. The author of 2 and 3 John refers to himself in the salutation as 'the Elder.' The author of 1 John does not identify himself at all, although presumably he is an authoritative figure.

OUTLINE OF CONTENTS

[outlines and discussion of 1 and 2 John here]

3 John can be outlined as follows:

- I. Salutation (1-4)
- II. Hospitality to emissaries (5-12)
- III. Conclusion (13-15).

In the earliest canonical lists, dating from the end of the second century, 1 John already appears. Indeed, 1 John is quoted as authoritative by Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna before the middle of the second century. The attestation of 2 John is almost as good. There is no second-century reference to 3 John, but that is not surprising, since it deals with a specific, local issue. Probably it was eventually included with 1 and 2 John because it was known to be the work of a notable authority in the church. See also Beloved Disciple, The; Diotrephes; John the Apostle; John, The Gospel According to; Revelation to John, The.

Bibliography

Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979.

_____. *The Epistles of John*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982. D.M.S.

6.2.4.1 Single Volume Dictionaries

As should be clear from the above discussion, the single volume publication will contain less detail for each entry included in the dictionary. This has both pluses and minuses. Most of these dictionaries will divide articles into what the publisher will define as major and minor entries. In essence what this means is a short article of one or two paragraphs over against a longer article of several paragraphs. The editors of the dictionary make this determination, and then invite scholars to contribute materials in the assigned articles.⁶⁷

Among the single volume dictionaries let me list several, but not too many, that I have found useful over the years.⁶⁸ As one might expect, a multitude of single volume dictionaries are available simply because of the much lost cost of publication and purchase price. These publications come in all 'shapes and sizes.' That is, most every religious publishing house has its own single volume Bible dictionary. These will target different theological view points, as well as different skill levels of readers.

Somewhat similar to the Harper's Bible Dictionary is *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* [(Revised and Updated). Edited by Powell, Mark Allan. Third Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.]. Representative of the new ultra-conservative Southern Baptist Convention is the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. [Edited by Brand, Chad, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.]. Very evangelical in orientation, although representative of the wide diversity inside evangelicalism is *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. [Edited by Barry, John D. and Lazarus Wentz. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012.]. More moderately evangelical, especially with strong UK evangelical influence is the *New Bible Dictionary*. [Wood, D. R. W. and I. Howard Marshall. 3rd ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.]. More traditionally US evangelical is the *New International Bible Dictionary*. [Douglas, J. D. and Merrill Chapin Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987.]. From a US oriented evangelical conservative view is the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. [Tyndale reference library. Elwell, Walter A. and Philip Wesley Comfort. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.]. Closely related to this volume but somewhat older is the single volume *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. [Elwell, Walter A. and Barry J. Beitzel. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.]. Representing European influence is *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. [Myers, Allen C. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.]. It is an English translation and revision of the 1975 *Bijbelse Encyclopedie* edited by W.H. Gispen. One has to distinguish this publication from & Row, 1985), 499-500.

⁶⁷Having contributed articles for several Bible and theological dictionaries over the years, I know out of personal experience that the writer does not generate much income from such contributions. Such publications are notoriously expensive to produce for a publisher because of the massive number of individuals beyond the publishing agency personnel that are involved in such a project. Most scholars contribute simply out of a sense of duty, and also it helps expands one's resume to be able to list published articles in a wide variety of publications.

⁶⁸Note that these which are listed are available in both print and digital formats through Logos.com.

Eerdmans Press from *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. [Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.], which is a much more detailed single volume dictionary. These are but a few of the massive number of such publications existing today.

6.2.4.2 Dictionary Series

Beyond the two primary multi-volume Bible dictionaries mentioned above, the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* and the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, several other sets have been published as well. The older five volume *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* is being released in digital format by Logos. From an evangelical perspective is *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, [Revised. Edited by Bromiley, Geoffrey W., Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988.]. Although not strictly a Bible dictionary, the three volume *Encyclopedia of Christianity* [Fahlbusch, Erwin and Geoffrey William Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003.] contains many entries commonly found in Bible dictionaries and is a translation of the five volume German *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*.

A more recent trend is for publishing companies to release a series of dictionaries with each volume focused on some aspect of Bible study. For example the InterVarsity Press has available (via Logos) *The Essential IVP Reference Collection Version 3*. This set contains some 18 volumes with dictionaries on Jesus, Paul, NT background etc. Several publishers are moving this direction rather than producing multi-volume Bible dictionary sets. Evidently this is the trend for the future with these collections being released both in print and digital form either as individual volumes or as collections. Marketing and profit motives drive most of this.

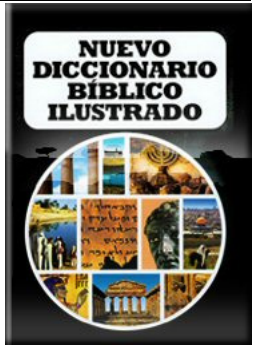


An interesting article in the online *Jewish Encyclopedia* released in 1906 contends that Jewish scholarship through the end of the nineteenth century had not been involved in producing an equivalent Bible dictionary for Judaism. But that picture is changing today. Although rather outdated, this encyclopedia itself functions somewhat in the capacity of a Bible dictionary and is often helpful for words and concepts connected to the Old Testament. Along somewhat similar lines is the *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* released early in the twentieth century, which provides a very traditionalist Roman Catholic view on many of the concepts and terms found in the Bible. Of course, the online *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* is constantly adding entries related to biblical terms and concepts, and thus becoming more useful as a free online source. The peer review policy adopted by Wikipedia a few years ago has greatly enhanced the quality and value of their entries. It has the advantage of being available in a growing number of modern languages, and thus becomes helpful for understanding various cultural viewpoints on a topic.

For those with skills in the German, the *Bibellexikon* project of the German Bible Society is a very helpful resource for an online Bible dictionary reflecting German perspectives on the topics. It is free, although one must set up an account in order to access the entries.⁶⁹ Also available free on the internet are some Bible dictionaries, i.e., diccionarios biblicos, in Spanish, although most appear to be rather limited in content. For example the *bibliaonline.org* offers a diccionario biblico with a fairly good number of entries. Logos Systems offers some 27 diccionarios biblicos in both single volume and multi-volume sets. Several of these are translations of English language publications, but some are original Spanish publications.



Thus with Bible dictionaries, the options are rather massive in all formats, print, digital, and internet. Also the range of presentations moves from rather simple to highly scholarly content. Some dictionaries stress visual communication and thus are loaded with maps, photos etc.; normally the word 'illustrated' will surface in these types of publications.



6.2.5 Bible study software

As I am confident you the reader have already realized, my favorite Bible study software is the package produced by Logos Systems at logos.com.⁷⁰ Although not the least expensive option, it is the package with the greatest number of features



⁶⁹Some background information is available in the article "Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet," wikipedia.org.

⁷⁰For a very helpful introduction to the entire concept of Bible software see "Biblical software," at wikipedia.org. It contains a wide range of the many different aspects about creating such software, as well as what is available in today's world.

and especially with the largest number of publications that can be added to the data base. The US based company grew out of a project created by two former programmers for Microsoft in the early 1990s. It has become something the standard for Bible study software packages around the world. Until a few years ago the focus was on English language publications as add on purchases. But a few years ago a Spanish version of the program was begun and now some two thousand Spanish language publications are available. The program comes in several varieties from the Starter to Portfolio packages.⁷¹ The beginning options do not contain the biblical language materials and thus do not require a knowledge of this languages. It is available in both PC and Mac versions, along with app programs for various types of electronic devices including both Apple and Android mobile devices.

One recommendation: over the nearly twenty years of using the program I have almost never purchased the addon publications at full price. Logos has a pre-publication option that they use to gauge interest in a particular book publication. By signing up for individual books at this stage one can normally get an additional 15 to 70 percent discount off their digital price when it is released. Since the digital release price is normally some 20 to 50 off the print edition retail price, this way of adding publications saves a lot of money.

Of course, Logos is but one of a whole host of available software programs.⁷² These include the free *e-Sword* software for Windows and the *MacSword* for Macintosh. For Mac users there is the *Accordance Bible Software*. Just behind Logos in capability and range of options is the *BibleWorks* software for Windows. Tyndale House Publishers have *iLumina Gold* for both Windows and Macintosh for under \$100 with several nice features. The *PC Study Bible Version* for Windows has an interesting feature that allows the user to create files individually and then integrate them into this software. Very popular but somewhat limited in options is *QuickVerse* for Windows. The limitations can be overcome by buying the high end version; prices range from around \$300 to over \$1,600. On the low price end is *SwordSearcher* at \$60 with most of the basic options; it is a Windows program.

From my experience of using such software for the past twenty plus years I would recommend that you look for some of the following items in selecting a Bible study software.

- Budget and prices will always impose limits. But spend a little more to get a solid basic program with maximum flexibility to expand by adding publications as they become available.

- Most programs are going to range between \$150 and \$300 for the beginning level program that contains the kinds of options that allow for expansion. For example, the regular price for the Logos Starter package is \$295, but in the package is included over 200 publications that alone would cost over \$3,500 in print form. Most of the under \$100 programs will contain the base operating system plus a dozen or so Bibles with a few of the older out of copyright commentaries etc.

- Check out both the kinds of expansions available as well as the typical cost of each of these. Price ranges can vary substantially here, depending on the software company's license agreement with the book copyright owner.

- If you are especially prone toward using mobile devices, be sure to check on the availability of appropriate apps for your devices. Also check to see whether the app permits a full or only a partial download of the software program on to your device. The very features you enjoy the most on the computer version of the software may not be available on the mobile device app.

- Give attention to the range and number of available Bible translations. Most programs include translations well beyond just English Bibles. If you use additional languages, be sure the program has translations available in this language. The biblical language texts will usually be included in most software programs. But it depends on the level of programming as to how well they are integrated into the rest of the program. Some may require knowledge of Greek and Hebrew before they are usable, but most will not since they will be linked to transliteration data bases and explanations that do not require knowledge of Greek and Hebrew.

6.3 Application to Third John

How to best apply the things learned in this chapter to Third John? Perhaps the most helpful approach is to look at Third John paragraph by paragraph and then make suggestions regarding the use of these secondary

⁷¹For an overview of the company history see "History of Logos Bible Software," logos.com.

⁷²A rather helpful review of a wide range of software programs is Mary Fairchild, "Top 10 Bible Software Programs," about.com. Also helpful in chart listing form is "Bible Software Review," fostertribe.org. Also worth checking is "Bible Software Review," at bsreview.org. For another top ten list but with some different listings see "Top Picks in Bible Software," at MinistryToday.Magazine.

tools for analyzing each paragraph. This will take on the form of an assignment for study outside of class in anticipation of the next and final chapter which will center on a detailed exegesis of Third John. For the English we will use the *New Revised Standard Version* and for the Spanish *La Biblia de las Américas*.

First, some of the **background issues** that need exploration prior to exegeting the text. The **literary qualities** needs to be examined. Two sets of secondary tools are useful for this: Bible dictionaries and the introduction section of more detailed commentaries on Third John. Assuming the absence of either print publications or computer software programs containing these, we will focus on the internet based materials to the extent they are available. If, on the other hand, you do have either print publications or a software program available, then make full use of them for this study.

L1: What kind of literary form or genre is this document? Clearly Third John is in the form of an ancient letter. Here are some internet resources with helpful information about ancient letters: “Epistle,” wikipedia.org; “Third Epistle of John,” wikipedia.org; “Third John,” bible.org; “Third Epistle of John,” theopedia.com; “Third John,” Bible Suite; “3 John,” Matthew Henry Commentary, biblestudytools.com; “Johannine Epistles,” cranfordville.com. Although the amount -- and quality -- of the details will vary, these sources will provide adequate background understanding about the literary genre of this document.

L2: What is the literary setting of this document? Here is essential answer is that this letter is the last of three letters connected to John that are found in the General Letters section of the New Testament. This means the first level of connections needs to be with the other two Johannine letters. Using the above sources, along with the biblical texts (3 Jhn // 1 Jhn; 3 Jhn // 2 Jhn; “Johannine Epistles,” cranfordville.com), explore possible connections between these three letters. Look for repeated words, phrases, and themes in them. Make notes of what you discover.

L3: What is the literary structure of this document? Ancient letters normally contained four basic sections: Praescriptio (v. 1); Proem (vv. 2-4); Body (vv. 5-12); Conclusio (vv. 13-15). The body of the letter usually subdivides into three paragraphs: vv. 5-8, 9-10, 11-12. Read through the contents of the letter making notes on theme expressions etc. that appear in the text. The link “Johannine Epistles,” cranfordville.com can be helpful for quick reading of this.

Next comes **the history concerns**, including both the external and the internal questions.

HE1: What are the compositional questions needing to be answered?

Who wrote the letter?

When was the letter written?

Where was the letter written?

To whom was the letter written?

Why was the letter written?

The answers to these questions begins with searching for signals inside the text of Third John. A few of them are answered internally but most are not. Next a searching for answers among the early church fathers of the second through the eighth centuries. The data collected from each category of sources will come together for a compositional profile. The two separate profiles from the scripture document and from the church fathers need to be compared to each other. Finally, some assessment of how modern scholarship views both of these profiles needs to be made. Here substantial diversity of opinion will surface. Look for the reasons given for each viewpoint.

HE2: How well has the Greek text of Third John been hand copied and transmitted over the centuries? The usual technical nature of this question means that finding a simple explanation in internet sources is virtually impossible. Consequently, I will provide a commentary quote for an assessment of this question:⁷³

The three Johannine Letters are included among the Catholic Letters in the major biblical manuscripts X A B C, and belong to that group of NT writings that is, on the whole, well attested. In earlier scholarship the classification of the textual tradition as belonging to the groups H (Egyptian or Alexandrian text), and K (Byzantine or Imperial text), as well as the Caesarean, Western, or Palestinian text (H. von Soden), had great authority. As regards the text of the Johannine Letters in particular, however, this division cannot be applied without some serious reservations. They are almost entirely absent from the most important representative of the so-called Western text, Codex D (05 = Bezae Cantabrigiensis). Because of a gap of 67 sheets, only 3 John 11–15 and the signature to 3 John are transmitted by this primary Western witness. The Old Latin manuscripts that are cited as witnesses of the Western text type vary in their content as regards the Catholic Letters (1 John and 1 Peter being the best attested), and there are gaps, even though in individual instances they offer some readings deserving attention, since they rest on Greek textual models.¹⁸ The Old

⁷³Georg Strecker and Harold W. Attridge, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), xxx–xxxii.

Syriac witnesses, which often contain a Western text, must be eliminated, since they do not contain the Catholic Letters. Only in the Peshitta do we find 1 John, and all three letters are contained in the Philoxenian version.¹⁹ The assignment of manuscripts to the so-called Caesarean text is problematic. Muriel M. Carder has attempted to ascribe minuscule 1243 to the Caesarean type,²⁰ but serious doubts have been raised against this.²¹ Moreover, the supposition of a Caesarean text type witnessed by W, 28, 565, 700, and the manuscript families f1 and f13 is highly questionable, and not only for the Johannine letters.²²

Beginning with the 26th edition of the Nestle text, Kurt Aland has introduced the symbol *M* to represent the “majority text,” which “for practical purposes” corresponds to the symbol *K*, and thus (being based on the great majority of the minuscule manuscripts) reproduces the Byzantine Koine. It is true that the “constant witnesses” are also subsumed under this symbol, to the extent that they correspond to *M*. These include, in part, important manuscripts such as κ ABCPKL Ψ , as well as P⁹ (partially) and P⁷⁴. These, together with a number of minuscules, are listed separately when they deviate from *M*.²³ It was a necessary consequence of this reorganization of the manuscript witnesses that in Nestle-Aland²⁶ not only the group symbol *K* but also the symbol *H* would be dropped. For the latter “not infrequently...represented a conjecture,”²⁴ so that the users of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* are again referred to the evaluation pro and con, as developed on the basis of the individual manuscripts listed. When Kurt Aland expresses himself more positively at a later point, and says that he regards the Alexandrian text, as well as *D* and *K*, as “incontestably verified,” in contrast to the Caesarean and Jerusalem text,²⁵ he apparently refers to an accepted form of the text that has not been evaluated for the text construction itself, since the Egyptian text type exists only in a few manuscripts that, in addition, are influenced by the Byzantine tradition.²⁶ Accordingly, the exegesis of the Johannine Letters may not ignore the insecurity of the acceptance of manuscript text groups, and the following discussion must deal with the question of the original reading not primarily by applying general criteria but differently from one case to another. In this process, it is not the external manuscript witnesses but the internal criteria that must be the decisive factors in determining the quality of one reading or another.²⁷

Although my friend Georg Strecker gets somewhat technical, I believe enough can be understood to realize a few traits in the copying of Third John over these early centuries.

Next come the internal history questions about the text.

HI1: Identify the place and people references found in these fifteen verses. These will include references such as the Elder (v.1), Gaius (v. 1), ‘arrived’ (v. 3), ‘friends’ (v. 5) etc. Using Bible dictionaries and commentaries identify as much as possible about each of these.

HI2: What are the time references -- direct and indirect -- in these fifteen verses? For example, “when some of the friends arrived...” (v. 3); “they began their journey...” (v. 7); “I have written something to the church...” (v. 9) etc. Using the same two sets of tools -- Bible dictionaries and commentaries -- examine possible time frames for these temporal references.

Exegesis of the text:

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1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

1 El anciano al amado Gayo, a quien yo amo en verdad.

What literary form is this and what is contained in it? Concentrate on the biblical text mostly.

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2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. 3 I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

2 Amado, ruego que seas prosperado en todo así como prospera tu alma, y que tengas buena salud. 3 Pues me alegré mucho cuando algunos hermanos vinieron y dieron testimonio de tu verdad, esto es, de cómo andas en la verdad. 4 No tengo mayor gozo que éste: oír que mis hijos andan en la verdad.

What literary form is this and what is contained in it? Concentrate on the biblical text mostly.

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5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; 6 they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; 7 for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. 8 Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

5 Amado, estás obrando fielmente en lo que haces por los hermanos, y sobre todo cuando se trata de extraños; 6 pues ellos dan testimonio de tu amor ante la iglesia. Harás bien en ayudarles a proseguir su viaje de una manera digna de Dios. 7 Pues ellos salieron por amor al Nombre, no aceptando nada de los gentiles. 8 Por tanto, debemos acoger a tales hombres, para que seamos colaboradores en pro de la verdad.

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9 I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

9 Escribí algo a la iglesia, pero Diótrefes, a quien le gusta ser el primero entre ellos, no acepta lo que decimos. 10 Por esta razón, si voy, llamaré la atención a las obras que hace, acusándonos injustamente con palabras maliciosas; y no satisfecho con esto, él mismo no recibe a los hermanos, se lo prohíbe a los que quieren hacerlo y los expulsa de la iglesia.

What literary form is this and what is contained in it? Concentrate on the biblical text mostly. Concordance check and Bible dictionary check on Diotrephes would be helpful.

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11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

11 Amado, no imites lo malo sino lo bueno. El que hace lo bueno es de Dios; el que hace lo malo no ha visto a Dios. 12 Demetrio tiene buen testimonio de parte de todos y de parte de la verdad misma; también nosotros damos testimonio y tú sabes que nuestro testimonio es verdadero.

What literary form is this and what is contained in it? Concentrate on the biblical text mostly. Concordance check and Bible dictionary check on Demetrius would be helpful.

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13 I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; 14 instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face.

15 Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.

13 Tenía muchas cosas que escribirte, pero no quiero escribírtelas con pluma y tinta, 14 pues espero verte en breve y hablaremos cara a cara.

15 La paz sea contigo. Los amigos te saludan. Saluda a los amigos, a cada uno por nombre.

What literary form is this and what is contained in it? What typical Conclusio elements are contained here? Concentrate on the biblical text mostly.

CONCLUSION

My prayer is that this exploration of Third John can be a really satisfying adventure for you, as you dig out the details of the biblical text. The final part of the study is now to bring the ideas you have found inside the biblical text into your own world.

How do you do this? Let me suggest two guidelines.

• **Look for themes and religious emphases in the text that remain current across time.** These will possess some relevancy to your situation today. For example, Christian hospitality is one significant emphasis in this letter. Using a Bible dictionary, look up ‘hospitality’ to get a better idea of how it worked in the early church. Then ask yourself how can I apply this in my world? Another theme clearly present in this letter is leadership dominance over a congregation that excludes those who disagree with leaders. What was going on with Diotrephes? Does that happen in your church? More themes are present as well. Explore these and their relevancy to your situation.

• **What can I conclude about Christian faithfulness in this letter?** What is there to learn from the examples of the personalities in this letter? The Elder, Gaius, the strangers, Diotrephes, and Demetrius?

In the process of your studies, you may very well think of more possible applications. If so, then jot them down. When we work our way in detail through this biblical text in chapter seven of the series we can discuss these as a group.