



BOOK REVIEW

A Review of Photo Companion to the Bible: Genesis, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ezra, Daniel, Hebrews and General Epistles

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Photo Companion to the Bible: Genesis, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ezra, Daniel, Hebrews and General Epistles. [BiblePlaces.com](https://www.bibleplaces.com/photo-companion-to-the-bible/). <https://www.bibleplaces.com/photo-companion-to-the-bible/>.

Introduction

While there is not a complete substitute for the in-person experience of visiting the Biblical lands and walking in the steps of Biblical heroes, the materials offered at the [BiblePlaces.com](https://www.bibleplaces.com) website come very close to it. The [BiblePlaces.com](https://www.bibleplaces.com) website has three main collections available for purchase: *Photo Companion to the Bible*, *The Pictorial Library of Bible Lands*, and *Historic Views of the Holy Land*. The focus of this review is the *Photo Companion to the Bible*. This collection provides illustrations on each chapter of the biblical text. Currently this growing collection has about 36 volumes that cover many of the Old Testament books and all the New Testament books. In this review, I evaluate five volumes from the Old Testament and four volumes from the New Testament, paying special attention to the way they illustrate the ancient languages and culture.

The Volume on Genesis

The review of this volume is more detailed than the other volumes in this article, as many observations are equally applicable across the volumes. This volume offers a rich collection of illustrations. For example, although not all chapters are illustrated in a similar way (e.g. chapter 48 has only 60 slides), 32 verses of Genesis 10 are illustrated by 603 slides. One is able to find the following types of visual aids for better understanding of the Scripture in this volume:

- Aerial view photographs with and without labels (e.g. Ai and Bethel illustrating Gen 13:3);
- Photographs of street signs (e.g. Jael Street, Gen 15:19);
- Photographs of various inscriptions and manuscripts (e.g. Torah scroll, Gen 35:10);

- Photographs of various reliefs (e.g. Relief of banquet of Ashurbanipal, Gen 40:11);
- Vintage photos from the Biblical lands (e.g. Structure atop Mount Cudi from 1909, Gen 8:4);
- Geographical maps (e.g. Map of Abram's journey from Schlegel's *Satellite Bible Atlas*, Gen 12:5);
- Paintings and illustrations (e.g. "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" by Tissot, Gen 9:18);
- Museum artifacts (e.g. Egyptian cubit measuring rods, Gen 6:15);
- Reconstructions and models (e.g. Model of a Bedouin tent, Gen 24:35);
- Charts (e.g. Chart of the Table of Nations, by Chris McKinny, Gen 10:1);
- Coins (e.g. Silver coin of Alexander the Great, Gen 42:15).

Unfortunately, artifacts cannot talk and tell their story. Just having photographs of, say, an inscription would not be enough. Thankfully, many of the PowerPoint slides in this collection have explanatory notes that help to put into context the pictures seen on the slides.

This volume has many interesting illustrations in relation to the original languages of the Bible. One of my favorite references to Biblical Hebrew in this collection comes from the late eighth century BC inscription from Jerusalem which reads "[Go]d, creator of the earth" (Miller 1980, 43). This inscription illustrates Genesis 1:1. The photo of the inscription is by Todd Bolen. The statement on this inscription illustrates a fundamental theological truth for understanding many passages in the Old Testament and beyond.

The Biblical Aramaic corpus is comparatively small. The larger passages are found in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Daniel. There is one verse in Aramaic in Jer 10:11 and just two words in Genesis 31:47. The verse in Jeremiah is sometimes used to show the similarities between Hebrew and Aramaic (Greenspahn 2003, 8–10). The reference in Genesis 31:47 could be used to show just the opposite (cf. "יִגְר שְׁהָדוּתָא" vs. "גִּלְעָד"). In this volume, these Aramaic words are illustrated with an Aramaic tablet with the records of a loan, possibly from Sefire near Aleppo. I wonder whether it would be possible in future upgrades to illustrate these words with photographs of 4Q542 1 ii 12 or Pap. Yadin 15:25 (Lipiński 2018, 733).

There are a couple of points to be aware of regarding the illustrations. The same pictures and photos are used in this collection to illustrate key topics when they repeatedly emerge in the biblical text. So, the total number of unique illustrations would be less than the total number of slides in the collection. Some illustrations may not be suitable for certain audiences; for example, numerous illustrations of animal sacrifices at the Samaritan Passover.

The Volumes on Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

An interesting feature of these volumes is that they not only provide vintage photos from the Biblical lands; some of these photos are also colorized using generative AI (see illustrations on Eccl 1:3). This brings new life to old black-and-white photos. Another interesting highlight from the volume on Ecclesiastes is the letter with the earliest reference to Solomon's temple (Eccl 8:10). The volume on Song of Songs has a creative solution to indicate the transition between the three main singers (woman, man, and choir)—each new section starts with an AI-generated image of the character or characters who is or are singing.

The Volumes on Ezra and Daniel

These volumes feature several interesting illustrations. Some of them are ostraca with an Aramaic inscription (Ezra 3:3), a cuneiform inscription "Cyrus, king of the world" (Ezra 3:7), and a reconstruction of the Aramaic inscription on the wall (Dan 5:8). Names are carefully illustrated with various inscriptions. The inscription "Cyrus, king of the world" is interesting because its meaning stands in direct opposition to the message of the book of Daniel about the kingdom of God.

The Volumes on Hebrews and General Epistles

The book of Hebrews is richly illustrated. This collection is not only valuable for New Testament studies but also for various Old Testament themes. One illustration that caught my attention is the photo of an ash layer at Numeira (possible Gomorrah, Heb 10:27).

The General Epistles seem to be less studied than, for example, the Pauline writings. These collections are an important contribution to this field of study. The inscription mentioning "Pontus and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1) is interesting as these regions are separated by three other territories in the biblical text.

Conclusion

Because of the wide variety of illustrations, these collections may serve several purposes. The illustrations from the ancient world would be especially helpful for interpreters and translators as they provide culturally accurate illustrations to the biblical text. More modern illustrations can be used for teaching purposes in sermon or lecture preparation.

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