

2023 Exegesis Exam on Judges: Recommended Commentaries

Before the exam date, be sure to do at least four things:

1. Secure commentaries ahead of time. Take a look at them. If you find one unhelpful, obtain a good substitute. If you have questions about one, email Dr. Matt *before the exam begins*.
 - a. People grading exams don't look favorably on old commentaries, especially when a student only uses commentaries more than 20 years old. At least three of the ones you cite should have been published since 2000.
2. Familiarize yourself with the book of Judges. Takes notes on themes and ideas.
3. Read introductions to Proverbs in study Bibles, such as:
 - a. *The New Oxford Annotated Study Bible* (edited by Coogan et al.)
 - b. *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (edited by Harold W. Attridge et al.)
 - c. *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (edited by Walter Harrelson et al.)
 - d. *The CEB Study Bible* (edited by Joel B. Green et al.)
 - e. NOTE: Whenever you use an idea from a study Bible, it needs to be cited. Having said that, it's best to avoid citing study Bibles too much on the exam. So, use them to get your bearings on the book, but don't rely on them too much in the exam itself.
4. Read introductions in your commentaries.

Nearly every PCUSA exegesis exam has questions dealing with:

- a. establishing the text,
- b. literary context,
- c. historical context,
- d. canonical context, and
- e. theology and application.

The following chart explains which commentaries are helpful in dealing with which questions. Most commentaries deal with [b] literary and [d] canonical context, but students need to be careful in selecting resources to help with [a] establishing the text, [c] describing historical matters, and [e] applying the text to today.

If you use a library copy online, **BE SURE YOU CLOSE THE COMMENTARY WHEN YOU ARE DONE**. That will allow another student to go in and use it after you. Also, it will work best if you save relevant pages of the commentary, close it, and then read what you've saved to your computer. This practice will allow your fellow students to use these resources as well.

You may be asked technical questions involving the textual apparatus. So, be sure you have a copy of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*—the Hebrew Bible with the textual apparatus. Be sure you have the English key to the Latin words, abbreviations, and symbols (see pages LIX to LXIX). Don't forget that the

last page of that key lists symbols, including ones that you might otherwise miss. If you've forgotten textual criticism, review that material from Hebrew class.

Many of these resources are available as eBooks to current students (see links on the right column of the chart below). If an eBook is *not* available, you could try emailing our library at reference@dbg.edu to see if it is possible for them to scan the section of the commentary. If you do so, be sure to give ample time for them to reply to your request. This method of obtaining resources can be helpful if you want to check an additional source, but it shouldn't be relied upon as a primary way of getting commentaries.

Commentary Features

Author	Series	Date: may differ with eBooks	Establishing the Text			Literary Context	Historical Context	Canonical Context	Theology or App.?	eBook?
			New Trans.	Textual Criticism	He- brew					
Bachmann	Wisdom	2018			Y	Y	Some	Y	Some	Click here for eBook
Biddle	Reading S & H	2012				Y		Y	Some	Click here for eBook
Boling	Anchor	1975	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		eBook not available thru UD
Butler	Word (WBC)	2017	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		eBook not available thru UD
Goldin-gay	For Every- one	2011				Some			Y	Click here for eBook
Mat-thews	NCBC	2004				Y	Y	Y		eBook not available thru UD
McCann	Inter- preta- tion	2011				Y	Y	Y	Y	Click here for eBook
Niditch	OTL	2008	Y	Y	Y	Y	Some	Y		eBook not available thru UD
Olson	NIB	1994			Some	Y		Y	Y	Click here for eBook
Pressler	West- minster	2002				Y		Y	Some	Click here for eBook
Schnei- der	Berit Olam	1999				Y		Y		Click here for eBook
Smith & Bloch- Smith	Her- meneia	2021	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Click here for eBook

Author	Series	Date: may differ with eBooks	Establishing the Text			Literary Context	Historical Context	Canonical Context	Theology or App.?	eBook?
			New Trans.	Textual Criticism	He- brew					
Way	Teach the Text	2016				Y	Some	Y	Y	Click here for eBook
Webb	NICOT	2012	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Click here for eBook

Annotated Bibliography (in Alphabetical Order)

Two important things to note:

- If a source interacts with Hebrew using transliteration, you may want to use the following resource to discern the exact Hebrew letters being described: <http://opensiddur.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/SBL-Handbook-of-Style-Transliterating-and-Transcribing-Ancient-Texts.pdf>
 - It provides two systems of Hebrew transliteration. The first is the academic one, which has the diacritics above and below letters (especially vowels, e.g., *â*). The second is the general one. It doesn't have diacritics, so a single letter can refer to more than one Hebrew character (e.g., *a* = *patakh* or *qamets*).
- If you use an electronic copy of a book, be sure to cite that you are doing so. For example, you can insert "eBook ed." just before the place of publication.

Bachmann, Mercedes L. Garcia. *Judges*. Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2018.

This is an excellent commentary that's new, accessible, and clear. The author is especially skilled at handling gender issues.

Biddle, Mark E. *Reading Judges: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012.

This commentary provides overviews of scholarly positions on different topics. The notes on contemporary context can be quite short.

Boling, Robert G. *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975.

This commentary series is now dated. However, for several decades, it was seen as one of the most authoritative scholarly sources. Note that for each section of text, there's first an original translation, then "Notes" (where one can find textual critical commentary), and then "Comment" (which takes more of a bird's eye view than the Notes). Although the author talks about historical context, the comments reflect 1970s scholarship. Turn to the volume by Matthews for better work on historical context.

Butler, Trent C. *Judges*. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: T. Nelson, 2009.

This lengthy work has some of the best resources when it comes to establishing the text (translation, textual criticism, Hebrew). It is a technical commentary, which makes it a little difficult to navigate. Each section usually has these subsections: [1] a bibliography (which you can usually disregard), [2] a translation with footnotes (pay special attention to these footnotes because they often deal with textual criticism; use page xvi to figure out abbreviations), [3] form/structure/setting, [4] comment (which often deals with Hebrew words), and [5] explanation (which looks at the bigger picture and may touch on application).

Goldingay, John. *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth for Everyone*. Old Testament for Everyone. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

This short volume focuses on relating the text to today. It's one of the best works to consult when working on the Application section of the exam.

Matthews, Victor H. *Judges & Ruth*. The New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

This book is perhaps the best source when it comes to looking at the book's historical and cultural context. It's less helpful with textual criticism and contemporary reflection.

McCann, J. Clinton. *Judges*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011.

This commentary is helpful with many matters (except for textual criticism and Hebrew). It is a good all-around commentary.

Niditch, Susan. *Judges: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

This author is highly respected, especially for her work on folktales and the Bible. Consequently, this commentary might be helpful in thinking about matters like genre. It also does solid work with textual critical matters and Hebrew. For these two matters, don't forget to see the footnotes on the translation. These footnotes contain their own abbreviations, which can be decoded using the section called "Abbreviations" at the beginning of the book after the acknowledgements and before the bibliography.

Olson, Dennis. "The Book of Judges." Pages 2:721–888 in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Although the commentary is now somewhat dated, it provides useful insights, especially in the subsections called "Reflections" at the end of each section. Do not rely on the transliteration in this eBook because it did not transfer well into the electronic format. To access this commentary electronically, use [the link above](#). Then click "View eBook." Next, log in with your UD credentials. Then click "+Biblical Commentaries." Next, click on "The New Interpreter's Bible." Then, click on "Nib Volume II" on the right. Next, click on "The Book of Judges" and choose a section.

Pressler, Carolyn. *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

This commentary is clear and concise. It doesn't extensively engage historical or technical material. It may be useful to consult initially before turning to more challenging commentaries.

Schneider, Tammi J. *Judges*. Berit Olam. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999.

This commentary is clear, accessible, and especially useful for literary matters. It stresses the progressive decline of leadership in Judges.

Smith, Mark S., and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith. *Judges 1: A Commentary on Judges 1:1–10:5*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2021.

This commentary is extremely technical. It dives deeply into matters like textual criticism, Hebrew, and historical context. However, it only deals with the first nine chapters or so. So, if the exam focuses on material from Judges 10:6–21:25, this commentary will not be helpful. To use it, be sure to pay attention to the footnotes on the translation (especially for textual critical matters and Hebrew). Additionally, look for notes on "Narrative Context," "Detailed Commentary" (which includes more info on Hebrew), and "Background and Setting" (which comes after the Detailed Commentary).

Way, Kenneth. *Judges and Ruth*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016.

This commentary is accessible and clear. It is clearly written for a less academic, more conservative audience, so you may want to rely on more academic commentaries especially with historical matters.

Webb, Barry G. *The Book of Judges*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012.

This commentary is one of the most in-depth and lengthy. It is fairly technical. While it offers little in terms of application, it's useful for other tasks.