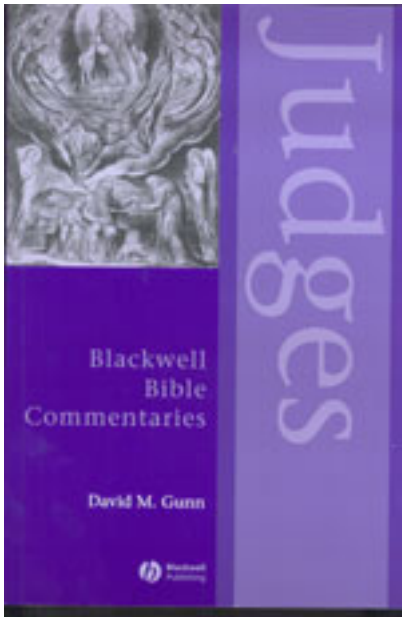


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**Gunn, David M.**

*Judges*

Blackwell Bible Commentaries

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In this first volume of the new Blackwell Bible Commentaries (BBC) series to treat a book from the Tanak, David M. Gunn has not only provided a useful tool for students of the book of Judges but also established a new standard for biblical commentaries in general. In the past century it was commonplace for scholars to write commentaries as if the Bible had recently been discovered along with other literary works from the ancient Near East. Many commentators appeared to be totally oblivious to the fact that the Bible had been read for millennia. In the conservative climate of post-WWII biblical scholarship, the tendency was to focus on the parallels between the text and the ancient Near Eastern sources. After dismissing much of the older critical scholarship and proposing the earliest possible dates for the biblical material, commentators found little, if any, space to acknowledge the extent to which the Hebrew Bible is a Jewish book with a long history of Jewish and Christian interpretation. Significantly, many of the older, more critical commentaries are not impaired by these shortcomings. Thus, with regard to the book of Judges, G. F. Moore's volume in the International Critical Commentary series (1895) is exemplary in the way it draws upon a wide range of sources from the Jewish and Christian traditions; few biblical commentaries since have come close to meeting the standard it set. However, Moore consulted the ancient material primarily with the aim of understanding the biblical text. In contrast, Gunn's impressive

commentary, in keeping with the methodology of *Rezeptions-* and *Wirkungsgeschichte* that inspired this new BBC series, is less interested in the meaning of the text itself than in the way it has been interpreted by its readers. Moreover, the readers Gunn finds interesting are not solely scholars but also novelists, poets, painters, cartoonists, musicians, Sunday school teachers, preachers, and other representatives of popular culture.

The structure of Gunn's commentary is dictated by the significance assigned to a given text in the reception history of the book. Thus, all the disparate, and for other commentaries very important, material in 1:1–3:11 is discussed briefly in the first chapter (17–33), while the entire second chapter (34–52) is devoted to the short story of Ehud and Eglon (3:12–31). Other figures who have been the focus of attention in the history of interpretation and thus who are the subjects of chapters in the commentary include Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, Samson (the longest chapter, 170–230), Micah and the Danites, and, finally, the Levite and Benjaminites.

Aiming to address students of the humanities in general rather than biblical studies in particular, the BBC series does not provide a verse-by-verse commentary, nor does it include a translation of the text and assessment of the related text-critical problems. Each chapter of Gunn's richly illustrated volume begins with an abstract of the story and a summary of the discussion. The next main section of the chapters is entitled "Ancient and Medieval," and it covers Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, classical texts from rabbinic Judaism, patristic authors, and sources from the Middle Ages, concluding with the fifteenth century and the onset of printing. Thereafter, Gunn turns to discussions of the "Early Modern and Modern" material, which is usually much longer than the preceding section. Here Gunn gradually narrows his scope to the postindustrial, English-speaking world. Some readers may be disappointed by Gunn's focus on a particular period and place, but given the abundance of material for the reception history of biblical material, especially the book of Judges, I think he has made the right decision. Moreover, the early postindustrial English sources are a good choice for the series, inasmuch as they provide insights into the way many still read the Bible today.

The final part of each chapter provides a overview of "Recent Reception," which consists mainly of a discussion of modern scholarship from the twentieth century to the present. As always, Gunn writes this section with both beginner and advanced students in mind. Perhaps, however, he could have allocated more space (either here or in the introduction) to theories of the book's composition and its place within the narrative of Genesis–2 Kings. Especially worthy of mention are the present proposals to dispense with Martin Noth's Deuteronomistic History thesis and to view the book of Judges as a late

composition that serves as a literary bridge between two older accounts in Exodus–Joshua and 1 Samuel–2 Kings.

The indices, glossaries, list of illustrations, and short biographies of the interpreters are useful. The detailed bibliographies would be even better if they included the wide variety of available electronic media and websites.

After using the book in the classroom, I have found it to be a good introduction to the basic issues facing scholarship on Judges as well as an impetus for lively discussion. Gunn is to be commended for his truly innovative and well-researched work that expands the interpretative horizons. One hopes it will inspire more scholars to undertake studies of Judges that focus on other aspects and periods of the book's reception history.