

# The Value of Bible Survey Books

Bible reading should receive top priority in the lives of believers, but over the years I have found it helpful to supplement that reading with Bible survey books. Why survey books? Bible survey books help us to get the “big picture” – to see both the forest and the trees. They help us to contextualize smaller chunks of Scripture so that we can more readily see the “broad strokes of the brush” of the Divine hand. An additional benefit is to see the flow of the thought within each book.

I recommend reading through a Bible survey book once a year, hopefully a different one each time around, but you can certainly reread a great one to get maximum benefit! If you read the survey of a Bible book per day, you will complete your study in a little over two months!

Many of these survey books are available digitally. I use Accordance and Logos. Both of them enable people to copy photos and maps to use for handouts and presentations. Additionally, they are available on mobile devices so that you can also read during down time away from home—a great way to make effective use of time!

Survey books may be grouped by categories:

**Devotional Survey Books.** These are books that focus on application and special insights from each chapter or portion of Scripture.

*With the Word* (Warren Wiersbe)

*Bible Exposition Commentary* (Warren Wiersbe)

*The Bible Reader's Companion* (Lawrence Richards)

**General Survey Books:**

**a) Graphically Rich Survey Books.** These types of books can liven up the reading with photos of Bible places or artifacts, colorful charts, and maps. They usually have summaries of larger portions of Scripture. The photos can help the reader to get a feel for the landscape and culture of Bible places. This helps to contextualize Scripture visually.

*The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook*

*The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*

*Holman Bible Handbook*

*Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*

*The New Unger's Bible Handbook*

*Eerdmans' Bible Handbook* (although liberal in places)

*Rose Bible Overview* (brief)

*Rose Guide to the Temple* (excellent)

**b) Analytical Survey Books.** These survey books show how thematic elements of different Bible books interrelate with each other. Many of these can be very interesting.

*The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* (W. Graham Scroggie)  
*Scroggie's Bible Handbook*

**c) Chart-Based Survey Books.** Some teachers are masters of creating charts that give the reader a very visual overview of the books of the Bible. For me, charts give the logical breakdown of the book in a way that is easy to digest and easy to remember.

*Talk Thru the Bible*  
*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts, Revised*  
*Jensen's Survey of the OT and NT*

**d) Introduction-Based Survey Books.** These are a little more technical than devotional books, but they provide more background information for the reader. They will typically discuss authorship, the date of writing, occasion, purpose, audience, key themes, etc. From here, they will typically give an overview of larger portions of Scripture.

*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Gleason Archer)  
*An Introduction to the New Testament* (D.A. Carson and Douglass Moo)

**e) Introductory Sections of Larger Commentaries or Study Bibles.** Most single-volume commentaries begin with the same kinds of topics that the introduction-based survey books do.

*Bible Knowledge Commentaries on the OT*  
*MacArthur Study Bible* (insightful, sound, and accessible)  
*ESV Study Bible* (great material throughout and especially in the appendices)  
*HCSB Study Bible* (excellent material)

**f) Technical Survey Books.**

*Encountering the Old Testament* (Bill Arnold, Bryan Beyer)  
*Encountering the New Testament* (Walter Elwell, Robert Yarbrough)  
*The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (William J. Dumbrell)  
*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Andreas Kostenberger, Scott Kellum, Charles Quarles)

**g) Bible Dictionaries or Encyclopedias.** You can do the same kind of survey study with dictionaries as long as you are willing you look up books of Scripture alphabetically.

**Specialty Survey Books:**

*The Teacher's Commentary* (Lawrence Richards)  
*Living Messages of the Books of the Bible OT and NT* (G. Campbell Morgan). This book is a little wordy for today's readers, but has some stunning insights.

*How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart). A good brief introduction. Like a tour guide, the author points out to the reader what to look for in each book of the Bible.

**Lastly**, consider taking survey classes at *Front Range Bible Institute*. Here, seminary-trained professors will guide your study, challenge you to push yourself, and give insights into all of the books of the Old and New Testaments. Additionally, class discussions allow students to contribute insights gleaned from study and sharpen one another as iron sharpens iron.