THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY

1 & 2 Samuel

From biblical text . . . to contemporary life
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THE NIV
APPLICATION
COMMENTS

From biblical text . . . to contemporary life

BILL T. ARNOLD

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DEDICATION

FOR MY HEROES OF 1939 – 1945

MY FATHER
SERGEANT WALTER L. ARNOLD
83rd Division, 329th Infantry Regiment
Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge
European-African-Middle East Theater Medal (5 battle stars)
American Theater Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal

MY UNCLE
CORPORAL JAMES H. ARNOLD
1346th Army Air Force Base Unit, Air Transport Command
Carbine Marksman
Asiatic-Pacific Theater Medal (2 battle stars)
American Theater Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal

MY UNCLE
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS ANDREW R. ARNOLD
95th Division, 377th Infantry Regiment
European-African-Middle East Theater Medal (3 battle stars), Purple Heart,
American Theater Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal
1925–1998

MY UNCLE
CORPORAL CEcil B. ARNOLD
504th Military Police Battalion
Army of Occupation Medal, World War II Victory Medal
MY UNCLE

STAFF SERGEANT HOBART SPIRES

100th Bomb Group, 349th Squadron

European-African-Middle East Theater Medal (1 battle star), Purple Heart, 
Presidential Unit Citation (Oakleaf Cluster), Air Medal (5 Oakleaf Clusters),

Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Ribbon

Killed in action over Berlin (March 6, 1944)

1920—1944

MY MENTOR AND FRIEND

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CLARENCE A. OLSEN

66th Division, G-2 (Counter-Intelligence Corps - Special Agent)

Liaison Agent (French Underground)

Croix de Guerre (avec palme)

Décoration Militaire (avec palme)

Interpreter at Post-Potsdam Conferences

Translator for General Lucius Clay, US Military Governor (Berlin, Germany)


Foreign Liaison Officer (Pentagon & Foreign Military Attachés in Washington, DC)

West Point Military Academy (Chief of French Department)

Presidential Citation for Meritorious Service at West Point

MY TEACHER AND FRIEND

PROFESSOR WERNER WEINBERG, PH.D.

Survivor of Bergen-Belsen

1915—1997
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THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY SERIES is unique. Most commentaries help us make the journey from our world back to the world of the Bible. They enable us to cross the barriers of time, culture, language, and geography that separate us from the biblical world. Yet they only offer a one-way ticket to the past and assume that we can somehow make the return journey on our own. Once they have explained the original meaning of a book or passage, these commentaries give us little or no help in exploring its contemporary significance. The information they offer is valuable, but the job is only half done.

Recently, a few commentaries have included some contemporary application as one of their goals. Yet that application is often sketchy or moralistic, and some volumes sound more like printed sermons than commentaries.

The primary goal of the NIV Application Commentary Series is to help you with the difficult but vital task of bringing an ancient message into a modern context. The series not only focuses on application as a finished product but also helps you think through the process of moving from the original meaning of a passage to its contemporary significance. These are commentaries, not popular expositions. They are works of reference, not devotional literature.

The format of the series is designed to achieve the goals of the series. Each passage is treated in three sections: Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance.

THIS SECTION HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND the meaning of the biblical text in its original context. All of the elements of traditional exegesis—in concise form—are discussed here. These include the historical, literary, and cultural context of the passage. The authors discuss matters related to grammar and syntax and
Series Introduction

the meaning of biblical words.¹ They also seek to explore the main ideas of the passage and how the biblical author develops those ideas.

After reading this section, you will understand the problems, questions, and concerns of the original audience and how the biblical author addressed those issues. This understanding is foundational to any legitimate application of the text today.

This section builds a bridge between the world of the Bible and the world of today, between the original context and the contemporary context, by focusing on both the timely and timeless aspects of the text.

God’s Word is timely. The authors of Scripture spoke to specific situations, problems, and questions. The author of Joshua encouraged the faith of his original readers by narrating the destruction of Jericho, a seemingly impregnable city, at the hands of an angry warrior God (Josh. 6). Paul warned the Galatians about the consequences of circumcision and the dangers of trying to be justified by law (Gal. 5:25). The author of Hebrews tried to convince his readers that Christ is superior to Moses, the Aaronic priests, and the Old Testament sacrifices. John urged his readers to “test the spirits” of those who taught a form of incipient Gnosticism (1 John 4:1–6). In each of these cases, the timely nature of Scripture enables us to hear God’s Word in situations that were concrete rather than abstract.

Yet the timely nature of Scripture also creates problems. Our situations, difficulties, and questions are not always directly related to those faced by the people in the Bible. Therefore, God’s word to them does not always seem relevant to us. For example, when was the last time someone urged you to be circumcised, claiming that it was a necessary part of justification? How many people today care whether Christ is superior to the Aaronic priests? And how can a “test” designed to expose incipient Gnosticism be of any value in a modern culture?

Fortunately, Scripture is not only timely but timeless. Just as God spoke to the original audience, so he still speaks to us through the

¹ Please note that in general, when the authors discuss words in the original biblical languages, the series uses a general rather than a scholarly method of transliteration.
pages of Scripture. Because we share a common humanity with the people of the Bible, we discover a universal dimension in the problems they faced and the solutions God gave them. The timeless nature of Scripture enables it to speak with power in every time and in every culture.

Those who fail to recognize that Scripture is both timely and timeless run into a host of problems. For example, those who are intimidated by timely books such as Hebrews, Galatians, or Deuteronomy might avoid reading them because they seem meaningless today. At the other extreme, those who are convinced of the timeless nature of Scripture, but who fail to discern its timely element, may “wax eloquent” about the Melchizedekian priesthood to a sleeping congregation, or worse still, try to apply the holy wars of the Old Testament in a physical way to God’s enemies today.

The purpose of this section, therefore, is to help you discern what is timeless in the timely pages of the Bible—and what is not. For example, how do the holy wars of the Old Testament relate to the spiritual warfare of the New? If Paul’s primary concern is not circumcision (as he tells us in Gal. 5:6), what is he concerned about? If discussions about the Aaronic priesthood or Melchizedek seem irrelevant today, what is of abiding value in these passages? If people try to “test the spirits” today with a test designed for a specific first-century heresy, what other biblical test might be more appropriate?

Yet this section does not merely uncover that which is timeless in a passage but also helps you to see how it is uncovered. The authors of the commentaries seek to take what is implicit in the text and make it explicit, to take a process that normally is intuitive and explain it in a logical, orderly fashion. How do we know that circumcision is not Paul’s primary concern? What clues in the text or its context help us realize that Paul’s real concern is at a deeper level?

Of course, those passages in which the historical distance between us and the original readers is greatest require a longer treatment. Conversely, those passages in which the historical distance is smaller or seemingly nonexistent require less attention.

One final clarification. Because this section prepares the way for discussing the contemporary significance of the passage, there is not always a sharp distinction or a clear break between this section and the one that follows. Yet when both sections are read together, you should have a strong sense of moving from the world of the Bible to the world of today.
**Series Introduction**

This section allows the biblical message to speak with as much power today as it did when it was first written. How can you apply what you learned about Jerusalem, Ephesus, or Corinth to our present-day needs in Chicago, Los Angeles, or London? How can you take a message originally spoken in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and communicate it clearly in our own language? How can you take the eternal truths originally spoken in a different time and culture and apply them to the similar-yet-different needs of our culture?

In order to achieve these goals, this section gives you help in several key areas.

1. It helps you identify contemporary situations, problems, or questions that are truly comparable to those faced by the original audience. Because contemporary situations are seldom identical to those faced by the original audience, you must seek situations that are analogous if your applications are to be relevant.

2. This section explores a variety of contexts in which the passage might be applied today. You will look at personal applications, but you will also be encouraged to think beyond private concerns to the society and culture at large.

3. This section will alert you to any problems or difficulties you might encounter in seeking to apply the passage. And if there are several legitimate ways to apply a passage (areas in which Christians disagree), the author will bring these to your attention and help you think through the issues involved.

In seeking to achieve these goals, the contributors to this series attempt to avoid two extremes. They avoid making such specific applications that the commentary might quickly become dated. They also avoid discussing the significance of the passage in such a general way that it fails to engage contemporary life and culture.

Above all, contributors to this series have made a diligent effort not to sound moralistic or preachy. The NIV Application Commentary Series does not seek to provide ready-made sermon materials but rather tools, ideas, and insights that will help you communicate God’s Word with power. If we help you to achieve that goal, then we have fulfilled the purpose for this series.

The Editors
General Editor’s Preface

If playwright Arthur Miller is correct in defining a great play as one in which you discover facets of your own character, then the two books of Samuel can be read as great plays. From Hannah’s reaction to her infertility in 1 Samuel to David’s desperate act of worship to stop the plague in 2 Samuel 24, these two books seem like nonstop character studies.

If you like to read biographies, the two Samuels are for you. If you are in need of a sure-fire Sunday school series to teach, the life of King David will keep them coming Sunday after Sunday. And, as Bill Arnold so expertly shows in the pages of this commentary, the application of biblical truth to everyday living is immediate and direct. God speaks through these pages.

Why do we hear God’s voice so clearly through the lives of Hannah, Samuel, Eli and his sons, Saul, David, and David’s family? What is it about the stories of these people that make us think we have met them? How do they remind us of people we know in everyday life?

A couple of “isn’ts.” It isn’t because we are reminded of our own specific life problems and successes through these characters. Samuel was a priest, David was a king. They lived three thousand years ago under circumstances so foreign to our way of life we can hardly imagine it. And it isn’t necessarily that we identify with the sins these characters committed. David coveted his neighbor’s wife and ordered her husband’s murder so he could have her. Such deeds most of us only have nightmares about.

Rather, the reason we find the applications so immediate has deep theological roots. No matter what role we play, what deeds we do, or what culture gives form to our humanity, we are all created in God’s image. We all have the same “father.” We are made the same way. If you dig deep enough, underneath every role, deed, and culture you find a person made to seek God. It is the deepest, most basic urge we have. That is why we can read biographies of kings and arch-criminals and see ourselves in them.

There is a second reason why we find these applications so immediate. It is because we are all sinners saved by grace. We recognize
not only our parentage, we recognize our common condition. When the prophet Nathan accuses David of murder and adultery in 2 Samuel 12, he points a long, bony finger at David and says, “You are the man,” and all of us flinch. We have not all committed adultery, yet in the deepest recesses of our hearts we all have sins we are desperately trying to hide.

Similarly, when David sings his beautiful song of praise to God in 2 Samuel 22, thanking his Creator for delivering him from all his enemies, both external and internal, we immediately feel the warmth surrounding our hearts. We remember all the times in our lives when God’s grace was sufficient to overcome the worst we could manage.

The two books of Samuel, therefore, have something to say about similarity and difference. One of the most important lessons of the twentieth century is the importance of difference. Through psychology we have learned the value of recognizing individual differences, of seeing each of us as unique as a snowflake. The study of anthropology has made us see the value of recognizing cultural differences, that the cultures in which we live dramatically shape the way we look at the world—so much so that people from different cultures can witness the same event and see radically different things. Such lessons are making enormous contributions to the ways we do evangelism and mission.

The books of Samuel, however, remind us of the importance of similarity. The lessons of difference must always be balanced by the lesson of similarity. We are so different from Samuel and David. But the same God made us, the same God saved us, and the same God keeps us safe. We call to that God who is worthy of praise, and we are saved from our enemies.

Terry C. Muck
Author's Preface

At the completion of this project, I have more people than usual to acknowledge for their support. I begin by expressing my gratitude to the trustees and administration of Asbury Theological Seminary for a sabbatical in the fall of 2000, which made it possible to complete the first draft of the commentary.

I have also benefited greatly from my colleagues in the Old Testament department at Asbury, who make it such a delightful place to work. Mary Fisher, Sandra L. Richter, Brian D. Russell, Lawson G. Stone, and David L. Thompson have enriched my thinking and fine-tuned my methodology on a number of points. In addition, Brent A. Strawn's office was directly across the hall from mine the entire time I worked on this commentary. We shared countless conversations about the books of Samuel, leonine imagery in the ancient Near East, and too many other topics to mention (forgive me, Holly). Unfortunately, just as we were both finishing our respective books, Brent was called to another place of ministry, leaving us all the poorer.

The nature of this series as an "application commentary" especially offered me an opportunity to swim beyond the waters in which I normally move most comfortably, that of Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern studies. The Contemporary Significance sections often opened areas that raised more questions for me than I was prepared to answer. I have therefore especially enjoyed the help of colleagues who are critics of contemporary culture, and I have been more dependent than usual upon them for help with interpreting their various disciplines, as well as more mundane guidance such as bibliography.

Such cooperative bonhomie has been rewarding and has created in me a desire for more consistent dependence on each other in our research. It has also made me more thankful than ever for the privilege of ministering in a Christian academic context, and especially for my colleagues at Asbury. On more than one occasion, I consulted with the following colleagues about a variety of topics: Scott R. Burson, Kenneth J. Collins, Joel B. Green, George G. Hunter III, Christine Pohl, James R. Thobaben, Jerry L. Walls, and Ben Witherington III. I am